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**REVITALIZING MINORITY LANGUAGE
AND ETHNIC IDENTITY:
THE CASE OF THE KVENS IN NORWAY**

This paper presents some findings from broader research into Finno-Ugric minorities living in the Scandinavian area. Since 1990 many ethnic minorities have started to view themselves and their language more positively, in spite of the assimilation policy lead by the countries in which they have been living for centuries. The Kvens constitute a small ethnic minority (about 10,000-15,000 people), whose traditional areas are the two northernmost regions of Norway, Troms (in Kven: Tromssa) and Finnmark (in Kven: Finmarkku). Their language was not recognized as separate by the Norwegians, and was regarded as a dialect of Finnish by the inhabitants of Finland. In 2005, the Norwegian government finally recognized it as a separate language. The situation of the Kvens shares a number of features with the process of language and identity revitalization of other ethnic minorities in the post-modern world.

I. HERMENEUTIC METHOD, RATIONALE, AND OBJECTIVES

By way of introducing this paper, I would like to clarify my position as a researcher of *identity*. It is now well known across the humanities and social sciences that the researcher cannot adopt a thoroughly objective position towards her or his topic as it is relatively more possible to do in the natural sciences. Why is it thus? Due to the very essence of non-empirical enquiry, the researcher assumes a *hermeneutic* position; that is, she/he does not only present verifiable facts, but values and perceptions as well, all the while connecting them towards a coherent and plausible interpretation that will, ultimately, be recognized by those participating. It is understood that the researcher,

by shaping the very enquiry and – however inadvertently – filtering the response, affects the data collected and reported, thereby reinterpreting the world being studied.¹

There remain some researchers who insist that “objectivity” be pursued. However, *salient questions* and interpretations which aim at *plausibility, coherence* ending in data grounded in *consensus* have become the more legitimate aspirations for researchers such as myself. Indeed, the *hermeneutic method* permits enquiry into such opaque and elusive existential phenomena as comprises psychological and political *identity*. Respect for reliable facts as can be discerned and verified, as well as the systematic and comprehensive study and documentation that have always given legitimacy to scholarship, continue, of course, to be imperative.

My interest in the psychosocial experience of linguistic minorities traces to two main sources, one of them being my own membership of an ethnic minority, the Hungarians in Romania. I have long felt pressed to seek information about other minorities throughout the world in an effort to identify possible adaptive similarities and further inform both my teaching and my understanding of my own community. The other reason for my particular interest in the Kvens is my discovery – through an indigenous newspaper, the Ruijan Kaiku (in translation, “The Echo from Northern Norway”) about a decade ago – of *their* minority community in Norway. As a Finnish language professor at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, I was drawn to their paper’s breadth of content and intellectual quality, so determined to follow it and through it, the development of the Kven community’s campaign to revitalize their language and, so, their ethnic identity *in situ*.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KVENS’ COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

I shall now discuss the identity of the Kvens through an examination of their characterizing, interactive cultural priorities, habits of language, and the attitudes with which they have come to apprehend

¹ I would like to express my thanks to Professor Deborah Youngman, a Developmental Psychologist from Boston University, for her work as a first reader of this paper as well as for her editorial suggestions.

their minority situation in Norway. I shall also continue to explore the construct of identity, taking advantage of multiple perspectives, particularly those offered by sociology, sociolinguistics and psychology. Of regrettable necessity, this is, like all such efforts, a reduction; the Kvens are not homogenous in either attitude or choice. I shall limit myself to describing those in the community who have intentionally sought to return to their ethnic roots and who consciously elevate their indigenous language as the central, distinguishing feature of their imperiled culture. The primary documents I have used for the discovery and charting of the Kvens' collective identity are two volumes (2005-2006) of the Ruijan Kaiku, the trilingual (Finnish, Norwegian and Kven) periodical of the Kvens and Finns from Norway (founded in 1995).

1. The historical situation of the Kvens in Norway

In present day Norway, there are four Finno-Ugric ethnic minority communities: the Sámi, the Kvens, the Forest Finns, and the Finns.² Their official status differs considerably, as the Sámi are accepted as an indigenous people, the Kvens and the Forest Finns are regarded as ethnic minorities, and the Finns are considered to be immigrants³. The minority politics of Norway have made a significant difference in the rights these respective populations are assured. Indigenous people enjoy the most rights and immigrants the fewest.

The most comprehensive, accurate and, therefore, useful work regarding the Kvens appears to have been written by Lassi Saressalo. According to his account, Kvens are a historical linguistic and ethnic minority, whose culture is based on Finnish culture and their language on the Finnish language.⁴ The traditional areas inhabited by the Kvens are the two Northernmost regions of Norway, Troms (in Kven:

² We have to stress here that these four are old (or historical) and relatively numerous minorities, and besides them, there are others like Romas, Tatars, Jews etc. as well as a new, heterogenous group of immigrants.

