

SAMI CULTURE IN A NEW ERA: THE NORWEGIAN SAMI EXPERIENCE. Edited by Harald Gaski. University of Tromsø, Norway. Karasjok: Davvi Girji, OS. 1997. Distributed in North America by the University of Washington Press. 223 p., bibl. after each article; no maps, illus., or index. Softbound. US\$20.00.

Harald Gaski, professor of Sami literature at Tromsø University, edited *Sami Culture in a New Era* to provide [...] information about the indigenous population of Northern Fennoscandia [through]...a rather comprehensive introduction to a variety of...themes [that]...offer...a state-of-the-art report on contemporary Sami studies in Norway (p. 5–6).

He says that the book's nine essays illustrate "the ways in which research, education and communication serve to shape and promote [self] identity in a modern society" (p. 16).

Anthropologist Harald Eidheim asserts that the 1970s Alta hydroelectric project, begun in the 1950s, became a defining moment in Sami activism as a unifying political cause, which connected the Sami Movement to global indigenous causes. The construction attracted international attention because it threatened the traditional reindeer herding industry. Although the Alta project went forward, it led to the creation of organizations like the Sami Parliament that now lead the society's political activism.

Historian Einar Niemi believes that the "Frontier Myth" shaped recent Sami-Norwegian relations because it gave the majority society the moral right to civilize the "wilderness," displacing the area's indigenous subsistence industries. The myth led to the doctrine of unregistered ground in Finnmark that made nomadic Sami land public territory as part of the government's Norwegianization program to reduce cultural pluralism in Sápmi [Lapland]. The Frontier Myth persisted into the 20th century, as assimilationist policies like compulsory education nearly eliminated ethnicity in the North. During the late 1980s, the country accepted multiculturalism and established Native language instruction and a Sami Parliament.

Language Council Head Nils Jernsletten relates how traditional terms for landscape and climate are important for preserving Sami culture because they were learned through practical application in fishing, hunting, and reindeer herding. Today's students learn Sami through "theoretical" (p. 98) curricula that stress grammar, syntax, and a vocabulary unrelated to those traditional industries. As an example, the once rich Sami vocabulary related to seal hunting, a thriving industry in Norway until the late 19th century, is virtually absent from modern usage. Preserving culture through language requires joining classroom instruction with field experience that gives students practical application in such topics as snow classification.

Former herder Johan Kalstad describes the Norwegian reindeer industry using government statistics about the number of herders and animals in the region. No longer

nomadic, Sami herders practice modern reindeer management with snowmobiles and aircraft, while retaining traditional herding knowledge and skills. Today, most family members are disconnected from herding activities, including migration. Consequently, pastoralism has become an adult male enterprise. The exclusively Sami reindeer industry is threatened by competing interests, including the nonherding Sami majority, who do not value the preservation of grazing land.

Physician Siv Kvernmo outlines today's unique Sami health care needs. The transition to Western medicine in 1778, with the appointment of Finnmark's first district physician, created problems because medical personnel did not speak Native dialects. Physicians attributed hip displacement among Sami children to the nomadic cradleboard, and higher infant mortality to poor diet and adverse living conditions (e.g. turf dwellings). Treatments, which included switching infants from breast milk to animal milk mixed with coffee, exacerbated health problems. A 1957 Sami Commission concluded that linguistic differences between Norwegian medical workers and their Sami patients prevented proper diagnosis and treatment, which led to the lower living standard. Training Sami-speaking physicians, nurses, and public health workers through a medical school quota system has eliminated some language barriers, although the number of trained personnel remains below the need.

Vigdis Stordahl explains the difficulty for younger Sami to establish an identity that allows them to be full members of modern Norwegian society, yet preserve their ethnic heritage. The resulting identity combines such components as Western music and traditional *yoik*. That hybrid identity is seen as a rejection of minority culture by their parents, who grew up during the 1970s, a period that "saw a political and cultural revitalization never witnessed before in Sami history" (p. 144). During that time, many Sami adopted traditional ethnic markers, such as language, clothing, and music, nearly lost following a century of "Norwegianization." The symbols led to conflict between moderates, who wanted a minority ethnic identity without giving up welfare-state benefits, and activists willing to sacrifice to regain self-identity. Sami youth today are not forced to make such choices, and are criticized for rejecting the ethnic symbols that helped win rights like Native language instruction. Many Sami youth merely want the freedom to choose their own identities, instead of those chosen by others.

