

# Sounding Sámi Sentiments

## Musical Practices in the Production of Ethnicity

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### INTRODUCTION

In Sámi language, “Adjágas” refers to experiences or a state of mind lingering between consciousness and unconsciousness. Such experiences can occur between sleep and waking states, when a specific sense of being unfolds on the borders of the “real” world and the “other” world. This mode of existence is regarded by many Sámi as a source from where you receive inspiration and hidden messages, as explained poetically on the band Adjágas' website:

Adjágas is the state of mind between consciousness and unconsciousness. Created on the borders of both this world and the other world. The messages fetched from this source resulted in beguilingly timeless music that sounds oddly unearthly with the sweet tastes of the magic arctic.

While such statements clearly resonate poetically with elements of mysticism and spirituality, like much of the cultural production in the field of world music<sup>1</sup>, it also hints at interconnections between sound, sentiments, and ethnicity. These interconnections should be taken seriously and given further consideration.

This article seeks to discuss the interconnections between sound production and ethnic sentiments by taking a closer look at the Sámi-based band Adjágas' first album entitled *Adjágas*, released in Norway on Trustme Records in 2005 and internationally on Ever Records in 2007. The album's recording started during the fall of 2004, with a





preproduction period in the summer and ending with an additional recording period and a postproduction in Oslo.

My main objective is to discuss how expressive modalities, through the production of sound, are culturally constituted by performance codes that communicate deeply felt ethnic sentiments and ethos.<sup>2</sup> This particular album, and its musical contents, should therefore be analyzed not only as an aesthetic object, but in addition as an integral part of individual, social, and cultural processes connected to values of existence, identification, transformation, and negotiation. In this context, I assert that the album *Adjágas* represents a new direction in the versatile soundscapes found in Sápmi.<sup>3</sup>

#### NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

This text is, for me, quite personal and colored by my own experiences with the music at hand, in addition to personal adventures into different performance settings, recording sessions, and social life as a musician with the band. As a researcher, I have mostly worked in the field of ethnomusicology with a focus on popular music traditions from the northern part of Norway, especially fieldwork related to local rap and reggae practices. But for this text, I rely heavily on my reflections over former lived experiences and sources as an active member of the band, from its formation in 2003 and through the recording and release of *Adjágas*' first album in 2005. My main musical role in the band was playing acoustic guitars and related string instruments such as the banjo and a square-neck Dobro lap steel guitar. In addition, I also participated in arranging the music, which was performed with the joiks. The musical arrangements<sup>3</sup> were developed through multiple rehearsals and sessions over time, combined with periods of individual work at home. The band members were spread over many places in Norway (Tromsø, Kautokeino, Oslo, Nesna), so rehearsals and sessions had to be planned in advance.

As a Norwegian, I did not share the same ethnic background, including language, of the two joikers in the band. Therefore, communication was in Norwegian. Furthermore, the two other band members at the time, playing drums and guitar, were from Finland. As student residents in Norway, they could speak Norwegian fluently. Communication in the Sámi language between the joikers was only sporadic – these discussions centered mainly on how to translate certain Sámi words or expressions into Norwegian or English.

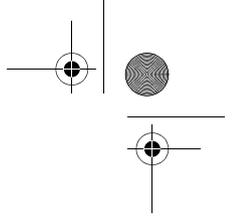
An internal, or emic, perspective on participating experiences is central to the idea and practice of fieldwork in anthropologically designed research projects. In addition to a more traditional approach with observation and data collection, fieldwork in music anthropology is strongly focused on what Titon suggests as vital: “experiencing and understanding music.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, the methodology behind this article is not based on a pre-defined and organized fieldwork. No formal scientific approach was established between myself and “others” prior to entering the “field.” But I did “work” musically in a

“field” and had many thoughtful and evocative experiences that led me to reflections on practicing music and relations to ethnicity. Such “ontological understandings of human and musical experience in the field,” as evocated by Rice,<sup>5</sup> are valuable for achieving insights into the important dynamics of musical practices and cultural processes.<sup>6</sup> This article is, then, based on a contemporary “reading” of the album, initiated through a retrospective view on lived experiences in performing, arranging, and being musically involved in the creation, production, and performance of the album. It should be mentioned that a lack of formal scientific documentation such as interviews, quotes, recordings of conversations and transcriptions does present a potential challenge. However, an internal perspective as a performer, supplemented by academic reflexivity and evaluation can be an advantage in this study – in Titon’s words – “[...] not as a form of data gathering, but as a means towards understanding”.<sup>7</sup> Following Titon, I support the idea of grounding knowledge about music in musical being and in the practice of music. Documentation is to be found in what Titon calls the paradigm of “the study of people making music”,<sup>8</sup> repositioned, “and [...] considered reflexively, as an inter-subjective product [...]”.<sup>9</sup> The “products” of lived experience, making music, being musically involved, making notes of discussions, together with the recorded album and liner notes all constitute the scientific fundament for this article.

### JOIK

The article title suggests interconnections between the practice of sound production, ethnicity, and sentiments. In the following, I will briefly present some thoughts about these three perspectives. In addition, the discussion will connect with analytical perspectives on CD production, music making, and sounding utterances.

The vocal practice of joik is manifold both in expression and in content, and it varies significantly from place to place throughout the Sápmi territory. But joiks, the traditional vocal music attributed to the Sámi people, have had similar *referential* functions to persons, objects, places, or some other external element. The vocal practice of joik has traditionally been performed without accompanying instruments. Melodically, the northern joik tradition is performed with relatively few pentatonic-related notes. In contrast, the southern tradition differs with a less distinct melodic modality, fewer notes and often gradually rising pitches. Performers emphasize that joiks may be called circular in that they have no clear beginning or end. A performer, therefore, may change the “point of departure” each time a joik is performed. As such, a joik is said to have an existential quality quite different than other types of musical “objects.” The joik “exists” on its own terms, and the joiker who performs it connects to it from different points of departure. This is a good example of a mythologized and existentialistic view of the joik. It was accentuated by many joikers during my work as a musician with Sámi performers and will be commented on later in this text.



