Transnational vitality of the Finno-Ugric identity in Estonia: The role of education and advocacy in a new geopolitical context

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INTRODUCTION

The Finno-Ugric identity, originally formulated by 19th century academics and nurtured as part of national-identity movements, has revived since the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991). This chapter explores the transnational vitality of the Finno-Ugric identity for Estonians in the post-Soviet era. In particular, I ask, “How has the Finno-Ugric identity remained meaningful in the contemporary geo-political context?” I draw on Schiffman’s (2006) “linguistic culture” framework to understand the renewed relevance of the Finno-Ugric identity. I argue that the identity’s continuing significance and renewed vitality stems from the new meanings that Finno-Ugric culture has taken on in the particular post-Soviet geopolitical context. I examine the key role of Finno-Ugric identity in Estonian efforts to sustain lesser-used-language (LUL) instruction domestically and to support its development internationally. By analyzing Estonia’s varied experiences with LUL
advocacy and development. I explore how Finno-Ugric linguistic culture functions as a rich resource in developing Estonian national identity, in making statements of ethnic solidarity and in providing new methods for language revitalization.

Speakers of Finno-Ugric languages live in small, widely dispersed clusters between Central Europe and Kamchatka, from Hungary to the eastern edges of the Russian Federation. Linked by their non-Indo-European tongues, many of these speakers feel a sense of cultural affinity and shared linguistic heritage that transcends the geographic, linguistic, and cultural distances between them; these generally "small" nations find a sense of broader collective identity as Finno-Ugric peoples. The Finno-Ugrians represent about 24 distinct nations and, counting the Samoyed-language speakers, number roughly 25 million people. Three European countries are Finno-Ugric nation-states: Finland, Hungary, and Estonia. These three countries include approximately 60% of the world's Finno-Ugric population. The remaining populations reside as minorities with varying degrees of autonomy in Europe and Russia.

Given the ethnic and geopolitical diversity of the Finno-Ugric community, this chapter concentrates on the relevance of this transnational culture with one nation, the Estonians. While the Estonian experience is by no means representative of or generalizable to the other Finno-Ugric nations, this case helps to illustrate the cultural framing of contemporary projects to promote LUL education from a unique vantage point. Estonia bridges the European and Russian Finno-Ugric worlds; Estonians have experience, on one hand, with the Russian empire and the Soviet Union as an Autonomous Republic, and, on the other hand, with independence (1918-1940 and 1991-current) and membership in the European Union (EU) (2004-current). Moreover, Estonia is the only Finno-Ugric state with a Finno-Ugric speaking minority, the Võro, who identify with the ethnic majority (i.e., the Estonians), yet are in the process of developing a regional-identity and school-based language program. Finally, Estonia's involvement with efforts to promote LUL education points to the intersection of this issue with foreign policy, domestic politics, and contemporary nation-building attempts.

I begin the chapter with a conceptual introduction to linguistic culture and a methodological overview of the research. I then provide an historical synopsis of the three phases of the development of the Finno-Ugric connection with particular attention to issues of language marginalization in the context of a shifting political landscape. I have divided the third section into three vignettes from Estonia to demonstrate the varied role of

Finno-Ugric culture in framing and addressing LUL education. I conclude with a consideration of the new meanings and significance of the Finno-Ugric culture, both in transnational and Estonian contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The concept of "linguistic culture" (Schiffman, 2006) illuminates enduring aspects of the transnational Finno-Ugric connection. Schiffman (2006) posits linguistic culture as the "sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures, and all the other cultural baggage that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture" (p. 112). In this chapter, I extend the linguistic-culture concept beyond the state (Schiffman, 1996; Lo Bianco, 1999) to a regional, transnational level. Scholars have noted the strategic use of formal schooling to promote cross-border identities (Yanik, 2004) in European and Eurasian space, but the role of pan-Finno-Ugric linguistic culture has remained largely under-examined (for exceptions see the Nationalities Papers, 2001; Taagepera, 1999; Kasten, 1999).

"Being small" constitutes a defining element of Finno-Ugric linguistic culture. The modest scale of demographic and political power across the Finno-Ugric world informs the cultural sense of smallness. The population of the individual Finno-Ugric nations, excluding the Hungarians and Finns, number between one million and one hundred people (according to 2002 statistics, Table 1). Participation in a larger, yet exclusive, joint culture allows for academic opportunities and a sense of combined strength. An Udmurt student echoed the unity-in-smallness sentiment, "It [the connection between Finno-Ugric people] gives a chance for all of us who are members of small nations to feel that we are part of something bigger" (informal interview, October 22, 2004). As members of less populous nations, Finno-Ugrians share a sense of cultural vulnerability. Former Estonian President Lennart Meri (1992–2001), famous for his Soviet-era texts and documentary films on the Finno-Ugric people, alluded to the common smallness of Finno-Ugric nations in his welcoming speech to the 3rd World Congress of Finno-Ugric People:

We should remember that against the background of the world or even against the background of Europe, all Finno-Ugric peoples, including Hungarians, Finns and Estonians, are small nations, subconsciously or consciously trying to protect their identity, their small island in the vast ocean of the Indo-European languages. (Meri, 2000)
Table 1. Population of Uralic People, 2002.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Home Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungarians</td>
<td>15,000,000</td>
<td>Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Austria, other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>Finland, Sweden, Russia, Estonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonians</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mordvinians (Ezyas and Mokhas)</td>
<td>843,400</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udmurts</td>
<td>636,900</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maris</td>
<td>604,300</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zyryan Komis</td>
<td>293,400</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permian Komis</td>
<td>125,200</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karelians</td>
<td>93,300</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saamis</td>
<td>100,000-30,000</td>
<td>Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nenetse</td>
<td>41,300</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatyns</td>
<td>28,700</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csangos</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansis</td>
<td>11,400</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kvens</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vepsians</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selkups</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setos</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>Russia, Estonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Besermanse</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nganasians</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrains (Izhorians)</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enetes</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livonians</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volians</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The linguistic Finno-Ugric culture of Europe and Russia constitutes the foundation for transnational involvement in the educational sphere. Branch (1993) highlights the historic influence of the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture in shaping policy development:

