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Acta Borealia
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/sabo20

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Available online: 17 May 2010

To cite this article: Henry Minde (2003): Assimilation of the Sami - Implementation and Consequences[1] , Acta Borealia, 20:2, 121-146

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08003830310002877

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Assimilation of the Sami – Implementation and Consequences[1]

Henry Minde

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> If it has taken 100 years to norwegianise the Coast Samis, then it will perhaps take another 100 years to make us Samis again? (Beate Hårstad Jensen (29), Dagbladet 28 July 2001)

In May 2002, the Norwegian Sami Parliament discussed a motion put forward by the government of establishing a Sami people's fund as an act of reconciliation; to compensate for the state's former policy of *norwegianization* [assimilation]. In conjunction with this case, the present article was originally written as a background paper to depict the present state of knowledge about the minority policy toward the Sami (1850–1980). The paper shows that on one hand great efforts have been made to clarify the political aspects of norwegianization towards the Sami and the Kven. One can conclude that the state's efforts to make the Sami drop their language and change the basic values of their culture and national identity have been extensive and long lasting. On the other hand, the consequences for the victims of this policy, both economically and social-psychologically, have so far been examined to a small extent. The few contemporary sources from the Sami children's encounter with the school system are used to discuss the methodology and the ethical problems in studying the consequences of the meeting between a dominant and a minority culture.

Introduction

1. The legacy

The policy conducted in respect of the Sami minority in Norway was for a long time synonymous with a policy of assimilation or *fornorsking*, which literally means "norwegianization". Both in a historical and a contemporary perspective we see that this convergence of the minority policy and a policy of

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norwegianization represents a separate phase of development, a separate era in Sami history. The policy of norwegianization, understood as a period of time, stretches from about 1850 up to approximately 1980. The beginning and the end of the period can be linked to two events, both of which had a material content, but which also had a powerful symbolic value. The first event was the establishment of *Finnefondet* [the Lapp fund] in 1851. This was a special item in the national budget established by the Storting to bring about a change of language and culture. The other was the *Alta controversy* of 1979–1981, which became a symbol of the Sami fight against cultural discrimination and for collective respect, for political autonomy and for material rights.

Most people who grew up in mixed-language areas in North Norway from the middle of the nineteenth century and far into the post-war period would have been able to tell their own special story of the assimilation. Within the scope allowed, I shall first give a brief historical summary of the efforts made by the Norwegian state over more than 100 years to assimilate the Sami – and the Kven[2] – people. I shall then discuss the ensuing consequences for the Sami people's understanding of themselves and their identity. The policy of norwegianization was introduced in the field of culture "with school as the battlefield and teachers as frontline soldiers" (Niemi 1997: 268). The subject which was focused on was, therefore, *language*. This became a measure and a symbol of the failure or success of the policy of norwegianization. Several other social sectors were involved throughout the twentieth century. The institutional co-ordination of the efforts in the various sectors was to be a special feature of this policy. I have nevertheless chosen to concentrate on education and language policy. This is due partly to considerations of space, but chiefly because it is possible in this sector to document to a certain extent the long-term consequences for the people who were subjected to this policy. Besides, *school* became the cornerstone in the governing of any nation state in the nineteenth century (cf. Weber 1979; Edvardsen 1992; Heathorn 2000).

Given the development of historical realities, it is necessary to see the assimilation of the Samis in a comparative perspective, especially in comparison with the Kven people. Both in Norway and Sweden, the Samis and the Kven appeared in this period as clearly distinct peoples who lived in certain places in such concentrated communities that their existence was considered a problem which called for a special national policy (see Elenius 2002). The breakthrough for the policy of assimilation was not unique in the world in the nineteenth century. Just across the Finnish border and in the Baltic, attempts at such a policy were called "russification" (Thaden 1981), and further afield in central Europe the Bismark's German Reich revealed the harmonization policy of "germanification" (Kohn 1965: chapter 8), and in far-away USA the non-violent policy in respect of the Indians was called "americanization" (Hoxie 1984). The policy of assimilation was, in other words, inseparable from the

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emergence of strong nation states. Thus, it was not the advancement and the existence of a policy of assimilation which made Norway different from other states, but rather the determined, continuous and long-lasting conduct of that policy. This is what makes the historical legacy of the norwegianization policy morally problematic and politically sensitive, even to this day.

2. The historiography

This exposition and discussion will necessarily reflect the situation in today's research, but will also draw attention to aspects of the assimilation which we know surprisingly little about today.

2.1. Institutional and political studies

It was teachers and educationalists who first became interested in norwegianization as a interesting field of study. This was only to be expected. First, the teaching profession had been staunch supporters of the central authorities in the process, they had, in other words, been central players and had a role which increasingly became the subject of discussion. Second, language, education and a Christian upbringing were very much in focus during the process. These were central subjects in the training of teachers in Norway from the mid-nineteenth century. Lastly, the legacy of the educational and nation-building perspective of the state developed by the Liberal Party dominated the historical accounts of it for a long time. After the Second World War and the Holocaust, scientists gradually began to shift their focus to other ideological motives and social processes. Elements of social darwinism and racial overtones came to light, forming a backdrop to the early policy – and research. The problems which the school encountered in Sami areas were now no longer limited to a question of language, which could be resolved by more sophisticated educational means. The problem had to be studied in the light of social processes, both inside and outside the schoolroom. The important contribution in this field was Anton Hoëm's thesis, printed in 1976. He demonstrated, in detail, how the central state power even in the 1960s had maintained, through its educational system, a firm and profound grip on the Sami community.

Historians were slow to involve themselves in this field of research, and the major contribution used a surprising approach – in the eyes of the educationalists. In the cold war era, Knut Einar Eriksen and Einar Niemi, for the first time, gave the security policy motive a prominent place, in their monograph *Den finske fare* [The Finnish Menace] of 1981. In their view it was

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security policy which explained the distinctive formulation of the Norwegian policy in respect of minorities, in its content, scope and depth, as well as in continuity and consistency. My account of the Norwegian policy in respect of the Samis in the years 1850–1940 will be based largely on Eriksen and Niemi's book, but will, to a certain extent, be supplemented and modified with subsequent historical research.

