

The Kveeni of Northern Norway: From National Minority to Indigenous People

Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Brandeis University

Graduate Program in Global Studies

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts  
in  
Global Studies

by  
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August 2014

## ABSTRACT

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Waltham, MA

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As a result of the phenomenon of globalization, lingual communities around the world are finding new ways to push back against the *lingua franca* that once threatened their very existence. Where once speakers of minority languages were forced to learn the language deemed most prestigious, as communities have become increasingly interconnected, they have access to innovative ways to maintain their language and culture within the realm of the majority language. Without diversity in language and culture, there is a risk of homogeneity in thought and loss of identity that is, at best, disheartening and, at worst, a threat to lingual communities worldwide.

This paper draws a connection between the experiences of the Kven people and the Sami people of Norway, two groups that are currently going through a lingual and cultural revitalization. Both groups are minorities in Norway, but each has had varying levels of success

in the maintenance of their respective languages and cultures. Whereas the Sami have legally established themselves as an “indigenous population,” the Kveeni are still considered a national minority and are not afforded the same privileges and rights that the Sami people have recently secured. The Sami have been more successful in their revitalization efforts, whereas the success of the Kveeni has been marginal. Through analysis of scholarly work, historical events, and interviews with Norwegian Kven people, this article posits that if the Kveeni take note of how the Sami have achieved their level of prestige and come together as a unified group to make their voices heard, they will then be able to preserve their culture, prevent the death of their language, and attain the status of “indigenous population.”

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Fig. 1

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

“Over 40 percent of the world’s approximate 7,000 languages are at risk of disappearing”

(“Endangered Languages Project”).

The Kven people<sup>2</sup> of northern Norway are facing an identity crisis: they are not legally considered an indigenous population, though by definition, they are. Their language was nearly

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<sup>1</sup> Fig. 1. Vestre Jakobselv school with Sami and Kven students, Wessel, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> As there are several variations on the spelling of Kven, I will heretofore use the term Kven as an adjective, Kveeni as a noun, and Kvensk when referring to the language.

wiped out in favor of the language of the majority, Norwegian. Many of their traditions have been lost to time. They faced state-sanctioned discrimination for over a century, and even now lack representation in the Norwegian government. Recently the Kveeni, who number between ten and fifteen thousand<sup>3</sup> (Kvensk Institutt 2014), have begun a cultural revitalization with an emphasis on the preservation of their language and traditions, the creation of new traditions and customs, and attaining the status of indigenous people. The fear is that if their goals are not realized, then their culture will vanish and their language will be one of the 40 percent that will soon disappear.

The Sami people, an ethnic population of about 35,000 in Norway (Broderstad 2011: 895), also underwent a cultural revitalization with the same goals in mind. They, like the Kveeni, nearly lost their identity as a result of Norwegian politics, but, through various methods, they have rebuilt their culture and now hold seats in the Norwegian government. Their unity has allowed them to push for Sami language and cultural classes in schools, the institution of a Sami flag, and the proliferation of Sami cultural products. It is critical that the Kveeni follow the example of the Sami to realize their objectives before it is too late. The ultimate goal for the Kven people is to be officially recognized by the Norwegian government as an “indigenous people,” rather than a “national minority.” The importance of this achievement cannot be overstated: with the status of indigenous people comes government recognition assistance, which is vital to preservation of Kven culture and language. Through “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds. 1983: 2), language revitalization and “emancipation,” (Lane 2011: 58), and

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<sup>3</sup> Note: the plight of the Kven people has all but evaded the attention of English-speaking scholars. There is little English-language research on the Kveeni, perhaps because their numbers are small. As such, research for this paper has been somewhat hindered by translation stumbling blocks and limited scholarly resources. There has been a wealth of information in many languages available about the Sami people, whose numbers are significantly greater. Many scholars, whether knowingly or not, overlook the fact that though much of the history that applies to the Sami also applies to the Kveeni, they are still a separate ethnic group with their own experiences and stories to tell. Perhaps in time this will change.

self-reification as explored in the work of Handler, the Kven people will be able to re-establish themselves in Norwegian culture and assert their right to have a voice in the government. The Kven people fit the definition of an indigenous population as outlined by the ILO Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, and should henceforth be deemed an indigenous people, with all of the rights and privileges entitled to them legally guaranteed.

## **Chapter 2 – Historical Context**

### *Norwegian history*

The history of Norway starts as far back as the Ice Age, but an abridged version of the facts will suffice for the purposes of this thesis. Sometime during the Stone Age, it is likely that a group from the “Germanic branch of the Indo-European race” migrated from the south and spread throughout Scandinavia, subsisting on hunting and fishing (Gjerset 1915: 38). This group became the Norwegians. Fast-forwarding through time, the legendary and historically significant Vikings have a long history of seafaring exploration beginning around the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Boyesen 1886: 25). Following centuries of territorial disputes between Denmark and Sweden, Norway was under the crown of Denmark, until it was ceded to Sweden in 1814 (Boyesen 1886: 515). Norway attempted to declare its independence, but after the Norwegian-Swedish War, Norway was united with Sweden. It remained this way until 1905. The country has a rich history closely connected to both Sweden and Finland, with immigrants from both areas dispersing throughout northern Norway for hundreds of years. Many of these immigrants were of Kven descent, thus the Kven people have long ties to Norway. The flow of immigration through this area was fairly constant and well-received until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when more Germanic ideas of nationalism were

adopted under the Norwegian Constitution, drafted in 1814. These ideas included language being the essence of a nation, and a nation being defined by ethnicity (Lane 2011: 58). Immigrants became foreigners, and the seeds of discrimination were sowed. This is where much of the modern Kven history begins to take shape.

### *The Kven people*

The Kven people have their roots in Finland: they were Finnish laborers who migrated to northern Norway before the 1700s (Niemi 2003; Minority Rights Group International). They were primarily fishermen, but many Kveeni were blacksmiths, carpenters, farmers, and foresters as well (Lane 2011: 59). Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were viewed positively by the Norwegian authorities for these skills and were treated as contributing members of society (Lane 2011: 59). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as nationalistic ideals were cultivated, the attitude toward Kveeni in Norway began to sour. It was feared that they were too connected to their “homeland” of Finland, which was then controlled by Russia, and citizens worried that Russians and Finnish would use those connections to annex land in Norway (Lane 2011: 60). As result of the fear and nationalism on the part of the ethnic Norwegians, policies were soon enacted that made discrimination against minority groups legal and state-sanctioned. The Norwegianization policy, which will be discussed later, was the culmination of these policies and resulted in the widespread damage to the longevity of the Kven culture.