The cultural and political perception central to that process [of 19th century identity formation] is the assumption that the speakers of Finno-Ugrian languages had a common origin and to some extent a common history and culture, and that this legitimated cultural and political activity based on the assumptions of a common origin. (p. 37)

Just as the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture helped to fuel academic efforts and social investment in early attempts to consolidate national-identity and develop nation-states, contemporary Finno-Ugric links also help to justify transnational and domestic advocacy in the educational sphere. The interconnection of policy and culture is also reflected in the Finno-Ugric response to assimilative efforts:

Many Finno-Ugric tribes have already disappeared or are on the verge of extinction. ... Usually it is said in such cases [of assimilation] that the choice was made voluntarily. Unfortunately the voluntary character of such a choice is but an illusion, as it was made under economic, political, demographic and educational considerations in a situation where a people had become a minority in their historical territory and lost control over the way they order their lives. (Rüütel, 2004)

In the post-Soviet context, the shared culture of linguistic endangerment bears a post-imperial imprint (Moore, 2006). Political leaders, like former Estonian President Rüütel (2001-2006), identify particularly in the marginalization of native languages, the effects of the Soviet colonial power when Finno-Ugric people became minorities “in their historic territory.”

The rise in global English dominance further exacerbates linguistic vulnerability in this postimperial context. Although, as Raun (2009) posits, “At first glance it would appear that the position of the Estonian language, which survived the threat of Russification in the Soviet decades and also continued to be modernized as an effective means of communication” (p. 528), would be secure, since regaining independence in 1991, Russian and English continue to pose threats to the vitality of Finno-Ugric languages. A researcher at the Võro Institute, a government-funded organization helping to spearhead the regional-language revival in Estonia, sketched (see Fig. 1) a scene that powerfully conveys the multiple and layered threats to Finno-Ugric languages. The artist depicts two of the regional southeastern Estonian languages, Võro and Seto, in the mouth of the “Eesti Keel” (Estonian) fish. The “Русский” (Russian) fish consumes
Fig. 1. Threats to Finno-Ugric Languages. Source: Image created by J. Sullöv (used with permission).

Karjala (Karelian) and Komi, two Finno-Ugric languages in the Russian Federation, while the Suomi (Finnish) fish swims in the middle eating Såmejla (Sami). English, pictured with an impression of the US flag in its tail, sits on the far left on the verge of devouring Finno-Ugric languages both large and small. In this portrayal of the Finno-Ugric language feeding frenzy, the Võro Institute researcher captures not only the culpability of some of the larger Finno-Ugric languages in contributing to language endangerment, but also the significant threats posed by Russian and English.

In order to analyze the relevance of the Finno-Ugric identity in the post-Soviet era, I draw on data from document analysis and qualitative fieldwork conducted over the last decade in Estonia (1999–2009). Part of my research consisted of an analysis of documents culled from international, national, and regional levels concerning Finno-Ugric native-language instruction including: all Estonian Presidential speeches delivered at the central


HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The notion of a Finno-Ugric people emerged out of 19th century academic pursuits and national-identity projects. The Finno-Ugric culture has changed over the last 100 years and can be loosely divided into three overlapping historical phases: (1) the birth of the Finno-Ugric culture through academic exploration and attempts at nation-building; (2) the Soviet-era consolidation and fracturing of Finno-Ugric culture; and (3) the rebirth and redirection of the Finno-Ugric connection through post-1991 cultural rapprochement. A brief overview of these phases positions Estonian efforts to sustain LUL instruction domestically and to support its development internationally.

The first phase, the birth of Finno-Ugric culture, spans the 18th and 19th centuries, encompassing academic exploration and the era of romantic nationalism. The concept of a Finno-Ugric connection, formulated, in part, by Hungarian and Finnish linguists after field research in Lapland and Russia, led to the development of Finno-Ugrian studies (or Finno-Ugristics) as an academic field of inquiry. Academic societies based on Finno-Ugric studies, including Finland’s M. A. Castrén Society and Hungary’s Reguly Society, consolidated the notion of Finno-Ugric kinship and brought together scholars across borders. The academic connections were strongest among the larger Finno-Ugric nations – Hungarians, Finns, and Estonians – but cultural bonds with the smaller Finno-Ugric people of Russia were also established primarily through academic linkages.
The academic foundation of the Finno-Ugric connection gained a political edge in the era of romantic nationalism revealing the intimate intertwining of the national and transnational elements of Finno-Ugric culture. Branch (1993) observes that scholars were driven in the mid- to late 1800s not only by the scientific curiosity of their predecessors, but also by an “emotional imperative, first, of cultural nationalism and later of political nationalism” (p. 40). The transnational Finno-Ugric linguistic culture emerged to play a feature role in the development of Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian national identities in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Education helped to further consolidate national identities, particularly native-language instruction and the backlash to school-based Russification policies. Although political sentiment related to Finno-Ugric culture during this phase was primarily channeled to nation-building, covert critiques of Russian policy also emerged. Saarinen (2001) notes that Finnish scholars during this era foresaw in the Russian treatment of the Finno-Ugric people in the empire a possible parallel fate and privately condemned the Tsarist policies, “In their travel sketches and diaries, scholars severely criticized the Russian colonists, who, especially in Siberia, had brought the indigenous peoples neither culture nor religion, only demoralization and decline” (p. 44).