Former College Rector Jan Henry Keskitalo defines the "ideals" versus the "realities" of a "Sami" higher education system. He frames the difference between the two in the following way: Does the Norwegian university system assimilate Sami into the majority society for the students' own benefit, or do professionally educated Sami provide a resource for the minority society? The Norwegian Parliament's 1992–93 report on Sami post-secondary education recommends strengthening research in traditional subjects, such as Sami language and culture, while developing

competencies in new areas like medicine. To accomplish that goal, the Sami College founded in 1989 was reorganized as a Norwegian State College in 1994. Primarily a teachers' college, the institution's curricula focus on three research areas: language, natural resource management, and minority education.

Former journalist John Solbakk proclaims that today's Sami popular media are inadequate. With no daily newspapers, only weekly TV programs, daily but brief radio broadcasts, and sporadic book publication, Sami mass media have marginal influence on creating self-identity. Today's Sami media are "very bad copies of the Nordic media" (p. 189) because they do not take the minority view on political issues. Sami media have adopted Western journalistic techniques like the "method of oppositions" (p. 185) to polarize debate, instead of discussing differing views until consensus, the traditional Sami method. To compete with their Norwegian counterparts for the minority audience, Sami media must become more "Sami."

Harald Gaski questions in what language Sami literature should be published. Literature in Sami contributes to the minority society's self-identity and cultural reawakening, but marginalizes the literature in the wider world. Conversely, publishing Native literature in a Western language expands its audience, but sacrifices indigenous meaning. It is possible to read minority literature in another language and achieve a certain level of understanding, but not that of an insider. Additionally, Sami literature in any language may not be an important symbol of self-identity in a culture based upon oral tradition.

Although the volume had lofty goals, problems like incomplete documentation prevent their fulfillment. Direct quotes sometimes lack page numbers, if the source is cited at all (e.g., Ottar Brox's quote, p. 62). Some bibliographies do not list references that are cited in the text (e.g., Wagner, 1981; p. 30) and fail to cite relevant works in English (e.g., Paine, 1994). Contributors discuss esoteric topics without reference to important sources, such as the growth of the Scandinavian middle class and its associated values (Frykman and Löfgren, 1987), or code-switching and other aspects of minority voice. Despite claims that "the book is meant to offer a rather comprehensive introduction to a variety of Sami themes" (p. 7), the limited and incomplete bibliographies reduce its scope.

Additionally, most articles contain no theory, dismissing it thusly: "The theoretical and ethno-political perspective which is utilized has been culled from the literature of social anthropology" (p. 30), without mentioning which of the multitude of social anthropological theories are relevant. The absence of theory renders irrelevant the editor's statement:

In my view this kind of debate is a conscious and productive way for the indigenous societies to communicate with "Western" theorizing while still insisting on the importance of "native understandings," but still be willing to engage in theoretical discussions with open-mindedness and an *in-*clusive attitude towards outsiders (p. 212).

The book should have been professionally translated and edited. The editor used an American graduate student as a "proof reader, and style and content advisor" (p. 223); consequently, there are many grammatical errors and usage problems, such as the use of the incorrect plural form "*Samis*" (p. 149). There are also structural problems, and some sentences are virtually impenetrable:

I am not trying to underestimate or minimize [sic] the importance of the inside reading of a text—I'll immediately return to proving the opposite—I'm just problematizing [sic] the difficult *positioning of criticism* in this picture, not totally willing to accept the exclusiveness of a so-called indigenous criticism on the one hand, and on the other pointing out the shortcomings of a merely outside, and "neutral" criticism, claiming nothing else but the text in front of you to be relevant for the "correct" and full interpretation. (p. 212)

The editor hoped to rectify the problem that "there is an enormous lack of information and teaching material designed for colleges and universities about my people and our culture" (p. 5). Yet, because of the scholarly problems mentioned above, the work is not appropriate for scholars, graduate students, or libraries as a reference. Undergraduates will find the work tiresome because the "sought after information about the indigenous population of Northern Fennoscandia" (p. 5) takes several readings to find in most articles. Scandinavian language readers will fare better with the authors' original works in Norwegian, which are generally listed in the bibliographies. The limited background information in many of the pieces, along with the lack of photographs, maps, and other graphics, will discourage popular readers drawn in by the attractive cover, which merges photographs of traditional and modern Sami lifestyles.

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