2.2. Studies of cultural and socio-cultural consequences

While the minority policy in itself has been given considerable attention, the cultural and socio-cultural *consequences* of the policy of norwegianization have received far less attention, although the subject has been dealt with in a number of major works and scientific articles, especially at a theoretical, methodological and general level. We find interesting observations and analyses in local community monographs, from Johs. Falkenberg's study of Laksefjord, dating from as early as 1941, to Ivar Bjørklund's history of Kvænangen from 1985. Bjørklund sees the assimilation as the main cause of the ethnic cleansing which apparently took place, evidenced by figures obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics: the proportion of Samis in this municipality was reduced from 44% to 0% in the period 1930–1950! (Bjørklund 1985: 12). Even though the country had been occupied in the meantime and the people of Kvænangen were forced to evacuate the area in 1944–1945, we know that largely the same families and persons lived in the municipality after the Second World War. Problematic as it may be, the ethnic registration carried out in the censuses demonstrates the drastic "disappearance" or change in identity of the Sami population in *overgangsdistrikter* [transitional districts], i.e. areas which had become ethnically mixed with a substantial element of ethnic Norwegians and other Norwegian speakers. Far into the twentieth century this was synonymous with Coast Sami areas.

Harald Eidheim submitted some early and inspiring works which were of some significance to the way his peers in social anthropology regarded the subject of history, and which, in addition, were to provide the basis for a wider cultural and political understanding of what had taken place and still took place in the Sami areas in the post-war years. Eidheim, in his MA thesis of 1958, thematized the problems of norwegianization as an "accumulation" of population in Inner Finnmark. He explains in detail how the Norwegians' attitude to the Samis manifests itself as negative discrimination. And he launches the hypothesis that the attitudes of Norwegians, including many public bodies, become increasingly negative the closer one gets to the Sami central areas. In the small, but classic, study "When Ethnic Identity is a Social Stigma" of 1971, this discussion is raised to a more general level. This study

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insists that the contemporary situation of the Sami must be seen first and foremost as *part of* the state societies within which the Samis as a minority (and in more recent works, as indigenous people) live. It was not the "real" history of the Sami which was of significance, but rather contemporary perception and experience of the Sami's past. And within this horizon of understanding, all things "Sami" were regarded as beggarly, old fashioned, reactionary and – in many circles – heathen. The asymmetric power relations between Norwegians, the Norwegian general public and the Sami relegated features of Sami culture to the private sphere, while attempts were made to conceal that culture in the public sphere.

The social anthropological paradigm on the norwegianization has not resulted in any comprehensive monograph of the consequences of the assimilation process. This is probably an indication of how complex and taboo-ridden the subject is, at any rate among the most exposed groups and those who underwent the most painful experiences. Traditional research will run into numerous problems and ethical dilemmas. On the one hand, considerable familiarity with the informants is required to be able to collect information and data and establish a dialogue with them. And on the other hand, the information obtained by the researchers in this way is so intricate and ambiguous and liable to hurt the informant that it should be used only with the utmost caution (Nergård 1994). Traditional methods of collecting historical material have involved problems of recording relevant data on the subject. The fear of being confronted with self-denial of one's Sami past or the shame associated with incidents from one's schooldays may be reasons why life interviews with people from the transitional districts are so superficial and general when they touch on childhood and schooldays. One intermezzo during an interview with an elderly couple from Skånland in South Troms gives a good indication of this. When the wife had said that her teacher "laughed at" and "mimicked" them because they knew only the Sami language when they started school (in the 1920s), her husband interrupted her with the following reminder: "Enough has been said now. Let me tell you, your story has been so thorough and correct that you need add neither A nor B".[3] It was obvious that a subject had been broached in which they soon reached a pain threshold (Minde 1993: 24f.). This type of reaction is typical of meetings between a dominant culture and a minority culture. When researchers carried out their interviews for the cross-disciplinary project on the consequences of the state policy in respect of the Romany people, concealment versus openness was a relevant issue to many persons (Hvinden 2000: 27). This project nevertheless showed how far one can go in the identification of such consequences when resources are made available for a cross-disciplinary research effort. As will appear from the following, we would still like to see a similar effort with regard to the history of the Sami.

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The phases, motives and content[4]

The long policy of norwegianization can be subdivided into several phases, commonly the background of the causes which impelled this policy, the peoples – Sami or Kven – who were most in focus, the means employed and the degree of co-ordination which took place.

1. The transitional phase, approximately 1850–1870

In the young Norwegian state after 1814, the first generation of senior civil servants who, by virtue of office, made contact with the Sami, put the Sami language on an equal footing with Norwegian. In accordance with the humanistic and romantic ideas of that period, it was believed that to speak one's native tongue was a human right. The most prominent spokesman for these ideas was the clergyman N. V. Stockfleth, who translated and published several books in Sami for use in schools and churches. Stockfleth's line had received strong support from the senior civil servants' party in the *Storting* [the Norwegian Parliament] and from the government. However, this "liberal" – as seen through our contemporary eyes – language policy was opposed by the Norwegian upper class of Finnmark, especially when Stockfleth placed the Sami and the Kven on an equal footing in terms of cultural policy. In 1848 and subsequent sessions of the Storting, Stockfleth's line in language policy was vehemently debated. The discussion heralded a tougher stance by the authorities in respect of the northern minorities.

The measures applied in the first phase were to focus on the Sami in "transitional districts". In 1851 the Storting created a special item in the national budget, termed "*Finnefondet*" [the Lapp Fund], to promote the teaching of Norwegian in the transitional districts and to ensure the enlightenment of the Sami people. To give some indication of the scope of this effort, see Table 1.

An estimate for the 2002 fiscal year shows that the grants for earmarked Sami purposes represent slightly less than 1‰ of the total national budget, a little over one third of which is managed by the Sami themselves, through the Sami Parliament (Fjellheim 2000). Table 1 shows that the proportion which the state spent on norwegianization through *Finnefondet* alone – except for the first two decades – was equal to, if not slightly higher than, what the Sami Parliament has at its disposal today. And in some periods in the early twentieth century the funds made available for norwegianization measures through *Finnefondet* were larger than the *total* proportion allocated for Sami purposes today. We must, of course, be careful not to draw solid conclusions on the basis of thousandths when dealing with phenomena from differing historical

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Table 1. *Finnefondet*, annual allocations, and per thousand of public administration expenditure.

