The Politization of the Concepts of Culture and Ethnicity: an Example from Northern Norway

Marjut Anttonen

'Culture' and 'ethnicity' are central but also difficult and controversial concepts in ethnology and anthropology. They are closely connected and intertwined; by discussing ethnicity we also discuss cultural distinctiveness and questions of origin as well as linguistic and/or religious characteristics. Besides being academic concepts, they have become popular words in the public sphere. On one hand, they have a wide and also inaccurate use in popular expression and in the mass media; on the other hand they have become highly politicized words that can also be given as explanations for a variety of conflicts.

In this paper I will first present some aspects of 'culture' and 'ethnicity' as scholarly concepts, and secondly an example from Northern Norway, where identities of Finnish origin were politicized in the 1990s.

Conceptualizing culture – from a static entity to a dynamic process

Earlier anthropological theories of culture stressed order, integration and stability by defining culture as coherent, integrated and self-reproducing. Culture was often presented as a homogenic small-scale entity, which could be described by naming its typical features, for example, with the help of lists of traits. This meant that each culture was supposed to have certain basic features that each member of that particular group should agree on. Thus, culture should be 'shared' by all its members – and at the same time it was made common by simplifying and homogenizing it. At the same time, earlier theories could also hide conflicts and contradictions. Culture should have a certain, eternal core of homogenity, genuinity, originality and truth, in other words eternal 'cultural essence'. Searching for this kind of cultural essence is called *essentialism*. Another parallel concept is *reification*; supposing that cultural or ethnic groups have certain enduring, everlasting features.

The present view, however, is the opposite: culture is not something

concrete, like 'a thing', having a beginning or a homogenic core, but it is a way of conceptualizing practices and beliefs as well as continuation and change. It must be understood as communication. Culture is not "something that we have", but "something that we do". Geographical borders have less meaning, as culture is creative practice and a combination of different elements that have been adopted from various directions. Borders between 'cultures' should be understood as incidental. The cultural variation within a certain group can be so extensive that defining the 'common culture' of that group becomes difficult. And the changes are so rapid, that it is impossible to talk of a continuing homogenic culture. Eventually, questions of 'sharing' or 'possessing' culture become highly politicized matters (Hannerz 1993: 95–98; Borofsky 1994a: 243–245; Borofsky 1994b: 313–318; Friedman 1994: 72–77; Keesing 1994: 306; Wolf 1994: 5–7; Wright 1998: 8–10).

The continual and dynamic process of change is described as follows:

"Culture is now everywhere, under continuous creation – fluid, interconnected, diffusing, interpenetrating, homogenizing, diverging, hegemonizing, resisting, reformulating, creolizing, open rather than closed, partial rather than total, crossing its own boundaries, persisting where we don't expect it to, and changing where we do" (Sanjek 1991: 622).

In other words, we are dealing with very complicated cultural dynamics. We should pay attention to continuation and change, and to increasing individual diversity and emerging new variations. We should also notice what is shared, and what is not, within different cultural groupings. These questions are connected with the concepts of overlapping, differentation, creolization and hybridization (Borofsky 1994b: 313–318).

The role of anthropologists and ethnologists in defining culture is also often discussed. We have chosen what we want to study as culture, and by doing this we define what is culture. This will, in return, influence peoples' understanding of what their 'own culture' is. In other words, the phenomenon we are studying is created by us at the same time as it is described by us (Ehn 1992: 3–7; Ålund & Schierup 1992: 9–10; Wright 1998:13–14).

Essentialized and reified concepts of culture are still deep-rooted in general discussion; 'culture' is turned into an object, regarding it from the outside as something existing independently. Even though most anthropologists and ethnologists emphasize the change of paradigm,

and have abandoned the older terms, some scholars, however, are still stubbornly referring to culture as if it were an actor doing different things (Ehn 1992: 4–5; Hannerz 1993: 95; Borofsky 1994a: 243–245; Keesing 1994: 301–310; Wright 1998: 8–10).