³ This population has moved to Norway after World War II and lives today scattered in different parts of the country.

⁴ Saressalo 1996:15.

Tromssa) and Finnmark (in Kven: Finmarkku). These territories have been multilingual and multicultural for centuries; historical documents attest to the presence of the Kvens' ancestors living alongside the Norwegians and the Sámi in the 16th century. Later on, in the 18th and the 19th centuries, there were other Finnish immigrant populations who moved from Northern Sweden and Northern Finland to the Norwegian seaside.

Of interest, it is not known how many Kvens live in Norway today, as there are different statistics regarding their number. The Kvens' Association in Norway (Ruijan Kveeniliito) estimates their number to be about 10,000, and of these, about 5,000-7,000 speak their mother tongue (Lindgren, Eskeland & Norman 2003:167). According to another source (Stortingsmelding nr. 15, 2000-2001) there are about 10,000-15,000 Kvens (Huss & Lindgren 2005:269). In Norway's report to the European Council regarding the minority politics of the country (14.9.1999), one can read the following "estimation": "Kvens are supposed to be few". This affirmation tells almost nothing about the number of Kvens, but reveals much about the apparent attitude of Norway towards this minority. An earlier survey regarding the number of people suffering from heart and circulation disease in Troms and Finnmark was conducted in 1987; according to it, 50,000-60,000 persons declared having Finnish origins. These numbers do not, of course, include only Kvens, but there are more members of this group who adhere to their Finnish identity than there are in the group of Finnish immigrants who do so (Koivulehto 2007:12).

2. The role of the intellectuals in shaping collective Kven identity

The following investigation into the collective ethnic identity of the Kvens relies in part on national identity constituents imported from the work of Anthony D. Smith. He writes, for example, of the role intellectuals and artists have historically played in the construction and promulgation of cultural identity. "It is the intellectuals – poets, musicians, painters, sculptors, novelists, historians, and archaeologists, playwrights, philologists, anthropologists and folklorists – who have proposed and elaborated the concepts and language of the

nation and nationalism and have, through their musings and research, given voice to wider aspirations that they have conveyed in appropriate images, myths and symbols.” (Smith 1991:93). “Fennoscandian” intellectuals dedicated to the revitalization of the Kven language and identity (mainly teachers of Finnish and Kven, historians and researchers of cultural disciplines) have assumed a central role in the unfolding emancipation of this ethnic minority and the repossession of their distinguishing language. Such activism may indeed be motivated by unresolved identity consolidation experienced at the individual level. Efforts, therefore, to reconstruct and embrace a personal ethnic identity may lead to reciprocating effects for self and community as the traditional social reality is recaptured and promoted through the modeling of its habits and imagery.

3. Antecedents of the Kvens’ loss of collective identity

Having established the centrality of intellectuals in recent Kven revitalization efforts, let us also examine the apparent etiology of the earlier decline of the Kvens as a consciously self-identified community and the role which intellectual leadership has played in the descriptive formulation of that gradual identity diffusion, by way of its remedy. The search for antecedents require a return to the end of the 19th century, at which time industrialization and modernization (in the form of urbanization, wider access to mass media, secularization, etc.) began to effect mass change in the Nordic countries⁵. Prior to this inexorable movement into Western modernity, most minority communities in the Nordic countries lived close to nature; their mother tongue was a natural part of their local culture, but multidirectional intercultural and multilingual adaptations were prominent throughout the region. Assimilation *and* accommodation within and across ethnic communities prevailed, even as nationalistic considerations began to gain ascendance among the ruling majority populations (Lindgren 2001:242).

⁵ Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Increasingly influenced (for better and worse) by the tenets of Social Darwinism, 20th century Europeans saw the emergence of assimilationist policies all over the continent. Mainly owing to their lesser numbers and therefore weaker political presence, ethnic and language minorities began to be rapidly subsumed within proxemic majority communities. The “lesser value” of their ethnic traditions (including their indigenous languages) was confirmed in both subtle and formal ways. Mainstream Norwegian citizenry was not exceptional in this regard; in the run up to World War II, Norway became increasingly characterized by strong nationalistic feelings, and a conscious policy of assimilation was adopted. Official documents of the period compared Norwegians to resident Kvens and Sámi and found the latter wanting. This ultimately dangerous perspective made a significant contribution to the dissolution of ethnic group consolidation as well as to the erosion of personal and collective identity and positive self-regard among the Kvens and Sámi.

As industry underwent modernization, many countries (Norway among them) concomitantly developed a very efficient school system in which the language used was, of course, that of the majority. It is well known that schooling has an extremely powerful effect on the enhancement (or, conversely, on the destruction) of the younger generations’ ethnic identity. The Norwegian school system promoted comprehensive assimilation, interrupting the geographic isolation that had historically characterized and preserved Kvens and Sámi communities through the “normalizing” power of boarding schools where children could be separated from their mother tongue environment and could be constrained to communicate in the majority language.

