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Name Siri Skogstad Berntsen

Affiliation: Cand.polit, University of Oslo, Norway  
Ongoing bachelor studies in art history, The Arctic University of Tromsø, Norway  
(Independent art and cultural worker)

Title of talk: The Kvääni minority people in the North of Norway: Regaining cultural group identity within the Fenno-Ugric cultural heritage after centuries of assimilation processes

Symposia C

Contact information Telephone 0047 908 14 566  
E-mail: siber9441(at)uit.no; skogstadberntsensiri(at)gmail.com;

## Title

The Kvääni and Norwegian-Finnish minority people in the north of Norway: Regaining cultural group identity within the Fenno-Ugric heritage after centuries of assimilation processes

## Abstract

As part of the revitalisation process of the Kvääni and Norwegian-Finnish people, in the north of Norway, Fenno-Ugric ornaments have been taken into use by practitioners of folk art expressions. I consider the ornaments as signs, creating meaning through representation. Important questions regard how meaning is ascribed to the ornaments and how this meaning unfolds. My hypothesis concerns the importance of the constitution or expression of cultural- and group identity for a suppressed and assimilated minority people, that originates from the «eastern» Fenno-Ugric cultural group by language and historical relations, but situated geographically under the domination of a majority «western» cultural group, the Norwegians<sup>1</sup>. The assumption is that the ornaments from the Fenno-Ugric heritage become part of constituting an independent and separate identity for the Kvääni and Norwegian-Finnish culture, positioning itself in relation to the dominant majority culture. As a cultural code, the ornaments contribute to an understanding of Kvääni and Norwegian-Finnish identity that was lost or disturbed by the Norwegian assimilation processes. In the contemporary discourse, the ornaments function as cultural markers or agents, becoming part of

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<sup>1</sup> The Kvääni and Norwegian-Finnish culture is situated right in the border areas between the cultures of «the east» and «the west», the terms are used here as a cultural pronunciations from the perspective of the Kvääni.

regaining the groups identity and belonging in a Fenno-Ugric heritage. The ornaments become carriers of knowledge; they function as historical documents of the past; visualising and giving information on Kvääni and Norwegian-Finnish historical culture and their relations; knowledge and connections that was lost or suppressed. The study contributes to give focus to how historical ornaments contribute to create an understanding of self in revitalisation processes.

The ornaments are examined according to contextual analysis, placing the Kvääni and Norwegian-Finnish culture in a critical framework of decolonisation, identity construction and revitalisation.

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