Conceptualizing ethnicity

'Ethnicity' became part of the English vocabulary in the 1950s, whereafter it gradually became an independent concept of social sciences during the late 1960s and the 1970s. During the past thirty or forty years new ethnic movements, revitalization processes and worldwide anticolonial fights have made the term well-known and it has superseded the concepts of acculturation and assimilation that were earlier fashionable terms in social sciences. Ethnicity is used as an analytical tool of research as well as for different ideological and political purposes. It sometimes seems that we can talk about ethnicity with apparent ease in most different situations without defining, or maybe not even being aware of what we really mean by it (Chapman et al. 1989: 11–19; Eriksen 1992: 2–3; Eriksen 1993a: 3–4; Roosens 1989: 11; Williams 1989: 401–402).

According to the previous definitions, ethnicity was based on culture and often also connected to tribes. Until the middle of the 1960s, it was usual to try to classify ethnic groups by making lists of different identifiable cultural traits that would distinguish cultural groups. This is demonstrated by different folksy taxonomies and popular suppositions from different parts of the world. In other words, an ethnic group was supposed to be the same as the 'culture' represented by it, and ethnicity was described and categorized in the same way as culture. Again we meet conceptual reification and essentialism (Barth 1969: 10–11; Roosens 1989: 12; Eriksen 1992: 3, 15–17, 28–30; Verdery 1994: 40–41; Banks 1996: 11–13).

The paradigm changed when Fredrik Barth published his famous book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). Even though some parts of it have been criticized since, the central ideas are valid. According to the Barthian view, ethnicity is neither a static phenomenon nor the same as culture. It cannot be defined by studying the so-called objective lists of traits. Such cataloguing would rather be like arranging empiric 'collections of butterflies'! Instead ethnicity deals with social relations between groups, and ethnic identifications are based on definition and self-definition. They are created by human experience and therefore attention should be paid to the creation and maintenance of borders,

and not to the 'cultural stuff' inside the borders. The invisible border itself is a social product of varying importance. It is also worth remembering that ethnic boundaries are not necessarily identical to territorial boundaries. Some scholars have pointed out the possibility of ethnic groups becoming culturally more similar, for example as a result of creolization, while group boundaries are simultaneously getting stronger (Barth 1969: 10–11; Eriksen 1992: 3; Eriksen 1993a: 36–39; Verdery 1994: 40–41; Vermeulen & Govers 1994: 2–3; Banks 1996: 12–14).

The conceptual confusion deals with the terms of ethnic identity, ethnic group and culture, as they are often confused in everyday use. This is not surprising as the term of ethnic identity can refer to the origins, 'the heritage of blood', the cultural distinctiveness, etc. All these facts can be presented in all possible combinations and emotional degrees and forms of social organization. At the same time, the usefulness of the concept of ethnicity has been criticized. Ambiguity makes it a difficult term. Even though it covers a large field, it is conceptually difficult and analytically weak. In fact, its negative aspects might remain unnoticed if one looks too eagerly for ethnic homogenity and at the same time neglects the cultural diversity on the field (e.g. Banks 1996: viii).

Eugeen E. Roosens has concluded that ethnic identity is a psychological reality, because people are also identifying themselves ethnically in addition to all their other identifications. He also reminds us that the concept of ethnic identity is flexible as it covers the cultural and social as well as the psychological dimensions. Combining them all dynamically makes many nuances possible (Roosens 1989: 15–19).

Ethnic and social identities are relational and situational, i.e. they are manifested situationally, as the Barthian school emphasizes. People define their own identities in relation to somebody else and this happens differently in different situations. In some situations, it can be practical to consider certain ethnic groups to be same groups while they can be regarded clearly different groups in some other situations. The relational and optional nature of ethnic identity is especially visible in persons that have multi-ethnic background, e.g. migrants or children belonging to families with more than one nationality or ethnicity. They have the choice of being loyal and identifying with either one or both of the groups. Strong over- and under-communication is also part of identity negotiations. Identities can also be manipulated, which has to be recognized in the analysis. In addition to all that, there are also many

situations in multi-ethnic societies where ethnicity plays no role. As the importance of ethnicity can change remarkably, it is worth noting the situations where the cultural differences become important, how ethnic identity becomes fundamentally important to some individuals but not to others, and how loyalty is created and maintained (Barth 1994: 13–30; Eriksen 1993a: 152–154; Verdery 1994: 34–35). People also understand the ethnic group differently: "The ethnic group is an aggregate of selves, each of whom produces ethnicity for itself" Anthony P. Cohen (1994) has remarked.