The second historic phase, a consolidation and fracturing of Finno-Ugric culture, emerged with the political reconfigurations of the early 20th century. The decade following the Bolshevik Revolution marked an early period of cultural consolidation for the Finno-Ugric people in the Soviet Union and Europe. For the newly independent states of Finland, Estonia, and Hungary, the 1920s brought a burgeoning of cross-border cooperation in the form of societies, associations, and Congresses, all in the name of Finno-Ugric links. For the Finno-Ugric people of the Soviet Union, the 1920s were “a time of national awakening” (Saarinen, 2001, p. 46). In general, the political will in both the newly independent Estonia and in the Soviet Union supported the development of national languages. Informed by efforts to secure national development (in Estonia) and to further cultural nationalism (in the Soviet Union), the 1920s marked a watershed in corpus and status planning for Finno-Ugric languages; standard written forms were developed for most of the languages, the government offered subsidized publication in native languages, and use of the languages expanded into political and educational spheres.

The introduction, support, and development for mother-tongue instruction established a foundation for national-identity sustenance through the later Soviet period. In Finland, Estonia, and Hungary, native-language education extended from kindergarten through the university. The use of the native language as a medium of instruction (MOI) in the Soviet Union ranged, by the early 1930s, from having a strong presence in Mordvin schools, where by 1935–1936 mother-tongue instruction was offered through the tenth grade (Kreindler, 1985, p. 243), to being absent in other Finno-Ugric national schools like those of the Karelians, who never achieved Karelian MOI in their Autonomous Republic (Pyöli, 1998, p. 129). A turning point and decline in native-language instruction occurred in the years leading up to and after World War II. For the Finno-Ugric people in Russia, the repressions of the late 1930s eradicated many of the gains in native-language education and, in several places, destroyed the native intelligentsia involved in language development (primarily through execution and deportation). By the 1960s, many native-language schools were closed and the MOI shifted to, in some cases exclusively, Russian (Saks, 2006, p. 60). An exception to this Russification trend was the network of Mari and Mordvin native-language elementary schools (Lallukka, 2001, p. 19). After the Soviet Union’s occupation of Estonia, its educational system was also used as a primary institution for Russification with an increased number of hours earmarked for Russian-language instruction in Estonian-medium schools.

The expansion of the Soviet Union fractured and reconfigured transnational Finno-Ugric culture. The strong post-World War I Finno-Ugric academic networks and opportunities for Russian-based fieldwork were largely terminated from the late 1930s until Stalin’s death, an era when “Pan-Finnism” was a serious charge (Kreindler, 1985, p. 249). As a result of Soviet rule, the networks supporting Finno-Ugric culture developed separately in Estonia, which became the Soviet center of Finno-Ugric studies, and in Finland, where Finno-Ugric research and academic growth continued without restriction, at times incorporating banned material produced by Estonians in the USSR. In the final years of the Soviet Union, with the ease of communication under glasnost, transnational communication strengthened particularly with Finland, and the Finno-Ugric people of the Soviet Union began to experience a second phase of national awakening.

The third phase, a rebirth of a transnational Finno-Ugric linguistic culture in the post-Soviet era, incorporates the scientific and academic activities reminiscent of the first phase, but also grafts on an explicit political dimension to cultural and academic activities. Toomas Ilves, the current Estonian President, noted this cultural transformation in his 2008 speech at the World Congress of Finno-Ugric People in Khanty-Mansiysk.
(Russia), "Language, and the presentation and development of languages, are truly important. But this can only occur successfully when we are engaged not in a narrow philological activity or garnishing for avocational [sic.] ethnography, but a socially encompassing, in other words political, theme" (paragraph 6). A new period of transnational political involvement with language maintenance, development, and education has begun with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, the Finno-Ugric people of Russia and Europe have turned to international organizations in an attempt to protect national languages: "The World Congress confirms that protection of human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities is not only the issue of the domestic policies of states but of the entire international community." The World Congress resolutions, in particular, advocate the use of international instruments, particularly the ILO Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) through calls for state ratification to protect the rights, cultures, and languages of minority and indigenous people.8 Finno-Ugric scholars, language activists, and members of the Consultative Committee9 now couch concerns about the non-state kindred people in global terms and concerns; regular references are made, for example, to the right to self-determination and the problems of indigenous people (Resolution of the 5th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, 2008, paragraph 2). Within this international framework, Finno-Ugric commitments to policies like mother-tongue instruction are discussed as a universal human right:

Based on the principle that every human being has the right to get education in its own mother tongue, it is necessary to continue to support the establishment of educational facilities which apply mother tongue in the educational process (from basic to higher) and to expand their educational opportunities. (Resolution of the 3rd World Congress of Finno-Ugric People, 2000, point III)

The appeal to international commitments and global concerns marks the transformation in the presentation of Finno-Ugric culture as one linked with indigenous concerns and minority rights.

In addition to the role of international organizations in promoting and protecting the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture, the Finno-Ugric nation-states of Estonia, Finland, and Hungary have taken on explicit socio-political obligations vis-à-vis their non-state "kindred" people, particularly those living in Russia. The three countries’ membership in the EU (Estonia and Hungary in 2004; Finland in 1995) brought new protections and resources for their national languages and fresh opportunities to infuse support for the non-state Finno-Ugric languages. The tripartite Finno-Ugric membership in the EU is conceived as one path to facilitate cooperation with Russia on issues of linguistic culture. For example, the Estonian parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee has repeatedly called for ways "to deepen cooperation between the EU’s Finno-Ugric member nations, that is Estonia, Finland and Hungary, and Russia to coordinate and implement through joint efforts state programs devised to help kindred peoples" (Estonian Review, 2006, paragraph 5). The three states have joined political forces in the EU and the COE to advocate for increased European attention to the monitoring of minority protections and the establishment of cultural programs for Finno-Ugric people in Russia. Evidence of this multilateral cooperation is the three-year program (2009–2011), "Minorities in Russia," sponsored by the European Commission, the COE, and the Russian Federation, to support Russia’s native peoples. President Ilves (2008) readily takes credit for the Finno-Ugric States’ influence in drawing Europe’s attention to their kindred concerns:

The European Union and its members are the motor that has driven the harmonization of protections for minority rights in Europe. And, we might now ask, would Finno-Ugric concerns be on the European agenda if Hungary, Finland, and Estonia were not members of the Union? Hardly. (Paragraph 34)

Finno-Ugric state advocacy with the COE has centered on concerns about the state of native-language education for their kindred people. Detailed reports (document no. 8126, 1998 and no. 11087, 2006) submitted to the COE’s Parliamentary Assembly by Finnish and Estonian rapporteurs highlight problematic aspects of mother-tongue instruction in Russia.10 The 1998 Report on "Endangered Uralic Minority Cultures" finds Russian to be the language of instruction in most of the Finno-Ugric autonomous areas with little, if any, native language MOI. The COE’s Committee on Culture, Science and Education drew attention to five primary problems regarding Finno-Ugric native-language schools: (1) "lack of mother tongue education at all levels"; (2) "few hours of mother tongue instruction (less than foreign languages)"; (3) "Finno-Ugric languages are not compulsory for non-natives"; (4) "School closings in villages (Finno-Ugrics are village dwellers)"; and (5) "lack of learning materials of sufficient quality and in sufficient numbers" (Saks, 2006). The possible strategies to address this situation include increasing access to mother-tongue instruction at the
elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels; improving teaching in these languages; enhancing the quality and availability of native-language learning materials; and exploring immersion programs "in order to help children of Finno-Ugric peoples to recover fluency in their ancestral languages" (Council of Europe (COE), 2006, points 10.8-10.10). The World Congress’s Consultative Committee echoes the COE suggestions and finds that "To preserve peoples, it is not enough to teach the native language as a separate subject. It is necessary to expand the network of national schools, and the first step, to increase the number of hours provided in the curriculum for teaching the national language" (Resolution of the 4th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, 2004, paragraph 16).

VIGNETTES

In the following section, I examine the key role of Finno-Ugric identity in Estonian efforts to sustain LUL instruction domestically and to support its development internationally. I provide three vignettes of Estonia's varied experiences with LUL advocacy and development, and explore the ways Finno-Ugric linguistic culture functions as a rich resource in developing Estonian national identity, in making statements of ethnic solidarity, and in providing new methods for language revitalization. The contemporary hurdles in maintaining the culture, including intractable educational systems and the distancing of contemporary school children from their kindred relatives, emerge as well from these overviews.

Vignette 1: Estonian State as Global Advocate

The Estonian government, in sustaining the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture, simultaneously invests in developing and defining contemporary Estonian identity. To be sure, Estonians are fully "European" in their state's commitment to freedom and democracy. President Ilves (2008), in his call for a new basis of cooperation across Finno-Ugric people, highlighted these shared European cultural elements of the state-based Finno-Ugric people, "cooperation will come to rest upon a strong foundation, upon common values. Hungarians, Finns and Estonians have chosen so-called European values, which today manifest themselves in the use of liberal democracy to order society" (paragraph 18). While European, the government also declares "... Estonians are Finno-Ugrics" (Kindred Peoples Programme, 1999-2004, p. 2). The identification with other Finno-Ugrics helps not only to define, but also to protect Estonian national identity:

Besides the European segment, our culture is also based on our old Finno-Ugric folk culture having much in common with the cultures of other Uralic peoples. The kindred peoples form an inevitable cultural rear, the need for which is especially pressing today as cultural influences from the West have become predominant. (Kindred Peoples Programme, 1999-2004, point 0.1)

In this positioning of Estonia, the notion of "co-guardianship" emerges with the Eastern kindred peoples helping to guard Estonian culture from the powerful Western influences and, as I explain below, the Estonians helping to protect the Finno-Ugric cultures from Russification.

As both Europeans and Finno-Ugrians, the Estonian government recognizes its new responsibilities in the post-Soviet era; Estonia has become an advocate for non-state Finno-Ugric people. Former Estonian President Meri (1995) acknowledged this new role in his speech to the World Congress of Finno-Ugric People where he declared "our responsibilities ... are totally different from the romantic kindred peoples movement of the beginning of the century." As a Finno-Ugric nation-state, Estonia, along with Finland and Hungary, has a new obligation to channel the diplomatic and financial resources of the government to aid cultural preservation of the Finno-Ugric people, particularly in Russia. As the Estonian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee (Estonian Review, 2006) noted "Estonia has to express its support for Finno-Ugric people of Russia more forcefully and give stronger support to activities aimed at protecting their language and culture" (paragraph 3). The Estonian state has developed at least three different strategies, which I review below, to advocate for the development and protection of Finno-Ugric culture: Disseminating the Estonian model of national development, publicizing on the world stage Russia's treatment of Finno-Ugric people, and investing in a bilateral educational program.