	Annual allocations from *Finnefondet*, NOK	Per thousand of public administration expenditure
1865 (1864/1865)	4000	0.19
1870 (1869/1870)	11,200	0.53
1880 (1879/1880)	20,000	0.67
1890 (1889/1890)	31,000	0.82
1900 (1899/1900)	25,300	0.39
1910 (1909/1910)	90,000	1.01
1920 (1919/1920)	189,200	0.34

Annual allocations taken from Larsson (1989: 58, Table 1) and per thousand of public administration expenditure calculated on the basis of figures from *Historisk Statistikk 1978* [Historical Statistics 1978] (table 234, column headed “utgifter i alt” [total expenditure]).

periods. A direct comparison will be incongruous for two reasons: first, as we shall see, there were a number of assimilation measures which were funded over other budget items[5], and second, many of these measures were intended for the border districts and the Kven population.

2. The consolidation phase, approximately 1870–1905

From the late 1860s, the Storting began to tighten the norwegianization measures. The great Finnish immigration to East Finnmark was brought up. The measures already taken had not had the desired effect. Quite the contrary, it was said, the Norwegian language was in decline among Sami and Kven. While these measures in the first phase had been motivated by civilizing and nationalistic considerations, now security policy was highlighted and “national considerations” were decisive to both objectives and strategies. It was against this background that the Storting, in 1868, decided that the money of *Finnefondet* was to be spent on measures also aimed at the Kven population. This item in the national budget was more than doubled in a few years (see Table 1).

The measures were gradually tightened. One central instrument was an instruction issued by the directors of Troms diocese in 1880 to teachers in the transitional districts. The instruction stated that all Sami and Kven children were to learn to speak, read and write Norwegian, while all previous clauses saying that the children were to learn their native tongue were repealed. Teachers who were unable to demonstrate good results in this linguistic decodification

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process or “change of language”, as it was called, were not given a wage increase. For someone who had taught for 7 years, this represented between 23 and 30% of the wage (Larsson 1989: 113). Sami or Kven teachers saw no point in applying for this increase, while Norwegian teachers became financially dependent on documenting the zeal they put into their norwegianization work (see Bjørklund 1985: 263–274). The instruction of 1880 marked the final breakthrough for the strict norwegianization policy.

The final and most long-lived school instruction was issued in 1898, and was nicknamed “the Wexelsen decree”, after the Minister for Church Affairs. Again, in the justification for the instruction it was pointed to the peril from the east, and again there were reports of the deteriorating language situation. It was now stated that use of the Sami and Kven languages must be limited to what was strictly necessary, “as an aid to explain what is incomprehensible to the children”. The instruction even required teachers to check that their Sami and Kven pupils did not use their native tongue during breaks. The objective was maintained and made more stringent, while the methods and the scope were modified. Funds spent on teaching the Sami and Kven languages at Tromsø Teachers’ Training Seminar were revoked. Although these funds largely went to students of a Norwegian ethnic background, the Ministry thought that it had been unfortunate to signal a willingness to oblige demands of this kind. Besides, it was thought that the process had gone so far that the actual need was no longer really present.

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Even though such well-known “Sami activists” as Isak Saba and Anders Larsen were admitted as Sami students on tuition scholarships at Tromsø Teachers’ Training Seminar, there could have been only a few whose background was ethnic Sami or Kven.[6] According to education researcher Helge Dahl, only 12 of the 187 students on tuition scholarships who graduated in the 1872–1906 period were from Finnmark, i.e. 6.4%. We do not know how many of these had a minority background. Some students from Troms (51) and Nordland (58) must also have had such a background (Dahl 1957: 256). In comparison, between 1883 and 1905, 10 Sami and five Kven were admitted at the seminar (Dahl 1957: 248). Scepticism regarding the admission of Sami and Kven students increased throughout the period. In the late 1860s, the directors of Troms diocese were already sceptical of Sami teachers: “There were considerable problems associated with them, yet with no possibility of instilling in them any satisfactory education” (quoted from Dahl 1957: 226). In 1877, Director General Hertzberg of the Ministry went in for work prohibition on ethnic grounds, with the following justification: “Experience seems to have demonstrated that teachers of pure or mixed Kven or Lappish descent are not suited to promote norwegianisation among their fellow countrymen with the desired success”. (Stortingsforhandlinger 1878). This proposed work prohibition on ethnic grounds at first met with no response,

but two decades later "the Wexelsen decree" signalled the green light for this measure.

We have seen that allocations for the norwegianization measures increased substantially in the early twentieth century (see Table 1). The reasons for this were both a greater fear of "the Finnish menace" and the attention given to it, and the national agitation surrounding the dissolution of the union with Sweden. New measures were introduced in a short period of time:

- the building of several boarding schools around Finnmark county, aimed at isolating the pupils from their original environments;
- the termination of courses in Sami and Finnish at Tromsø seminar;
- at the same time, tuition scholarships for pupils with a Sami or Kven background were abolished at the same school;
- the authorities preferred teachers with a Norwegian background in Sami and Kven areas, i.e. a work prohibition for Sami and Kven in schools;
- teaching methods designed to promote assimilation most efficiently were discussed at teachers' conventions and demonstrated by the school superintendent himself.

Moreover, there was a considerable tightening of state control over the norwegianization measures, especially in schools. Up until the turn of the century, the local authorities had had control of, and responsibility for, the implementation of norwegianization, e.g. the vicar checked that the measures were put into practice in the municipalities, by virtue of his role as chairman of the school board. In 1902, the state authorities set up the first office in Norway of a county Director of Schools and ordered Bernt Thomassen, a well-known Liberal Party sympathizer, to carry out the new mission in the county of Finnmark. In *Sagai Muittalægje*[7] he was called Bobrikoff after the general governor whom the czar appointed to russify Finland (Polvinen 1995). It is no doubt that Thomassen was strictly dedicated to the task he had been given. We note that the justification he gave included not only nationalism and security policy, but also welfare policy. Norwegianization was, as Thomassen pointed out in a statement to the Ministry in 1907, "as much a matter of welfare for the vast majority of the North Norwegian Lappish and Kven population. Norwegianisation paves the way for development and progress even for these people" (quoted from Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 114). With this conviction, the authorities believed that they could maintain their objectives *on behalf of* the minority populations and *for their good*. I will return to this point later. As Thomassen stayed in the office as Director of Schools for a long time (1902–1920), he marked out the course and put his mark on how the norwegianization was implemented.