Throughout the 20th century, in the process of building up a modern and democratic welfare state, minority members and parochial communities have been persuaded to accept assimilation as being necessary to the new, nationalized way of life, as an opportunity for “primitive” members of society to be equal with the others (Lindgren 2000:111). The most intensive period of language shift occurred between the two World Wars; by the middle of the 20th century, Norwegian officials believed that the “Kven question” had finally been resolved through absorption and re-education. Government intentions were, of course, at least partially melioristic; the address of concentrated poverty and inequalities between social classes were legitimate,

though the solution came at the price of intensified minority *cultural* losses.

4. Ethnic minority identification: an analysis of universal features

Following World War II, the situation of minorities in the Nordic countries has gradually changed. Before presenting the documented facts of this more recent historic process, I should like to apprehend some of the basic questions of identity as a means of locating the Kven experience within the larger context of sociolinguistic identity interests: Who am I? Who are we? Where do we come from? What is our purpose and role in life and society? Do we have a history of our own that can and should be acknowledged? I shall speak throughout this portion of my address directly from my perspective as an ethnic minority intellectual.

Answers to such questions about one's psychosocial identity may be as diverse as the individuals giving voice to answers. Choice and circumstance together yield legion permutations. The particulars notwithstanding, however, a very appealing answer, by my lights, emphasizes the possibility that *individual identity* can indeed be realized *within* a newly transformed, *collective cultural identity* of one's ethnic minority. I would immediately distinguish *this* process from that which involves the subordination of the individual, a kind of "sinking" of individual identity into a "melting pot" through which the collective comes first, and individualism is less important. For me, as a conscious member of a national minority, it is evident Transylvanian Hungarianism is, periodically and in some situations, more important than any other aspect of my personal identity, both for me and for those who have historically beleaguered my kind.⁶ So, what I mean here, is not the proclamation of an heroic attitude, but something that any intellectual can experience while thinking through the obligations

⁶ I would like to express my thanks again to Professor Deborah Youngman, for our ongoing, hermeneutic discussion of individual and collective identity.

of her/his role is in the world. Through such a conscientious process, individual psychological identity is partially consolidated through derivative means; identity is conferred, in measure, from a cultural collectivity⁷. When this collectivity is a nation or an ethnic group, and the individual becomes a rightful and recognized member (both identifying with it and *being* identified with it), she/he becomes “part of a cultural community of history and destiny” (Smith 1991). It is important to lay special stress on the idea that identification is a two-way process, requiring mutual recognition and acceptance.⁸

I have described the special contribution of artists (writers, musicians, sculptors, architects etc.) in shaping, modeling, and reinforcing collective identity through a reconstruction of the sounds and images reminiscent of the historic ethnic community. It is of lesser importance here whether the historical “reconstruction” actually existed; what matters is the sense of verisimilitude it creates in the mind of the cultural descendent. As Juha Pentikäinen points out, members of an ethnic community need myths, sacral and profane as well, in order to form their “historical spinal column” (Pentikäinen 1995:32-36). These myths are characterized by a highly expressive subjectivity and are eminently suitable for the language use and style of ethnic nationalism so admirably assist those involved to find part of their “innermost self”, that is, that portion of the core of their identity conferred by legacy.

5. The revival of Nordic ethnic minorities after World War II

Intellectuals in general, and artists in particular, have, thus, a double mission of *uncovering* the historical roots of the ethnic group’s collective identity and *articulating* the legitimate meaning of ethnic uniqueness in the modern world. It was not until after World War II, mainly in the 1960s, that intellectuals began to revive the ethnic rea-

⁷ According to some social scientists, all aspects of identity (individual and collective) should be considered as cultural phenomena, because identity itself is the result of social relations and is, therefore, culturally determined. See Assmann 1999, Cohen 1997, Kartag-Ódri 1998.

⁸ See also Erikson 1950.

lity of minorities in the Nordic countries. The most important difference between the nationalistic movements of the 19th century and the ethnic awakening of the 20th century is the fact that minority activists did not aim at the creation of a separate state or a monolingual population but, alternatively, campaigned for the majority community's acceptance of multilingualism and multiculturalism. A new idea was introduced and pursued: all minorities should have the *right* to belong to their own ethnic community *and* enjoy full national citizenship.