Joiks contain few lyrics, partially and sparsely included between phrases of chanting on syllables and “sound-lyrics.” Today, *personal joiks* are mostly known as a genre, and joiks with a clear socializing function are known as a symbol where the joik refers to a specific individual. According to Ola Graff, a joik melody “stands as a symbol of an object, always refers to an object (a person, a place, an animal, etc.), and thus functions as a musical name of the object [...]. The reference function is underlying as a fundamental level of meaning”, and “primarily constitutes the melody as a symbol”.<sup>10</sup> Through the act of receiving one’s own joik, a Sámi person also “receives” a part of his or her individuality and, as some performers state, they thereby become a fully integrated and independent member of the community.<sup>11</sup> The importance of a close social relationship between the composer of a person joik and the person who receives the joik is strong.<sup>12</sup> The joik is often given to children or young adults as presents, becoming both a part and a property of the person to whom it is given. The musical characteristics of the personal joik can be strongly connected to properties and characteristics of the individual (or other objects, places, animals, etc.). If you are an extroverted, active, and playful person, the joik that’s given to you often features the same characteristics. If you are a calm, thoughtful, and mild person, the joik should reflect these personality features. For individuals, the joik is a strong factor of identification, where the musical characteristics are central. As the joikers I worked with stated, a trained ear can listen to the rhythm and melody in the joik and thereby understand central aspects of the personality of the individual to whom it is given. The musical and sounding aspects of joiks, performance strategies, and lyrical content and connotative meanings and values are challenging when it comes to arranging them musically for inclusion in ensemble settings and music production. This also follows for the constructed and strongly felt social, cultural, and individual sentiments connected to the joik. But the process of arranging and performing joiks within a frame of western popular music is not a new thing in itself. Such reframing of “traditional” Sámi material may also be, As Jones-Bamman puts it, “[...] indicative of a complex of purposeful decisions to liberate the genre from the negative connotations of its past, in effect restoring it to a position of acknowledged importance in Saami culture”.<sup>13</sup>

### ADJÁGAS

The poetic description of the band’s name mentioned earlier is followed up in the band’s presentation of their music:

Adjágas music is gentle, peaceful, dreamlike, spiritual and utterly engrossing. It is, at the same time, strangely alien. Lyrics are unrecognizable, startling vocals delivered in a style that veers between whispered but crystal clear sweetness, unbridled emotion and all points in between, sometimes hitting notes that may previously have never existed.

Our music is based around the concept of the yoik, a traditional musical form which describes something not with its words but its sounds. You can start a yoik where you like; you can end it where you like. Its elements remain structured, but it's fluid at the same time. A yoik is like liquid in a bottle; you can shake it up, but the contents remain the same.

And the content of the yoik deliberately has many meanings, in order, if necessary, to spare the feelings of the subject. So it may pass judgment, but it's open to interpretation. It is also possible to be the subject of more than one yoik: how it sounds depends upon the perspective of the person who is delivering it. More importantly, a yoik is not written. It comes to a person.<sup>14</sup>

Here, the band portrays the music as two-sided, both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. This was also a clear strategy when working on the musical arrangements for the "joiks". The young Sámi vocalists Lawra Somby and Sara Marielle Gaup in Adjágas felt strongly committed to holding on to authentic aspects of the joik and the practice of joiking. But they were also committed to revitalizing a tradition that has declined severely during recent decades. "Authentic" here does not refer to some essential property or the historical uniqueness of Sámi joiks, although performers may well be inclined to support this interpretation. As we will see later, notions of authenticity and identity are in this case study closely interlinked and are vital aspects of sounding Sámi sentiments. Here, authenticity should be understood as "[...] a discursive trope of great persuasive power. It focuses on a way of talking about music, a way of saying to outsiders and insiders alike 'this is what is really significant about this music', 'this is the music that makes us different from other people'".<sup>15</sup> For Sámi performers, authenticity is often connected to something traditional, specific and historically unique. "I don't like the modernization of traditional joiks," Lawra states, and "therefore we only write new joiks. We don't touch the old joiks".<sup>16</sup> Such an internal view on authenticity could be said to contribute to the confirmation and continuation of cultural identification. The other position of authenticity *includes* this internal perspective, but only as a part of a broader discursive project towards cultural production and meaning. It focuses not on music as object, but on the discussion of music as both object and social/cultural practice.

In the album artwork and in other visual forms, Adjágas highlights connotations to aspects of modernity and the contemporary while at the same time alluding to the traditional and indigenous. The picture below (Figure 1) portrays the two joikers, Sara Marielle Gaup and Lawra Somby, in contemporary clothing with traditional references. The shirt worn by Lawra is, for instance, home-made of prepared reindeer skin, with buttons made of reindeer bones, but is characteristic of modern clothing design. Sara Marielle Gaup's makeup, styled hair, and shawl (traditionally worn) also contrast with traditional Sámi appearance and clothing.

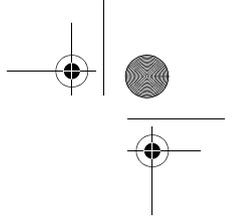
Figure 1: Sara Marielle Gaup and Lawra Somyby



The connection to nature is often prevalent in indigenous cultural practices and also in world music symbolism. The Adjágas project also relies on such strategies, but has a strong affiliation to the dynamic, fuzzy, and *moving* state of Sámi ethnicity. This can be seen in the iconology of visualization as well in the sounding strategies, where the performers are simultaneously connected to traditional and modern worlds.

The iconology of logo design and use of CD covers also highlight and amplify other central Sámi sentiments. The name Adjágas is used as a logo and digitally designed in relation to the curves, lines, and blurred opacity created from smoke. This reference is well known to the Sámi, who have strong sentiments and ties to the *Lavvu*. The Lavvu is the Sámi traditional tent that is used in nomadic reindeer herding. People move together with the animals, from place to place, while the seasons change and the reindeer move to richer grazing lands. Today, Sámi people live in “ordinary” houses, but they still use the *Lávvu* in different contexts for revitalizing traditional values and symbolizing their ethnicity. Inside the *Lávvu*, a fireplace at the center is an important social gathering point.

In Figure 2 we see the fireplace and smoke rising from the wood, placing the logo, heavily stylized with the three members visible within and surrounded by the smoke from the dying embers. The symbolic placement of the band arising from the fire also refers to the joikers’ understanding of themselves as keepers of a long and threatened



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Figure 2: Fireplace



musical tradition. In 2007 Adjågas participated in a production of a documentary film called *Firekeepers*.<sup>17</sup> Their mission is to keep the fire alive – i.e. the joik tradition – and their musical project grows out of this revitalization practice.

