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# The Role of the Libraries in the Norwegianization Policy 1880-1905

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## The Sámi and Kven in the Library History of Norway

The national library history in Norway is a grand narrative describing how literary clubs and public libraries were established all over the country from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and onwards. A leading library researcher in Scandinavia, Geir Vestheim (1992), argues that public and municipal libraries, “were one of the cornerstones in the work for the enlightenment of the people, (...)..we (can) say that behind it all, was the fundamental idea that knowledge and culture (...) were supposed to give the individuals a common goal in the evolution of society” (p.14).<sup>1</sup> Vestheim ties this to the concept he calls “a culture of enlightenment,” the notion that there exists a common, homogenous and consistent culture, a common good, that all members of society have a right to get their share of. The school and the public libraries were the institutions that could organize and transfer this culture to the citizens. A central motivation for the establishment of libraries was to “civilize and educate farmers” (p. 15). The task of these institutions, according to Vestheim, was to “have an educational effect, to be an instrument for democracy” (p. 14). But Vestheim points out that this “culture of enlightenment”, also brought with it a hierarchy of values dominated by the higher and middle classes. Workers, farmers and fishermen were at the bottom of this hierarchy. Byberg and Frisvold (2001) characterize Norwegian library policy, from the end of the 1700 and to the beginning of 1900, as “paternalistic” (p. 82).

At the beginning of 1900 a “library revolution,” as named by many researchers (Ringdal, 1985, pp. 100-163), took place in Norway. The main protagonists are the men (there were a few women, too) leading and directing the “revolution.” These men and women studied in the USA, where they met a forward looking and progressive library movement. In the USA the libraries were seen as a public good, institutions that should make available information and knowledge that people were seeking (Ringdal, 1985, pp. 100-101). The Norwegian students also learnt the Dewey classification system, which was seen as a modern and efficient way of cataloguing and indexing the book stock (Ringdal, 1985, p. 113). When these students returned to Norway they renewed an old-fashioned, inward looking library system. The library reform adopted by Parliament in 1902 established a library office within the Ministry of Church and Education. The assortment and distribution of books for the 650 public libraries in Norway were from now on controlled by a state committee, the Dewey classification system was gradually taken into use and new systems for book circulation, including the use of statistics, were introduced (Fisher, Heiberg & Nyhus, 1901, p.13). A printed catalogue recommended books that were suited for public libraries. Grants from the state were given to libraries that purchase books from this catalogue (Byberg, 2009, p. 45). Through the library reform of 1902 a centralized library system was established in Norway, with no room for a multicultural perspective. This does not mean that the Kven and Sámi

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Vestheim is translated by me.

did not use the libraries. But they were silenced and made invisible as users of the public libraries *qua* Sámi or Kven (Grenersen, 2002; Nergård, 1994).

### **The Libraries in the Norwegianization Policy**

From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, a policy inspired by nationalism and fear of “foreign nationalities” took hold. The Sámi and Kven could even be given this label when their case was discussed in official documents (Killengreen, 1887). The term “foreign nationalities” was used in spite of the Sámi presence from time immemorial in the northern parts of Scandinavia (Hansen & Olsen, 2004; Manker & Vorren, 1962). The Norwegian authorities gradually strengthened the Norwegianization policy through a succession of measures (Eriksen & Niemi, 1981; Dahl, 1957; Minde, 2003). Eriksen and Niemi (1981) define Norwegianization as a policy of assimilation where “the state and the majority population try, by using the institutions of the state, to diminish the feeling of identity and unity of the minority” (p. 24, my transl.). The policy was implemented through different methods, some of them encouraging and supporting, like extra wages to teachers and the printing of double-texted (Sámi-Norwegian or Finnish-Norwegian) schoolbooks and religious books (Grenersen, 2014; Tvette, 1955). Other measures were more negative and were forced on the Sámi and Kven, many of them presented in a succession of school instructions between 1862 and 1899 (Kjerschow, Killengreen & Smitt, 1880). Eriksen and Niemi (1981) characterize the instructions as “the most important formal instrument for the Norwegianization in the schools” (p. 49, my translation).