Ethnic awakening started first within a small circle of (Norwegian) Sámi in the 1950s. It spread during the 1960s, and the first visible results could be seen by the 1970s. The Sámi have achieved more in strengthening their position as a minority than the Kvens or the Tornedalian in Sweden, mostly due to their more intensive engagement in different forms of political work.⁹ The ethnic revival of the Kvens started in the 1970s, and organizational activities began in the 1980s. The endeavors of the ethnic activists have come to be understood and supported by a part of the majority population since the 1970s. Nevertheless, minority issues have been continuously debated without full resolve, as influential, ethnocentric attitudes as well as more hidden forms of racism (e.g. ethnicism and linguicism) persist.¹⁰

6. The central role of language in determining identity

The process of ethnic revival requires that the minority redefine itself and start consciously valuing itself and its cultural inheritance in positive terms. It is logical that the ethnic awakening and cultural revitalization of the Nordic minorities has been characterized by a strong focus on *language*: the politics of assimilation often formally deprived the minorities of their mother tongue. There was, additio-

⁹ The most eloquent example is the conflict produced by the construction of a dam on the river Alta at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The Sámi struggled side by side with environmentalists to prevent the construction. Although the decision was won by the government, it called attention to the Sámi as a conscious collectivity.

¹⁰ Terms invented by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas.

nally, the not less strange attitude of the Finns towards the Finnish-based languages spoken outside the borders of Finland, for example by the Kvens and the Tornedalian. These languages were regarded by majority Finnish speakers as “bad” or “spoiled” Finnish, a “lesser” mixture of some Northern Finnish dialect(s) and Norwegian or, respectively, Swedish.

As language and identity are strongly interrelated, having one’s native language considered irrelevant or inferior can take on the proportions of a psychological trauma in an individuals’ life. If your language is considered, furthermore, to be worthless, then your cultural heritage is also without value, and the community to which you are linked through your language and culture ceases to exist as an honored psychosocial niche of belonging. Much has been written regarding the significance of the mother tongue as the language most deeply rooted in the human being’s personality. To quote here from a poem written by Sándor Kányádi, one of Transylvania’s most cherished Hungarian poets, “our only bundle, stick and weapon is the mother tongue” (“*egyetlen batyunk, botunk, fegyverünk az anyanyelv*”). The same idea, in very similar poetic language that makes use of another effective metaphor (that of the *map*) is expressed by Aaroninjussan Terje (in Norwegian: Terje Aronsen), one of the most stalwart activists of the Kvens’ awakening: “Our language is our map of this world. If the map is not suitable for the land, man gets lost in his own region.” (“*Meidän kieli oon meidän kartta täähän maailmhaan. [...] Jos kartta ei sovi maisemhaan, ihminen hävvii omasta maisemasta.*”, Aronsen 1998:86).

There is a striking similarity between the 19th century Finnish nationalists struggling to make Finnish language the base of their national identity and Kven ethnic activists arguing for the importance of their own language in the process of revitalization. To the Finns, “Finnishness” has always been a matter of vital importance. During the period of National Romanticism (the first half of the nineteenth century), the national slogan of the Finns was a sentence attributed to a history professor from the University of Turku, Adolf Ivar Arwidsson: “Swedes we are not, Russians we don’t want to become, so let us be Finns.” About one and a half centuries later, the same idea has been adapted for the situation of the Kvens by Aaroninjussan Terje: “Finns we are not, Norwegians we do not want to become, so let us be

Kvens.” It is understandable that he has “rediscovered” this slogan, given the many similarities between the earlier revival campaign of the Finns and current efforts to revive the Kvens. (Only time will tell if the adapted slogan will be accepted by the whole Kven community as best expressing their feelings of collective identity.)

III. MOVING FORWARD: SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. The need for language independence from Standard Finnish

As noted, Kven was historically considered by Finns to be a dialect of Finnish language, and attitudes towards it were quite negative. Even when regard for dialects in general became more indulgent, the lack of comprehension for the strivings of the Kvens persisted. Nevertheless, ethnic revival made it necessary for the Kvens to reevaluate the status of their language, and reevaluation has required a determined struggle in two directions: they had to persuade *both* the Norwegians and the Finns that they do indeed use a language independent of the Finnish spoken in Finland. For those familiar with sociolinguistic research, it is obvious that the difference between a language and a dialect cannot be made from a purely linguistic point of view.

From a historical perspective, it is understandable that the Kven activists do not identify with the Finnish spoken in Finland, because their community has lived for centuries outside the area where primarily Finnish dialects have been used. Their own language, both in vocabulary and grammar, has developed in a different direction. The Kvens have not been acquainted with standard Finnish in Finland, and if that is to be considered the norm, then, by that standard, their own language could always be judged the “lesser”. The official Finnish language of Finland is, moreover, emotionally foreign to them. A minority language which has no official status may be thus ill-equipped to help its speakers build a positive collective identity. Consequently, this frustration persists without end, until such time the Kven language came to be accepted as independent from Finnish.