One approach to sustaining the linguistic culture has been the dissemination of an Estonian model for national-identity development to non-state Finno-Ugric people. The Estonian government has identified historic parallels between the Estonians' early stages of national consciousness and the current development of Russian-based kindred people. This correspondence has inspired the government to promote the Estonian model
as a possible path for cultural and national development. Former President Meri (1995) observed:

Out of the 23 Uralic peoples only three have been able to establish their own states. Current social expectations of the Finno-Ugric people living in the Russian Federation can be compared to the feelings of national awakening among Estonians, Finns and Hungarians during the last century. They are looking at us. We have academic and even political responsibility to meet their expectations. (Paragraph 8)

In this Hroman perspective on national development (Raun, 2003, p. 136), the Estonian government has an obligation to help raise “Finno-Ugrians’ self-consciousness” (Estonian Review, 2006, paragraph 4) just as the Finns provided a model for the Estonians in the late 19th century (Raun, 2003, p. 134). The Estonian government has disseminated the model rhetorically at pan-Finno-Ugric meetings. President Ilves’ (2008) delivered a bold call at the most recent World Congress for non-state Finno-Ugric nations to consider the Estonian example:

Freedom and democracy were our choice 150 years ago, when not even the poets dreamt of an Estonian state. Many Finno-Ugric peoples have yet to make this choice. As a small aside it bears mentioning, particularly in light of the example of Estonia, that once you have tasted freedom, you will realize how much of it is sacrificed in the name of surviving or just ‘getting by.’ (Paragraphs 20–21)

In addition to this public invitation to consider the Estonian model, the government has earmarked funds for the material distribution of documentaries and other historic materials portraying the Estonian model: “Organisations and centres of Uralic indigenous peoples should be provided with video materials on Estonia. These should include copies of films made about Finno-Ugrian peoples as well as films on how Estonia gained independence, minorities in Estonia, Estonian economy…” (Kindred Peoples Programme, 1999–2004, point 1.3, paragraph 3). In distributing these visual materials, the government embraces the notion that sharing Estonia’s path to (re)independence and aspects of current statehood might help to enlighten and inspire the kindred peoples of Russia.

A second Estonian strategy for embracing its new responsibility for non-state kindred peoples is to draw global attention to Russia’s treatment of Finno-Ugric people. The government has particularly focused on Russia’s policy toward native-language education. From the Estonian government’s perspective, an improvement in the native-language education helps not only to revitalize Finno-Ugric nations and languages, but also to support the democratic development of Russia. Former President Meri (2000) suggested that native-language education “would be a loyal way for the

Finno-Ugric nations to support the democratization of the Russian Federation with their cultural contribution and creativity. [The] Future always begins with education” (paragraph 5). Meri (2000) highlights in this proposal the notion that support for native-language education is not something threatening to Russia; in fact, investment in this policy reveals one’s civic loyalty and commitment to the country’s democratic future. A more critical tack was taken by Katrin Saks, an Estonian representative to the European Parliament (2006–2009) and the COE’s Rapporteur on Finno-Ugric peoples in the Russian Federation (2003–2006), who offered this assessment of Russia’s policy:

The Russians have repeatedly emphasized that the problems of the Finno-Ugric people are not anything special, they are in the same situation as others. In this way, the Russians are right – all of the minorities have this problem because Russia, for some reason, does not believe in the possibility of multilingualism and plurality of identities. (Saks, 2008, p. 8)

In this passage, Saks used the universality of the Finno-Ugric plight to criticize the problematic aspects of Russia’s policies toward other minorities. A third state approach to cultural advocacy is the development of a bilateral program to assist in the cultural and educational development of Finno-Ugric people. The Estonian government has established and funded three iterations of the multiyear Kindred People’s Programme (1999–2004, 2005–2009, and 2010–2014) similar to the Finnish state-sponsored bilateral program supporting linguistic cultural development and education of kindred people. The program, framed initially as part of Estonia’s contribution to the United Nations’ Decade of Indigenous People (1995–2004), supports the linguistic and cultural development of Uralic (i.e., Finno-Ugric and Samoyed) people living in the Russian Federation and Latvia. Education plays a significant role in these programs with the Estonian government funding the education of over 100 Finno-Ugric students at Estonian universities since 1999. The bilateral program also functions as a foreign affairs’ tool. In part, the program strives to clarify and correct any Russian misunderstandings about the state of minority affairs in Estonia. The program states, “Via the Finno-Ugrians of the Russian Federation, a positive opinion of Estonia should be moulded. This would include sharing truthful information to the kindred peoples on the position of ethnic minorities in Estonia” (Kindred Peoples Programme, point 1.3, paragraph 3). This word-of-mouth diplomacy via education helps to counterpoint any misinformation and to illustrate the complementary purposes of supporting the development of Finno-Ugric linguistic culture.
Vignette #2: A Primer-Based Rapprochement

In addition to Finno-Ugric linguistic culture acting as a rich resource in protecting Estonian national identity and developing the state as a global advocate, language activists also draw on the culture to make statements of ethnic solidarity. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, Estonia represents a unique case to consider the sustained meaningfulness of Finno-Ugric linguistic culture since the state is home to two ethnic Estonian groups – Estonians who speak the standard language and the Võro, ethnic Estonians who typically speak both Estonian and, to varying degrees, the regional language of Võro. Similar to other small Finno-Ugric languages, Võro is endangered; it has experienced significant language shift over the 20th century with a decline in language transfer from generation to generation. Researchers estimate that 50,000 to 70,000 Estonians (approximately 5% of the ethnic Estonian population) speak the regional language, which has benefitted from 15 years of state financial support (1995–2010) to further revitalization and research. One of the primary avenues of state assistance is the subsidizing of a voluntary Võro regional-language program in about half of the schools in the region where the language is spoken.

As a small language in a state with an endangered official language, the Võro are sensitive to issues of ethnic solidarity, yet also strive to cultivate a distinct regional identity. Content analysis of core material used in elementary regional-language classrooms – the Võro-language primer, ABC Kiráoppus (Sullöv, Ülle, Kõivpuu, Reimann, & Hagu, 1998) and the companion teachers’ guide to the primer, ABC tjuht' kiráoppusõ maonq (Reimann, 2000) – illustrate the way text-based rapprochement with kindred people simultaneously functions to position the Võro as part of both the Estonian and Finno-Ugric communities through the use of familial terms and cultural parallels. By invoking the Finno-Ugric connection in instructional material, the Institute expresses the autochthonous community’s membership in the Estonian “we,” while also making connections, as a distinct group, with other “small” Finno-Ugric people in Europe and Russia.