The school directors of Troms and Finnmark were responsible for the implementation of this policy. They reported on the effectiveness of the Norwegianization policy to the school- and church department. In 1887 school director Jens Killengreen made an inspection travel to all the school districts in Finnmark (Killengreen, 1887). Killengreen writes about the effect libraries can have on the Norwegianization processes. He has been the leader of a “reading society” in Tromsø, the largest town in Northern Norway, and is the leader of the board for the public library in the same town. At the time he travels in Finnmark there are at least 12 public libraries in the county (Fisher, Heiberg & Nyhuus, 1901, p. 32). He concludes after his travel:

As a direct support for the Norwegianization efforts in the schools well equipped and suitable public libraries would be valuable. The existing public libraries have not been much visited by the foreign nationalities, (the Sámi and Kven, my remark) but we can hope, as the knowledge of the Norwegian language increases, they will visit the libraries more often. We can already see that the foreign nationalities take an increased interest in the libraries; such as in Nesseby municipality, where the

Lappish youth rather often seek Norwegian readings (Killengreen, 1887, p. 62).<sup>2</sup>

In all the municipalities where there is a public library, school director Killengreen makes a comment about its general status and notices the ethnic background of the users: Norwegians, Sámi or Kven. Often his remarks read like this, the example is from Syd-Varanger, one of the municipalities close to the Russian border: “while the Norwegian populace borrow books rather often, the library is not visited by Lapps or Kven” (p. 11). In Vadsø city there is a larger Kven than Norwegian population. Killengreen notices that “the city council runs a well equipped library that is frequently visited” (by the Norwegians, my comment). And he continues, “The Kven do not use the library, and among the Norwegians, no one from the working classes (...)” (p. 14). Most of the libraries in the county are, according to Killengreen, not visited by the Sámi or Kven. But there are exceptions, like Nesseby and Polmak schooling district with 237 children in compulsory school age: 180 Sámi, 16 Kven and 14 Norwegians. 27 children are not accounted for when it comes to ethnic background, but the numbers gives a picture of how many Sámi children there were in some of the school districts. Killengreen sarcastically states: “The school works with a compact mass of Lapps who stick to their own Language, as used in their homes” (p. 19). Killengreen uses this public library as a proof of a successful Norwegianization policy. “The fact that the public library is frequently visited by the younger Lapps, who have learnt Norwegian in the schools, is a proof of the dissemination of the Norwegian language in the diocese” (p. 19). Killengreen is in line with the official Norwegianization policy in his judgement of the effect public libraries have on the policy of assimilation (Dahl, 1957, p. 239). In the years to come, from 1880 and onwards, the Norwegianization policy came to affect all parts of the society, from the individual to state level in sectors like schooling, church policy, health care, agricultural policy and foreign policy (Eriksen & Niemi, 1981).

How reliable are the school directors’ reports as a source? In their inspection travels they mostly talked with, and got their opinion from, the elite in the municipality: the teachers, the merchants and the local priests, the latter were often leaders of the school board and the local library. The view on Norwegianization policy varied among the elite, some were directly opposed to it while others supported it. The teachers had an important role in this policy. Every teacher relied on the extra grant from the Lap Fund, which could amount up to 30-35 % of the total wage (Eriksen & Niemi, p. 51). The teachers were obliged to write an application every year to receive the grant. Many applications read: “the Norwegianization works well,” with no further explanation. There is reason to believe that many of the teachers equated Norwegianization with Norwegian language training, and used Sámi or Finnish in the class-rooms to a larger degree than intended or allowed by the language

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<sup>2</sup> All quotes from Killengreen is translated by me.

instruction (Grenersen, 2015). Many teachers told the school inspectors what they wanted to hear, and formulated their applications in such a way that the extra grant would be given them (Dahl, 1957, pp. 222-227; Grenersen, 2014).

Another important question is the soundness of the school inspectors' statement about how many Sámi and Kven that visited the libraries. The ethnic borders among Sámi, Kven and Norwegians have never been straight forward in Northern Norway. The nomadic reindeer herding Sámi has always amounted to only a few per cent of the total Sámi population, and is easily recognizable through their specialized occupation, their use of traditional clothing and Sámi language. But the Kven and Sámi fishermen and farmers (many were both fishers and farmers) were difficult to set apart from the Norwegian farmers and fishermen in these districts. The language used in the public sphere was mostly Norwegian (most Sámi fishermen mastered Norwegian), cloths and general appearance were the same, it would take a trained eye to distinguish between the different ethnicities (Eidheim, 1970; Grenersen, 2002). In addition there were many interethnic marriages, and the mastery of two, three or four (Sámi, Finnish, Norwegian and Russian) languages among the population was not unusual (Maliniemi 2009, p. 16). We also know that the reading capability among Sámi and Kven was high. As many as 90% of the population read well, many also wrote well (Apelseth, 2004, pp. 19-21). When the school directors tried to estimate the ethnic background of the population in multicultural areas in Northern Norway, these factors can be sources of error. The school directors were quite dependent on what they themselves observed and who they talked with, which given the short time they stayed in each municipality, must have made their observation dubious. Most of the higher public officials in these areas came from the southern part of Norway, and they had limited knowledge of the local conditions. These factors could mislead them in their judgement of how Sámi, Kven and Norwegians expressed their identity in the public sphere, and likewise the variety in ethnical expressions inside each group.