I consider it of major importance that, years before Kven was officially approved as a language of its own, Aaroninjussan Terje – at a seminar about language and cultural contacts organized in 1999 in

Finland (Kajaani) – presented his lecture in Kven, even though the official language of the conference was Finnish. These are the reasons he gave for doing so: “The language of the seminar is Finnish, I read it in the invitation. I cannot speak Finnish – at least not standard Finnish – this is why I speak in my own language. If you do not understand what I say, come to me afterwards and ask me what I intended to say.”¹¹ This was of course an individual identity strategy of language choice, but it also bears wider importance as an intellectual speech act of one who is an advocate of Kven ethnic revival.

The breakthrough in the status of the Kven language occurred on 26th April 2005, when the Norwegian government, after years of opposition, at last declared Kven as a language of its own. The rejoicing of the Kvens and sympathizers to their cause was expressed on the front-page of *Ruijan Kaiku* by the following title: “*Kvääni oon kieli*”¹² (“Kven is a language”).

This formal designation does not mean the emergence of a new language on the palette of Norway or Europe, as Kven has been spoken for centuries, and its existence was denied only in 1936, when its use in Norwegian schools became forbidden.¹³ The very positive emotional reaction to having its own, independent language has been expressed by the Kven community since 2005 in many ways. An eloquent example lies in the enthusiastic interest of people of very different ages in studying their mother tongue and subsequently experiencing their first exam in their own language (Koivulehto 2006c). The problems, of course, did not end with this formal event of recognition; the Kvens also need material support from the Norwegian government for the continuing revitalization of their language and culture. Without this support, the acknowledgement of Kven as an independent language will merely remain a vital symbolic gesture (Koivulehto 2005:2).

¹¹ “*Seminaarin kieli oon suomi, mie lujin seminarian kuttusta. Mie en jaksa puhhuut suomee – en kuitenki yleissuomee – sillä mie puhun minun omala kielelä. Jos että ymmärrä mitä mie sanon, tulkkaa sitte jälkhiin ja kysykkää minulta mitä mie meinaasin sannoot.*” (Aronsen 2000:82).

¹² *Ruijan Kaiku* 4/2005:1.

¹³ *Ruijan Kaiku* 4/2005:4.

2. The question of the ethnonym

There has been much debate about the ethnonym most suitable for this population. The choice of ethnonym is problematic, particularly in the case of a community which does not constitute a natural unity, but presents itself in the form of different regional ethnic collectivities, as do the Kven. This is why, when speaking about ethnonym as a distinguishing mark of collective identity, members of the Kven population tend to call themselves on the basis of their place of living (*pysyjokilainen* “from Pysyjoki”, *vesisaarelainen* “from Vesisaari” etc.).

It is true that most of the Finno-Ugric people (and not only they!) have two kinds of denominations: one, given by themselves (*esoteric name*) and another, given to them by others (*exoteric name*) (Saressalo 1996:56, 208). In the case of the Kvens, the situation is more complex, and the main reason for this involves the identity crises to which I have alluded. It is, thus, understandable that a portion of the Kvens have preferred the name of Finns or Finns from Ruija (in the sense of Northern Norway¹⁴), while another portion shows preference for the name *kveeni/kvääni* or *kvensk* (in Norwegian) and yet a third group elects to be called the *kainulainen*. There was a public opinion poll conducted in 2006 according to which it was concluded that *suomalainen* (Finn) is not an option as an ethnonym for the Kvens any longer (as it refers to the group of Finnish immigrants), and the opinions for or against *kveeni/kvääni* and, respectively, *kainulainen* were divided almost equally (Ruijan Kaiku 2006:4-5).

Kainulainen is favored, for example, by Eira Söderholm, a Finnish lecturer at the University of Oslo who also serves as editor of the first Kven grammar. In her view, *kainulainen* is the proper term to use, at least for two reasons: first, because it was a very old name of this population, already in use by the year 550 in a written form by Jordanes in his history of the Goths. This name was, however, later forgotten, and the Kvens thereafter did not seem to have one accepted name for themselves, using instead names like *suomalainen*, *lantalainen* (loan-word from Sámi) or *kveeni/kvääni*. The second reason for returning to the use of *kainulainen* is based on the fact that

¹⁴ Another meaning of *Ruija* is “Norway”.

kveeni/kvääni is a Norwegian loan-word and has developed throughout history a negative shade of meaning due to the attitude of the power-holding majority towards the minority it describes (Söderholm 2005, Koivulehto 2006a). Taking again into usage the name of *kainulainen* would not be unusual as it has been, since the last decades of the 20th century, a general trend among ethnic minorities to prefer esoteric names instead of exoteric names, when the latter are so often burdened with negative historical memories.¹⁵

The name giving is, I believe, first an emotional act of confirmation; cognitive aspects follow. Whichever ethnonym one prefers, however, it is imperative that all members of the same ethnic community are uniformly so designated. As Terje Aronsen observes: “The beloved child has lots of names!” (in Kven: “*Rakhaala lapsela oon monta nimme!*”, Aronsen 2000:83). This circumstance does not, naturally, serve the interests of identity.