There are between 10,000 and 15,000 Kven people in Norway today<sup>4</sup>, predominantly in the northern-most counties of Troms and Finnmark, though “exact figures are difficult to

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<sup>4</sup> The population of Norway is just over 5 million (CIA Factbook 2014).

estimate as there is no definition of the Kvens” (Minority Rights Group International; Kvensk Institutt 2014; Lane 2011: 63). The definition is based on self-identification, as genealogy is difficult to trace (Kvensk Institutt 2014). The lack of definition is a major issue resulting largely from official discrimination and assimilation policies. Kvensk speakers number somewhere between 2,000 and 8,000, but the exact statistics are unknown (Kvensk Institutt 2014, Lane 2011: 63). This is partly due to the fact that “no censuses have been carried out recently on the Kven as an ethnic group, and there are therefore no statistics showing the number of people who speak Kven” (Lane 2011: 63). It can also be argued that as a group, the Kven people have been largely marginalized in the past and ignored in recent history by the Norwegian government (E. Johansen 2014). Though the state has seemingly addressed the issue of Kven language and culture preservation with the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, prevailing politics and discrimination have rendered both of those multilateral treaties all but obsolete.

According to a personal interview with Eskild Johansen, head of the Halti Kvenkultursenter (a Kven cultural center) in Storslett, Norway, there is really no ethnically pure Kveeni. Johansen, himself Kveeni, says that because of forced assimilation, as well as exogamy practices throughout history, modern Kveeni are nearly always part Norwegian, part Sami, or both. In order to trace Kven roots, it is necessary to look back at one’s genealogical history, perhaps many generations back. The language was considered a dialect of Finnish until 2005 (Lane 2011: 62). As such, there is no real, cohesive way to define a Kven identity. The question “What is Kven culture?” lacks a definitive answer. This has been a hindrance in the movement toward Kven unity, and this issue will be examined more closely in later sections.

Figure 2 is a picture of a Sami woman and a Kven man milking a reindeer in Finnmark taken before the year 1900. It demonstrates how the lives of the Sami and the Kveeni were intertwined in Norwegian history. Yet it must be emphasized that they are two separate groups with different roots and should not be characterized together as one entity, which happens far too often in Norwegian history and scholarly research.



Fig. 2

### *The Sami people*

The Sami ethnic group have been in Norway for over a thousand years. They started as a nomadic fishing and farming community, then developed into a reindeer herding community in northern Sweden, where the climate is less than ideal for agricultural purposes (Josefsson 2010:

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<sup>5</sup> Fig. 2. Sami woman and Kven man milking a reindeer, Wessel, 1900.

141). Over time the nomadic group migrated throughout the area of Sápmi, which covers the northern-most areas of Sweden, Finland, and Norway, as well as the Kola Peninsula in Russia (Josefsson 2010: 142). They followed the seasons, or, more often than not, reindeer migration patterns (Josefsson 2010: 144). They were geographically and economically isolated from the Norse people until after the plague of 1350 (Peskle 1999), but scholars agree based on genealogical and archaeological evidence that the Sami have been in Norway as long as the Norwegians have, if not longer (Meriot 1984: 373). This further renders their treatment during the Norwegianization period unjust.

Like the Kveeni, the Sami existed largely without incident in Norwegian territories until the peak of “European National Romanticism” (Lane 2011: 58). By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, not only had their land been taken away and their language stomped out by the state, but the Sami lost their traditional animistic/shamanistic religion as well (United Nations). These important pieces of culture were lost due to the policies of discrimination in Norway. Prejudice toward the minority groups in Norway did not begin (or end) with the Norwegianization policy. While Sweden, Denmark, and Norway were having land disputes – for centuries until Norway’s independence in 1905 – the Sami were regularly forced off their land, which had in many cases been in the family or Sami community for hundreds of years (Weinstock 2013: 415). The aforementioned evacuations coupled with centuries of land disputes with Sweden have led many Sami people throughout Norway to abandon their Sami roots (Fig. 3), and it has allowed for some present-day Norwegians to decide “to ‘consider’ themselves to be Sami” (Weinstock 2013: 412). This makes identifying Sami for data collection difficult presently.

Today, the greatest number of Sami in Norway live in Troms and Finnmark (Silviken 2006: 707), as do the Kveeni. This reflects their past of taking root in the coldest of climates,

where the reindeer population is the greatest. While reindeer herding is less prevalent now in Sami communities, it played an important role in establishing Sami self-determination. The advantage that the Sami have achieved is that they have been deemed an indigenous population by the Norwegian government, partly to make up for the state's involvement in legal discrimination policies. Though they faced the same prejudice, the Kveeni have not yet been granted the same status as the Sami.



Fig. 3

### *Norwegianization policy*

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Kven, Sami, and other minority children were “forced into boarding schools where Norwegian was the only language of instruction” (Lie 2003: 280). By the 1840s, any group considered nomadic, like the Kven and Sami people, had their land taken from them, which was justified by a prevailing royal doctrine that nomadic groups were not entitled to land rights (Kjelstrup 2001; Lane 2011: 59). In the 1860s, the *fornorskningspolitikken*,

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<sup>6</sup> Fig. 3. Sami pupils waving Norwegian flags, wearing Norwegian dress, Norvang, 1954.

or the Norwegianization policy, was enacted in a reflection of growing nationalism. Several actions were taken to stamp out foreign culture, including the aforementioned boarding schools, as well as “subsidizing colonization (settlers) in Sami territory in the north, and restricting property ownership to those who mastered the Norwegian language and had a Norwegian family name” (Weinstock 2013: 414). Children in school were banned from using Finnish or Sami languages, and church sermons were conducted only in Norwegian (Lane 2011: 60). In boarding schools, children “were taught Norwegian ideologies. They were also taught that the ways of their forefathers were wrong” (Lie 2003: 280). Forefathers here referred to the Russian enemy so feared by authorities. The Sami were categorized as threats as well, and the Kveeni and Sami became known as *de fremmede folkeslag*: ‘the foreign nations’ (Kjelstrup 2001).