The school directors seem to take for granted that the Sámi and Kven interests and motivation in reading books, papers, pamphlets and magazines, all which were available in the libraries, would strengthen the Norwegianization process among them, when – paradoxically – it might to a certain degree have had quite the opposite effect. (Paulaharju 1973, pp. 292-297, 335-337; Ryymin, 2002, pp. 149-160).

### **A Library History of the Sámi and Kven – New Perspectives**

How can we study Sámi and Kven use of libraries during the Norwegianization period? Researchers have to study archives and look for documents that represent minority voices (Stoler, 2011). Kaisa Maliniemi (2009) used archival materials to study how Sámi and Kven people were represented in municipal archival documents in Finnmark, the northernmost county in Norway. She found hundreds of documents written in Sámi and Kven languages, dating from the years 1860 to 1910 (p. 16). The archives had been studied both by local and professional historians, but no one had paid attention to the surprising fact that

Sámi and Kven language were used in official municipal correspondence during the hardest Norwegianization period. Maliniemi asked: “How was it possible that the researchers using these records, and the archival professionals processing and describing them, had overlooked these materials?” (p. 16). She does not believe the archivists consciously omitted information about minority language records. The main reason that these documents are not mentioned in the archival catalogues seems to be that:

regulations and guidelines for archival description were formulated in the central administration in the other end of the country. There appears to have been little if any consideration that archives in northern Norway should reflect the special local cultural, historical and linguistic conditions, or that minorities should be regarded as relevant. Therefore, we find marginalization in all areas of record management – from record creation and keeping to record appraisal, arrangement and description (p. 20).

The same holds for library catalogues, lending protocols and the official library archives in Norway from 1850 and up to the 1950s. The Sámi and Kven were not recognized as a group in need of special library services. I have searched for documents connected to Sámi and Kven library use during the Norwegianization period in the National Library of Norway and the Regional State Archives in Tromsø. I have also engaged archivists in regional and municipal archives to search through library catalogues, book orders and book lists, lending protocols and teachers reports, but have found no documents that could give adequate answers to these questions. If no straight answer can be wrested out of the archival materials, we have to read and interpret the archival documents from new and creative angles and use comparative methods and our “sociological imagination” (Wright Mills, 2000). I will give one example. Nearly all the lending protocols from public and school libraries in Finnmark between 1860 and 1930 have been lost. But some of the book catalogues from the local libraries are preserved in the archives of the National Library of Norway. These catalogues give us an overview of the titles of the books the libraries had in stock. They indicate that many of the books in the public libraries were of a political nature, where ideas connected to democracy, individual freedom and women’s rights were discussed. From the 1880s Norwegian writers like Henrik Ibsen, Knut Hamsun, Alexander Kielleand and Amalie Skram, together with other European writers, created a new literary trend called the “modern breakthrough” in literature (Pax leksikon, 2015). Did the Sámi and Kven public borrow, and read, this literature? Did the modern turn in literature, and the political radicalization of the European literary public, influence the general Sámi and Kven public? We do not have the answers to these questions, yet. But let me try to put forward a hypotheses: was a political Sámi (and also Kven) public already established when the Sámi newspaper *Sagai Muittalægje* (“The News Reporter”) was started by the Sámi teacher

Anders Larsen in 1903? The Norwegian historian Ketil Zachariassen (2012) writes that from its first issue the paper was instantly filled with critical political articles and reader's letters, most of them written in Sámi. This indicates that a Sámi political public already was established when the first number went in print. This Sámi public sphere was a prerequisite for what Zachariassen labels the "Sámi counterhegemonic project," the political and cultural mobilization among the Sámi that came to the surface around 1900 (pp. 54-57). How did political ideas, that spread among the central European public throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reach a Sámi and Kven public far north? Could libraries have played a role in this transfer of ideas? Public libraries were established in all major cities and larger communities in Finnmark throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of them well equipped with books and pamphlets that brought contemporary political and cultural themes to their readers (Nyhuus 1904 pp. 6-13).