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3. The culmination phase: approximately 1905–1950

In the first part of this phase "measures previously launched were consolidated and ideologies were firmly cemented" (Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 323). The Versailles Peace Treaty after the First World War changed the borders on the northern Fennoscandia. For Norway this resulted in a common border with both Russia and Finland. The security policy threat perceived by Norwegian authorities became stronger after the Russian revolution, but after a short period it was still "the Finnish menace" which was at the centre of attention. The inter-war years were therefore to be marked by a shielding off from Finland and – more relevant to our topic – an "inner offensive" against Kven and Sami.

The various means which had been employed until then and which were supplemented with several new ones, were finally brought together in a joint, secret, body, *Finnmarksnemden* [the Finnmark Board], in 1931. This body marks the culmination of the Norwegian assimilation policy which continued into the post-war years and which, characteristically, remained quite unaffected by the change in government in 1935. The Finnmark Board also demonstrates the increasingly stronger ties which gradually developed between the minority and the security policies and which, in particular, characterizes the distinctive character and form which the norwegianization policy assumed. The secrecy must also be seen as a reaction against the organized opposition by the Sami and their criticism of the education policy. The fear of both ambitions for a greater Finland and Sami mobilization led to more "underhand" justifications for the introduction of new measures.

Allocations for the above-mentioned *Finnefondet* had been considerably increased in the early twentieth century and were more than doubled in the years before the outbreak of war in 1914. The great increase was intended to cover the government's boarding schools initiative as a new and more efficient tool in the assimilation efforts. At first the boarding schools were built as border fortifications in Kven-dominated areas, but later Inner Finnmark county and Tysfjord were also included in the programme (Meløy 1980). As soon as the war was over, the Director of Schools for Finnmark county characteristically took the initiative to change the name of *Finnefondet* to a more "neutral" term. This initiative should probably be seen in the context of the Sami national meetings which had been held the previous years. The Ministry followed the advice, and from 1921 *Finnefondet* was camouflaged as a general tool: "Special grants for elementary schools in Finnmark's rural districts". Bjørg Larsson, who has studied how the money allocated over *Finnefondet* was spent, concludes that "grants for *Finnefondet* continued as before" (Larsson 1989: 31).

Chr. Brygfjeld was one of Thomassen's successors in the office of Director of Schools and the state's chief inspector of norwegianization measures from

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1923 to 1935. Academic literature refers to him as both stubborn and rigorous in his practice (Meløy 1980: 94; Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 257 ff.). He rejected all demands made by the Sami, partly from clearly *racial* points of view:

> The Lapps have had neither the ability nor the will to use their language as written language. (...) The few individuals who are left of the original Lappish tribe are now so degenerated that there is little hope of any change for the better for them. They are hopeless and belong to Finnmark's most backward and wretched population, and provide the biggest contingent from these areas to our lunatic asylums and schools for the mentally retarded (quoted from Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 258). [8]

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According to Brygfjeld, the assimilation of the Sami was an indisputable civilizing task for the Norwegian state, because of the Norwegians' racial superiority. Here he distinguished between Sami and Kven, as he considered the latter to be a cultured people, the "most industrious and competent" in Finnmark. The fact that the Kven must be norwegianized was due exclusively to security policy considerations.

From the mid-nineteenth century the authorities did not distinguish between Sami and Kven pupils in assimilation measures in schools. But, as the example with Brygfjell above shows, this distinction was more commonly made in the inter-war years. This differential treatment could be negative to the Sami, based on a scale of civilization where the Sami fell short. Or it could be positive from a historical argument: unlike the Kven, who must be considered old immigrants to Norway, the Sami were an old indigenous people of northern Fennoscandia.

This differential treatment of Sami and Kven was in fact laid down in the Elementary School Act of 1936. The previously existing possibility of using Finnish as an auxiliary language in case of need, as was the case with Sami, was now abolished. The 1936 School Act was, in other words, a further tightening of the regime in respect of the Kven. The justification was that the Sami enjoyed special rights as an indigenous people and that many of them knew no Norwegian. One underlying motive was security policy, but this was expressed only in unofficial memorandums, not in public debates in the Storting. The new Labour Party government, in other words, followed up the norwegianization and assimilation policy of the previous non-socialist government.

4. The termination phase: approximately 1950–1980

Formally speaking, the instruction of 1898, the Wexelsen decree, remained in force until the Sami Commission's recommendation was debated in the Storting in 1963 (Innstilling 1959: 58f.; Stortingsmelding 21 (1962–1963)).[9] The

requirements laid down in the instruction consequently applied throughout the 1950s, indeed there is evidence that they were applied far into the 1960s in some places. In Tor Edvin Dahl's book report (1970: 150), a teacher who came originally from Oslo states the following:

> Then we had to make sure the children never spoke Sami or Finnish, we had been told by the headmaster that they were not allowed to speak their native language, not even during breaks or after school hours. Norwegian was to be spoken, and no discussion about it.

The fact that the Old Spirit was still alive in the 1960s is further confirmed by a small account which Anders Ole Hauglid (1984): 65) from Brummundal has given of his meeting with "the land of adventure":Wondrous Finnmark – it was quite an experience to have gone to a foreign country: – Everyone speaks Norwegian. Nobody has to speak Finnish or Sami, was the message we had been given! Until the manager of the school's dormitory made me aware that Sami and Finnish were their native tongues and that the boarding school was their second home. Today, 20 years on, one can fret and grieve about this.

Both accounts are from Porsanger, but it seems likely that active norwegianization was carried on during and outside school hours elsewhere in Troms and Finnmark as well, as late as in the 1960s, even after the Storting had finally buried the "Wexelsen decree". In the case of North Troms, it has been demonstrated that the teaching staff in the inter-war years consisted largely of people from outside who were animated by the authorities' programme to disseminate the Norwegian language and culture. There are examples of teachers who publicly expressed racist attitudes. In Bråstad Jensen (1990): 141) words, school had:

> (...) unfortunate consequences for the development of the self-image of many Sami and Kven pupils. At school they were told more or less overtly that their native language and their cultural belonging were of little value altogether.

It is not within the scope of this article to discuss in more detail how the relationship between school and local communities developed or to discuss the outcome, in terms of knowledge, of the development of education in the norwegianization policy. There was no major survey of these issues until the 1960s, in connection with the transition from elementary school to 9 year primary and lower secondary schools in the central north Sami areas. At that time the pupils' average performance was markedly below the minimum requirements of the curriculum plan, and all through the twentieth century the distance between school and Sami, in both social and cultural terms, had increased (Hoëm 1976a,b).

