

Flying Beyond: Diverse Sáminesses and Be(com)ing Sámi

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Abstract

This poststructuralist autoethnographic writing and wandering happens in the context of Sáminess(es) and gets inspired by new materialist and posthumanist theories. This is a porous and fragmentary (non) writing with memories and affects, illustrations and nomadic wonderings. Through sharing her, and never only her, messy and rhizomatic story the author hopes to create space for multiple Sáminesses and the celebration of tiny and provocative differences. This is different autethnographic beginnings, no conclusions, but for multiple connections and towards love and affirmative critique.

This is, Or: Introduction

This autoethnographic writing or wandering and wondering – if using Deleuzian and Braidottian and other new materialist terms – on becoming and nomadic research, happens in the context of Sámi diversities and fluidities. I’m a Sámi, and have taken back the language of my father, my father tongue, during the last two to fifteen years. (It depends on how you count.) The effectivity of taking back my father tongue is related to that that I’ve started to work in Guovdageaidnu, at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences, with the people I can call “my people”. This is also a thinking with Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 37), when she writes: “When I read texts, for example, I frequently have to orientate myself to a text world in which ... words such as ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’, ‘I’ actually excludes me.” I suppose I’m not the only Sámi, who sometimes has that feeling while reading text worlds on “us” Sámis. Like many researchers (for example Harris, Carlson & Poata-Smith, 2013, and Sarivaara, 2016) notice, there are tendencies and pressure towards indigenous cultural purity and in those essentializing discussions both culture and identity are seen as rather unchanging attributes.

In this article, I encounter the Sámi diversities and discussions on Sámi identity politics with new materialist and post humanist theories (Braidotti 2011, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari 2004; Barad 2007), with which it becomes possible to decenter the human and humanist and rationalist thinking, and accept the messiness and diverse entanglements of the socio-material realities. This article gets inspired by poststructuralist autoethnographic writing (see Gannon 2006) and new materialist, never “neutral”, but striking, provocative, political worldly writing (see Stewart 2007; Wyatt & Jackson 2016). This gets written full hearted from “my” – and never only mine – perspective, moving, becoming, and messy space of encountering the discourses and materialities of the world. The disruptive postructural autoethnographic knowledge sources “from our particular locations in particular bodies with particular feelings, flesh, and thoughts that become possible in particular

sociocultural-spatial contexts” (Gannon 2006, 476) while representing and troubling the multiple selves and experiences of ours. Crossing the boundaries of Western dichotomist thinking, like nature-culture, human-animal, reason-emotion/affectivity, theory-lived experience, Western-and-all-the-possible-others-like-Indigeneities, opens spaces for affects and affective writing. Here non-linearity and messiness of the writing, as well as the refusal to any final conclusions, is a political and an onto-ethico-epistemological (see Barad 2007) respond to the world as messy, vague, diffuse, uncertain, and undecided (Law 2006).

This is writing with Rosi Braidotti (2013, 165) “non-linear, web-like, scattered and poly-centred”, zigzagging “in the spaces that flow and connect the binaries” (Braidotti 2013, 164).

[A] method that replaces linearity with a more rhizomatic style of thinking, allows for multiple connections and lines of interaction that necessarily connect the text to its’ many ‘outsides’. This method expresses the conviction that the ‘truth’ of a text is never really ‘written’ anywhere, let alone within the signifying space of the book. Nor is it about the authority of a proper noun, a signature, a tradition, a canon, or the prestige of an academic discipline. The ‘truth’ of a text requires an altogether different form of accountability and accuracy that resides in the transversal nature of the affects they engender, that is to say the outward-bound interconnections or relations they enable and sustain. (Braidotti 2013, 165.)

So, how can you read this?

What kinds of outward-bound interconnections could this text enable?¹

This is a porous and fragmentary story in between the grey areas of the rigid categories of being or not being a Sámi. The rigid categories, which I want to escape.

This is not written in order to be understood, but in order to create spaces for sharing, connecting, building bridges over the binaries, yes, doing that all with theoretically grounded autoethnographic revealing of difficult stories. That yes, that’s how we are. That’s how we move. And become. And mask and unmask.²

This is reconnecting to “the virtual totality of a block of past experiences, memories and affects, which, in a monistic philosophy of becoming, get recomposed as action or praxis in the present” (Braidotti 2013, 166)

This is writing with Rosi with George Eliott, “writing with ears and mind open to that roar of energy that sustains Life” (Braidotti 2013, 166)

Life with connections, becomings, movings,

Life with hope and hopings.