During World War II, many Sami and Kveeni were evacuated to the south during German occupation, especially as the German army burned any and all structures they deemed unnecessary (Lane 2011: 60). In these temporary enclaves where they settled, “sometimes for more than a year – they tended to speak Norwegian or Finnish and continued to do so when they returned home” (Weinstock 2013: 416). This contributed to the loss of their indigenous languages, and the difficulty of going back to one language after using another for so long meant that it was unlikely that many of the Sami and Kveeni would choose to switch in favor of a minority language as opposed to a majority language. During the process of reconstruction following the war, the Norwegian government followed a model of “Scandinavian social democracy,” where homogeneity was key: any and all legal documents “had to be completed in Norwegian... [and] knowledge of Norwegian became linked not only to success, but associated with privileges and modernity” (Lane 2011: 60).

Gradually, discrimination policies fell out of favor in Norway. Though the Norwegianization movement was ostensibly dismantled by the 1980s (Hansen 2012: 27), Johansen (2014) argues that “the move from the Norwegianization policy has been slow... and the government has never really dismantled the policy.” An incident in 1978 may be the reason that the government started loosening its strict regulations on its minority populations. The “Alta Dam incident” has been credited with bringing the rights of the Sami into the forefront of politics and the minds of Norwegians. In short, the Norwegian government proposed a hydroelectric dam that would flood a Sami village. The Sami protested, but by 1982, the dam was erected. The protests, which included hunger strikes and people chaining themselves to trees, were powerful, and left their mark on the psyche of Norway (Parmann 1981: 152).

Recently, “a process of integration and increased ethnic revival has gradually replaced a history of force assimilation and colonization” (Silviken 2006: 707). Although remnants of the *fornorskningspolitikken* are extant, much has been done to repair relations with the Sami people. Though it took over a century of oppression, “the Samis demanded recognition as an indigenous population and... in 1989 the Sami Parliament was established” (Lane 2011: 61). The King of Norway apologized formally to the Sami for past wrongs in 1997, but left the Kveeni and other minority groups out of his expressions of regret, which demonstrates a puzzling lack of real empathy on the part of the state (Ertzaas 2001).

Progress on behalf of other ethnic populations in Norway has been much slower. Almost a decade after the establishment of the Sami Parliament, the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was ratified by the Norwegian Parliament in order to recognize “the Kven, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani as national minorities” (Lane 2011: 61). This convention (signed by Norway in 1998) acknowledged the groups’ roles in Norwegian

culture and the importance of their languages. Section II, Article 5, paragraph 1 of the convention states the following:

The parties plan to undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions, and cultural heritage (Council of Europe 1995: 3).

This document represents a significant advancement in the treatment of minority groups all over Europe. Yet some Kveeni, including Johansen, believe that the Norwegian government needs to do more to live up to the guidelines outlined in the convention, and, to take it a step further, upgrade the status of the Kveeni from national minority to indigenous population. The situation of the Kven people has yet to show much progress in the political sphere.

#### *Psychological effects of discrimination*

It has been postulated by researchers that as a result of the discriminating policies enacted by state agents in Norway, Sami and Kven people are more likely to experience “psychological distress” than other groups in Norway, including ethnic Norwegians (Hansen 2012: 37). More specifically, the study showed that Sami and Kven males felt the highest levels of psychological distress, likely because the men were “more frequently... unmarried, experiencing more frequent and severe discrimination, and having a lower household income” (43). Further, their findings supported the idea that Sami and Kven people, even after the dismantling of the Norwegianization policy, still face prejudice today and feel the psychological effects of such bigotry. The study concludes: “published data on this phenomenon are scarce despite its particular relevance from a global indigenous health perspective. More work remains to be done to understand how discrimination influences mental health in Sami and non-Sami populations”

(46). This study does not reveal what kinds of discrimination are projected upon the Sami and Kveeni, but it does present some ground-breaking data for the Norwegian government to examine and assess what sort of changes might be implemented.

### **Chapter 3 – Terminology**

National minority, or indigenous people: what's in a name? Why is the status of the Kven people so critical to the push for cultural preservation? The answer is actually quite simple: indigenous people receive legal and financial help from the government to preserve their “language, culture, and community life” (Bjørøgo 2001). At this time, the Kveeni, a national minority, are not entitled to this aid. Below are expanded definitions of these important terms, followed by an explanation of the “Sami Policy,” which further illuminates the importance of legal status in Norway.

#### *National Minority*

There is no universally accepted definition of national minority – it is up to each party who ratified the Framework Convention to decide upon the criteria (Council of Europe 1995: 12). Norway's vague definition, which includes the Kveeni, Jews, and Roma, is simply “groups with a long-standing attachment to the country” (Bjørøgo 2001). The website for the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation (henceforth called the Ministry) adds:

The Government emphasizes the objectives enshrined in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European

Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The authorities wish to maintain a close dialogue with organisations that represent the national minorities in order to ensure that their views are heard (Bjørgero 2001).

Johansen (2014) asserts that the Kven people would argue that their views are not being heard. They have no representation in the government; Kvensk was not recognized as a legal minority language until 2005 (Lane 2011: 62); and only within the past few decades have cultural centers and museums dedicated to the Kveeni been in existence. With only a national minority label, the Kven people have been largely ignored by state agents. As a result, many in the Kven community are pushing to be recognized as an indigenous people. Government inactivity is no longer considered an acceptable course of action in Norway.

### *Indigenous people*

Currently, the only minority group in Norway recognized as an indigenous people is the Sami. According to the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries Convention of 1989,

Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (Bjørgero 2001).

The Ministry offers some additional information regarding who is considered an indigenous population and why. Legally, it is groups that have been in Norway since the 1600s that are eligible to be considered an indigenous people. *It is not important that the group be the first, or connected to the first, inhabitants of the geographical area.* The Ministry website (Bjørgero 2001) also stresses that a shared trait among indigenous populations is a history of suppression and “long-term assimilation policies.” Furthermore, the importance of “traditional land areas” is

emphasized. Therefore it is clear that the Sami people fit the guidelines of what it means to be an indigenous population. Yet the Kven people, who also typify these characteristics, have been overlooked by the Norwegian government, and are continually marginalized while their issues are ignored (E. Johansen 2014).

### *The Sami Policy*

The Sami have been guaranteed government support in their continued cultural preservation and expansion since before the Sami were legally recognized as an indigenous people. The Sami Act of 1987 was the first legal bill enacted to protect Sami culture. The Act ensured that the Sami would have equal importance with Norwegians in language, politics, health, education, and religion (Bjørngo 2001, Ministry of Labor and Social Inclusion 2008). The Sami Policy is founded upon the Sami Act as well as Section 110a of the Norwegian Constitution, which states: “It is the responsibility of the authorities of the State to create conditions enabling the Sami people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life.” Essentially the Sami Policy is the blanket term covering all of the rights and privileges enjoyed by the Sami people. It asserts that “as a state, Norway was established on the territories of two peoples, Norwegians and Sami, and that both these peoples have the same right to develop their cultures and languages” (Bjørngo 2001). This is revealing, in that it emphasizes the importance of the land.