### SOUNDING

With the term “sounding,” I refer to practices of making and using sound, playing music, recording, producing, performing, and disseminating. This also includes listening and other participatory activities. It suggests an active and situated practice, where sounds always have a political and ideologically charged source, and develop within a territory of attentive and interpretive receivers. An act of sounding should thus be analyzed as an integral part to a process or ecology, not as an object. “Sounding” therefore includes much more than producing sound; it is strongly connected to contexts of ethnic boundary maintenance, identification processes, political utterances, and celebrating or negotiating cultural values. The term is associated with the development of soundscape studies, mainly associated to Schafer,<sup>18</sup> and relates to Christopher Small’s



term “musicking”<sup>19</sup> and to the field of acoustic ecology, especially Steven Feld’s perspectives on acoustemology.<sup>20</sup>

When Steven Feld discusses “how histories of global entanglement are shaping contemporary African musical life-worlds” he is especially attentive to “sound as a way of knowing such worlds [...]”.<sup>21</sup> He suggests that “jazz cosmopolitanism in Accra is about histories of listening, echoing and sounding, about acoustemology, the agency of knowing the world through sound,” and that a “such sonic knowing, is the imagination and enactment of a musical intimacy”.<sup>22</sup> Later we shall return to the concept of musical intimacy. Feld’s use of the term “agency” should thus be discussed in relation to sounding. By definition, “sounding” could mean a) “measurement” of certain conditions or b) “a probe, test, or sampling of opinion or intention.”<sup>23</sup> Practices of musical sounding, then, should be seen as active processes in measuring conditions within a cultural field. Values, attitudes, and beliefs are transmitted through the practice of sounding, and the reception and evaluation of these sounds is echoed back to their source. When releasing sounds within an ethnic community, insiders react on how these sounds are fit to affirm, celebrate, or explore basic values within their community.<sup>24</sup>

Sounding can be seen as a central strategy of knowledge production: a way of knowing the world and transmitting knowledge about the world to others. Mediated through both local and transnational social networks, in the form of comments, attitudes, narratives, reflections, and spoken sentiments about experiences of a sounding, sounding is meaningful as an active ingredient in people’s social and cultural processes, and in their everyday lives. While exposing the individual through subjectification, the practice of musical sounding also plays an important role in negotiating collective sentiment.<sup>25</sup> Producing a CD is therefore often a thorough and exhaustive process, both because artists want the music to sound “right” in an object-aesthetic meaning, but also “right” in relation to the transmission of values and sentiments connected to a sociocultural background.<sup>26</sup> Here, I will comment on both perspectives and argue for their unconditional interconnection.

One of the objectives with the production and release of the *Adjágas* album was to produce new joik-based music with young Sámi artists in the new context of mainstream popular music. The project was initially established by a Norwegian manager at the management firm Bureau Storm. He told me he had heard Sara Marielle Gaup joiking on national radio, and was fascinated by her voice. After some time, he contacted her and another joiker, Lawra Somby, and asked them if they were interested in doing a collaborative project with other musicians. They agreed, and after some time the band was established, composed of two joikers, one drummer, and two musicians playing guitar and other string instruments.

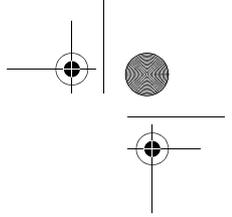
After a period of arranging, rehearsing, and performing in concerts, we decided to start working on the band’s first album, based on both traditional and newly created Sámi joiks with our own arrangements. Working with joiks in a popular music setting

became more and more challenging. As a vocal genre, joiking is rarely connected to a specific time or pitch. On the contrary, the time aspect of joiks is significantly relative and diffuse, where variations and alterations are important aspects of meaning and value. This also goes for pitch. The southern Sámi joik tradition in particular is characterized by its improvised and gradient rise in pitch that definitely does not concur with the tempered instruments used for the arrangement. This is of course a well-known challenge in world music production, where the traditional musical sound is often subject to compromise when new technologies are used. Our challenge and intent was to lay aside the most challenging joiks in this respect and keep the ones that had the potential for collaborative work, although the clash between time-pitch characteristics and tempered instruments do characterize a great number of the album's tracks. The joik *Lavvu Vuovddis* portrays such openness in performance, as the joiking stretches and compresses freely in time, sparsely accompanied by a plucked resophonic guitar.

Recording *Adjágas* started with a preproduction period in Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino). After this, Studio Larsville in Stugudal, owned by Norwegian musician Lars Lien, was booked for the main recording sessions. Lien is a well-known figure in the popular music scene in Norway for his newly established studio in Trøndelag, far from urban areas. Before the actual recording, we also discussed thoroughly which producer to invite for the project. One aim was to avoid traditional production (and marketing) strategies that might lead the project to be categorized as world music.<sup>27</sup> Taylor indicates that such categorization is beyond the control of the performer, producer or manager.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, definitions of world music are at best problematic. However, in pursuing booking and marketing strategies that differed from previously established strategies within the ethnic music industry, the band expanded the Sámi soundscape into new territories of listening and experience.

Finding the “right” producer is an important aspect of album production, and the cultural implications perhaps become even greater when working on ethnic and indigenous sounding recordings. For the sound of this project, it was important to move beyond simply thinking about the soundscape to also thinking about the personal aspects – the trustworthiness and capability of those involved to maintain the subtle cultural sentiments connected to the music. A crucial element of this was a series of talks between the joikers, band members, and producers that touched on joik, Sámi identity, and history. This points to the importance of knowledge about the cultural and social background of joik as a social performative practice in Sámi society and its significance in the recording and production process. As this shows, the strong sentiments of Sámi ethnicity clearly stand in a strong connection to sounding as a practice in process.

This also follows for the album's drum track production. It was important to keep the drums as acoustically real, authentic as possible, with minimal use of reverb or processing. The traditional Sámi drum *runebomme* has had a central position in Sámi traditions, and has been used by the *noaidi* (shamans) to heal, solve social conflicts, pre-



dict the future, or connect with gods. The drum was made of a frame and covered with reindeer skin that was decorated with symbols from Sámi cosmology. Because of its strong ties to pre-Christian Sámi beliefs, such drums were burned and destroyed during the assimilation processes initiated by the Norwegian state and church. Today there are only three original *runebommer* left in Norway, although some others exist in European collections and museums. The drum was often combined with the *noaidi's* joiking. Therefore, drumming has both a historical and cosmological interconnection to Sámi sentiments and may be regarded as valuable in the cultural practice.