¹ Whom do I assume as the reader of the text? I know-feel you, my dear co-writers-with/in-affirmative-critique (this issue) and “all-the-“post”-people-in-league”, but as being and becoming relatively a new beginner in Indigenous and Sámi studies, I can’t stop thinking all the anonymous readers, which are an inherent part of academic writing. Where are you and where does this article take you? This may be, already may have been, written differently than you may be used in academic contexts, but it is meant so. Writing is political. The style of writing is a political choice.

² Oh, this became maybe one conclusion. While rewriting this introductory part. About the immanent style of writing, I write more in Guttorm 2016a and 2016b. Always here, during the writing process, with (all) my thinkingsensingfeeling body-mind.

This is writing movements-towards-poems (see Guttorm 2016a) or poem-like writing (see Hohti 2016)

Writing as not-yet-or-ever-ready, finalized, not with arguments fully crafted,
 But fumbling, sketching, composing,
 Making a crazy and uncertain, stubbornly incomplete³ assemblage
 Around and with some wandering and wondering thoughts around and with becoming Sámi
 Becoming Sámi, and Sámi as becoming
 Me, a becoming, a wanderer, a wonderer, an inquirer, who happens to be(come)⁴ a Sámi and a Finn,
 Who after writing on, with and about differences in her doctoral theses,
 After getting inspired by poststructuralist feminists and other theorists⁵,
 After refusing to know about/on others,
 After seeing the tiny small differences⁶ all over the spaces, times, matters, people(s), moments,
 entanglements,
 After writing autoethnographic, openly unfinished, unravelling the assumptions of “research” (see
 eg. St. Pierre 2013, Otterstad 2015, Reinertsen 2015),
 After that all, yes, what happened, is happening, after that all?

³ Incompleteness and difference gets performed also in the minotarian English, as this article never went through any language check. It is one conscious choice of becoming minotarian, as well as an enactment of difference.

⁴ Being and becoming, Sámi and Finn. And becoming-imperceptible (see Deleuze & Guattari 2004).

⁵ In addition to already mentioned Gilles Deleuze with Felix Guattari and Rosi Braidotti this writing happens after reading and loving texts, those entangled becomings with the world, where the prevailing (research/schooling/power-knowledge) practices get challenged (like Foucault’s and Derrida’s classics; Cannella & Virur, 2004; Osberg, Biesta & Cilliers, 2008; to name some) and/or the tiny differences celebrated (Barad 2007). With those I write. With the world and with the inspiring texts as part of it. With embodied and embedded affects (Braidotti 2013), with (un)comfort, and with the weight of the heart (see also Nancy, 2010). And with Deleuze and Parnet (2002, 51): “One only writes through love, all writing is a love-letter: the literature-Real.”

And with Anne Reinertsen (2015), again and again:

Through moving “head over heels and away” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 26), unfolding myself onto the world, while enfolding the world within; showing the imperceptible and thinking the unthinkable, I Creole, mutate, twist and turn, and make this into working with/in minor languages and words . . . minor research . . . —*seemingly small and perhaps insignificant details or weak signals* . . . yours and mine and trust hopefully indirectly developing a better understanding of the manner in which the interconnectivity and mutually reinforcing nature of various “-isms” having something to do with me; my responsibility, engagement, and possible impacts. *Hopeisms* . . . I do not know. “Welcome to my” worldly hyperbolic crocheting coral reef word-creating meaning making thinking doing inspiration researching events showing my ontologically polyvocal subjectivities; my “postanthropocentric embodied” brain (Braidotti, 2013, p. 104; Reinertsen, 2013). I must. And how much force . . . critique . . . is there in abstractions . . . words . . . actions? Rigor . . . Professionalism . . . Sciening . . . I try to make them do. (Reinertsen 2015, 625.)

⁶ For Deleuze (2004) difference is positive and provocative, it is not something to get recognized in pre-existing, often dichotomist categories. The world, us, everything is differing all the time, thus are not observation or representation working anymore (St. Pierre 2013; MacLure 2013). “Also a different science must be thought” (St. Pierre 2013, 650.)

What is it, what brings me to write this?