The Sami are entitled to government protection because they were in Norway since its establishment. It makes sense that their culture and language are safeguarded for this reason, and they have had this right since 1987. Yet, as stated by the Ministry, all that matters for the label of

indigenous population is that the group was there from the 1600s onward, as the Kven people were. Consequently, there is no legal reason that the Kven people may be prevented from drafting their own version of the Sami Policy to ensure their language and culture are preserved and protected.

## **Chapter 4 – Sami Methods of Cultural Revitalization**

As a result of the Alta Dam incident, the Sami people were able to unite behind a common goal: to raise their social, political, and economic status in Norway as an indigenous population. With the Sami Policy in place, it became easier for the Sami to move toward cultural revitalization. Because so much had been lost to Norwegianization, it was necessary for the Sami to redefine what made them Sami, and thus reinvent their culture. The word “culture” is not a static, tangible idea, but includes many aspects of life for a particular group. It is subject to the group’s definition as well as factors such as time, outside influences, technology, and so on. It can be thought of as “signifying, symbolic, or meaning systems” (Delaney 2011: 16). Therefore, as I will explain in the section on cultural authenticity, culture cannot be essentialized or made static; it can be created and altered, while certain aspects may be left untouched for centuries.

A major part of any culture is tradition. “Tradition is fluid; its content is redefined by each generation and its timelessness may be situationally constructed” (Linnekin 1983: 242). Any traditions that evolved as a result of a changing culture may be dubbed “invented traditions,” as coined by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Invented traditions are “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition” (2). These invented traditions are no less authentic than

traditions that have been in place since time immemorial, but often come about as a necessary response to changes over time. The following are the various methods used in the revitalization of Sami culture, as well as traditions and cultural forms that have come about in more recent years.

### *Language and education*

“Since so much culture is inherent in knowing a language, in order for indigenous cultures to maintain their roots, a certain level of competency is needed in the language, customs, traditions, and belief systems” (Lie 2003: 275). Immediately following the dismantling of the Norwegianization policy, Sami language and cultural lessons were introduced into school curricula. Sami people can now feel as though they are a part of Norwegian culture; at the same time, they have the ability to cultivate and maintain their own distinct ethos, traditions, and language. Sami language learning in schools begins at the primary level. “In 1967, Sami language instruction in Norwegian schools began on a trial basis, and in 1969 the *grunnskole* (primary through lower secondary education) gave Sami instruction (as a subject) a formal place in the curriculum as a school subject.” (Lie 2003: 280). As language learning is most effective at a young age, it is important that children are exposed to the Sami language and history as soon as they begin school, if not sooner.

At the college level, there are many universities in Norway offering Sami language and cultural studies. Students at the University of Tromsø may take classes in the Centre for Sami Studies, where they have the opportunity to get their Bachelor’s degree in Sami Language and Literature, or do their Master’s work in Philosophy in Indigenous Studies. There are more than

twenty classes offered in the area of Sami Studies, proving that the culture of ignorance, while not completely disappeared, is at least shrinking in the presence of scholarly research (Universitet i Tromsø 2014). At the University of Stavanger, Nordic language classes are offered (University of Stavanger 2014). And, perhaps most important of all, the Sámi University College has Sami language-learning classes as well as a “traditional knowledge” class taught in Sami, Norwegian, and English (Ramsalt 2014). That the Sami could have their own college would have been unheard of three decades ago, and it serves to demonstrate the progress Sami people have made over time.

College students are a prime group to help increase community involvement in Sami affairs. As anybody who has ever been on a college campus can attest to, universities are teeming with students looking to become active in some form of service or another. A program like the Centre for Sami Studies could never exist were it not for the politically-minded students in Tromsø. Keeping Sami language and affairs in the universities is an excellent method for cultural preservation.

### *Sami flag*

The Sami flag (fig. 4) was created in 1986, and it flies in all four countries of Sami occupation (Pittja 2010). The circle on the flag represents the sun and the moon, while the colors are taken from the traditional Sami costume, called a *kolt* (Pittja 2010). A flag is a sacred, revered symbol of unity, of freedom, and of nationalistic or patriotic pride. Sociologist Durkheim saw flags as “modernized versions of the sacred emblems known to anthropologists as totems” (Shanafelt 2009: 14). For the Sami, having a flag demonstrates that they have achieved as a

community a sense of independence within the area once known as Sápmi; they are past the days of Norwegian assimilation, and are now asserting their identity that transcends physical boundaries. It is an icon that can be used by Sami around the world to show their unanimity as a once-stigmatized group.

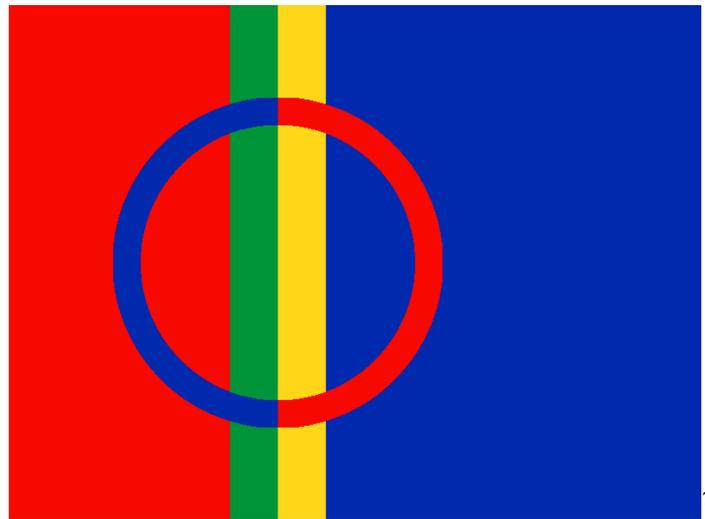


Fig. 4

### *Arts, events, and cultural products*

Perhaps as a result of increased awareness throughout northern Europe and in the academic world of the plight of the Sami people, there is no difficulty finding information about the Sami on the internet. Material includes books, CDs, YouTube videos, scholarly articles, news, and more. This increased exposure is incredibly important for the Sami, as it helps to solidify their identity for posterity, allows scholars and academically curious people to learn about their culture, and creates a venue for Sami people to share cultural products such as music

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<sup>7</sup> Fig. 4. The Sami flag, Båhl, 1986.

and literature. One need look no further than Amazon.com for examples of cultural exposure. Typing “Sami people” into the search bar yields a myriad of results, including biographical accounts of the Sami and other minority populations in Europe, as well as music made by Sami artists available for purchase. Further refining the search to “Sami of Norway” offers books on Sami artists, photos of Sami people, Sami folk music, and more just on the first page. Using other resources, a YouTube search brings up countless videos of Sami singers, many of whom are singing older Sami folk songs, but also some who sing new, original ballads and pop songs, or foray into the realm of heavy metal. These data demonstrate not only the longevity of certain Sami cultural products, but also a connection to modernity, proving that the culture is not stuck in a time loop but is in fact fluid and adaptable.