3. The need to speak of past traumas: “collective psychotherapy”¹⁶

Historical tragedies have deeply marked the Kvens. If the process of identity reconstruction is to be successful, it must include the development of positive attitudes towards the community to which they belong. “Memory work”, in the Freudian sense of discovering new and propitious meanings in the old stories, will be a vital part of the process (Ricoeur 1999:63-66). Learning to speak about the humiliations of the past can function like a form of “collective psychotherapy” which, it is to be hoped, leads to the “recovering” of the community.

One of the leading articles I have read in the Ruijan Kaiku proposes a “therapy” which, if a somewhat radical suggestion, has a serious point beneath the symbolic significance it defends as a point of entry. The proposal is that a *parkumaloma* (in literal translation, “holidays of howling”) should be held annually, by way of providing a

¹⁵ See for example the widespread use of ethnonyms like Sámi, Roma or Inuit.

¹⁶ Koivulehto 2006.

collective opportunity for the Kvens to cry out loudly over their historical grievances. There seems indeed to be an urgent need for such catharsis, because it is said that when two Kven individuals meet, sooner or later, they end up complaining about historical inequities, which most of the official institutions continue to ignore. A public attempt at the initial stages of collective self-therapy just might constitute an effective intervention.

4. The central symbols of Kvenness

The importance of language and of the ethnonym as distinguishing features of Kvenness have already been discussed. Generally speaking, collective ethnic symbols, customs, ceremonies (music and cuisine!) are, additionally, the most durable and potent aspects of ethnic unity. They embody basic concepts, making them visible and distinct for every member of the collectivity. They communicate abstract ideas in concrete terms, evoking instantaneous emotional responses from recipients and witnesses. These symbols can be numerous and diverse; some of them are inevitably linked to language.

An important group of symbols and ceremonies belong to folk culture. This includes, besides the oral literature (songs, tales, ballads, rhymes, lullabies, etc.), folk costumes, dance, indigenous architecture, tools, beliefs, habits and so on. All these have major significance for all ethnic minorities. I shall, thus, concentrate on selected aspects of folk culture having particular significance for the Kvens. Lena Aarekol has completed a doctoral dissertation on the same subject of Kven symbols and their role in modeling ethnic identity. I haven't any information as to whether the research has been concluded or how it has been received; all I know has been reported in the Ruijan Kaiku (Koivulehto 2005d).

The problem of designating a self-identifying folk costume has recently become an issue for the Kven community. Although there were once folk costumes incorporated by the Kvens (mainly different kinds of regional ethnic costumes), the tradition of using them ended at some point. It has only been in relation to the revitalization process that the need for reconstructing the folk costume has re-emerged. After years of research, a costume has finally been reconstructed and

has been in use again for about three years now. Its re-introduction has enjoyed wide socio-political success, and current demand for the costume has proven too high for folk artists to satisfy (Koivulehto 2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

The revitalization of traditional folk crafts, customs and meals are also an important part of the Kvens' awakening process. They pay special attention, for example, to the custom of sauna-building and going to the sauna, which is also characteristic of Finnish tradition. For the Kvens, however, the sauna and associated rituals function as a cultural feature, distinguishing them in the larger Norwegian society. At the same time, such a preoccupation could be interpreted as a remnant of the common roots Kvens share with the Finns, a possibility which may be politically important for the Kvens to remember.

Even bread, the food basic to most European cultures, can be of a special importance and endowed with the symbolic meaning of "*our* bread", if it is made in a different way than "others" or "they" make it. Bread-baking is, at the same time, a significant ceremony, a tradition in itself, inducing a sense of simultaneity with all those who have ever made bread in the same way "we" do. Everything that is "ours", tastes better, feels better, because it evokes the strong positive emotional responses first experienced in pre-conscious childhood (Koivulehto 2006d).

Other important symbols of ethnic culture are the museums, arts centers, and monuments of an identified community. In national museums, the culture of the ethnic minorities is generally poorly represented, giving rise to the need to found their own "sacred places" of culture. The Kvens have constructed many museums and arts centers to make visible their former and actual presence in Norwegian society. The first Kven monument to which I was ever exposed (by photograph) seemed to be that of a fisherman's family of four generations. The inscription on the base of the monument read as follows: "This monument was raised in 1977 as an acknowledgement of the importance the Finnish immigration has had for the development and

growth of the county of Finnmark.”¹⁷ What was so captivating for me about this statue? Historical monuments are generally erected to memorialize important people – generals, kings, presidents or cultural personalities. The Kven immigrants’ monument is striking in its simplicity and its respect for working families. The moral values it symbolizes indeed made me deeply interested in this ethnic minority with whom I was completely unfamiliar.