The only higher academic institution in Northern Norway at this time, Tromsø Teaching College, also had a huge library at the students disposal. To what degree was this library used by Sámi and Kven students? Chief editor of *Sagai Muittalægje*, Anders Larsen, and his political ally Isak Saba, the first Sámi to be elected to the Norwegian Parliament in 1906, were two of many Sámi and Kven students who got their education at Tromsø Teaching College (Dahl, 1957, pp. 248-256). A quota of six Sámi and Kven students were admitted each year during the period 1827 to 1906. Zachariassen (2004) argues that through their years at the Tromsø Teaching College (1896-1898), Saba and Larsen became good friends and they participated with great energy in the political debates arranged by different student unions at the college (pp. 46-47). The library gave them access to books in Sámi and Kven languages (Dahl 1954). The library also had a solid representation of Norwegian and European literature published after 1880. Anders Larsen and Isak Saba were inspired by the emerging socialist ideology that spread throughout Europe. In Northern Norway this ideology was reinterpreted and adapted to the special conditions for the Sámi, Kven and Norwegian "fishing-farmers" ("fiskebonde", in Norwegian), people living from a combination of fishing and farming (Zachariassen 2004, pp. 48-61). The library archive at Tromsø Teaching College (today a part of the University of Tromsø), especially the library lending protocols, can be studied in order to try to identify which, and how many, books the Sámi students borrowed. Could it be that Sámi political entrepreneurs were created in the political clubs and among the library shelves at the only higher academic institution in Northern Norway at this time? (Barth, 1972). Empirical research can give us an answer to these questions.

Did the Sámi and Kven laymen use the libraries? This is a difficult question to answer since no lending protocols have been found from this period. We know that the Kven population in the midst 1890s organized a reading society and established a library in Vadsø, the largest town in Finnmark county. A newspaper in Finnish was also started (Ryymin, 2002; Larsen, 2012, pp. 77, 264). These efforts were all short-lived, since Norwegian

authorities systematically worked against them. In the same town the “Finnmark Library” (“Finmarksbibliotheket”, in Norwegian) was established in 1895 by the county governor and the local priest, with the aim to collect scientific and fictional books, manuscripts, paintings and pictures about the people and nature of Finnmark (Larsen, 2012, pp. 144-145, 193). Over the years it accumulated a large numbers of books on Sámi and Kven conditions and in the Sámi and Kven languages. Larsen (2012) says about the Finnmark Library that the philosophy behind it was not in line with the Norwegianization policy, but rather “represented a multicultural perspective” (p. 193). We still do not know if, and how, this library was used by the Sámi and Kven.

There are complicating factors connected to the interpretation of the archival materials. I have mentioned earlier that Maliniemi (2009) points out that ethnic minorities often are silenced and made invisible in the archives. The source material I have collected from Norwegian library archives confirms this. There are few – if none – sources to be found that tells us about the minorities use of libraries. A vital question is to identify the ethnic background of the users. For this we must search through the official birth- and confirmation certificates from the municipality church registers (ethnicity was regularly noticed in these) and match these with the names in the library lending protocols (if we are so lucky as to find some). A very minute and time consuming process, but necessary if one wants to estimate how many Sámi and Kven used the public libraries. If we combine different sources and search through archives with a minority perspective in mind, we might experience what Maliniemi (2010) has shown; “silenced voices were, after all, not so silent” (p. 113).

### **Conclusion**

The role of the libraries in the Norwegianization policy in the period from 1850 to approximately 1960 leaves many questions to be investigated. The best way to start is to search through the archives and build hypothesis and theories based on empirical findings. Detailed studies have to be carried out, and archival documents must be read “against the grain,” in order to seek out alternative interpretations of materials that up to now have been interpreted in conventional ways (Maliniemi 2009, p. 22; Stoler, 2011). We must work our way through archives and other sources, and search for materials overlooked by earlier research (Maliniemi, 2011). Important questions are: when and where can we see the first attempts to organize Sámi and Kven libraries? (Larsen, 2012, p.77, 144, 193, 264; Ryymin, 2002). How were these libraries perceived and used by the Sámi and Kven public? What was the ratio between Sámi, Finnish and Norwegian books in the different library stacks? What was the relationship between libraries and the rise of a political public awareness among the Sámi and Kven in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century? The time has come to place these question in the forefront of the research on library history in Norway.



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