(In addition to this lovely collaboration with my co-researchers, with my companions?)

How do I choose what I write about?

Is it me, who makes the choice?⁷

Nevertheless, in this kind of poststructural (new materialist / post humanist / sociocultural) autoethnographic writing we can use everything,

Think and write with everything and accept the messiness (and not).

Fly little bird

Fly little bird

sing

Fly beyond

thoughts

(Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *Trekways of the wind*)

Fly beyond the words

Sing love

Sing solidarity

Is it possible to say

something sensible

Beyond the words, beyond the thoughts⁸

when every word

can be turned

Encounter spaces

any which way

In-between

(Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *Trekways of the wind*)

Fly little paper

Get out of the paper

Sing

And now I have to start to write. In a situation, where I only have plenty of different beginnings.

⁷ Those questions, as a manifesto of naivety (with Cixous, 2008, with Derrida).

⁸ Maybe it's not possible to go beyond the words or thoughts, but for me the porous writing enables to reach for the unspoken, reach for solidarity beyond words, reach for something which may get too naïve or even lost in academic papers... Maybe this is also a reach beyond the humanist endeavor to understand and know; a reach towards the post humanist unity, towards the unspoken sharing of and on our common planet Earth, "the third planet from the sun", as Jamaican writer Edward Kamau Braithwaite writes (cited by Haraway 2004, 41). Some silent and still. Like seen and heard from the universe. Plain singing, smoothly joking heartfelt. With tiny words, if at all. With love and hope. *Hopeism with Reinertsen (2015), oh yes.*

We always start in the middle, write Deleuze and Guattari (2004).

In the middle of the encounterings, in the middle of the assemblages, of the time-space-matterings
(see also Barad, 2007).

Where is the middle? There is no one middle, but many diverse enterings into (and exits out of) the mess. There's just an entanglement, rhizomes, lines of flights.

One possible beginning could be:

The Sámi are the only recognized indigenous people of Europe, inhabiting the specific areas of Northern Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia⁹. Sámi people do not live in extreme poverty and are not exposed to high levels of violence, as many indigenous peoples in the post-colonial world, but have experienced different kinds of colonization and discrimination, and struggle with the states in order to get the rights to the land, language and culture back, like Trudel, Heinämäki and Kastner (2016) write. Or stronger again, revitalize maybe, I'd like to add. Only Norway has ratified the ILO 169 (International Labour Organizations convention on Indigenous and Tribal People, 1989).

I could continue this path, I could continue with the different histories of these four lands, And the different histories of the states, how and if they recognized their colonization policies, and how they then built practices and institutions to strengthen the languages and cultures again in (some more or less) collaboration with the Sámi societies.

I could write on the frustrations and the disappointments of the Sámi people with the governments.

I could write on how the Sámi them/ourselves understood who they/we are, who belongs to them/us, and continue with asking where the margins in our Sámi societies are, or, how we could bring harmony to the society when Sámi especially in Finland are fighting about who can get recognized as a Sámi and as a elector in the electoral roll of Sámi Parliament.

I though prefer to start from an autobiographic middle:

Mun lean Báršši-Sámmol-Hanna

I am Hanna, whose father is (was) Sámmol (Samuel/Sami/Sammeli, all the different names used in North and South) from a small village called Báršši in the Finnish side of Deatnu (Teno river) valley¹⁰

My father learned Sámi as his first language, but moved away in need and wish to find paid work because of survival, or "a different life" – I don't know,

⁹ The amount of the Sámi variates in the countries and according to different references. The Sámi are told to be the most in Norway (around 50 000) and the least in Finland (some 10 000) (In Sweden some 20 000). Sámi languages still spoken today are nine.

¹⁰ Deatnu is a river on Finnish-Norwegian border, where there are small villages, a road and fells and tundra on the both sides of the river. My father though is not so known outside the village(s), as he has moved away many decades ago. That's why people recognize me better through my uncles (*eagit*, the older brothers of my father, and *čeahci*, the younger brother of my father) and cousins (*oambealit ja vilbealit*, half-sisters and half-brothers). That's why my answer in the question of who I am often continues with explaining who's my *eahki* and who are my *vilbealit* and *oambealit*. Relationality to families, villages and areas is relevant in the Sámi culture, as well as in other Indigenous cultures (see eg. Shawn 2008).