Originally, the ideology of many nation states was based on compulsory categories of identity and on the so-called imperative identities, which meant that each person could have only one certain ethnic and national identity. These kinds of identity categories are essentially important for the state in helping to keep the census. One can't keep the census if people have "one identity today, and another one tomorrow". In the same way, the rise of the states and the registration of the population led to the use of surnames. The idea of one single identity has been prevalent in modern states, but it seems that the concept of multiple identities is now becoming so in postmodern states (Anderson 1991: 164–170; Verdery 1994: 37–39).

Politization of ethnic and cultural identities

As we now understand the culture concept, it is not a homogenous zone of shared meanings but a zone of disagreement and contest. This means that by studying ethnicity we are not studying shared culture but how certain concepts of culture as well as concepts of tradition and history are used as political tools. Ever since the end of the 1980s, there has been a flow of anthropological studies dealing with the study of culture as politics. In these studies, ethnicity is tied to social ideologies, especially to ideologies of nationalism, which certain social groups construct around notions of 'culture' and 'origin'. One starts arguing about 'culture' while one also fights over 'possessing' it (Friedman 1994: 72–77; Verdery 1994: 42–43; Wolf 1994: 5–7; Wright 1998: 8).

The rapidly changing social and cultural processes have shown us how ethnic identity has become more clearly articulated than before. Ethnicity has not disappeared, as many researchers predicted some decades ago; on the contrary, the meaning of identity is emphasized in such situations where social mobility, change and competition for resources have started threatening ethnic boundaries. For example, some people react on the modernization process as though it were

threatening, whereas ethnic identity can give people a comforting idea of belonging and being connected to the past. Ethnic symbolism refers to traditional language, religion, way of life and a family system, which has a particular reason for maintaining the ethnic identity. Knowing that you 'possess a culture' is a sign of being faithful to your forbears and the past. Maybe, it makes life easier in the turbulent changes of the modern world, if one 'knows' that one is "a link in the chain of a thousand years" and descends from some ancient folk (Eriksen 1996: 49–51).

Besides answering 'perennial problems of life' – questions on origins, destiny and even the meaning of life – ethnic ideology must also have a practical function, otherwise it would not thrive. Ethnicity can be an instrument for competition for scarce resources, i.e. it can be used to obtain certain privileges. Roosens (1989: 13) has remarked that many people would even change their ethnic identity if they could gain by doing so. The instrumentalistic view, in its strictest sense, has been criticized for not paying any attention to the symbolic aspects of ethnicity, and the emotional meanings of ethnic identity (Eriksen 1993a: 45–47, 73–74).

In ethnopolitics, ethnicity becomes a relevant political factor. It is important to define culture and its owner, as ethnicity is understood as common and shared culture. Cultural differences are also used as ideological weapons in ethnic conflicts between different groups. They start arguing about 'culture' and quarreling and fighting over its 'possession'. 'Possessing culture' becomes the 'politics of culture'. Becoming extremely politicized, it also becomes a question of a violent conflict. This is why it is important to study how the concept of culture is used for political, ethnic and nationalistic purposes (Ehn 1992: 3–4; Borofsky 1994b: 318).

One of the interesting fields of study is to scrutinize how historical and cultural symbols are manipulated in identity management. When studying *ethnogenesis* – i.e. the creation of ethnic relations and identities – historians often try to find out what really happened, and some of them even distinguish between 'invented' and 'real' traditions. Anthropologists, in their return, would rather show the ways certain historical accounts are used as tools in the contemporary creation of identities and in politics. History is not a product of the past, but a response to the requirements of the present. The ambiguity of symbols makes it possible to manipulate them politically; e.g. different versions of the same myths can be created for political purposes. Ethnic groups might

need either a tragic or a heroic history. In other words, we are not dealing with the past but with the constructions of the past that are created in the present (Eriksen 1993a: 71–73).