Many have recently seen a Sami movie character without knowing his indigenous origins. The character Kristoff (fig. 5) from the wildly popular Disney film *Frozen* is, as confirmed by director Jennifer Lee, a Sami reindeer herder.<sup>8</sup> Clues to his Sami identity include his clothing, his reindeer friend Sven, and the music from the beginning of the film, which is an example of the Sami musical form, the *joik*. The *joik* (also spelled *yoik*) is reminiscent of the Sami people’s shamanistic roots (Keeling 2012: 255). Often, the *joik* has no lyrics, only animalistic sounds unfamiliar to Western ears (E. Johansen 2014). Aside from the first scene of *Frozen*, *joik* videos can be found on YouTube, along with other traditional Sami language folk songs.

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<sup>8</sup> Twitter exchange. User @perrizaa: “...So is Kristoff intended to be ethnically Sami in the movie?” 19 Sept. 2013, 9:21am. Director Jennifer Lee (@alittlejeelee): “Yupsie.” 19 Sept. 2013, 10:58am. <<https://twitter.com/alittlejeelee/status/380752825854074880>>



Fig. 5

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<sup>9</sup> Fig. 5. Kristoff of “Frozen,” Disney, 2013.

## Chapter 5 – Kven Methods of Cultural Revitalization

Recently, the Kven people have been engaging in a cultural revivification, due largely to the aspirations for the indigenous population label. This movement has been sluggish at best. The underlying problem is that the Kven people have no unified identity – though they may share common roots in Finland, time has weakened the very concept of what it means to be Kveeni. Due to the assimilation policies, much of the past has been lost. The language nearly died and is still endangered. Rather than go to the trouble of digging into the past to get a grip on the old customs, it has been easier for many Kven to continue living as a Norwegian, or a Sami (E. Johansen 2014). This unfortunate reality exists not only for the Kven in Norway, but for many ethnic and minority groups around the world. Sometimes assimilation is simply easier.

But as a result of the efforts of people working in institutions like the Halti Kvenkultursenter, hope is not lost. A movement toward a more unified Kven identity is happening in northern Norway. Though it will take time to raise interest, particularly among the youth, there have been great strides toward reinventing what it means to be Kveeni. The idea of reinvention is important, as anthropologists have argued that newly invented customs are not really “authentic” to the culture. Yet reinvention is critical in the revival of a dying culture, and *it in no way undermines the authenticity of the culture*. In fact, recently devised cultural forms

(invented traditions) and activities, such as lingual camps, music festivals, and Kvensk-language theater productions, have raised interest in Kven revitalization, particularly among the youth.

### *Self-reification*

As mentioned above, the Kven people lack a firm sense of their shared identity. Therefore, self-reification is a problem. In the quest to solidify a concept of Kven culture, it may help the Kveeni to reflect on the ideas of Ernest Renan. Renan asked scholars, “What is a nation?” Not all of what he asserts maps neatly onto the experiences of the Kveeni, but many of his ideas do mirror much of what the Kven people have been feeling. Unlike the finite boundaries Anderson discusses (Anderson 1983: 16), nations have become more infinite in scope: we talk now of the “Red Sox Nation,” the “Queer Nation,” the “Iroquois Nation,” and so on. Renan might have argued that a group like the Kveeni are a nation in essence. To sum up a few points relevant to the Kveeni:

A nation is a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history; it is a spiritual family not a group shaped by the earth... The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion... A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity... the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life (Renan 1882: 18-19).

These sentiments are beautifully put, and, when applied to the Kven people, serve to prove that they are more than just a minority group in Scandinavia, but are a nation in their own right. His ideas employed in context may help the Kveeni to reify their identity as an indigenous population and an important part of Norwegian history.

The anthropologist Handler explored this idea of self-reification in Quebec. He asked people what it meant to be Quebecois, and two particular answers came up the most often: “the

relationship of an individual to a particular locality or territory, and a style of living or ‘code for conduct’” (Handler 1988: 33). It is interesting to see how perfectly these responses line up with Renan’s definition of a nation, how it is less about physical boundaries and more about the people within a particular community. People, indeed, “can change not only their place of residence but their nationality,” though he does say that “choice is subordinate to essence” (35). When reflecting on the “code for conduct,” Handler’s interlocutors kept coming back to the idea of a Quebecois culture – yet, when pressed, people found that they were unable to pinpoint just what exactly Quebecois culture was. Most finally related it to their history. It may be worthwhile for the Kven people to reflect on this question of what it means to be Kveeni. Rather than attempt to essentialize the idea of “Kven-ness” (culture and ethnicity are dynamic terms that do not lend themselves to essentializing, which is a thought I will return to later), Kven people, especially youth, might find aspects of their history that evoke a feeling of belonging, and use those features as a way to develop their own inner Kven-ness. If this self-reflection leads to common traits as it did with the Quebecois, the Kveeni may be able to use these unifying qualities that, while not strictly essentialized, may help to quantify a more definitive concept of Kven-ness.

### *Language revitalization and emancipation*

“Linguistic revitalization movements are crucially important because they can mark the end of a long history of discrimination and stigmatization and the beginning of a new and positive minority identity” (Lie 2003: 276). In 2005, Kvensk was recognized by a Committee of Ministers in Norway as a separate language from Finnish, following pressure from the Council

of Europe after Norway ratified the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Lane 2011: 63). Until quite recently, Kvensk was a completely oral language – there was no written form with the exception of the use of Finnish. During an interview with Kaisa Maliniemi, project manager for the Kvensk Institutt, she explained that within the past couple of years as a result of the Kven language emancipation from Finnish, a Kvensk dictionary has been completed, and a written form of the language has tentatively been agreed upon. This will prove to be a huge step in the process of revivifying Kven culture and will allow for the creation of teaching materials for Kvensk learners of all ages. In the past, Lane maintains, Norwegian authorities have used the connection between Kvensk and Finnish as a method to keep costs lower – rather than pay for the development of Kvensk teaching materials, schools simply used readily-available Finnish materials (64-65). This is slowly changing as Kvensk has become emancipated from Finnish both officially and socially; and there now exists a standardized written form that can be used to convey the language to younger generations. Without this lingual emancipation, there would have been less incentive to develop a written language, and it is likely that teachers would continue to use Finnish teaching resources. “Thus, the ratification of the European Charter and the Framework Convention has considerably improved the situation and protection of the Kven language and has also strengthened the revitalization of Kven culture” (Lane 2011: 65).