5. Strategies of revitalization of the Kven language

The Kven Institute (Kainun instituutti), organized at the beginning of 2007, aims at channelling all the activities of Kven language and identity revival. In the following section, some of these projects will be introduced. The central strategies of revitalization of the Kven language can be charted from the Ruijan Kaiku and include the following four initiatives: education in Kven on all levels (kindergarten, school and university); founding of a language council and a cultural council to facilitate standardization of language; edition of a grammar and dictionaries; pursuit of financial support for the development of Kven culture (literature, mass media, movies, music, arts etc.).

Important results in these areas of interest are already evident. The first Kven language course, organized by the University in Troms, started in January 2006. It is an e-course, and there are two gatherings for the students and teachers every semester, as well as exams at the end of each term. The significance of this course is formulated in a highly emotional choice of words in the Ruijan Kaiku, perfectly understandable in the context of the Kvens’ situation. It is called in this article, “the first Kven language course at university level in the history of the world”¹⁸ (Koivulehto 2006b). It is, indeed, an historical event.

¹⁷ In Finnish: “Tämä muistomerkki pystytettiin vuonna 1977 tunnustukseksi siitä merkityksestä, mikä suomalaisten maahanmuutolla on ollut Finnmarkin läänin kehitykselle ja kasvulle.”

¹⁸ “Maailmanhistorian ensimmäinen yliopistotasoinen kainun kielen kurssi.” □

The number of students it attracted was much higher than expected. The ground for comparison was the number of students at a Finnish language course, which draws 5-10 every year; 42 students started the Kven course in January 2006. No previous knowledge of Kven was required, and the course was open for everyone. The candidates were from different age groups, the two extremes being teenagers and retired people. Their motivation were various: some knew Kven in childhood, but had forgotten it; for others, this was the first opportunity to study their own mother tongue. There were also some Finns and a couple of Norwegians eager to become closely acquainted with this language. In the second semester, 30 students continued their studies, while in the third term, 22 were enrolled.

The biggest problem to be faced for the future of this course is the lack of sufficient financial support from the Norwegian government. There is a need for more teachers, as well as for assistance extending the syllabus, and the students require the organization of more meetings with the teachers.

Another aim considered to be a priority for the Kven Institute is the project of immersion for kindergarten-aged children. I consider of major significance the fact that, in Finnish language, there are two terms used for what is called “immersion” by English-speaking¹⁹ sociolinguistics. One of the terms is *kielikylpy* (“language bath”), the other *kielipesä* (“language nest”). The idea is the same in these two cases – a kind of “shock-therapy” is applied in teaching minority children in their own mother tongue, even if it is not their stronger language, because the parents do not speak this language either at all or “properly”. There is, however, an important difference between the processes indicated by the two terms. *Kielipesä* refers to the method of paying special attention to the needs of pre-school children, mainly to make this very young age-group feel safe and comfortable (hence the metaphor of the nest). The first *kielipesä* was opened in Pyssyjoki in the autumn of 2007, and prior to its opening, there was a Kven language course organized for the parents involved (Koivulehto 2007a). Research has demonstrated that children are capable of learning more than one language at the same time, and moreover, minority children

¹⁹ In German: *Immersion*, in French: *immersion*, in Hungarian: *bemerítés*.

learn the majority language more easily and better if their mother tongue has been properly mastered and they start majority language acquisition in an additive mode.²⁰ This has been shown as the best way to achieve high level bilingualism and biculturalism.

Among other recent accomplishments in the revitalizing of the Kven language, the following successes stand out. The standardization of Kven has begun: the first version of the Kven grammar is ready, and the written language is being developed. There are curriculum projects available for efficient language teaching at all levels; literature written in Kven²¹ and about Kvens has been published; movies have been made about this population, and the first pop-music disc²² has had a very positive reception. The growing status of Kven is well shown by the fact that articles published in Kven, as well as those written in Norwegian and Finnish about the Kven, are beginning to proliferate. It should also be noted that all these results and many others have been achieved with minimal material support and in the face of numerous, official obstacles in Norway. Should desired, multi-lateral collaborations emerge, prospective revitalizing of the Kven language and culture will likely accelerate, given the strong enthusiasm of the Kven community alone. It is just such collaborations, however, which will probably be necessary to any real and lasting progress.

6. Conclusion: sharing the experience with other ethnic minorities

The Ruijan Kaiku pays considerable attention to the situation of other minorities in Norway, as well as abroad. While studying the case of the Kvens, I have encountered an unexpected and perhaps unintended consequence of the hierarchical minority politics of Norway. Conclusive evidence may be wanting, but it seems to me that there is

²⁰ Additive teaching: minority children are taught through the medium of the mother tongue, with good teaching of the majority language as a second language.