The fragmentation or 'pluralization' of identities can become visible in certain situations; e.g. when there is the possibility of 'playing the identities games'. Personal identity politics are typical for our modern societies. The contradictions of identities are, on one hand, in society and on the other hand, in the minds of individuals. No single identity, e.g. belonging to a certain social class, can adopt other identities so that the result is some kind of an overarching 'master identity', that could be a safe ground for politics. On the contrary, modern political landscapes produce dislocated identifications that are competing with each other; multiple identities are connected to negotiable history and cultural content. This means that identifications become politicized and they can be competed over. This change has sometimes been described as a shift from a politics of class identity to a politics of difference (Hall 1992: 279–280).

As a result of the social development and the many processes of change, the 'homogenizing projects' are nearly over. Diversity becomes visible and even more attention is paid to difference. At the same time, one can see signs of so-called 'new-essentialism', understanding all kinds of difference as inherent and imperative. Essentializing and politicizing culture and ethnic identities can have strong social political influence, and therefore it is important to focus research on these questions, e.g. on how a certain state or a nationalistic or ethnic movement attempts to achieve homogenity (Verdery 1994: 46–47, 51–55).

Three levels of analysis of ethnicity

Fredrik Barth (1994) suggests that any analysis of ethnicity should take place on three different levels; the micro, median and macro level in order to fully understand the diverse processes whereby ethnicity is transformed into politics. In fact, these levels are not objectively separated from each other but they are interwoven in a complex fashion. For analytical purposes, however, one has to distinguish them in order to be able to illuminate their interconnections.

A micro level, or the so-called grassroot level, is the field where identities are formed. It focuses on persons and their interpersonal interaction in various events and arenas of human lives; on the management of selves, the complex context of relationships; the

experiences of self-value, and how different symbols are chosen or rejected. The processes on this level are formative of a person's consciousness of ethnic identity and they also lay foundations for a possible identity crisis, which again can feed back to the other levels.

A median level is needed to depict the processes that create collectivities and mobilize groups for diverse purposes by diverse means. This is the field of ethnic leadership, groups and organizations, rhetoric and stereotypes. The dynamic of groups and collectivities arises from requirements of group leaders and ideology. Ethnicity is defined by certain conditions, dichotomies and boundaries. Processes on this level limit the various expressions of identity as people are compelled to take either/or choices and construct 'package deals'. Instead of conveying the multiple ways of understanding ethnicity, the simplified and homogenized concept of the leaders is made public by media – often very aggressively. They present the politics of the leaders as the will of people. Therefore it is important that researchers also listen to those who have different opinions than the ethnopolitical elite.

On the macro level attention is paid to state politics and the way the state deals with groups and categories of persons. All ethnic processes must be understood with reference to state structures as modern states provide a vast field of public goods, which can be distributed by arbitrary regulation or control by bureaucrats. As a result, different new groups start organizing and claiming access and rights to the benefits and privileges given by the state. Different governments have different political agendas for different ethnic groups. On this level, bureaucrats grant privileges and restrictions on the basis of formal criteria. In this way, modern states generate categorical distinctions within the field of cultural variation, and they also create the basis for the development of ethnic groups. In different parts of the world there are new situations where different ethnic movements, liberation movements, international organizations etc. are rising against their governments. By scrutinizing their relations to each other one can analyze the premises they create for each other. The individual understanding of identity, formations of ethnic groups, the interests of governments and global processes are fused together forming a complicated field of political and cultural processes, where – to rephrase Barth – we are facing a competition with most global processes and most intimate experiences of identity (Barth 1994: 19–21, 26–30).