### *Education*

Following the dismantling of the Norwegianization policy, Kvensk has been gradually introduced in schools, when citizens request it. In Troms and Finnmark, if there is need in a community from three children or more, these children have a right to education in Kvensk or

Finnish (Ministry of Education 2013: Sec. 2-7). At this time, the Ministry of Education maintains on their website that Kvensk and Finnish may be taught simultaneously in elementary school. It is expected that these children will also learn the Norwegian language simultaneously. The Finnish as a second language program helps children communicate in Finnish and Kvensk while teaching them about the culture and social issues of the Kven people. The need for these types of programs is not as great in the more southern areas of Norway, so they appear to be more concentrated in the two most northern counties.

The University of Tromsø in Norway offers classes in the various Kven dialects as well as in Kven culture, as can be found on the university's website. It is widely accepted that language learning capabilities diminish with age, so the ideal time for Kveeni to learn the language of their people is in their youth. But it is important for college-age students to enroll in these classes, as they are at a prime age to get involved in the various Kven cultural centers around northern Norway. Searches on the websites of other major universities turn up no results for Kvensk studies, but it is of course possible that courses are offered at smaller universities and college around Norway. Again, it appears to be that the need for the Kvensk language is perceived by Norwegians as greater in the north.

Kvensk makes appearances outside of the classroom as well. Eskild Johansen discussed with me his future involvement in a Kven lingual summer camp. Children will be immersed in Kvensk, taking classes and hearing the language spoken around them, while taking part in creating literature and theatre productions in Kvensk. It will be a wonderful educational opportunity for children to become more involved in the revivification of Kven culture, while having fun during the summer months. Kaisa Maliniemi recounted to me stories of teenagers

writing and performing plays entirely in Kvensk. This has only been made possible because of the newly-agreed-upon written form of Kvensk.

Further removing the language from the classroom: on my tour around northern Norway, I saw many villages marked by signs (fig. 6) with their name in Norwegian, followed underneath by the Sami and Kvensk names. These signs serve as both physical and metaphorical reminders of the heterogeneity of these villages, and the history within.



Fig. 6

### *Kven flag*

Progress in language conservation is only one part of the process of Kven cultural revival. The Kveeni are also working toward a universally recognized Kven flag. During a personal interview with Ivar Johansen, secretary general for the Norwegian Kven Association, he

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<sup>10</sup> Fig. 6. Sign in Norwegian, Sami, and Kvensk, Verrill, 2014.

stated that a Kven flag would be a “unifying... not a nationalistic symbol.” This is an important distinction: as opposed to rallying behind an icon for nationalism with aspirations of self-determination, the Kveeni are more interested in an icon of figurative unification – for the most part, they are not, as Eskild Johansen phrased it, “separatists.” A flag may represent a nation with borders, like the Norwegian flag, or it may be used as a symbol for a group that has roots everywhere, such as the rainbow flag for the LGBT community. Kveeni people all over northern Europe have for years been discussing and proposing designs for a flag representing them as a widespread community, but they have yet to reach a consensus (E. Johansen 2014).

A flag is more than a piece of cloth. Flags are viewed as sacred in most if not all cultures. In the United States, there are laws against the desecration of the flag. “The mysterious aura that comes to surround either totem or flag derives from the fact that both objects are a group’s collective representation of itself” (Shanafelt 2009:14). By this logic, a Kven flag would be a symbol not just of Kven unity, but of their past history and all of the obstacles the Kveeni have overcome. It serves to stand as a symbol of progress, to demonstrate that though they have not yet eliminated the prejudice aimed at their people, they are an entity that deserves to be heard. As Shanafelt puts it, “it remains to be seen whether or not there are other common social symbols that function so well to evoke universal psychological proclivities” (26).

Figure 7 is a proposed design for the Kven flag, put forward by the Kvenland Association in 2009. The flower comes from traditional Kven peasant design, and can be found on ancient weapons and sheaths (Linder 2011). An article from Swedish news asserts that this design has been accepted as the flag of the Kven people, but Ivar Johansen states, and my research shows, that the flag has not yet been accepted officially in Norway. Johansen does not foresee a decision

anytime soon, as Kveeni continue to debate this issue today. Figure eight is the emblem used by Kveeni in the place of a flag.

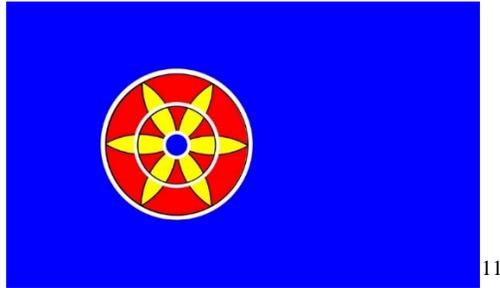


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

### *Arts, events, and cultural products*

Eskild Johansen has taken part in a “lingual summer camp,” where the emphasis is on Kvensk language immersion and activities revolving around Kven culture, such as fishing and wood carving. Children have the opportunity to write and act out theatrical skits in Kvensk.

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<sup>11</sup> Fig. 7. Proposed Kven flag, Johansson-Kyrö, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Fig. 8. The Kven emblem, Kretowicz, 2009.

Similarly, Kaisa Maliniemi has worked with youth on writing and performing theater for Kven and Norwegian communities, as well as organizing other projects, like the “Uuet laulut – Ođđa lávlagat – Nye sanger” (New Songs) project. The Kvensk Institutt, working with Swedish musician Erling Fredrikkson, has recruited youth to sing in minority languages such as Kvensk and Sami, in order to keep these languages alive. In Fredrikkson’s words, the children “*går ut i världen lite mer hela när de bär med sig en del av sin egen historia*” (“they go into the world a bit more whole when they carry with them a part of their own history”) (Kvensk Institutt 2014).