Overall, the *Adjágas* project was marked with sentiments of respect for the value of musical material and practices and the importance of cultural material. The choice of tracks for the album was governed by these principles. One of the most effective live songs performed by *Adjágas* could not be included on the album, as it was a personal joik. A crucial point is that such joiks are regarded as the “property” of the receiver. It becomes an integral part of the person’s individuality; therefore, “using it” or joiking it would be to activate the person it connects to. It cannot, or should not, be used freely by everyone everywhere. The question of use for the album was long discussed and ended with the decision that it could not be used due to sentiments of respectfulness for the owner – the person it “represented” or was connected to. Meanwhile, it was extensively used in live settings, because of its fast, powerful, and energetic musical features. When asked if this was disrespectful, the joikers replied that it was acceptable, to a certain degree, because most Sámi would have seen it as an honor if their own personal joik were used in a respectable and celebratory manner.<sup>29</sup>

After some discussions and assessments, we decided to contact Andreas Mjøs from the Norwegian band *Jaga Jazzist*. He agreed to produce the album and had a sounding background as a producer that aspired to the sentiments of the Sámi. Mjøs’ soundscapes can be described as a combination of simple acoustical country-inspired recording and production techniques, combined with electronic, experimental, and contemplative strategies. The recording and production strategies by Mjøs valued realism, sincerity, and honesty: a form of authenticity (here in the form of “pure” unprocessed sound signals) in the form of organic sound ideals juxtaposed with heavily processed sound elements. It also valued acoustic sound recording and “preservation” with the use of a distinct locality and room. The studio, a big room in an old school with wooden walls, was preferred for its acoustics, but also for its geographical location, with rural surroundings in the southern Sámi district.

Sounds from outside the recording studio are likewise present in the final mix, a sign of the commitment to preserving the sincerity and spontaneity of the recorded tracks. These tracks were preferred to be kept “dry” and “real” (with no added digital delays or reverb effects) in the final mix, in order to preserve their original delivery. Other later and additional tracks were more processed, both because they strategically opposed the organic, practice, and authentic tracks and because they were not regarded as represen-

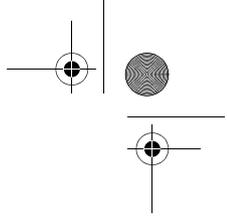


tations of a sounding primordial or indigenous expression. This shows us that Sámi sound recording and production is a central aspect of treating ethnic sentiments. Blurring the voice with processing, reverb, or delay was not appreciated by the joikers and seen to distort the idea of an artistic realism, and connected to weakening the sounding ethnic expression. But such recording strategies are, of course, political, especially in constructing the performers' sense of "authenticity," the "real," and the "ethnic." Sounding strategies like arrangement techniques, studio recordings, and production techniques are thus central to the idea here of negotiating ethnic sentiments. Some sounding strategies could be regarded as "closed" in that they are obligatory for expressing central sentiments. Others are "open" and represent other sentiments and aspirations toward more globalized and cosmopolitan values.

The song *Mun ja Mun* is a characteristic southern Sámi joik melody, created by the Joiker Lawra Somby. Sámi joiks in the south are characteristic in that they often consist of fewer notes than the northern, more melody-based joik tradition. In addition, it is heavily colored by vocal throat techniques, voice elaborations, and a relative attitude toward pitch and time. *Mun ja Mun* was for Lawra Somby a subtle comment on the conflicting state of language and identity within the southern Sámi community, where the use of native language has almost disappeared. The sounding joik sentiments of loss of native language and the importance language has in carrying cultural and social distinctiveness form a point of departure for the joik. In addition, it sounds sentiments of a state of being betwixt and between: between a south Sámi identity and a northern Sámi identity, which differs in both language and joik traditions.<sup>30</sup> One of the artists we were greatly influenced by during the start of the Adjágas project was the Spanish–Portuguese artist Manu Chao. Lawra presented the joik *Mun ja Mun* and the other guitarist, Stian Einmo, instantly came up with the chord sequence from Manu Chao's song *Me Gustas Tu*, based on the harmonic turnaround A minor, G major, and D minor repeated two times. The northern Sámi phrase "*Mun ja Mun*" literary means "I and I", a common verbal phrase in Jamaican patois. Its title was inspired by Jamaican dancehall, a genre we listened to frequently while arranging the joik.

This shows a sounding expression that is strongly connected to ethnic and indigenous sentiments and, at the same time, develops through transnational routes of sounding expressions connected to Jamaican speech genres, world music artist Manu Chao, and an electronica-inspired soundscape reminiscent of artists like Sigur Rós. Through such a layering of different sound elements, the complexity of authenticity also becomes clear here. One important factor is thus that in spite of such a musical hybridization, the discourse of joik authenticity stands firm.

The video for *Mun ja Mun* is another symbolic utterance for southern Sámi conflicts, especially regarding the problematic state and declining use of the southern Sámi language. As the Joiker Lawra Somby points out, many young southern Sámi people today avoid using the language in fear of being criticized by the elders for not using it correctly.



While trying to (re)-learn his native language, Somby was told by a close relative that it (the southern Sámi language) should now suffer a “beautiful and silent death”.<sup>31</sup>

Sounding in the form of popular expression plays essential historical roles in the development of the Sámi counter-hegemonic struggle. It is in the joik that Sámi are most comfortable in imprinting their emotional identification. It is also in the playful politics of racial and emotional re-identification that one can understand the pivotal place of Sámi popular culture in both expressing and channeling Sámi postcolonial existence. Popular culture has therefore a central place in the counter-hegemonic project of the Sámi’s ethnic ethos. Different ways of sounding and practicing popular and traditional culture “allows for a continual process of identification that is never completely limited by the greater, failed class projects of the nation’s elite and allows the incorporation of the majority population’s own scheme of self-identification”.<sup>32</sup>

In *Sound and Sentiment*, Steven Feld emphasizes how the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea express a close relation between their cosmology and the environment.<sup>33</sup> Sounds from the rainforest, especially bird sounds, are included in a collective construction of meaning where bird sounds are connected to the spirits of the dead. The musical practices of the Kaluli deal with imagined journeys to ancient living areas and people that previously were a part of daily life. An important point for Feld is that the musical practice *makes* the surrounding world into something that *engages* people *emotionally*. Music, or making sound, is a practice that activates sentiments and the emotions within a group of people. While Feld’s intention is to analyze how “modes and codes of sound communication lead[-] to an understanding of the ethos and quality of life in Kaluli society”,<sup>34</sup> my intention here is to discuss how we can understand such sounding in relation to a Sámi ethos characterized by stronger issues of strategic identification processes and technology. Now, let’s briefly discuss Sámi ethnicity before taking a closer look at some of the album’s tracks.