An example of the ethnopolitical debate on the Kvens

Since the 1970s a considerable interest has been paid to the language, culture, history, roots and origins of the population with Finnish-speaking ancestry, also know as Kvens, in Northern Norway. This kind of interest is typical for ethnic revitalisation movements around the world. Over time, it has become important for some members of the present-day generation of the Kvens to politicize their Finnish-speaking background and the cultural identification of 'being a Kven'. The debate accelerated in the 1990s and was full of controversial and conflicting arguments on the questions of ethnicity, culture and language. The debate has revolved around controversial arguments about the ethnonym 'Kven' and the present-day situation of the Kven culture. It has also focused on different ways of defining the status of those with Finnish-speaking ancestry, whether they are defined as descendants of early immigrants or whether they could be regarded as an aboriginal population on a par with the Sámi people. The debate has also dealt with different interpretations involving the Finnish language and the local dialects in Northern Norway, one of the main questions being whether these dialects are variants of the Finnish language or whether they can be considered as belonging to an independent language, which still needs to have its own written grammar.

In the following chapters, I will present some examples on how the concept of culture has been used and how the idea of historical background has been reconstructed in the ethnopolitical debate (see also Anttonen 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001).

Death of the Kven culture?

While I collected material for my thesis, I often encountered arguments about the dying Kven culture. Sometimes there were serious comments about cultural death at various seminars and symposia, at another times, jokes about the resurrection of the Kvens. Often death was mentioned in readers' letters or in the fiery headlines of some newspaper articles like "I don't want to die as a Kven" or "I am going to die as a multicultural Kven". Powerful metaphors dealt with, for example, the idea of Kvens being sentenced to death or being buried alive. Language death was also often mentioned in many debates in Northern Norway (see also Anttonen 1995).

At first I didn't understand why the Kven representatives used terms of dying when they talked about their own language, culture and group in Norwegian society. They didn't seem like a 'forgotten' group as they

had become ethnically organized in the past 15 years, and Kven matters were openly discussed in public. The atmosphere had become freer during the past twenty years and it allowed various minority members to articulate their ethnic distinctiveness loudly, which made the debate multivocal and contradictory.

Gradually, I understood that the death metaphors were part of conscious ethnopolitical rhetoric, which the Kvens used when addressing their message to the state or to the members of the government and the parliament. Culture was described as a kind of 'threatened species', which needed money in order to be preserved and revived. Describing the dangers of culture would show how general modernization was regarded as a threat to the so-called traditional ways of life and how culture was understood as an essentialized, static, bounded and self-supplied entity.

Kven culture has also been defined as a dying culture by some researchers. Nearly all experts used similar metaphors and drew similar conclusions about the fate of Kven culture in the early 1980s, as, for example, in a seminar held in Rovaniemi. It was described as a museum-like culture of the past, having no future (see Aikio 1982: 204; Bjørklund 1982: 215–217; Bratrein 1982: 153; Eriksen 1982: 143–145; Eriksen & Niemi 1982: 108). At that point in time, the existence of people of Finnish origin was publicly recognized and made into a research object, and the researchers had the paradigm of that point in time in their mind. They conceptualized culture as it was then understood, a homogenic and static entity without future. Those academic comments about the death of the Kven culture can be compared with the polemic, ethnopolitical metaphors of today. What lies behind them is the holistic and essentialized concept of culture. In reality, we are dealing with a process of cultural change, i.e. the process of modernization, which sweeps across all fields of society and results in replacing earlier habits and practices with new ones.

The same kinds of judgements have also been offered about the Sámi culture. There are several examples and early literal notes on the 'disappearance' of the Sámi, and the idea has been presented on quite a few occasions in recent years even though Sáminess has proved to be most dynamic in many respects.

What is 'genuine' Kven culture?

One has looked for 'genuine' and 'real' Kven culture in the past years. But what might that be for us today? We know that the Kvens of the 19th

century were hard working tar distillers, fishermen and peasants with diligent wives and large families. It seems difficult to abandon this image of a 'real Kven' and to accept that a present-day Kven actually is a Norwegian-speaking citizen of Norway, one for whom 'being Kven' means being familiar with the historical background of the family. As we want to research the culture of these Kvens, we are repeatedly facing the question of defining the research object. Should we focus on the old Kvens, burning wood in charcoal pits to make tar, or barley cultivation, or sauna traditions, or on the post-war modernization, or what?