Like the *jeli* music played by Malian Bamana people, where instruments such as the *ngòniba*, the *kora*, and the *balafon* create the unique sound of the *jeliw* (Durán 2013: 211, 218, & 234), the Kven have their own instruments and musical forms as well. The *kantele* (fig. 10), which is probably Kven in origin, can be used as a harp or a guitar (Kvensk Institutt 2014). Though traditional Kven music would fall in the genre of folk, modern musicians are beginning to write songs in different styles using Kvensk lyrics (E. Johansen. 2014). About a year ago, Johansen organized a Kven folk music festival to bring together musicians from northern Norway. The event drew a large crowd of youth and adults alike to enjoy some traditional and original Kvensk music. Music is so important to keeping a culture alive because it transcends lingual boundaries, so it may prove beneficial to focus efforts on the expansion of the audience for Kvensk music. This is where social media again becomes a handy tool for cultural awareness.



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Fig. 9

*Cultural authenticity: Tukanoan Indian parallels*

The Norwegianization policy clearly had a lasting impact on Kven culture. So much was lost to time that it has been necessary to create new cultural representations. This is not unique to the Kveeni; minority groups that have been repressed in one way or another by the majority population have faced a similar problem. The question of cultural authenticity has been raised by anthropologists and native peoples worldwide: if traditions are created and evolve over time, are they “authentic” to the culture? Cultural authenticity is a tricky issue, as it implies that culture can only come from the past, from handed-down traditions. Yet when a group like the Kveeni has nearly lost their culture to time, it becomes apparent that the people must adapt as customs, traditions, and language erode. A new culture may be created, with or without foundations in already existing traditions, and from this are birthed new traditions and lifeways. This created culture with its invented traditions has, in its own way, become authentic.

Jean Jackson wrote an excellent article about the Tukanoan natives of Colombia, whose situation closely resembles the Kven dilemma, where “a relatively powerless people tries to maintain cultural and political autonomy within a highly bureaucratic and centralized state”

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<sup>13</sup> Fig. 9. The Kantele, Lenz, 2004.

(Jackson 1995: 5). Jackson finds the idea of culture to be a dynamic, fluid concept, as opposed to one clinging to the trappings of authenticity. While she asserts that some measure of traditional culture is important for the Tukanoans to gain power (5), the origin of that culture – whether it is based in history or is largely created by modern Tukanoans – is irrelevant. I say irrelevant because within the whole of the article, Jackson makes clear that authenticity is a relative, subjective term.

Where a purist might see new forms of culture, be they Tukanoan or Kven, as “spurious” in their novelty (16), Jackson argues that they are just as authentic as anything based on tradition. “I would prefer to argue that if, in 20 years, all Tukanoans have adopted these new forms and believe they are and always have been Tukanoan, then these new cultural elements would be ‘genuinely’ Tukanoan” (20). Likewise, if it is necessary that the Kveeni develop new traditions in order to preserve and revitalize their culture, then it is inappropriate to label these new customs as inauthentic or counterfeit. “The new cultural forms that the Tukanoans and other native peoples are creating, though perhaps not historically accurate, are not corruption; they are neither spurious nor contrived culture!” (18).

Because the term “culture” is such an enigmatic concept with its ever-changing meaning, it is understandable that scholars and anthropologists have had difficulty conceptualizing how a group interacts with its own cultural forms: “Although many writers on ethnicity have recognized the complexity of processes that groups such as the Tukanoans use to retain, remodel, or reject traditional cultural forms, anthropology has not yet provided adequate conceptual tools for the analysis and interpretation of those forms” (16). Without the aforementioned tools of analysis, it is nearly impossible to call one custom or another “authentic.”

### *Cultural commodification/essentialization*

Still, people yearn for authenticity, or “the specter that haunts the commodification of culture everywhere” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 10). Culture, for some, has become or is in danger of being commodified – it is a means of economic, political, and social survival, as opposed to simply a way of life handed down over generations. In chapter two of *Ethnicity Inc.*, John and Jean Comaroff discuss the idea of ethnicity as a brand: “Ethnicity is also becoming more corporate, more commodified, more implicated than ever before in the economics of everyday life” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 1). Jean Jackson takes it one step further by arguing that “one ‘has’ culture, an entity that can be lost, enriched, or stolen – in other words, a commodity subject to all the processes to which any commodity is subject, a familiar notion in our late-capitalist society” (Jackson 1995: 16). The Comaroffs describe how ethnic groups in different parts of Africa have commodified their ethnicity and culture in order to appeal to tourists – the reification of their identity hinges on making their customs, while often newly created, fit their image of what African authenticity is. As with the Tukanians, for the Makuleke, these new customs have effectively become their new lifeways, which are “withdrawn from time or history, [and] congeal into object-form, all the better to conceive, communicate, and consume” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 12).

The idea of ethnicity and culture becoming almost tangible commodities for eager consumers is not a novel one – many people, subconsciously or consciously, attach ethnicity and culture to objects. Hip-hop is widely considered to be an African-American creation, thus certain “ethnic” features are mapped onto hip-hop music (Schulz 2012: 143). When hip-hop was accepted into Japanese youth culture, it was “dismissed as a transient fad by major corporations”

as an essentially American fad (Condry 2006: 2), yet it is still popular there today. Japanese youth took a cultural object and made it their own, writing lyrics about their experiences and often criticizing the Japanese government (11). Hip-hop could therefore be looked at as both a global and a local commodity, as something that is both American in origin, yet Japanese in its essence (Condry 2006: 17). Fundamentally, ethnicity and culture are relative, subjective terms, and their definitions can and will evolve over time – therefore, ethnicity and culture cannot be essentialized.

Though, as stated, the Norwegian government officially dismantled the Norwegianization policy, the Kven, Sami, and other ethnic groups are still struggling in many aspects. “The Sami people experience ten times more discrimination than ethnic Norwegians” (United Nations). It is very easy to ignore or forget about bigotry when one is not part of the group being marginalized. To relate this back to Africa, Bruner discusses the deliberately overlooked negative side to the Maasai tourist performances in Kenya. These dances are full of global influences and often have less to do with Maasai culture, and more to do with how tourists would like to imagine the Maasai (Bruner 2001: 883). To Bruner, the dances are “not authentic in the sense of being accurate, genuine, and true to a postulated original” (900). They project a sense of harmony, of an idealized society, that is not a true reflection of the reality in Kenya. He asserts that Kenyans are “well aware of the reality of the ethnic conflict in Kenyan society,” but they choose to see these stylized performances as what they were hand-crafted to be: positive demonstrations of increased integration (900). The Comaroffs handily sum up this idea of affected cultural forms: “The stress, quite blatantly, is on conjuring affect, itself evermore a commodity, by aesthetic means” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 16). In Norway, the Kven are less concerned about putting on a show for tourists, yet they must, in some sense, perform for the government. They

must demonstrate that they have some kind of conceptual, or better yet, tangible form of culture. One of the stipulations for the indigenous people label is that the group “retain[s] some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions” (Bjørgero 2001). For a group that was repressed by its government and forced to reject its cultural heritage, it is puzzling to imagine how the Kven were meant to hold onto these various institutions. This paradox is yet another issue the Kveeni must address in the move toward becoming an indigenous population.