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5. Today's knowledge and discussion of the effects

It has been said that the norwegianization policy "was the aggregate measures and thinking behind the totality of the assimilation work" (Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 61) and that it, in our context, "required the Sami to be what they were not" (Nergård 1994: 58).

Based on history, one can safely conclude that the state's efforts to make the Sami (and the Kven) drop their language, change the basic values of their culture and change their national identity, have been extensive, long lasting and determined. The restructuring of social institutions must have had profound consequences for the individuals' relations with each other. The state's efforts were to some extent made easier by existing everyday racism, but these efforts in themselves probably contributed to a massive downgrading of those who were subjected to the policy. Yet, it has been pointed out that social unrest was remarkably feeble during the entire modernization and norwegianization period. There is great consensus that this is due to the powerlessness caused by the extremely unequal power relations between state administration as the executive party and the individuals who were subjected to the changes (Aubert 1982; Eidheim 1971; Eriksen and Niemi 1981; Hoëm 1976a,b).

Eriksen and Niemi have launched as "a reasonable hypothesis" that without "the Finnish menace" "the norwegianisation policy in respect of the Sami would not have been conducted as strictly over such a long period of time" (Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 333, see also 125). We have, in line with this conclusion, seen that after about 1870 the assimilation policy in Finnmark was continuously tightened owing to increased Kven immigration. Recent research has nevertheless drawn attention to the fact that the authorities' policy in respect of the Sami south of Finnmark, especially the reindeer-herding Sami, was characterized by national, social darwinistic and racist motives to an equally great extent. The long process leading up to an agreement between Norway and Sweden about reindeer grazing in 1919, the Reindeer Grazing Convention, has been called by historian Roald Berg "another victory" for "the Norwegian restrictive policy in respect of the Sami culture" (Berg 1998: 182), and in the work *Norsk utenrikspolitisk historie* [the history of Norwegian foreign policy], Berg concludes the discussion of this issue thus:

> The reindeer grazing conflict with Sweden up until 1919 was the manifestation in foreign policy of the hard-handed norwegianisation policy resulting from colonisation from the south, the inner consolidation and expansion into the old Sami country (Berg 1995: 143).

A closer look at the economic development than this article allows reveals that the marginalization was to a considerable extent a result of the assimilation measures in a wide context (Minde 2000: 81–103). The result in the Coast Sami

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areas was that the Sami "disappeared" from the censuses, and that Sami interests and identity in the fishing industry were stigmatized (Drivenes 1982: 144f; Eythórsson 2003). In other words, studies made of the Norwegian–Swedish reindeer grazing conflict, national and regional reindeer herding in Norway (Berg 2000) and local communities in South Troms and Ofoten (Minde 2000) have both supplemented and modified the work of Eriksen and Niemi on this point.

We know from other research that this form of powerlessness which the minorities experienced during norwegianization has social-psychological consequences. On the one hand, various defence mechanisms are activated to adapt to the social pressure and the new conditions. But if the pressure from the surroundings becomes sufficiently strong and persistent, it will on the other hand "mark one's self-image, undermine one's self-respect and self-esteem, and at worst cause self-contempt and an exaggeratingly critical attitude towards other members of one's own group" (Hvinden 2000: 19).

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The identity and self-esteem

Since Bjørnstierne Bjørnson's peasant stories and the novels of Arne Garborg, Norwegian literature has contained innumerable descriptions of schools' injustice towards children on the basis of social position and conditions of class. A great number of such stories could be expected, given what took place for more than a century in the 50 boarding schools and 70 school rooms, [10] if we look at Finnmark alone

As mentioned in the introduction, there has been little research performed by historians and social scientists regarding the social-psychological consequences of the norwegianization of Sami and Kven. I shall nevertheless summarize some observations on the background of evidence that has become known up until the present day from literature and written recollections. How did schoolchildren themselves experience their encounter with school? What were the consequences of the norwegianization policy for young people's development in a critical phase of their lives?

1. Introduction of a new teaching method – an episode

Academic literature does not know of many episodes which shed light on the cultural clash that must have occurred daily in the school rooms. Historian Regnor Jernsletten has referred to an episode which was reported in Anders Larsen's newspaper *Sagai Muittalægje*, which took place during the Director of Schools' (Thomassen) journey in Porsanger in 1903. Thomassen took over a

classroom lesson in Lakselv, wishing to demonstrate how the new method in educational norwegianization, visual instruction,[11] was to be applied in practice.

> The school superintendent shouted to one of the children: "Go out! Go out!" and when the child did not understand the foreign language, the superintendent seized him by the neck and threw him into the hall with the words "Go out!". The child was frightened and began to cry. Then one of the other children was told to go and fetch him back, again on the school superintendent's order – which was again "Go out! Go out!" This child fared no better than the first. Then the superintendent fetched a stick and pointed around the room at various objects with it. And when the children failed to understand his foreign tongue, he banged the stick on the table. And *then* the children understood nothing at all, as they had become utterly terrified (Jernsletten 1998: 50).

The Director of Schools superintendent did not let this go unchallenged. His version, which was translated into Sami and printed in the same paper, largely confirms the actual events, but offers a totally different interpretation:

> The school superintendent demonstrated how teaching could be effected by means of visual instruction, without the use of the Sami or Kven language. What was to be learned was the word "out". A child was required to leave the room for this purpose, and the remaining children were asked where he was. Their answer was to be: "Johan has gone *out*". After this had been repeated several times, Johan was asked to come back in. However, he had misunderstood the situation. The whole thing was therefore repeated with another boy, and Johan realised his misunderstanding. – The teacher was impressed by the superintendent's simple and good method of instruction. – And the superintendent had been forced to bang the stick on the table a couple of times in order to have the children's attention (Jernsletten 1998: 51, cf. Hoëm and Tjeldvoll 1980: 79–82).

Regardless of which version is the most correct compared with what "actually" happened, these accounts reveal the real implications and consequences of the new teaching methods. As we shall see below in more detail, the pupils risked having their human dignity violated daily. But paradoxically enough, there have been few accounts of how these children experienced school. One common attitude in Sami areas has been to "let bygones be bygones". The contrast with the many and detailed school day memoirs which exist from ethnic Norwegian areas is striking. In most multi-ethnical communities in North Norway, however, school seems to have been almost as taboo-ridden to Sami and Kven pupils as rape and incest have been until recently in Western countries. How are such paradoxes to be explained? We have no

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possibilities of doing in-depth studies here, but if one takes as a starting point what people have suggested more or less implicitly, there should be enough material to arouse interest in further fact-finding.