The questions of so-called ethnic monopoly of research are also relevant in this connection. The University of Tromsø has been accused by the Kven organization for not doing enough Kven research, or having too many Norwegian or Finnish scholars working in that field. The ethnopolitical elite would rather restrict the right to do Kven research to 'genuine' Kvens (Figenschau 1996; Seppola 2000). This kind of claim for ethnic monopoly is typical of our time – it deals with the questions of insider's and outsider's points of view – at the same time, the debate shows what kind of problems can arise if the principles of academic freedom and the right to research are limited, for example, to particular ethnic groups only. The ethnopolitical elite would also like to direct research to focus on subjects that it considers important; for example the Kven newspaper published a list of cultural phenomena that should be studied (Kveenitutkimusta tarvitaan 1996). Maybe not surprisingly, the suggested list coincided with the indexes of old ethnological works; the main features of material culture grouped according to a certain pattern. Over a hundred years ago, it was typical that ethnologists set out to collect material from the fields that were considered to be in danger of imminent death. Now too, the suggested fields of present-day research are most essentialistic, understanding culture as a static and bounded phenomenon.

The homogenizing culture concept is connected to demands of authenticity; i.e. researchers sometimes present their views on what ethnic groups should be like in order to fulfil researchers' own criteria. While searching for the 'genuine' and 'real' cultural features of 'genuine' and 'real' groups, they make the mistake of wanting to prohibit these groups from developing and modernizing because of our own essentialistic demands. Researchers have also warned us about victimizing the various ethnic groups and indigenous peoples by contact with the Western world, as such a simplification objectifies their cultures as static and inflexible systems that are on the verge of being destroyed or

disappearing. This kind of attitude overlooks human flexibility and different ways of becoming adjusted, or it does not appreciate the versatile dynamics of cultural processes either (Eriksen 1993b: 294, 347; Thuen 1995: 13).

Reconstructing ethnic origin

The history of the Finnish-speaking minority in Norway has been understood and presented as a history of migration; it was one of the results of the colonization of the wilderness by Swedish and Finnish peasants in the 18th and 19th centuries. Gradually, they reached Arctic coastal areas where some of them settled permanently. Unrest due to years of war as well as famine and the need for a better livelihood also provided some of the main reasons for migration. Present-day Kvens are descendants of these early migrants and settlers.

In the beginning of the 1990s some new interpretations of Kven history became public. Some Kven activists claimed that it was only a 'political myth' that Kvens had been Finnish-speaking migrants in the latter half of the 19th century. Instead of defining their forefathers as Kven migrants a few hundred years ago, they wanted to focus on their ancestry from the 10th and 12th centuries and focused on the mythical original home of the Kvens between 900 and 1100.

Nowadays, one hears another explanation of their origins, which start with the story of Ottar in the 800s, which is one of the oldest written sources in which the words 'Kven' and 'Kvenland' are mentioned. Kvenland was the lowland area around the bottom of the Gulf of Bothnia, and the name Kven was used to describe the inhabitants of that area by other Scandinavians in the late Middle Ages. This idea of the mythical original home of the Kven people is used as a historical explanation when one has wanted to obtain indigenous rights for a population of Finnish-speaking origin: "Our country has to be responsive to the UN resolution on minority rights and the ILO Convention. *State borders should be unimportant because Kvens are an indigenous people of the North Calotte*" (Første landsmøte i NKF (Norske Kveners Forbund/Norwegian Kven Organization) 1991, my italics).

The ethnic leaders like to point out that there was a permanent Kven settlement in Norway before 1751, when the present borders of the state of Norway were first drawn. In connection to demands for indigenous rights, the Kvens have been compared with the Sámi. Some ethnopoliticians have concluded that the cultures can be fully compared with each other as their starting points are similar: the historical

tradition is longer than a nation state, and both groups have been Norwegianized, and "the demolition of their cultures has been systematic and organized" (the essentializing idea of a 'demolished culture' as an entity is visible also here). According to these claims, both the Sámi and the Kvens have the same forefathers historically, which means that the Kvens are just as much an indigenous population and should obtain the same aboriginal rights (see eg. Johansen 1992).

New historical interpretations are a clear sign of the need to search for the oldest possible historical background in order to legitimize the demands for an indigenous status. On the other hand, these demands have not been accepted by all Kvens. There is a wide disagreement between different members of the group.