### SÁMI HARDCORE

The Sámi are an indigenous people and ethnic minority that live in the northern part of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia; a geographical area called Sápmi. Traditionally, Sámi have their own unique culture with traditions that are disconnected from the majority populations of these countries. This includes reindeer herding, a nomadic organization of life, and cultural traditions in clothing, music, and language. In practice there are quite a few Sámi working with reindeer today. Many are difficult to distinguish from “ethnic” Norwegians, Swedes, or Finns.

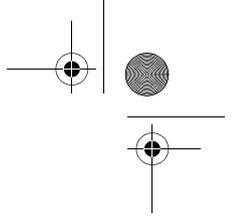
Essentialist perspectives of originality and the primordial are central elements of ethnicity and indigeneity. They are central not for their objective, valid, and acknowledged existence, but for their argumentative value in themselves in identifying ethnic groups. Today, issues of who was here first are key to Sámi politics, especially regarding the use of resources in relation to the Sámi’s key business – reindeer herding. But essentialism in



this context is problematic. Ethnicity, ethnic awakening and organizing, address strategic and intensified consciousness about *difference*, about cultural clarification, stabilization, and the treatment of borders and boundaries.<sup>35</sup> Ethnicity consists of *experienced* cultural differences made relevant in interaction. And these differences exist *between* groups and not inside them as objective, fixed parameters. Latour points to the fact that “[...] for every group to be defined, a list of *anti-groups* is set up as well”.<sup>36</sup> Group “set up” necessitates active and performative work as these groups are “[...] made by the various ways and manners in which *they are said* to exist”.<sup>37</sup> Sámi ethnicity doesn't exist a priori; rather, it *becomes* through repeated utterances, statements, performances, and sounding.

Ethnic consciousness and mobilization often starts with a few social and cultural entrepreneurs taking initiatives for social or cultural action. In such processes, the Sámi change due to their mobilization, media, travel, education, new technology, jobs, living arrangements, and social and cultural interaction with other groups. Creolization<sup>38</sup> processes, in the negotiation of Sámi ethnic borders, could then be described as a two-sided mixed process. First, Sámi ethnicity is becoming less “clear” when assimilated with the majority. Second, their ethnicity is empowered through the establishment of dedicated Sámi institutions and revitalization processes of Sámi language and culture. These interactions with “themselves” in the form of constantly negotiating “Sáminess” and with the others (national and other local and global social and political realities) to a high degree constitute social and cultural life in Sámi society. The strategic and ideological determination of Sámi entrepreneurs is often constructed with perspectives of primordiality and origin, even if such an origin, or “hardcore”, is quite difficult to identify. Sámi people and society are as dynamic and difficult to represent as any other society, group, or population. Therefore, only a dynamic, nonrepresentational approach can provide a way of assessing Sámi life in its multiple congruencies. This is highly convoluted: How can Sámi ethnicity be established, maintained, and represented when it is in fact dynamic? Here, the Sámi activate the hardcore of their fixed ethnic identity and autonomy. Language is obviously one of the most defining features of Sámi identity. But language can be learned, changed, *and* exchanged. The Sámi hardcore is something more sentimental, sacred, secretive, and imbued. It is related to what the Nobel Peace Prize winner from 1992 stated: “I'm still keeping my Indian identity a secret. I'm still keeping secret what I think no one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets”.<sup>39</sup>

In discussing Sámi ethnicity and cultural heritage with my fellow musicians in Adjá-gas, the conversations often took the problematic direction into a mystical, otherworldly being-in-the-world where elements of “essence” defined the absolute divide between them and us. In the many discussions on joiks and the practice of joiking, there were always *some* vital meanings and connotations of the practice that we (Norwegians, Fins, Swedes, etc.) could *never* fully grasp. This is an interesting example of what Fredrik Barth sees as a way of organizing cultural difference. According to Barth, ethnic groups pro-



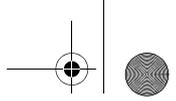
tect their cultural distinctiveness by withholding certain “areas” of their culture from being relevant in interethnic connections.<sup>40</sup> Sámi (indigenous) ethnicity is in many ways *made relevant* by musical practices. Ethnicity is actualized through lyrics, visual elements, language, and references to a certain set of values. In addition, the musical practices and credibility are contingent on the fact that their unique qualities are protected against a commercialism that threatens to vulgarize their music as banal and superficial.

### SENTIMENTS

In discussing the politics of indigeneity and ethnicity, sentiments are often activated as key elements. Sentiments and feelings cannot be recognized as mere individual realities devoid of social context. Instead, they should be seen as grounded in very specific ways in the particular historical and social contexts in which they are produced. Cultural and social feelings of belonging, sharing, nostalgia, empathy, pride, and longing are a collective set of sentiments that are active ingredients in the production and maintenance of ethnic distinctions, borders, and boundaries.<sup>41</sup> Still today, one of the most central Sámi sentiments of being is their interconnectivity to and understanding of nature.<sup>42</sup> So, sentiments relate strongly with Sámi presence in the world – being-in-the-world spiritually and in contact with nature and in the evocation and memories of others.<sup>43</sup> It is thus important to stress the constructionist perspectives of production and maintenance. This is no essential or autonomous being-in-the-world exclusive to the Sámi. Of course, “ethnic” Norwegians or others may both value and master a strong and deep, even spiritual interconnectivity to nature. The point is that in their interaction with others, such sentiments are actively performed by many Sámi in establishing difference. It is a feature that is made relevant in different contexts and therefore contributes to the definitions and distinctions of the Sámi as an ethnic group.