2. Pupils' "mastering" of changes in school

Where the pre-Second World War period is concerned, I would first of all refer to two well-known accounts, both printed in the clergyman Jens Otterbech's anti-norwegianization battle pamphlet, which appeared in 1917 (Hidle and Oterbech 1917).[12] In this collection of articles, two Sami teachers write about their own encounter with school, Anders Larsen (1870–1949) from Seglvik in Kvænangen[13] and Per Fokstad (1890–1973) from Bonakas in Tana.[14] As a man who was past the prime of his life, Larsen remembers his own schooling in this way:

> I cannot remember anything of what my teacher said during my first years at school, because I did not understand him, and I was certainly not among the least gifted. I profited sadly little from school. I was intellectually malnourished. My soul was damaged. These are the most barren and fruitless of my learning years. They were wasted, so to speak, and a wasted childhood can never be made good (Hidle and Oterbech 1917: 35).

What is left in Larsen's mind is the feeling of having been ignored and neglected. At this time, Larsen had been frozen out from his teaching vocation in the Sami areas and had ended his period as a Sami activist (Bjørklund 1985: 329, cf. Hoëm and Tjeldvoll 1980: 79–82; Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 114). It is the life experience of a resigned man that marks the school day recollections we meet in this account. One might expect a different attitude in the young teacher Per Fokstad, who worked in his home community in Tana and who faced a long career as Sami and Labour Party politician.

> Oh, what helpless experiences those first school lessons were! It was as if all doors were closed! – What was he saying? – It sounded so stiff. – There was something revolutionary going on in your mental life. The bright, bold receptiveness left you; the childlike cheerfulness disappeared! You did not dare ask a question; you only guessed. No utterance of amazement at what you saw ever crossed your lips. It was as if you had suddenly become old. You became uncommunicative, you were seized by a feeling of loneliness. (...) School lessons were so boring and so poor, so poor in content.

True, there are accounts of a demand for knowledge and revolt, but these are repressed for fear of the authorities. The awareness of the reactions that

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school created is remarkably similar to the one found in Larsen. Half a century later, Easter 1970, Fokstad reflected on the personal consequences that the rigorous norwegianization could have:

> Sometimes when I think about this, it is such a great pain that I can't sleep. I stay awake at night, I feel I have to speak up. Tell this story to someone, everything that causes pain, that has been trampled down –. There is something inside me that shouts: Don't suffocate me! Something that needs air, that wants to rise, that wants to live. But we were branded. We were trampled down and I can never forget it. Never forget what it was like. Everything was taken away from us. Our native language we were not allowed to speak. Nobody listened to us (Dahl 1970: 10).

Again the feeling of being looked down upon is underlined, of not being appreciated and of being ignored. In the case of Fokstad, the feeling of bitterness, similar to what we saw in Larsen, led to an occasionally active opposition to the minority policy in force. Larsen and Fokstad were no doubt representative of those Sami who, from about 1905 to about 1920, took part in the first Sami organization building (Jernsletten 1998: 49–65). It may, of course, be a question to what extent such attitudes were common among the Sami in general. We shall look at some examples from areas which did not have any strong ethno-political organizations until the 1980s and 1990s. One Sami from Ullsfjord in North Troms, born in 1911, who had not been active in Sami politics, stated in an interview in 1990:

> I wondered why the teacher didn't speak Sami in school when he was a Sami – He probably wasn't allowed to, he thought. (...) We were so used to being repressed – it didn't matter much.[15]

A woman of about the same age and from the same place had not only noticed the low status of the language, but remembered in particular how the teacher had made a habit of ridiculing pupils who knew no Norwegian: "We had a teacher from Bodø. He was a true Norwegian. He made fun of anyone who spoke Sami".[16] The feeling of being looked down upon by the teacher is common to those who have talked about their school days at all, such as this Sami woman from Skånland, born in 1924:

> When I started school I could not speak Norwegian. Had to learn. Of course it sounded broken. (...) I have to say many times, that when I think back, I was bullied many times for my language alone, the poor Sami language.[17]

School day recollections given in Tor Edvin Dahl 1970 report from Karasjok, Tana and Porsanger refer to the period during and after the Second

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World War. It is from Inner Finnmark, which is where the ethno-political opposition began to take root in the 1960s (Stordahl 1996). Dahl lets a varied group of people with a Sami background tell their stories:

> The language was Sami, of course. The teachers were the only ones who spoke Norwegian, and all teaching was in Norwegian. You perhaps didn't understand very much. But you crammed the Bible stories until you knew them. In the course of 4 1/2 years I had 9 teachers, and none of them knew Sami (Hans Eriksen, headmaster in Karasjok. Born and raised in Sirma. Approximately 35 years old in 1970; Dahl 1970: 69).

> At any rate, many are insecure and feel so. It began when you were small, didn't it. At school, with the endless misunderstandings, all the small humiliations. I didn't know Norwegian so well, I had problems expressing myself, and I frequently said something different from what I intended (Albert Johansen, headmaster, Polmak. Approximately 40 years old in 1970; Dahl 1970: 74).

> I never had more than 4 years of schooling, I suppose. Then I went south to a lower secondary school, and at first I did all right. I could read mechanically, but strangely enough, when I began to understand a little, things got worse. Writing something, that was not easy. And then one day we had a test. I didn't hand in my paper. Afterwards the teacher came and asked me why? I said it wasn't much good, so I didn't want to hand it in. Well, let me see, then, he said. After that he sat with me many evenings, and that was probably why I managed as well as I did (LK, carpenter from Sirma. Approximately 40 years old in 1970; Dahl 1970: 92).

> I suppose I am quite simple, as you will understand who have come from Oslo to make a book. But I have always got along. I have even learned Norwegian, even though it is said to be so difficult for us Sami. I didn't understand a word at school, and the teachers gave us the Bible stories, and we were told to read. But of course it was quite incoherent to us (RS, housewife from Polmak. Approximately 55 years old in 1970; Dahl 1970: 118).