The competition between ethnic groups has become tenser in the past years. One sign is the founding of a new Kvenland organization (Kveenimaa-yhdistys in Finnish) at the end of August 1999, which wants to prove that it is the Kvens and not the Sámi who are the real indigenous population of the North Calotte (Koivulehto 1999).

Analysis of the Kven debate

The Kven debate can be scrutinized with the help of Barth's model; analysing ethnicity on three levels. *On the micro level,* there is a diversity of identifications. The population with Finnish-speaking ancestry is heterogenous, with a variety of ethnic and cultural identifications. Many of them also have multiple identifications, with Norwegian and Sámi elements as part of their Kven or Finnish identities. In reality, there are diverse interpretations of how to be a 'real' Kven, or a real Finn, Norwegian or Sámi. As far as 'genuine' Kvens are concerned, there are very many ways of representing and expressing their cultural distinctiveness. For some – in fact quite a large number – it is enough to be aware of one's family history and Finnish ancestry. Some others are also interested in various cultural activities, whether this means merely celebrating some annual festival or taking a more active part in various Finnish and Kven events. In addition, there is a small but distinctive group of Kvens for whom their cultural background is a basis for ethnopolitical activities.

This variety of meanings reveals the fact that identities are not homogeneous, one-dimensional or static, but rather are constantly in flux. Instead of interpreting identities as discrete entities with clear boundaries, we see that in reality they often function analogically. One can be both Norwegian and Kven or Norwegian and Finnish with

shifting differences. This also leads people into their never-ending negotiations on cultural identification and various forms of self-ascription.

On the median level, ethnic and cultural identifications are politicized; ethnopolitical leaders are trying to construct an idea of a single, homogenous minority population, which could eventually be called a Kven nation, and which could thus obtain a certain legal status based on its historical background and cultural distinctiveness. Comparisons are made to the Sámi population, which was granted a status as an indigenous population due to the ILO Convention number 169 in 1991.

The idea of a homogenous Kven nation is created with the help of some rhetoric tools such as the concepts of language, identity and culture, and with the help of the metaphors of culture and language death. Reconstructions and new interpretations of the historical background are also needed; like the above-mentioned idea about the one thousand year old mythical homeland. The need to obtain the largest possible number of members for the ethnic group, leads the ethnopolitical enterprise to a 'fight for souls' since a solid bulk of people sharing the same identification and self-ascription is a prerequisite for the idea of an ethnic community (even a nation) with clear boundaries. There are imperative demands for a certain identity for those persons who have Finnish-speaking ancestry so that they can be classified as 'real' Kvens. The organizations, however, cannot make imperative demands on people's identities, so the result is to continue with identity negotiations. The idea of a homogenous Kven nation is created by defining a common ethnonym, 'Kven', for all members of the group, creating a common Kven language of their own, and postulating a shared historical background and origin. There are also identity symbols; a national Kven museum has been established and a national costume was designed a couple of years ago. A Kven flag and some other identity symbols have also been discussed.

On the macro level, the relationships between ethnic groups and the state are analysed. Different groupings organize themselves and start claiming the public benefits and services that the modern state can provide. They also want to establish their status and want to legitimize their demands by referring to the concepts of culture, tradition and authenticity. This also happens in Norway, where society tolerates a fair amount of ethnic and cultural diversity – unlike the past when the young nation-state wanted to create and maintain an imagined idea about the homogeneous Norwegian nation.

Nowadays, a general 'aboriginalization' is also taking place; earlier the Sámi were defined as a national or ethnic minority, whereas now they are considered an indigenous population. In the 1970s, nobody would have defined Kvens as indigenous people, but in the 1990s this has become a popular subject of debate. At the same time, questions of special cultural and linguistic rights on ethnic grounds become a dilemma for modern welfare states. For example, in Norway the Kven organization demands the same benefits and rights as the Sámi already have, and they also demand compensation for the injustice that their earlier generations have suffered. Fundamentally, the politicized debate on culture and identity is negotiation for economic resources and power in the modern society.

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