In the United States, similar to the Kenyans, we choose to follow the Lincoln model of the “rags-to-riches narrative that everyone can be president,” while overlooking the fact that politics here are traditionally dominated by white men (Bruner 2001: 900). This myth, which many of us recognize as such, only serves to highlight the harsh truth of everyday bigotry and intolerance while taking the guise of a Horatio Alger fiction. In Norway, while the King has apologized publically for the discrimination faced by Sami citizens (leaving the Kveeni out of the discussion) (Ertzaas 2001), the reality is that minority groups still do not have the same social, political, and economic status enjoyed by the Norwegian majority. Areas needing improvement include “better collection of numerical data on minorities, continuing discrimination against Roma, and complaints by minorities that it continues to be difficult to get their voices heard when decisions are taken which effect minority groups” (Minority Rights Group International). Clearly, the rags-to-riches story is an unlikely goal for minorities in Norway.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

“We have seen that in the Tukanooan case, ‘culture’ is a component in political negotiations at both the local and national level” (Jackson 1995: 17). This quote maps nicely onto the experiences of the Kven and the Sami people: it has become less acceptable over time for the state and the general public to ignore the plights of the minority groups. They must be included in political discussions, and allowed to have a voice in matters involving their community and the country as a whole. Though the government still has a long way to go in terms of equal treatment of all minority groups, including the Sami, achieving the label of indigenous population would allow the Kveeni to feel a greater sense of unity while simultaneously reifying the fact that they are, as Eskild Johansen points out, “a very important part of Norwegian culture.”

The Kveeni of Norway are clear candidates for the label of indigenous people. History has shown that they meet the criteria laid out in the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries Convention of 1989, as well as additional guidelines specified by the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. Commonalities with the Sami people further prove this point, therefore action must be taken. The Norwegian government must move past its history of ignoring the Kveeni and allow them to have a voice; permit them to

make decisions on behalf of their people; and offer them rights to the land that was taken away. Without assistance from the government, the culture and language of the Kveeni will likely continue to disappear from the planet, slowly but surely, every day. This would be a tremendous loss, not just for Norway, but for all who have Kven heritage, and for all people with strong academic curiosity.

Until the Kven people come together as a community without borders, they will find asserting their claim for the indigenous people label all but impossible. As greater numbers of Kven youth are educated in the importance and ways of their culture and as more people devote their time to promoting the work of the various cultural centers around Norway, the likelihood of Kven continuity will increase. People like Eskild Johansen and Ivar Johansen are working tirelessly to bring attention to the issues of the Kveeni, as they have addressed it with me. The interest of other foreign scholars will certainly help raise awareness. Making the information available in multiple languages will serve to reach more widespread audiences, and Kven people around the world will have more resources to learn about their people and language, and to keep the Kven culture alive.

It may be necessary for the Kven people to study the successes and failures of other indigenous and minority groups who have fought to win back their rights, to assess the best practices for cultural revitalization and working with the government to reestablish themselves. They can look beyond the Sami and investigate the ways in which, for example, Native Americans gained back many of their indigenous rights but are still disadvantaged in terms of social status. Perhaps one day the Kveeni will be a success story, one other cultural groups will study. The local story of the Kven people could become a global narrative, with far-reaching effects. It remains to be seen.

The Kven people have many options to increase their visibility in the public eye and ensure their longevity. It would serve them well to follow some of the methods the Sami have used. Areas where they might improve their position in Norway include:

- Increased youth involvement in projects and cultural centers
- Advocating for the label of indigenous people
- Pushing for greater access to Kvensk language-learning and cultural studies
- A flag uniting Kven people everywhere
- Scholarly research on the Kven people as a separate entity, available in multiple languages
- Kven leaders in institutions reaching out to local and global scholars who share an interest in preserving endangered languages and cultures
- Universally accessible cultural products representative of the Kveeni culture, such as music, movies, and television shows
- Forming sustainable communities to strengthen their sense of what it means to be Kveeni

These are just a few of the ways the Kven people could follow in the footsteps of the Sami people to attain a greater sense of Kven solidarity. To break down each point: greater youth involvement ensures that the language and culture will not die with the older generations. If the Kveeni are to achieve the label of indigenous people, they must demonstrate and prove that they meet the aforementioned standards set by the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. Education at all grade levels is imperative to ensure that the fight continues. A unifying flag gives people a symbol to rally behind, and will promote a sense of shared identity for Kveeni all over the world.

Kven people and leaders will not be able to accomplish everything on their own. Scholars and anthropologists worldwide who believe in cultural and lingual diversity should take advantage of the opportunity to study this endangered minority group and help to preserve it, by doing research in multiple languages and making it available to all who share their interests. Likewise, Kven cultural products should be made more readily accessible for all, to ensure longevity. If the culture and language is simply preserved like a museum, it is likely that youth and scholars will reject the stilted nature of the traditions and allow them to fade into obscurity. This cannot be allowed in the interest of anthropology and academia, therefore steps must be taken to make the Kveeni more visible. The internet will continue to prove to be a useful tool and resource.

That last point may be the most important. Because there is no strict definition of a Kven person, it would be in the interest of the Kveeni to reestablish ties with other Kven people to reify their culture. “Without viable local communities no ethnic minority can survive as a distinct cultural group in the long term” (Svensson 1986: 214). Communities build unity. This is not unity at the expense of the majority group – only those on the very fringes of society have any interest in being separatist (E. Johansen 2014) – but unity in the sense of having a shared common identity. Just as we talk about “Red Sox Nation” and “Queer Nation,” one day there might be a Kven Nation, unified in spirit. It is a tragedy when culture and language are lost to time, leaving behind only faint traces of lives lived – shallow echoes of what once was and can never be again.



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Fig. 10

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<sup>14</sup> Fig. 10. Kveeni Eskild Johansen playing guitar, Verrill, 2014.

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