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Book Review

OWEN, S. 2008. *The Appropriation of Native American Spirituality*. London: Continuum. vii + 704 pp. ISBN 978 1 84706 393 9. Hbk. £65.00.

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Around the world what passes for "Native American Spirituality" is performed in various ways. Some of these are considered inappropriate and insulting by at least some Native Americans. Suzanne Owen's contribution to Continuum's "Advances in Religious Studies" series is an excellent engagement with Native Americans and those who appropriate from them. More precisely, what is appropriated is an imagined version of the spirituality of Native North America expressed in selected, re-worked ceremonies. From the opening sentence Owen is clear that the issues raised by the contests and controversies she discusses are of the kind that is currently at the forefront of the academic study of religion(s). She begins, "Native American and other indigenous religions pose questions about how we identify, categorize and defined religions" (p. 1). Those as yet uninterested in specific indigenous religions or in ethnography will find resonances with debates about the meaning and value of the term "religion." The centrality of "protocols" is an important contribution here – and one unlikely to have been made without engagement with the practices and rhetorics of Native American religionists. Scholars not yet interested in indigenous studies may also make good use of this book as an example of reflection on the relational processes of research in ideological and cultural conflict zones.

The Appropriation of Native American Spirituality largely presents Owen's research about the appropriation of versions of Native American religious activities originating among the Lakota (sometimes Sioux). "Appropriation" is a loaded term and much of what interests Owen is the ways in which ritual complexes originating among the Lakota are re-contextualized among Euro-Americans, Europeans, and other non-Lakota. Such people have been the target of a number of high profile declarations by Native American, particularly Lakota leaders and activists. In particular, it is objected that significant ceremonies are commodified in the process of their adaptation to white consumer culture. Money is charged before people are permitted to participate. But it can also be objected that Lakota ceremonies are only appropriate among Lakota people. Certainly one of the rituals in the complex that is Lakota tradition is entirely about adopting other kinds of people into Lakota clans ("extended families" rather than the modern norm of "truncated families"). Among those who object to other-than-Lakota participation in Lakota ceremonies, some have problems even with those adopted. This, in turn, is part of a problematic but creative tension about authority among indigenous peoples. Whereas many text books claim that, for example, Lakota tradition is communal or corporate, this is only true at a family level, and even there authority is negotiated. To illustrate: while all sun-dances follow similar patterns and are bounded by similar protocols,

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they can only take place after an individual is authorized by significant other-than-human persons (often during visionary experiences) to initiate them and to conduct them in ways that may vary according to vision and local practice. In short, Lakota religious authority challenges Lakota to negotiate among themselves while challenging academic assertions that religious individualism is a product of European cultural processes.

Nonetheless, Lakota leaders have made declarations that many (not all) Lakota recognize as expressing objections to Euro-appropriation of ceremonies. As if the theft of land, livelihood, and lives was not enough, now the ceremonies around which Lakota identities constellate are being taken and sold. Some of the appropriations are enacted by Lakota people wishing to be famous "medicine people." Others appropriators might be identified by another problematic term: "New Agers." But scholarly appropriation of indigenous knowledges or of reputation following research among less-empowered indigenous peoples is also contentious. Much of this has been discussed before in various arenas. That it deserves to be discussed in a series about "advances" is illustrated by deaths during an alleged sweat lodge in late 2009. What casts doubt on whether this should be identified as a Lakota inspired ceremony is its performance in a series of endurance tests as much as the financial and Euro-American leadership angles. Owen's book is far richer than merely taking on such relatively easy targets. Much of her fieldwork was with another indigenous nation, the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland. Their particular historical and recent experience has led to considerable learning from Lakota and other teachers. Owen discusses the ramifications of this appropriation.

What this book does best is to challenge the idea (entangled with indigenous declarations, Euro-American appropriations and scholarly debates) that the key issue is ethnicity, genetics, or "blood quantum." Owen brings out the taken-for-granted and declared centrality of protocols for doing ceremony, protocols that make a person or an activity appropriate. There is much to be learnt and considered here both about religious facts (e.g. the nature, performance and conceptualization of rituals) and about how scholars interested in religions and/or indigeneity might behave in relation to those among whom they research. I recommend Owen's book to colleagues interested in advancing our scholarly efforts and believe it will contribute to the increase of respectful, protocol-observant enquiry, consideration and vigorous debate.

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