The Võro are positioned as members of the Finno-Ugric language family through the careful development of linguistic and cultural connections. The Võro Institute recognizes that despite the general bond Estonians feel with kindred nations, both teachers and students may be unfamiliar with their Finno-Ugric relatives. The regional-language educational material encourages teachers to acquaint their class with other Finno-Ugric peoples, their stories, and their fates. The regional-language textbook serves as a tool of cultural rapprochement. The Võro-language teachers’ guide urges teachers to bring Finno-Ugric people into the classroom to help students hear their stories first hand, “Every autumn there are kinship days (höömgpäädäg). With the help of ‘Finno-Ugria’ [an NGO-based in Tallinn] you can also invite singer-dancer kinsmen to your school. The teacher should speak about who these guests are, where they come from, and how they are our relatives” (Reimann, 2000, p. 54). To assist in presenting students for these visits or other lessons incorporating kindred people, the Võro-language teachers’ guide includes lists of additional recommended readings and web sites on Finno-Ugric peoples (Reimann, 2000, p. 60).

One of the ways textbook authors establish solidarity with Estonians and other Finno-Ugric nations is through the use of kinship language. Familial terms, like relative, family, and kinsmen, bridge the territorial distance between the Finno-Ugric people and evoke a bond based on language, and perhaps in the very distant past, blood. The teachers’ guide refers to the Finno-Ugric peoples as “our kinfolk” and “our relatives.” The recommended questions for Võro-language instructors to pose in class reflect the extension of family terminology to other Finno-Ugric peoples:

Who can name our kinfolk? Why are they considered to be our relatives? What do we have in common with them?... Look on a map and find where our relatives live. How much time might it take to visit one or another of them? The most well known relatives are Finns. Do you know some Finnish words? What do you know about Finns? (Reimann, 2000, p. 157)

These questions reflect a strategy to regenerate the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture for a new generation (i.e., “Why are they considered our relatives?”) and establish meaningful transnational connections in a new geopolitical order (i.e., “What do we have in common with them?”). Moreover, this passage underscores the unique connection between Estonians and Finns, who are the first among equals of Finno-Ugric kindred people.

An additional text-based strategy for establishing Finno-Ugric solidarity is through attention to cultural commonality. One shared element between the Võro and other Finno-Ugric speakers, according to the teachers’ guide, is a universal belief system. “The Finno-Ugric people regard all that is around them equally and do not consider themselves to be superior to the rest of what was created” (Reimann, 2000, p. 110). The primer also points to the collective musical traditions of the Finno-Ugric people. A caption next to a photo of a Mari Julia Kuprina plays the zither (kannōld) – in their language, zither (kärsi)” (Sullöv
et al., 1998, p. 122). The juxtaposition of the Võro and Mari term for either suggests that although the names differ, the people share the instrument and broader musical tradition.

A second common cultural element highlighted in school material is the Finno-Ugric sense of linguistic endangerment. Fateful stories of other Finno-Ugric nations function as a cautionary tale of what could become of related languages like Võro. The primer’s closing story concentrates on a Kamas woman, who speaks a language that is “a distant relative of the Võro-Seto language” and represents, to the story’s author, a portentous tale for Finno-Ugric language-speakers and nations. The author, a well-known poet and author, Kauksi Ülle, recounts the details of a documentary featuring this Kamas woman she saw while a university student:

An old Kamas woman stood alone in the middle of a mowed field and said something to herself that was almost soundless. The researcher, who was allowed to shoot the film, said that the old woman was saying something to her god because there was not anyone else left with whom to speak in her own language. I have this Kamas old woman on my mind whenever I speak, write, or teach Võro. She was also in front of my spiritual eye when I put together this ABC-book. I do not want this type of fate that she does not have another person with whom to speak her language. This is why you should speak your language as much as you are able. (Suilõv et al., 1998, p. 148)

The author, by invoking the image of the “last speaker,” highlights personal responsibility in maintaining one’s mother tongue. Thus, the primer story provides an example of the way transnational Finno-Ugric elements, represented here by the Kamas woman, serve to inspire and motivate local regional-language identity construction in southeastern Estonia.

Vignette #3: Language Nests as a Finno-Ugric Tradition

A final way the Finno-Ugric culture maintains relevance in the post-Soviet era is as a source for new methods of language revitalization. In particular, language nests, or immersion kindergartens, have emerged as a favored strategy to address Finno-Ugric language loss. The attempts of the Võro-language activists to found a language nest illustrate efforts to reshape “international trends ... to local ends” (Arnove, 1999, p. 3). Language nests are early-childhood education programs premised on the idea that an older person, who acts as language educator, speaks with a small group of children in his/her minority language; this native-language environment ideally helps to sustain the minority language by passing the language along to the next generation. The language nests, which originated in the 1980s in New Zealand in an effort to revitalize the Maori language and then “traveled” to Hawaii as part of language renewal efforts, have quickly gained a foothold in the Finno-Ugric world as a potentially effective method to infuse early childhood education with native-language learning opportunities. The experiences of the Inari-Sámi (in Northern Finland) and Karelians (in Russia), in particular, have had great influence on regional-language nest experiments in southeastern Estonia. The Inari Sámi first experimented with language nests in 1993, opening programs in 1997. Karelian language nests, developed in cooperation with the Finns and modeled on the Inari experience, began in 2000 (Pasanen, 2009, p. 3). By 2004, two modified Karelian language nests had opened in Karelian villages (Mattheus, 2004), and, in September 2009, one Finnish and one Karelian language nest opened in the Karelian capital of Petrozavodsk.

