

THE REBELLION OF KAUTOKEINO-(Kautokeino- opprøret)



The rebellion of Kautokeino / Nils Gaup. Photo: Royal Norwegian Embassy

85% of the population in Kautokeino, which lies in the vast region of Finnmark have Sami as their native language, and a third of the people work with the reindeer, which are also the main industry.

The Sami culture is strong and true even in modern society today. The famous Easter Festival in Kautokeino is an annual event with historical traditions. Easter was traditionally the time of the year in which the Sami, from all parts of the region Sami, gathered in the capital of the reindeer, Kautokeino. They celebrated the end of a long, cold, dark winter, and all participated in religious festivals and wedding season.

The weather is adverse but the known solar cycles encourage a land where the sun does not set for five weeks in summer and doesn't get rise for six weeks of winter.

1. DATASHEET

Director: Nils Gaup

Genre: Drama

Nationality: Norway

Distributor: Films Rubicom

Year: 2007

Duration: 90 min

2. ARTISTIC STATEMENT

Elen: Anni-Kristiina Juuso

Mathis: Aslat Mahtle Gaup

Aslak: Mikkel Gaup

Mons: Nils Peder Isaksen Gaup

Ruth: Mikael Persbrandt

Bucht: Peter Andersson

Stockfleth: Bjørn Sundquist

Laestadius: Mikael Nyquist

3. SYNOPSIS

Based on historical facts. For centuries the northern Scandinavia was inhabited by the native Sami and their reindeer. In 1852 the modernization reaches the desolate village of Kautokeino, governed by Ruth, a ruthless liquor dealer. One of the tribes of natives, headed by a young woman named Elen, refuses to pay an unjust debt to Ruth, which constitutes the beginning of one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of northern Scandinavia.

4. DIRECTOR

Gaup was born in Kautokeino, Finnmark County in northern Norway. He first intended to become an athlete, but from 1974 to 1978 he went to drama school and studied theater in Beaivvá Sami in Kautokeino. He also founded the first Sámi Theater Ensemble.

After acting in several films he became famous in 1987 by the direction of the Norwegian film *Ofelas* (International English Title *Pathfinder*). It was the first full movie with all the dialogue in Sami, the native language of Lapland. This film earned him an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film and the Grand Prix prize in 1990 Yubari International Fantastic Film Festival. Afterwards he shot the Disney-financed film *Haakon Haakonsen* (*Shipwrecked*), based on the novel adventures of

the young "Haakon Haakonsen". In 1993 he shot his film *hodet over vannet* (head above water). For this film he won the Amanda (the most important Norwegian Film Award). In 1996 it was remade as an American movie with Cameron Diaz and Harvey Keitel in the lead roles. His next film was *Tashunga* (also known as *North Star*), a project by Christopher Lambert. This film was not so much at the box office and critics.

Gaup was scheduled previously as director of Kevin Costner's film *Waterworld*. However, due to the costs he left the project.

In 2008 he shot *Kautokeino-opprøret* which means approximately the rebellion of the city of Kautokeino with the same name in Norwegian. It is the true story of the troubles of the Sami people against the Church and state control over alcohol sales.

5. COMMENT

The film begins with the image of two defendants who are carried in car shipments to their final destination (being killed by an executioner), before the pleading and astonished gaze of dozens of people.

Elen is not only a caring Sami woman who works with a reindeer herd, she is also the real protagonist of the story; she is a hard and fair woman who fights for the welfare of his family and the people living under the oppression of Ruth, an unscrupulous man who seeks to enrich himself by distributing supplies among the inhabitants of this inhospitable place, in exchange for their cattle.

Using the technique of Flashback, Elen tells in great detail the terrible events that took place in the town of Kautokeino in the mid-nineteenth century. Intelligent woman ever there, she soon realizes the tremendous social injustices that her people are subject to.

But the fight is not going to be easy. The State and Church join together. The supposed civilized society of Norway intends to continue outraging this poor village sending a new pastor (priest). This will be in charge of disseminating from the pulpit a number of ideas inimical to the interests of the Sami.

Clashes between authorities and Elen are continuous and the spectators immediately sense the terrible end that is devoted to these brave characters with feet of clay. The climax of the story builds slowly, scene by scene. With the death of the proprietor and his assistant at the hands of Alaska and Mons, the doom that was already written is latent and fully justified.

It is also worth noting the clear parallelism that can be seen throughout the film between the shepherd Stockfleth leading his servants into chaos and tragedy, and Elen, a pastor who cares for her herd and is even able to cope with a herd of wolves with the only help of a stick.

The scene in which the culprits face death is particularly shocking. The two leaders of the uprising are executed in the name of God. Aslak and Mons are two black sheep who have left the herd in the eyes of the Church when, paradoxically, they only meant to struggle to keep it alive. Hence their total rebellion and their refusal to repent of their sins just before being executed.

The film ends with an image of Elen telling her child the whole story 17 years later. The conclusion that she reaches about everything that has happened is that these two men didn't give their lives in vain, their sacrifice was not in vain. They died with

the hope that things would change and that feeling must endure in the hearts of all Sami.

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PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSALS

A. RESEARCH ON THE CONTEXT

We can divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 students. Each group will choose one of these issues and seek information about them to expose any post in the classroom.

Throughout the exposure the students may be supported by all kinds of computerized audiovisual material etc.

This could be done in the areas of English, social science, religion, history, citizenship and so on.

- **THE SAMIS**

Who are they?

Where do they live?

What do they do?

How do they dress?

Do you know any other countries where there are people like that?

What about Spain? Is there any social group that reminds you of the Sami?

- **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Where is Kautokeino on the map?

Who lives there?

What happened in that place?

Is the Norwegian society then a civilized and advanced society?

Are the Lapps so primitive in their habits?

What is the relationship between church and authorities?

Should the Church get involved in secular conflicts?

- **RELIGION**

What are the two interpretations of the Scriptures and the Word of God in the movie?

What do you think of the pastor Laestadius giving the sermon in Karesuando (Sweden)?

How did Stockfleth, new pastor of Kautokeino, preach the same doctrine?

Why did Elen not go to church?

What is the attitude of Aslak and Mons just before being executed?

B. ANALYSIS OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Individual work of reflection and analysis after seeing the film. Following this exercise, the students would be ready to discuss their findings in small groups.

ELEN

Profession

Family situation

Personal Qualities

Interests and conflicts

RUTH

Profession

Personal characteristics

Interests and future plans

Problems in carrying them out

STOCKFLETH

Profession

Personality

Personal situation

His relationship with the Sami community

C. RELIGION-AUTHORITIES

Discuss these phrases that are said throughout the film. Analyze who speaks and in what situation.

- ✓ That den of liquor is pure evil. Nothing good comes from there.
- ✓ Your body is the body of the Holy Spirit. So take care of your body. The temple of God!
- ✓ We're losing all our customers. How will we survive?
- ✓ We are the temple. The Church is only an organization built by man.
- ✓ I also have a flock to attend to. It's spread to the 4 winds. And I fear for the wolves. Day and night.
- ✓ It is important that the Church did not take part in a secular conflict.
- ✓ Do you repent of your sins, especially those for which you're going to die?
- ✓ I'm afraid I cannot.
- ✓ They lost their lives. But there was something they couldn't remove from them: hope.