I never asked

He never taught/talked Sámi to me when I was a kid

But

How happy, proud, and excited would my father be now?

Oh, I would love to meet my father,

Do you hear me father,

Are you there

I would like to ask you things

I would like to ask your opinions

I would like to ask about your life

About your moving away

About your working even in the mine

Can I say it aloud

That you worked in a mine for some time...

Destroying the land, *eatnama*

Were you less-or-more-than-Sámi?

(You know you have a story to tell that has to be told when you can't tell it...)

How many things we have we can't talk about

What can I talk about

What can an associate professor in Sámi University of Applied Sciences talk, think, research, ask, feel,
where can she move, what can she touch, affect, sense,

What is Indigeneity?

How (if) does Indigeneity get produced and performed today?

Am I becoming (or always-already) minoritarian because of my Indigenous background?

Where I minoritarian always-already

As I not had the possibility to learn my father's tongue, to learn my other mother tongue

Or am I becoming minoritarian just now when I learned the language and became more-Sámi?

Being a Sámi is a full-time work, said someone

Being a Sámi is a full identity, is it?

Don't we also have many selves?

And (t)here I am, studying, teaching,
writing the language of the heart of my father,

the language of the heart of mine

Struggling and scrambling with the language,

But loving my people, the culture, the landscape

Could you ever, dear father, have thought
that I revitalize, take back, your language,
Revitalize the language and the culture?¹¹

There is some sorrow, something stuck,
Like I needed to explain,
Like I needed to convince
Like
Like
LLLLLLLLLLLL¹²

I could also start with the memories:

I remember the itching woolen Sámi costume
It itched my little shoulders and legs
Aunt had sewn me and my little sister Sámi costumes, dress and hat, which we 'had' to put on to the
Christmas parties at school, last day before the Christmas holidays
At the spring party, they would have been too hot.
Sámi costume. No, we called it Lapland's costume. The Sámi name 'gákti' I had never heard.
Dad came from Lapland. He was born in Northern Finland, called Lapland.
He talked our home language, Finnish, a little bit funnily.
He never pronounced D, but voiced and softly T,
Lada, the Russian car, was Lata
And when he talked in the phone with his relatives, his eyes were shining
And we understood only the words for technical things, telefovnna, magnetofovnna...
-
Many years later one young man gave my shoulders a massage
And when I told him my father is Sámi and that according to the Finnish law I'm too, his eyes lighted
up even more
And I grew longer and prouder
There is shine in my Sáminess

¹¹ What is revitalization? Vital, vitalizing, living, Life? What is Life?

¹² The discussions in Finland between and around Sámis are currently so inflamed, that it is exciting to continue writing. I (get) quiet.

I got so proud of my roots, wow, I'm a Sámi

--

I could continue with the right to vote:

I'm a register Sámi, registered as an elector

in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament in Finland,

Because my father has learnt Sámi as his first language

I'm a register Sámi and I can never become a "wannabe Sámi",

or wear a "fake Sámi costume" - no matter how it itches

On affirmative critique, Or: Another introduction/frame/possible conclusion, ethics, multiplicities and becomings

This is a *non-innocent* song/search/invitation/scribble on solidarity, respons-ability and ethics among Sámi multiplicities. This is a humbling and fumbling venture, one of the first steps in a new area to write autoethnography, a new area to struggle with the world. To become "worthy of the present" (Braidotti 2013, 189). Both responding/participating in the actual discussion around the theme, Sáminess, and always-already a methodological endeavor/movement with the question, how it is possible to actwritetknowbecome in scientific contexts.

This is fumbling towards an affirmative critique with Rosi Braidotti (2005, 2013) and Michel Foucault (1963):

.. not to judge but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep... Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightening of possible storms. (Foucault, 1963, 41, preface to *transgression*, in Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer & Thaning, 2016, 19.)