Language nests have become the signature Finno-Ugric early-childhood language-learning method. The Finnish Government has emerged as a major proponent of the language nest approach and in 2006 began to finance (via its State kindred people’s program) the development of language nests among Russia’s Finno-Ugric peoples. The Finnish President, Tarja Halonen (2008, paragraphs 10–13) has acted as a major advocate of this method. In her welcoming speech to the 5th World Congress of Finno-Ugric People, Halonen concluded,

... we [the Finns] have learned to respect everyone’s right to a native language and to understand that minority languages need support to survive and to develop as living languages. We have made particularly strong efforts to strengthen the position of the endangered Inari Sámi language. International cooperation has been a great help in this, as much acclaimed ‘language nest’ method proved to be an excellent tool. ... Now we want to help others. In 2006, the Finnish Cultural Foundation launched a project to support the maintaining and saving of endangered Finno-Ugric languages in Russia. A decision has now been taken to extend this project by allocating more than one and a half million euros to the revival of small Finno-Ugric language communities. The tool used for this process is, once again, the language nest method.

Halonen’s attention to the successful Finnish experience with the Inari Sámi and announcement of the allocation of financial support illustrates the leading role of the Finno-Ugric nation-states in providing a model for other states’ investment in non-state kindred people. The Consultative Committee of the World Congress of Finno-Ugric People further endorsed language nests in its 2008 Resolution “to study the experiences of language revitalization for the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed minorities using the so-called language nest methods ... and develop its further dissemination” (paragraph 22).
The Võro-language nest idea emerged as a result of new, post-Soviet networks of Finno-Ugric educators and language activists. The educational ideas and experiments of other Finno-Ugric groups have informed the trajectory of several research and language projects since the Institute's foundation in 1995. When researchers and other activists became interested in developing a Võro-language nest in southeastern Estonia, they reached out to other Finno-Ugric peoples, especially the Karelions and Sámi, through visits (to the Karelian Republic of the Russian Federation), participation in conferences and casual communication in order to understand better the organization and impact of language nests. The Finno-Ugric experiences with language nests, as documented in papers such as Annika Pasanen’s research report on the Inari Sámi, which was circulated to Võro Institute members in the early 21st century, serve not only as a useful project blueprint, but also as testimony to the language nest tradition among the Finno-Ugric peoples. The influence of the Finno-Ugric network on Võro language-nest planning is reflected in an NGO’s application to fund language nests teachers’ salaries, “The thought to create the Võro language nest arose in Karelia while visiting the Karelian language nests” (Ministry of Culture, 2010b). The rooting and pertinence of the language nest experience with other Finno-Ugric people adds familiar context and veracity to proposals to develop this approach in Estonia.

Regional-language nests in Estonia have emerged in a different form from their kindred counterparts in part due to the limitations imposed by existing educational and language laws. In Estonia, the pilot Võro-language nest, which opened in the fall 2009 for one day a week, is not part of the public-education system.17 The language nest, a result of NGO and public institute cooperation (between the Võro Institute and the Hanja Men’s Council), operates outside the public-education sphere, which allows teachers the freedom to maintain the one-language immersion approach. Within the public sphere, the exclusive use of the regional language is not possible; based on existing language laws, the state language (Estonian) must be offered in public schools even at the preschool level (also called “kindergarten” for three- to six-year olds in Estonia). Given these limitations, the Ministry of Education and Research would allow the establishment of a regional-language nest only with parallel Estonian instruction. Pasanen (2009) reports similar systemic troubles with developing language nests in Russia where preschool children are required to learn Russian as a state language. “Relying on this [the language regulation], the Karelian Education Ministry has not let the language nest work like they should with the children speaking only in the minority language from the beginning in their groups” (p. 3). Due to these Russian regulations, the Karelian-based language nests operate on a modified immersion model, but within the public sphere, with one teacher speaking to the children in Russian and the other in the target minority (i.e., Karelian, Finnish, etc.) language.

Although the organization of a Võro-language nest meets systemic limitations in the public sphere, the Estonian government had expressed ideological and financial support for native-language early childhood education through programmatic assistance. The Director of the Language at the Ministry of Education reflects this enthusiasm in his statement that the instruction of the “dialect language” to nursery school children is in “every possible way a positive phenomenon” if it is taught alongside standard Estonian and voluntarily (Mattheus, 2004). Currently, the Estonian Government translates this support for language nests into programmatic development and funding. The Old Võrumaa (Vana Võrumaa) Cultural Program: 2010–2013, for example, specifically mentions the program’s intentions to support the widening of support for the use of Võro language on the basis of a language-nest or playgroup model (Ministry of Culture, 2010a, p. 10). The language nests’ dependence on programmatic funds are evidence of the “competitive market model of language policy” in Estonia, “in which individuals or organisations in civil society compete to implement projects connected within a general programme framework developed by the Ministry of Culture” (Brown, 2009, p. 141). The market model makes language nests unstable, however, in part due to the lack of a comprehensive LUL language policy, but also, because programs can be canceled due to lack of funds, leadership, or support. The instability of language nests has been a concern in Finland as well where five ministries within the Finnish Government recently announced (June 2010) joint efforts to secure permanent state funding for the Sámi language nests (operating in Inari, Skolt, and Northern Sámi).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The sustained pertinence and intellectual investment in the transnational Finno-Ugric identity illustrates the enduring cultural links across European and Eurasian space. The political reconfigurations following the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a new era in the development of the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture. European resources and the advocacy position of three independent Finno-Ugric states hold potential for infusing energy into
this 18th century cultural idea. In this chapter, I have suggested ways that the Finno-Ugric identity has become newly relevant in the post-Soviet context from an Estonian vantage point. Conceptually, Schiffman's notion of a linguistic culture helps to frame the renewed sense of belonging, or at least, a return to the shared linguistic Finno-Ugric culture across different nations and ethnicities. A defining element of this culture is "being small," a common worldview informing a sense of linguistic vulnerability. For Estonia, independence, occupation, and membership in the EU have transformed the state's and nation's relationship to non-state Finno-Ugric peoples with the most recent political developments, bringing new resources and possibilities for international advocacy in multiple spheres.