Performing sentiments may be seen as a process of developing ethnic attachment in general: attachments to situations, relatives and kin, other persons, landscape, animals, and the environment. Such sentiments are amplified in performative acts or ritualistic events, and cultural values are aligned within performative processes like joiking. Sounding is perhaps one of the most important modalities or expressive embodiments of Sámi concepts of sentiment. In the field of ethnicity, such modalities lie at the heart of ideological strategies and should therefore be evaluated as an important element of ethnic and indigenous consciousness. In the following, I shall look closer at some of the tracks on the album *Adjágas* and discuss them in relation to these perspectives. I do not claim to present a complete and thorough analysis of each and every song on the album. Elements like the form of the songs, use of chords, harmony, rhythm, and timbre are commented on to support the main argument regarding relations between sounding and invocation, activation, and the intensification of values and sentiments. As Walser argues, “[...] any cultural analysis of popular music that leaves out musical





sound, that doesn't explain why people are drawn to certain sounds specifically and not others, is at least fundamentally incomplete".<sup>44</sup> In addition, Walser emphasizes the ties between sentiment and society: "Understanding of cultural pleasures is an unavoidable precondition to understanding social relations, identities, structures and forces [...]".<sup>45</sup>

An example of connections between the practice of sounding and Sámi sentiments enfolds in the arranging and production process of the song *Suvvi Ijat*, where the soundscape is connected to sentiments of movement and walking in the snow. The joik "came" to her, explained Sara, when she early one morning walked on the solid snow crust. While arranging this joik, we were constantly experimenting with different musical, technical, and performative approaches to associating with a crispy, crackly, cold, specific snow consistency that occurs in very cold, dry weather. New snow that falls during the night freezes to a hard rocky crust in the morning sun, producing a surface that lightly breaks under the feet when walked on. The openness, serenity, and vast horizon also play key roles in the sentiments of such experiences of being-in-the-world. Musically, while the band worked on the arrangement and instrumentation, we thought this could be stated with simplicity, looping circularity, and a combination between dry, unprocessed sound signals and floating wide and airy sound pads. The rhythmic structure is reminiscent of walking slowly, and the cold, spacy terrain is sounded through high-pitched palettes of percussion and processed guitar overtones, mallets, and minimalistic piano arrangements.

*Suvvi Ijat* are, according to the traditional belief of the northern Sámi, three nights in the middle of April that have been used for predicting the weather for the following spring and summer. The joik also contains some lyrics<sup>46</sup> that deal specifically with feelings and Sámi sentiments:

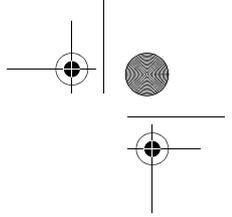
Are a person's feelings and desires  
Predetermined  
As with migrating birds?

Is the warmth in our lives  
Rationed and dealt out  
As are the sunny days of the year?

Are the life values of the past  
Forgotten and blocked out  
Just as the infant's first inklings?

Are connection and relation  
Decided and demonstrated  
Just as the weather after *Suvvi Iját*?





The text poetically reveals a reflection on time-space circularity and the possibility for a naturalistic circularity of human sentiment. The song hints at the possibility of sentiments, like values, warmth, relations, and desires, equivalent to the changing weather and seasons. It also confronts and questions a possible spirituality that affects sentiments.

On the track *Guoros Fatnasat*, meaning “empty boats”, Sara Marielle Gaup joiks in a modern Sámi style common to the area of Kautokeino. Here, sentiments of losing Sámi traditions are confronted and a call for action is presented.

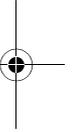
We each live in our own lake  
 Tears from a river between our lakes  
 Mysterious lake it is  
 Only big hungry fish watching and sneaking  
 Strange plants on the bottom, calling and smiling to you  
 Many empty boats, and orphaned paddle floats, waiting – Does he not come?

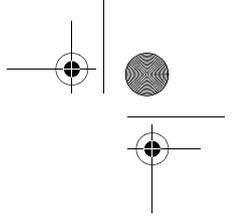
While waiting it does not help  
 To wish you wings  
 When you choose to paddle with one oar on a log  
 You choose to paddle in circles with one oar – It doesn't help, you must do it yourself

The tears dries, the river empties  
 It doesn't help, you must do it yourself  
 Before the boat no longer finds its way  
 Before the boat can no longer encounter its path

The music's arrangement and performance is quiet and contemplative, as different rhythmic structures cross each other. The close recording of guitars keeps the finger slides at the front of the mix, emphasizing closeness and making the distance minimal and the soundscape almost tactile. Simultaneously, floating sound elements tie together the overall timbral structure like a coherent painted background. The music thus supports and frames a sense of longingness and the nostalgic and melancholic sentiments rendered in the lyrics. The breaks and temporary accompaniment retractions and vocal pauses give important moments of pensiveness and reflection.

The song *Libkolas* (the northern Sámi word for “happiness”) is a track typical of the Deatnu area in Sápmi near the Tana River at the border between Norway and Finland. The song portrays sentiments of existential happiness over being caressed by all that surrounds you. The lyrics engage with sentiments relating to being in contact with na-





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ture, birds, flowers, and waves and how these sentiments have a powerful influence on human life:

The wind caresses my hair so softly  
Birds yoik the melody of life, bringing it to a higher plane  
A flower tickles my feet, sharing power

Thoughts come crashing in like endless waves  
Feelings come crashing in like endless waves  
In the sea of life, waves never stop

The night recalls the sun's warmth  
Looks forward to the new day

Like *Suvvi Ijat*, this soundtrack is circular, loop based, and simplistic. Bell-like ringing tones, a percussive guitar and banjo riff, and references to blues continue until a contemplative break delivers a moment of repose. The vocals are kept dry and realistic, with a clear signal processing and varied microphone placement in order to simultaneously create distance, space and closeness to the mix.

The song *Rievdadeapmi* (the northern Sámi word for “change”) points to the sentiments of memory, tradition, and transformation:

Memories linger in the mind, yet changed  
Traditions remain, yet transformed  
No two clouds exactly the same  
Can the same water flow through the river twice?