Rosi Braidotti (2005, 2011) talks for affirmative critique, about the transformation from the negative to affirmative passions and ethics of conatus: "the harm that you do to others is immediately reflected in the harm you do to yourself, in terms of loss of potentia, positivity, self-awareness, and inner freedom" (Braidotti 2005, 4). And critique which would be dressed in red could harm others, could harm my people, in this phase, where we are, struggling both with collective identity building and with recognizing and celebrating the diversities of us. The Sámi are and not one nation, one culture, one language. Affirmative critique is something that is not getting/being/becoming stuck with rights and demands, sorrow or despair, but something that creates movement, creates connections, creates new, positive spaces. As Rosi (Braidotti 2011, 165) writes:

Affirmation is essentially and intrinsically the expression of joy and positivity. -- The ethical moment consists in overcoming the slight sense of shame, the ethical nausea that marks the recognition of the intrinsically negative structure of one's passions. In other words, the ethical act consists in relinquishing the paranoid-narcissistic ego and installing instead an open ended, interrelational self. --

Paradoxically, this requires also the recognition of the impersonality of the many forces that compose us. - - Finding adequate representation for these processes is a challenge for all thinking beings. One that is best met not by critique, but by taking the risk of creativity. A risk that may involve the kind of cognitive and affective stutter that shatters all uncertainties and opens doors of perception to multiple lines of unexpected possibilities.

Relinquishing the paranoid-narcissistic ego, who also would like to be complete in her everything she starts and gets into. Would like to be a perfect Sámi, too, oh yes.

But fails, stutters, and through revealing that invites the others to do so too. To let go. To become. To live lively.

Fear, anxiety, and nostalgia are clear examples of the negative emotions involved in the project of detaching ourselves from familiar and cherished forms of identity. To achieve a post-identity or non-unitary vision of the self requires the dis-identification from established references. Such an enterprise involves a sense of loss of cherished habits of thought and representation, and thus is not free of pain. No process of consciousness-raising ever is. (Braidotti 2005, 7/2011, 321.)

Post-identity

Multiplicities are always becoming, always changing, always becoming different, differing again and again.

We all. Yes, we all, we Sámi too:

We Sámi are diverse. Some live in the Sámi home areas and practice traditional livelihoods. Some live in Southern parts of the Nordic countries and work wherever. Some have moved or were already born somewhere else in the world and learned to know other and third cultures. Some of us speak some Sámi, in some families the kids haven't learned Sámi during one or more generations. Some have studied the language in adulthood and started to speak it with their kids too. Some can talk many other languages, but not the language of their parents or ancestors.

We Sámi are diverse, but we have also some common history, history of oppression and assimilation, which can be seen in all these diversities. Sáminess, Sámi language and culture, has gotten very diverse positions in our lives.

We Sámi are with diverse Sámi cultural backgrounds, with stronger and not so strong roots and threads. Sáminess cannot be measured with one or two indicators.

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While starting to work at the Sámi allaskuvla (Sámi University of Applied Sciences)
I wanted/dreamed/planned to accept and celebrate the differences, in me, AND in others
But already first week I understood
that I want and need desperately the Sámi costume to become,
I needed, I wanted to get the costume I already for 15 years had been dreaming to get again
(Or, did I want to hide to the same?)

Another not so easy story to tell: I never had an adult dress earlier
 Oh, how scary it was to wear the dress for the first time
 Almost a Sámi dress -virgin
 Do they see it? Can I do it right way?
 How to put the scarf, how to put the belt?

In Seija Somby's article (2011) I had read that (in her research context confirmation fest) in the dress you can read not only the family and area, from where the wearer is coming from, but in addition to that also "the ability to dress up". Ups, I could feel the gazes.¹³

I wanted to bring multiplicity to Sámi teacher education
 I wanted to perform that there are all kinds of Sámis
 I wanted to open space for differences (and hope and solidarity)
 I wanted/tried to teach/write towards affirmative critique,
 Affirmative critique with R.B.

But/and I ordered the dress
 To have the feeling that I belong ...
 That I relate to ...
 That I'm 'real'
 That now I become
 Sámi

Post scriptum, with Annemarie Mol¹⁴

And now there will be a discussion. I know. (- -) We will see. I do not think that I have prepared us (myself, this text, - -) very well for a fight. I have not crafted a stronghold that is easy to defend. There are no walls around this text, instead it is quite open. I have written this as a present. Here it is. Enjoy it or forget it. Eat from it, as much as you like, and digest it – or push your plate away ... (Mol 2010, 266.)

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¹³ Also Somby (2011) tells in her article about the pressure of producing an culturally acceptable body (with the dress) (see also Utriainen 2009), as well as about the uncomfortable embodied experiences and memories, because of the updrressing and the haste and irritation with it.

¹⁴ Thank you, Riikka, for sharing the reference!

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