> (...) I went to school for 17 months, but didn't learn a word of Norwegian and could neither read nor write. Grey sheep, my teacher called me. Maybe I could have won the court case and been paid money because I didn't learn anything, many people up here could have done that. But I am not like that (JS, farmer from Karasjok, 50 years old in 1970; Dahl 1970: 138).

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> I don't know very much. I can't speak Norwegian, just a little, but it is hard. I don't understand it when they talk on the radio, it is too fast there. And I can't read or write, not Sami and not Norwegian. So you understand, there isn't much I can do either (AS, from Karasjok. Approximately 45 years old in 1970; Dahl 1970: 143).

One element common to these personal school day stories is the disgrace the pupils felt as they were left out of things during the first years because of their language. They did everything to avoid being ridiculed and disgraced. Pupils' absence and omission at that time were certainly not always caused by poverty and disease, despite the notations in school protocols. The gifted pupils managed to get through school, but not always without memories which could still be painful. And surprisingly, many never learned proper Norwegian. One account from Musken boarding school in Tysfjord confirms the impression from Inner Finnmark. The informant was born in 1932 and later became a teacher:

> When we showed up at school – it was a totally strange world. We learned how to read – it is a miracle – I can't understand how we made it. I learned mechanically. Of course I read, but I didn't understand a thing (...) We cried and did our homework – crammed and crammed (...) How I got through the first years at school I cannot understand. Not until the 6th grade was the Norwegian language an instrument of thought (...) Pupils who, had it been today, would know how to both read and write with a little special teaching, I remember them in particular (...) There was a fellow the same age as me. He managed, in the seven years, to write the figure 1 – and he never learned to read. What struck me afterwards was that he was a crackerjack at mental calculation.[18]

3. The cultural pain

One recurrent feature in this context is the fact that the events of the past are soon lost in semi-darkness. The human costs of the measures that were applied are, as already indicated, difficult to evidence. Because a culture based on the written language is less common among minorities, and because loyalty and shame have been common feelings, we can talk about a structural feature, i.e. the fact that "power covers up its tracks" (Hvinden 2000: 27–28; cf. Høgmo 1986; Nergård 1994).

It is, therefore, not surprising that academic literature contains relatively few examples of organized resistance among Sami and Kven, aimed directly at the implementation of assimilation measures. The feeling of powerlessness among the minorities was too great for that, and those in power were

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convinced that the minorities' agreement was not even necessary. This is well demonstrated by the short period during which the norwegianization policy was attacked by the directors of *Finnemisjonen* [the Lapp Mission], i.e. circles within the Church of Norway. Both Director of Schools Thomassen and bishop Dietrichson[19] were forced to come to the defence of the norwegianization policy. The main arguments were that the vast majority of those entitled to give an opinion were in favour of the policy in force. The opposition was characterized as reactionary because it wished to return to the previous confusion in school language and because it disregarded the fact that norwegianization would elevate the Sami materially, culturally and religiously. Besides, Thomassen and Dietrichson claimed, it was not correct that the Sami themselves were opposed to assimilation (Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 122).

Here, the Director of Schools and the bishop responsible for the Sami population in the north on the one hand disregarded the pronounced opposition voiced in Sami political circles and represented by such politicians as Anders Larsen and Isak Saba. In the magazine *Sagai Muittalægje* (1904–1911) they had expressed well-known opposition against norwegianization: the language is a people's life nerve, therefore Sami and Norwegians must enjoy equal rights "in our realm". On the other hand, Thomassen and Dietrichson could point to expressions coming from Sami quarters which gave them support. This is seen in the first big language debate about the native language among the Sami in *Sagai Muittalægje* in 1905–1906. Larsen had then given space to a Sami language teacher from Talvik in Finnmark who wrote under the pseudonym "a thinker". The article could have been written as an application to the Director of Schools for a wage increase from *Finnefondet*: without learning the main language of a country one could not get very far. What little progress had been made in the country was due to Norwegians. The Sami were incapable of making a better future for themselves. Only when the next generation of Sami had become norwegianized would the Sami peoples see progress (Jernsletten 1998: 51f). It was not the first and only time that such opinions were voiced among Samis. The Sami writer Matti Aikio received public attention when he stated in a national newspaper in 1919: "Modern life is getting closer and closer, and it does not speak Lappish".[20]

This attitude to their native language was probably becoming quite common among the Sami, especially among those who wished to rise in the Norwegian society, whether they were teachers or writers. It was a widely held opinion in some coastal areas where the Sami had previously been the majority that tending the Sami language was a futile business. A couple from Ullsfjord (born approximately 1915) obviously had differing opinions, as they

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answered thus when asked whether there were problems for pupils from Sami homes:

> Wife: Yes, you know, there were...
>
> Husband (interrupting): Oh no, because all the other kids spoke Norwegian. Even in the homes where they spoke Sami, they had to learn Norwegian (...) It was more convenient to use the language spoken in Norway. It is a dying language. What is the point of keeping it alive? It is the old, old people who can't walk anymore who have the Sami. And you university people who are working to get the Sami language back. That is just foolish![21]

While norwegianization among those who belonged to the Sami movement must often have caused bitterness and opposition, the reaction among the "loyal Norwegian subjects" of Sami descent was often one of shame, either on behalf of one's ancestors and fellow tribesmen who still spoke the native tongue or on behalf of themselves, if the pupil was unable to learn Norwegian well enough.[22] Sami politicians explained such attitudes in the following way: in the Sami and Kven communities it was accurately shown by Larsen as early as in 1917:

> Unfortunately there are few young Finns [i.e. the young Sami, author's comment] who have not had their soul damaged in some way or another by norwegianisation at school. Given school's attitude towards Finnish [i.e. Sami, author's comment] they have gradually come to depreciate their native tongue. One sees often enough that as soon as young Finns have learned Norwegian tolerably well, they become ashamed of their native tongue and their origins (Hidle and Oterbech 1917: 35f).

We have seen that "the Sami pain" – an expression borrowed from educationalist Jens-Ivar Nergård (1994) – may have been widespread among those who were in opposition, but probably even more deep-felt and traumatic among those who tried most eagerly to adapt to the assimilation pressure. In this respect the latter group was to play the most serious role of the victim. To attempt an answer as to why it was so is to undertake a whole research project *per se*.