I am still myself, but different  
Change is the only thing that does not change

The soundscape arranged together with these lyrics floats, with a calm, down-tuned, and plucked steel-string guitar accompaniment through the chord sequence G sharp minor, E major, B major, F sharp major, G sharp minor, and A major 7. Gradually, the mix becomes more and more dry due to the fading of the reminiscing sound elements from the previous track *Mun ja Mun*. Sentiments of intimacy, closeness, and authenticity were important in planning, recording, producing, and mixing the album. Here, crackling sounds in the guitars, sliding fingers on the strings, and a close care in microphone use for all instruments are sounding elements that are important for both transmitting and commenting on such sentiments. The sounding expression connects to aspirations of cultural stability and highlights serenity through circular chord move-





ments, low tempo, and production “closeness”, which stands in contrast to a faster changing world characterized by speed and rapid exchange.

The song *Dolgemá?ki* (“Feather Journey” in English) contains complex meanings relating to Sámi sentiments toward personal relations and connectivity. As described in the album’s liner notes, it is “about breaking loose from situations that tie you down”. It also poetically encourages the listener to “Spread your wings and fly”. The joik itself highlights the improvisational aspects of the southern Sámi joik traditions in particular. The arrangement is bluesy and repetitive. The banjo and ukulele combination contributes to a sense of bluegrass. Combined with the airy timbres and textures from crystal clear mallets, sentiments of freedom, movement, and traveling are sounded. Joikers often take the liberty of spontaneously improvising on the main elements of a joik. This is a dynamic and important part of joiking, which also contributes to the articulation of travel into unknown territory, experimentation, and movement away from the constraints of life.

#### WHO’S PRODUCING WHOSE ETHNICITY?

I have discussed how we can evaluate sentiments as a central element in the practice of sounding and that sounding should be regarded as a key aspect in the construction and maintenance of ethnicity and indigeneity. Sounding deals with grasping and transmitting an emotional reality that is often beyond a linguistic description. In discussing this album and some of its production strategies, I hope to point to the importance that sounding has for cultural entrepreneurs in establishing difference in Sámi cultural practices and dynamics.

It is thus important to point to the fact that the project was also grounded on aesthetic aspirations towards popular music making, values and globalized sounding ideals. This perspective of practice balanced the focus on cultural ethnic distinction, traditionalism and politics. Basic ideas about a Sámi ethos contributed to many choices and strategies during the band’s formation and album production. But *so did* ideas and sentiments from Caribbean practices, jazz-related sound ideals, country and modern popular music production techniques, as discussed above. To *participate* in the broader field of Sámi cultural politics and socio-musical expression, you may be of Norwegian nationality, Swedish, Senegalese, etc., as long as you have the musical potential to contribute with sounding elements that resonate with both aspects of cultural values, and aesthetic preferences in collaboration with your fellow musicians.

This production was made with non-Sámi musicians, and a non-Sámi producer, technician, label, management, and the liner notes and promotion material also feature other languages. Even the initial idea and organization of the Adjágas project came from an “ethnic Norwegian” manager. This shows that ethnic borders and boundaries are discursive and dynamic elements that are not restricted to any internal group of people and do not prevent others from participating in the production of ethnicity. When the domains of ethnicity and aesthetic cultural production meet, Sámi practices are both open, prag-

matic and globalized, *and* deeply rooted in ideas of tradition, origin, and the authentic and unique. These positions do not exclude one another. But as we have seen, knowledge and competence about Sámi culture, values and sentiments were important for the Sámi performers in order to communicate in a creative environment with Sámi sound material.

Finally, this case study of Adjágas' debut album investigates the potential for CDs to be both analyzed as aesthetic *objects* and as a *process* within cultural and ethnic negotiation. Sámi performers are clearly vigilant about the process of recording, perhaps due to the fact that their musical tradition, the joik, is so central to their ethnic and cultural identification processes and that the joik and joiking has been targeted for recording since the beginning of audio recording history. Most Sámi musicians are conscious of the way modern recording practices and digital sound productions affect the outcome and how indigenous music has been shaped by the constraints of technology. The album discussed here could be evaluated as an aesthetic object and as a documentation of different social processes, from local boundary maintenance to transnational interconnectivity. As a case on indigenous sounding, we could say that it reveals cultural potentiality where values, different ethnic positions and aesthetics intersect.

## Notes

- 1 Timothy D. Taylor gives examples of such strategies as central in world music production, liner notes, and album art. In this context, the case is not analyzed from the perspective of world music categorization, but in a broader field of ethnomusicology connected to musical production, identification strategies, technology, and cultural sentiments. Timothy D. Taylor, *World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997)
- 2 Here "ethos" refers to an underlying sentimental communality, which motivates fundamental values, customs, aspirations or character, particular to Sámi culture. Ethos stands in opposition to "*eidos*", the cognitive thought-centered and logical communality of a culture. The joik could be seen as central to the cultural production of Sámi ethnicity, in that it serves to negotiate and "sound" a Sámi ethos.
- 3 Sápmi refers to the geographical area inhabited by the Sámi, a territory overlapping the national borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.
- 4 Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, eds., *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 87
- 5 Barz and Cooley, eds., *Shadows*, 106
- 6 Rice's point of departure is an etic perspective, gradually turning to an emic understanding of the field. In contrast, my project starts with an insider's perspective, working toward an etic discussion. As such, it relies more on an auto-ethnographic perspective, closely discussed in Peter Collins and Anselma Gallinat, eds., *The Ethnographic Self as Resource. Writing Memory and Experience into Ethnography* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). The methodological implications that arise are central to this text but will not be central to the following discussion.
- 7 Collins and Gallinat, eds, *The Ethnographic Self*, 89
- 8 Collins and Gallinat, eds, *The Ethnographic Self*, 91
- 9 Collins and Gallinat, eds, *The Ethnographic Self*, 92
- 10 Ola Graff, "Om kjæresten min vil jeg joike." *Undersøkelser over en utdødd sjøsamisk joiketradisjon* (Karasjok: Davvi Girji os., 2004), 258
- 11 This point was underlined in an informal conversation with the Gaup family about person joiks. It should be mentioned that other Sámi families would hesitate to emphasize such a connection between person joik and individual, or between person joik and communal inclusion.