²¹ The first volume of the first serial of novels in Kven (Elämän jatko I.) was published in 2004. Its author is Alf Nilsen-Børsskog.

²² Karine Jacobsen and Kine Johansen.

in some articles a feeling of animosity for the Sámi, who enjoy much more support from the government than is extended to other minorities. Such an attitude, if indeed it exists, can seriously jeopardize efforts at cooperation between and among different minorities living in the same country. The evidence is merely oblique; references betraying this possible attitude of negativity toward the Sámi are made in the context of complaints about the unequal treatment of minorities by the hand of the majority. Nevertheless, there is perhaps a turning point to be observed in this respect in that recent numbers of the periodical give information about the interests of the Sámi for the problems of the Kvens as well as news about a conference to be held in Alta, where members of the Tornedalian and the Sámi Language Councils will share their experience in language planning with the Kvens. Again, collaboration would seem to bode well for all parties involved, including the majority Norwegians.

The situation of the Kvens presented in this paper shares a number of features in common with the process of language and identity revitalization of other ethnic minorities in the post-modern world. Some of these communities have understood the need for beginning with a reevaluation of their status, sooner than later; some have encountered less opposition from the majority, others more, but all of them have been met with essentially the same problems, national host or other factors notwithstanding. These universalities of experience as ethnic and linguistic minorities underscore the importance of communicating with each other, of sharing the experiences they have endured and transcended in order to learn from one another's errors and accomplishments. Dwelling with envy on those whose endeavors have propelled them further to date is a folly whose self-generated consequences will only be added to the constraints historically experienced at the hands of others. A better future would seem to rely on a strong sense of belonging together with all those who struggle for acceptance as equal citizens, wherever they are attempting to flourish in this world we share.

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RÉSUMÉS

La revitalisation des langues minoritaires et des identités ethniques: le cas des Kvènes de Norvège

Le présent article dresse un bilan partiel d’une recherche plus large sur la situation des minorités finno-ougriennes vivant dans l’aire scandinave. Depuis les années quatre-vingt-dix, on assiste à la prise de conscience identitaire et linguistique d’un nombre croissant de petites ethnies, victimes durant près d’un siècle d’une politique d’assimilation. Les Kvènes, fort peu connus dans le monde, constituent un groupe ethnique d’environ dix à quinze mille personnes qui vivent traditionnellement dans les deux départements les plus nordiques de la Norvège, le Troms et le Finnmark. Si les Norvégiens ont pendant longtemps ignoré leur langue, leurs voisins finlandais ont fait de même, la considérant comme un dialecte du finnois. En 2005, l’État norvégien a fini par reconnaître au kvène le statut de langue indépendante, ce qui a considérablement rehaussé son prestige. Après avoir décrit les stratégies de revitalisation linguistique et de construction identitaire mises en œuvre par les Kvènes, l’auteur souligne, en conclusion, que l’échange des expériences et la coopération entre les différentes minorités ethniques à travers le monde

peuvent aider celles-ci dans leurs efforts pour préserver leur culture et obtenir les mêmes droits que la majorité.

**Kisebbségi nyelvek és etnikai identitások újjáélesztése:
a norvégiai kvének esete**

A jelen tanulmány egy olyan, átfogó kutatás részeredményeit ismerteti, amelynek témája a skandináv régióban élő finnugor kisebbségek helyzete. Az 1990-es évek óta egyre több kis népcsoport kezd pozitívan viszonyulni önmagához, nyelvéhez, miután közel egy évszázados beolvasztási politika áldozata volt. A kvének – akikről keveset tud a világ – egy kis lélekszámú, 10 000 – 15000 főből álló etnikai kisebbség, amelynek hagyományos lakóterületei Norvégia két legészakibb megyéje, Troms és Finnmark. Nyelvüket hosszú időn keresztül semmibe vették a norvégok, de ugyanúgy lenézték, és a finn nyelvjárásának tekintették a szomszédos országban élő finnek. 2005-ben lényegesen megváltozott a kvén presztízsértéke, amikor a norvég állam végre önálló nyelvként ismerte el. Dolgozatomban az identitás fejlődéslélektani és szociálpszichológiai szempontú vizsgálata mentén tisztázom azokat az alapfogalmakat, amelyeket a későbbiekben felhasználok a kvének identitásformáló és nyelvi revitalizációs stratégiáinak leírásában. Tanulmányom végkövetkeztetése az, hogy csakis a világ különböző területein élő nyelvi és etnikai kisebbségek együttműködése, tapasztalataik egymással való megosztása és a közös érdekeikért való összefogás vezethet el ahhoz, hogy sajátos kultúrájuk megőrzésével egyidőben, a többségekhez tartozó állampolgárokkal egyenlő jogokat élvezzenek abban az országban, ahol élniük adatott.