The Finno-Ugric linguistic culture has survived and thrived in the 21st century, in part, due to the dynamic nature of the culture in Estonia. Rather than representing a staid, two century-old idea, Finno-Ugric culture changes and accommodates multiple expressions due to its broad, defining parameters. In the case of Estonia, I argue the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture remains relevant, in part, because it allows those who embrace it to accomplish several goals. The chapter's three vignettes illustrate the varied ways that establishing and promoting the Finno-Ugric connection also assist in (1) reaffirming Estonian national identity as both European and Finno-Ugric and positioning the state as global guardian; (2) transmitting messages of national solidarity and distinct regional identity; and (3) promoting new strategies for LUL education. These three snapshots provide evidence of the way that educational advocacy intersects with foreign policy, domestic politics, and nation-building.

Finally, this chapter suggests that the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture provides a basis for considering language education as a justified and active sphere for transnational involvement. A significant component in the renewed relevance of the Finno-Ugric linguistic culture is advocacy for education in native languages. The proposed use of Finno-Ugric languages as the MOI represents one strategy to address the progressive assimilation and cultural loss among the varied national groups of Europe and Asia. This analysis reveals, however, the ways the persistent politics of education threatens to thwart gains made via this strategy. Whether native-language instruction represents a challenge to existing notions of civic loyalty, contradicts the "logic" of voluntary assimilation, or runs counter to protective state-language policies, a shift in current educational policy signals a potentially potent, and in some cases, unwelcome, sociopolitical change. Tsui and Tollefson (2004) address the politics of an MOI shift:

"Medium-of-instruction policy ... is a key means of power (re)distribution and social (re)construction, as well as a key arena in which political conflicts among countries and ethnonational, social, and political groups are realized" (p. 2). The vital intersection of Finno-Ugric linguistic culture and native-language instruction depends upon the continued redistribution of power and reconstruction of national identities in Europe and Asia.

NOTES

1. I use the term nation in this chapter to refer to a self-identified ethnic group; I am not using "nation" as a synonym for state. When the borders of the nation and state broadly overlap, I use the term nation-state as in the case of Estonia, Finland, and Hungary.

2. The student made this observation at the Võro Institute's annual conference, where the working languages were any of the Finno-Ugric language (without translation). Organizers included English as a conference language in 2005.

3. The World Congress of Finno-Ugric People is a gathering every four years in a different Finno-Ugric home territory of government authorities (including Presidents) and select international organizations to share status reports, deliver academic findings, and make policy recommendations. For more information on the Congresses in English see the Fennougria web page http://www.fennougria.ee/index.php?id=1073.

4. The use of the term "native" for an ethnic group's national language becomes increasingly complicated during the 20th century as the mother tongue of more Finno-Ugric nations shifts to Russian. As a result of this change, a nation's "native" language might be Russian. Although this is the sociolinguistic dynamics common to several Finno-Ugric nations, when I use "native" or "mother-tongue" instruction in this chapter, I am referring to the language sharing the group's eponym.

5. National schools refer to a school that follows a curriculum that includes the native language and subjects related to the national group (e.g., history, literature, etc.).

6. Saarinen (2001) reports that in 1937 and 1938 all the writers belonging to the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic were shot (p. 47).

7. Several area studies scholars note the detrimental impact of Krushchev's educational reforms of 1958–1959.

8. Among the examples of the scientific and academic activities of this third phase are the founding of the Finno-Ugrian Program at Tartu University (Estonia), the meeting International Finno-Ugric Students' Conference, and the regular gathering of Finno-Ugric Writers.

9. Finland and Hungary both ratified (in 1994 and 1995, respectively) and put the ECRML into effect (both in 1998). Russia signed the Charter in 2001, but has yet to ratify it; Estonia has not yet signed the ECRML.

10. The Consultative Committee, composed of an equal number of representatives from each of the Finno-Ugric peoples, refers to the coordinating body of the World Congress of Finno-Ugric People.
11. The COE has further addressed joint Finno-Ugric concerns in Recommendation no. 1775 (2006) and Resolution no. 1171 (1998), which highlight the decline in opportunities for native-language education.

12. As early as 1992, Finland had signed a treaty with Russia to support the Finnic peoples through underwriting cultural and linguistic preservation programs; a state program of support, launched in 1994 from this initial agreement. Estonia’s Kindred People’s Program has been in effect since 1999.

13. The Kindred Programme III document provides (in Estonian) a useful overview of the ethnic background, site of enrollment, and completion rates for these students.

14. The Pan-Finno-Ugric Days, held in Estonia since 1988, and in some of the Finno-Ugric Republics of Russia as well, are traditionally celebrated on the third weekend of October. The days are full of concerts, literary evenings, cultural workshops, and exhibits.

15. To be sure, these terms are used in standard Estonian publications as well. An example of this particular use of language is the slogan of a newspaper article reviewing the highlights of the 2004 World Finno-Ugric Congress — Congress as a Family Reunion [Kongress nagu suguvõsa kokkutulek] (Mõttus, 2004).

16. Kamas was a Samoyedic language spoken in the Russian Federation. Like Estonian, Kamas is in the Uralic language family, but while Estonian is in the Finno-Ugric language group, Kamas is in the Samoyedic language group. Both the Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic language groups constitute the Uralic language group (Raun, 1991, p. 5).

17. The first Võro-language nest opened in 2004, but, by the language-activists’ own description, this was more of a one-language playgroup. For more on the history of Võro-language nests, see http://keelepesa.haanumaa.ee/

REFERENCES


PART II
EDUCATION AND POST-SOVIET TRANSFORMATIONS WORLDWIDE