- 12 Such relational intimacies weaken in the practice of recording and transmitting joik through CD production and live performance.
- 13 Richard Wiren Jones-Bamman, "As long as we continue to joik, we'll remember who we are". *Negotiating identity and the performance of culture: The Saami joik*. (Washington, 1993), 388
- 14 Adjagas web page. [www.adjagas.com](http://www.adjagas.com) (08.08.2013)
- 15 Martin Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), 7
- 16 Interview, Holen 2005
- 17 Rozella Ragazzi and Brit Kramvig, *Firekeepers*. DVD (Oslo: Sonar film, 2007)
- 18 R. Murray Schafer, *Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, N.Y.: Destiny Books, 1977)
- 19 Christopher Small, *Musicking. The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998)
- 20 Steven Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana*. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012)
- 21 Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism*, 7
- 22 Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism*, 49
- 23 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sounding>
- 24 Christopher Small treats this process as ritualistic: "[...] a form of organized behavior in which humans use the language of gesture, or paralinguistic, to affirm, to explore and to celebrate their ideas of how the relationships of the cosmos (or of a part of it), operate, and thus of how they themselves should relate to it and to one another. Through their gestures, those taking part in the ritual can articulate relationships among themselves that model the relationships of their world as they imagine them to be and as they think (or feel) that they ought to be" (Small, *Musicking*, 95). Understood in this sense, sounding is a ritualistic behavior – explorative, suggestive, affirmative, or celebratory of ethnic values and sentiments.
- 25 Martin Stokes discusses the voices from different Turkish musicians as "voices of cultural intimacy [...]", that "[...] shape an intimate, as opposed to official, idea of the nation." (Stokes, *Ethnicity*, 15-16) His perspective could be compared to Sámi joikers and their vocal utterances of Sáminess as intimate; intimate towards their roots and connectedness to nature and ideas of primordialism. Richard Jones-Bamman's view of joik also resonates to this perspective, where joik "[...] in spite of periodic cultural cloaking and concerted suppression, remains a viable and thriving musical genre because of its intimate connection with Sámi conceptions of self, in both the individual and corporate sense" (Jones-Bamman, "As long as", 6).
- 26 Beverly Diamond, in Paul D. Greene & Thomas Porcello, eds., *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), discusses what recordings do as a form of communication and social action. Instead of aesthetic objects, CDs should also be interpreted as "documentations of cultural processes" (p. 123).
- 27 Escaping world music categorization also became strategic in the choice of venues and festivals like the British Glastonbury Festival in 2005, Groningen in the Netherlands, and at ByLarm in Tromsø, Norway. The band participated at national ethnic festivals like the Riddu Ri?u festival in Manndalen, Troms County, but also national rock and popular music festivals.
- 28 Taylor, *World Music*
- 29 This clearly highlights interesting questions of musical ownership that transcend the juridical and established structures of royalties, but it is not discussed further here.
- 30 Lawra Somyby's father is north Sámi and his mother is from the south Sámi community. While growing up, the family more or less decided to leave the southern Sámi language behind, focusing on the northern, to facilitate a less complicated language learning experience for Lawra. The loss of these roots made a deep and sentimental impact on him and contributed to the thematic ideas behind the song *Mun ja Mun*.
- 31 Ragazzi and Kramvig, *Firekeepers*
- 32 Hugo Benavides, *The Politics of Sentiment: Imagining and Remembering Guayaquil*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) 148
- 33 Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982)
- 34 Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*, 3
- 35 Fredrik Barth, "Introduction." in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. by Fredrik Barth. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1969)
- 36 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32

- 37 Latour, *Reassembling*, 34, Italics added
- 38 Here, I use the term creolization to denote the mixing of cultural features, symbols, rites, and customs into new categories so that new forms for interaction and distinctive features are constantly being established, changed, and replaced. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Kulturelle veikryss: essays om kreolisering*. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1994)
- 39 Benavides, *The Politics of Sentiment*, 10
- 40 Barth, "Introduction"
- 41 The Sámi historical and social contexts are of course long and complex, with a conflicting relation to colonialism as a central perspective. See, for example, Trond Thuen, *Quest for Equity: Norway and the Saami Challenge* (St. John's, Nfld., 1995); Thomas R. Hilder, *Sámi Soundscapes: Music and the Politics of Indigeneity in Arctic Europe* (London: Royal Holloway, 2011). I shall not go further into this material here.
- 42 This connectivity to nature is often commented on in discussions on music in northern areas. See Nicola Dibben, "Nature and Nation: National Identity and Environmentalism in Icelandic Popular Music Video and Music Documentary". *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 18 (1): 131–141 (2009), for a comment on such connections in Icelandic popular music.
- 43 One of the most fascinating joik experiences I have had was during a trip by car from Kautokeino in northern Norway to a small town in Finland. I drove with Ánte Mikkel Gaup, Sara Marille's father. After talking about joiks, he remembered a story about a Sámi he met farther south in Norway. He talked about their meeting and started to joik the friend's personal joik. After this, he almost cried in the car, explaining that it was like the person was present in the car with us. The evocative feeling was so powerful that he almost had to stop the car for a while. Joiking, then, has a profound effect of activating memory and sentiment, stronger than other sounding practices that I have ever experienced.
- 44 Robert Walser, Popular Music and analysis: ten apothegms and four instances". in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. by Allan F. Moore (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21–22
- 45 Walser, "Popular Music", 21–22
- 46 The joiks are written and performed in northern Sámi language on the recording. In addition, they are translated into English on the album cover.

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## Summary

This article discusses the role of musical practices in ethnicity production within the Sámi community in Norway. Following a general discussion of the musical practice of joik (pronounced "yoik" in English) and Sámi ethnicity, the text focuses on the Sámi band Adjágas and the production of their first album. Musical practices like performing, arranging, recording, and disseminating music, will further be discussed with the term "sounding" as a way of talking about cultural, social and political aspects

of music. Central to this idea is that ethnic sentiments – feelings, aspirations, and desires – are strongly negotiated within the field of music making. With a close reading of some of the album's tracks, and an insider's perspective on its production, I hope to show how musical practices are central to negotiating Sámi ethnicity and creating strong connections both to an imagined ethnic primordiality and a modernity characterized by a globalized soundscape.

## Keywords

Ethnomusicology, ethnicity, popular music studies, popular musicology, cultural studies

## Biography

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