I shall conclude here by pointing to a factor which is of relevance even today, and which is associated with the problems of self-determination, or rather the lack of self-determination. The norwegianization policy in respect of the Sami and Kven was presented by the authorities as being *for their own good*. As in the above-mentioned example with the Director of Schools Thomassen and bishop Dietrichson, it was assumed that the Sami and Kven themselves did not know any better. Given the image which civil servants had

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of the minorities, there was no reason to invite Sami and Kven to a dialogue and co-influence in the process. What apparently was needed was paternalistic protection. Even if the motivation behind the methods could be construed as social welfare, these methods were implemented through one-way communication and coercion. Using a sentence from Habermas (1998): 56f), one may conclude that "evil is not sheer aggression as such, but something one feels justified to do. Evil is good turned inside out".[23]

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Concluding comments

- Our knowledge of the assimilation process is unevenly distributed. Great efforts have been made to clarify the political aspects of norwegianization. There are many obvious reasons for this priority. The extensive source material of state activity invites this. Many of the players were powerful men in their day, and some were colourful persons. On the other hand, the "victims" of this policy were a big mass where only a few are conspicuous and have left traces in the sources. Many of those who are still alive will be reluctant to "drag up" the memories of how the assimilation affected them personally. I would maintain that it is just as important for us – and certainly about time – to have some knowledge of the effects of the norwegianization process as of its causes. Only in this way can we assess the actions of the players on the side of both power and powerlessness; the actions of those who introduced the process and of those who bore the burdens of assimilation pressure.
- It appears as relatively certain that the norwegianization policy succeeded in reaching its goals in the "transitional districts", i.e. in the Coast Sami districts, at any rate with regard to the objective of a change of language, and partly a change of identity. The consequences of the norwegianization process were individualized and in part associated with shame. Being taken for a Sami in public was a personal defeat. Poverty was linked to Norwegians' image of the authentic Sami. Sustainable counter-images became possible only when the modern Sami movement inspired big, collective actions. The Sami actions during the Alta controversy of 1979–1982 are the most well known (Minde 2003), but were followed by a number of local actions, less known in the Norwegian public mind, such as the "Coast Sami revolt" in Finnmark in the 1980s (Nilsen 2003).
- I have tried to find a measure with which to compare the public efforts for assimilation with what is allocated for Sami purposes over today's national budget. With the reservations that must be made in cases of comparisons over time, I would nevertheless maintain that the annual

efforts from about 1870 were probably at a level corresponding to today's total efforts over the national budget to "rehabilitate" and strengthen the Sami community. In this sense it could be said that it will take about 130 years from the establishment of the Sami Parliament until the Norwegian state will have "settled its account" regarding the norwegianization policy.

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Notes

1. The Norwegian Parliament decided in June 2000 to allocate 75 million Norwegian crowns to a *Samefolkets fond* [Sami peoples' fund]. The purpose was to compensate collectively for the damage the so-called "norwegianization" policy had inflicted on the Sami peoples. *Sametinget* [the Sami Parliament] was invited to give advice on how the statute for the management of the fund should be framed. The present article was originally written as a background paper to the Sami Parliament when they handled the case in May 2002 (*Sametinget*, case 23/2002).
2. Kven is the Norwegian name for the Finnish settlers in Northern Norway and their descendants. Originally coming from the area around the Gulf of Bothnia, they began to settle in Finnmark from the Late Middle Ages. A regular migration took place from the early eighteenth century to the two northernmost counties in Norway, Troms and Finnmark.
3. Henry Minde's collection of interviews from *Stuoranjárga*, recorded 27 November 1990.
4. This whole section is based in particular on Eriksen and Niemi (1981), especially pp. 113 ff.; 256 ff.; 298 ff. References to other works are included only insofar as they supplement or modify Eriksen and Niemi's account in this work.
5. An example of this was the Storting's allocation for road construction in Sør-Varanger in 1869–1876, a total of 80,000 kroner, an average of 11,400 kroner per year. This issue was given high priority as an instrument in the service of norwegianization (Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 70f). The average sum is just as large as the annual funds of *Finnefondet* in the same period.
6. Isak Saba (1875–1921) from Nesseby (Finnmark) became a member of the Storting 1906–1912 representing the Labour Party from the constituency of East Finnmark. He also wrote the national anthem of the Sami *Same soga laula* [The Sami peoples' song], published in the magazine *Sagai Muittalægje* [*The News Reporter*], 1 April 1906. The editor of that magazine was his friend and brother-in-arms Anders Larsen (1870–1949) from Kvænangen (Troms).
7. Edited by Anders Larsen 1904–1911.
8. It should be remarked that, to my knowledge, nobody has checked whether there are grounds for the allegation that the Samis were over-represented among the mentally ill. If this were to prove correct, it seems likely that the norwegianization policy in schools had been a contributing factor.
9. The school situation for the Samis of Finnmark in the first 25 years after the Second World War has otherwise been discussed in Melding om skolene i Finnmark 1945–1970 [Report on the Finnmark schools 1945–1970] s. 32–37 ("Norsk skolepolitikk i samiske områder de siste 25 år. En oversikt" [Norwegian school policy in Sami areas during the past 25 years. A survey] by the then advisor in Sami language issues, Odd Mathis Hætta) and pp. 42 f.

("'Søring' i skoledirektørstolen" [A "southerner" in the school superintendent's chair] by Arthur Gjermundsen).

10. The figures are from (Meløy 1982: 50).
11. This was a method which was to replace the need for Sami and Kven language instruction among teachers.
12. For the debate which the publication caused, see (Eriksen and Niemi 1981: 121 ff.).
13. See (Bjørklund 1985: 324–331).
14. Fokstad has described the story of his life in an interview (Dahl 1970: 7–15). See (Jernsletten 1998: 125–128).
15. Tove Johansen's collection of interviews from Ullsfjord, account dated 15 June 1989.
16. Tove Johansen's collection of interviews from Ullsfjord, recorded 11 September 1990.
17. Henry Minde's collection of interviews from Skånlandhalvøya, recorded 15 May 1991.
18. Henry Mindes collection of interviews, recorded 29 January 1993.
19. Bishop of (Hålogaland 1910–1918).
20. Quoted from (Gjengset 1980: 142).
21. Tove Johansen's collection of interviews from Ullsfjord, recorded 11 September 1990.
22. Similar socialization processes from recent years have been described by Høgmo (1986).
23. These problems pose fundamental ethical questions, which, with regard to the history of the Romany people, have been discussed by Wyller (2001).

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