

Books written about identity, and specifically the identity of those in less well-known cultures, can easily fall into an exoticizing trap, focusing more on why those groups are different or ‘unusual’ than on who they simply are. Editors Håkon Hermanstrand, Asbjørn Kolberg, Trond Risto Nilssen and Leiv Sem manage to avoid this trap very well in their book *The Indigenous Identity of the South Saami: Historical and Political Perspectives on a Minority within a Minority*. Within it, they show how identity as a concept is felt, formed, reformed and perceived in various ways, using examples from the context of the South Saami, a minority within the larger Indigenous Saami minority in Fenno-Scandia. This makes for a piece of scholarly work relevant to those wishing to explore wider questions of representation, as well as a helpful volume for those seeking out information specifically about the South Saami.

The book is organised into five sections. The first contains an introductory chapter by the editors, sharing a brief overview of relevant history and their hope that the book will contribute towards creating a “memory environment”, promoting awareness and knowledge about the South Saami. They describe the wider academic discussions around Indigenous representation, alongside providing a brief positionality statement themselves and an acknowledgement that the book does not definitively answer any questions on identity, instead contributing to the negotiations around this multifaceted topic. This self-reflective tone rightfully fills the reader with confidence that the book is being approached from a duly nuanced perspective.

Section 2 dives into the complex world of identity in relation to language. Chapter 2 by Brit Mæhlum takes a practical and historical approach, discussing the institutional factors that have influenced the decline of the South Saami language, as well as those that have helped it to survive. She notes the role of schooling, the geographic spread of South Saami speakers, and the use of the language in the reindeer herding livelihood as particularly important in these processes. The chapter finishes by asking how the Saami identity can negotiate between tradition and the innovation and change inherent in all living, breathing cultures.

Chapter 3 by Inger Johansen continues by exploring the idea of the ‘identity tangle’, namely that the question is not of being or not being, but rather of *how* to be. This is done through outlining 10 South Saami language profiles. There are, for example, ‘Language Shifters’

who have chosen to use Norwegian or Swedish as a home language to help their children better navigate the dominant society, although with some regret to their loss of South Saami skills. On the other hand, 'Reversed Shifters' have grown up without the language yet intend to learn and become fluent speakers specifically for the sake of raising their children in a South Saami speaking household. Other profiles relate to the extent of ability in the language, but also the context of how and why the individual's ability is at that level, and how they intend to use it. More than mere categorisation, this chapter does a brilliant job in outlining the nuances and diversity of individual experiences of identity in relation to their language. It shows how language transmission is situated in a complex emotional world.

Whereas section 2 could be said to focus more on self-identification, section 3 examines how the story of the South Saami has been written by others. 'Written' here is the key word, as it specifically questions the validity of written archival materials that tend to be viewed as more reliable than other sources. Chapter 4 by Håkon Hermanstrand reassesses the 1801 Norwegian census, outlining how the identification of the Saami in this record was inconsistent and at times clearly incorrect, based largely on the assumptions, preferences and biases of the census takers. Erik Norberg's following chapter further critiques our overreliance on written records, outlining the value and wealth of archaeological and palaeo-biological records. He advocates for bringing these disciplinary approaches together to create a more rounded history of the South Saami region.

Turning back to the archives, Section 4 explores how the South Saami have been depicted, mostly by the dominant Norwegian society, over the last two centuries. Cathrine Baglo's chapter does this from a more unusual angle, using picture postcards from approximately 1880-1950. Not assuming these postcards depict what South Saami culture actually was or is, she rather traces how the public's understanding of the culture was constructed through the use of motifs and tropes within the images printed and sold. Asbjørn Kolberg also traces the evolution of depiction in chapter 7, outlining how regional presses have reported on Saami-related topics from 1880-1990. The arc of this change goes from generally well-intentioned aims at objectivity but with patronizing and exoticizing undertones, to a shift in the 1970s towards more works trying to see things from a Saami perspective. The details of this evolution are also linked to key societal events, particularly in the political sphere, that brought Saami topics to the fore.

Finally, section 5 lays out how some of these discussions around identity and representation are affecting the South Saami today. In chapter 8, Leiv Sem shows that a notable history of the Trøndelag region published in 2005 maintains some worrying characteristics of excluding and minimising Saami presence in the region, despite being such a recent publication. This highlights that the question of fair and accurate Saami representation is still an area of ongoing work. Trond Risto Nilssen expands this further in chapter 9 through the case study of the Fosen windfarm, a controversial construction project that has led to court disputes relating to its negative impacts on reindeer herding. Nilssen argues that underpinning this controversy is a lack of understanding that the reindeer herding livelihood has great importance, even amongst non-herding Saami. Maintenance of the livelihood is intimately connected to maintenance of the language, culture and overall identity, and so damage to one means damage to the others.

Overall, this book makes for a thought-provoking read. It raises universal questions about how we define group identity, how these definitions can vary within a group, how others can define us, and what impact these understandings can have in our wider lives. This is nicely interwoven with stories of how the South Saami are currently negotiating these questions, leaving the reader with a nuanced awareness and knowledge of this dynamic minority within a minority.