INTRODUCTION

Indigenizing Movements in Europe

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Comparisons are at the heart of this book, some more or less explicit than others. This introduction devotes significant space to comparisons between religions that are often categorized as “new” and those often labelled “Indigenous.” It does not forget that these ways of grouping some religions are, in various ways, integral to or parasitic of the questionable practice of comparison that is indicated in the phrase “World religions.” Thus, this book also offers some data for the consideration of the *practice* of comparison. However, as terms in the title indicate, there are two more central comparisons at issue here. Most obviously, there is a comparison between religious movements that are “European” and others that are “Indigenous.” An explanation for capitalizing “Indigenous” will be offered soon but the relevant comparison hinges on the question of whether *European* movements which are not Indigenous in a particular sense do, nonetheless, *indigenize* in ways that might be comparable with practices of Indigenous peoples. This is already to point to the second key comparison. Drawing on Paul C. Johnson’s (2002) coining and discussing of the term “indigenizing,” this book compares and contrasts practices in which people either indigenize or extend their repertoires of ideas, practices and/or discourses.

Indigenizing

Johnson’s use of “indigenizing” arose in his reflections on processes among the Garifuna and practitioners of Candomblé in South America and the Caribbean. He contrasted it with processes he labels “extending.” He writes,

Both [indigenizing and extending] are present among all religious groups, but are balanced and mobilized differently by each. *Indigenizing* discourses and practices have as their objective the configuration, at least imaginatively or discursively, of a pure group performing traditional practices on its original homeland. When outsider signs, symbols and practices are relied upon, they are quickly indigenized—given a culturally specific form that makes the outsider symbol “ours,” even traditional. *Extending* discourses and practices take as their objective the lowering of social boundaries, the circulation of religious knowledge and symbols into wider availability, and the overt assimilation of new forms acknowledged to be from outside. (Johnson 2002, 312)

Johnson’s terms recognize tendencies to emphasize resonance with and relevance to local and ancestral traditions (indigenizing) and tendencies to stress universal relevance or global engagement (extending). These exist on a continuum and are more likely to be matters of emphasis rather than opposites. Those who conceive of themselves and their cultures as maintaining, enhancing or purifying discrete ethnic, cultural or religious communities may represent one trajectory. Others not only assert that they have something to say to the rest of the world but may also seek to revise “local ancestral” traditions in the light of more global traditions. Often, the two trends are activated in phases or in varied encounters with “others.” At times, people might draw in practices and ideas from elsewhere to enhance their received or current lifeways, practices of knowledges. At times (and possibly simultaneously) they might share or offer what is theirs to the wider world.

The first question generative of this book is whether these processes are visible among members or practitioners of European religious movements. The second question is whether comparing processes among European and Indigenous religions increases understanding. Before we approach those questions, it will be helpful to consider the practice of comparison and some of the terms drawn into our consideration of the potential (a) for observing and (b) of observing indigenizing processes among European religions.

Comparative practices

Although people are sometimes told that they are not comparing like with like, or that they are wrongly comparing chalk and cheese or oranges and apples, comparison can, at least sometimes, be helpful in refining understanding. Clarifying what is distinctive and what is shared between phenomena can lead on to the asking of further questions. Comparison can also be immensely helpful when we test the value of an idea or theory. It may lead us to check not only whether, or to what extent, an interpretation or thesis

might apply elsewhere but also how productive or even predictive a proposal might be prove more generally or globally. This book arose from a double panel at the 2018 conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion in which the authors considered the possibility that the term “indigenizing” might (or might not) enrich analysis, interpretation, theorization and/or discussion of movements and practices beyond those which lead to its coining.

So then, this book focuses on a selection of European religious movements which are typically the kind of movements labelled “new religions” or “new religious movements.” They are not usually the focus of scholars interested in Indigenous religions. Similarly, members of the groups we have chosen to discuss only rarely identify their religions as Indigenous. Nor do they usually lay claim to being Indigenous themselves. They certainly do not do so programmatically, definitively or with any great emphasis. This is important because some Europeans (like some Hindus) certainly do attempt to assert their indigeneity and use such language as a plank of their nationalist, regionalist or ethnic self-assertion. Religion can be an element of such efforts and we could have devoted space to the kind of groups which identify themselves as, for example, “Native Faiths” (see, e.g., Rountree 2015). Our goal here, however, has been to see how the term “indigenizing” might reveal or develop better understanding of processes that are comparable to those implicated in Paul C. Johnson’s coinage but occur among a quite different array of religions.

A further possibility is raised and debated in a final chapter. This asks whether the testing of the wider applicability of “indigenizing” (which *might* be imagined as the indigenizing of the term by a different scholarly community and/or as expanding its reach to other movements) might also feed back into discussion of its Indigenous originating contexts and interpretations. Among other matters, this additional comparison of scholarly practices raises significant questions as to the relation between nationalist, romantic and anti-colonial modes of indigenizing. Before we get to this and other chapters, some further consideration of the comparative terms “new,” “Indigenous,” and “World” is offered.

Comparisons: “New”

It will have been noticed that in the previous paragraphs there is an evident contrast between the capitalized “Indigenous” and the lower-case “new religions.” If “New” were to be capitalized it might have suggested that novelty is the defining characteristic of religions to which this label is attached. However, not only do many adherents of such religions assert the antiquity

of their roots, but there is no scholarly consensus as to when “new” began. When “new religious movements” first entered the scholarly arena, the label “new” was often applied to movements founded or first organized in the nineteenth century. More recently, the term’s reference has been restricted to post-World War II or post-1950s movements. In each case, a movement’s claims to be a contemporary expression of, for example, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu or Muslim traditions was or is often of less scholarly interest than the “newness” of its social organization. However, the putatively recent origins of such groups are not the only attractor of scholarly interest. In addition, questions have been asked about the fit or resonance between these “new religions” and the contemporary era. Is there something specifically modern, late modern or post-modern about these religions in contrast with others? Are the dynamics of consumer or supply-chain capitalism more relevant to the practice of new religions than they are to other religions? Is there a relationship between a group’s ideology or practices and climate catastrophe, political crises or other contemporary phenomena.

A broader sense of contemporaneity is conveyed in the website of the *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* (IJSNR). This notes that it and its parent society, the International Society for the Study of New Religions (ISSNR), have chosen to adopt a broad definition [of “new religions”]. Articles with subject matter as diverse as conversion to Satanism (Lewis 2010), children in new religions (Van Eck Duymaer van Twist 2010), ecumenism and religious dialogue among Jehovah’s Witnesses (Chryssides 2012), new ideas of food taboo in some contemporary Jewish and Muslim communities (Theobald 2012), as well as gender and spiritual therapy in Japan (Gaitanidis 2012) have been published in *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* since its inception (Equinox 2019).

In short, the putative novelty of some religions has not proved to be of enduring interest or of interpretative or theoretical value. Other matters have attracted more interest and generated more recent—and more critical—debate. Nonetheless, “new” continues to label a swathe of religions and remains a comparative term. But with what should such religions be compared and on what basis?

Comparisons: “Indigenous”

Indigenous religions present themselves as a possible category for comparison with new religions. Before offering a short summary of what an “Indigenous religion” might be, let’s return to the capitalization of “Indigenous.” It is notable that not all authors in this book follow this practice. Indeed, in

coining the term “indigenizing” Paul Johnson does not do so either. Why is “Indigenous” capitalized here and elsewhere? What does the capital letter gain and offer?

The capitalized “Indigenous” and the lower-case “indigenous” might be synonymous in some contexts. Both can be used to refer to communities which self-identify in ways that the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) indicates in its “working definition.”

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system (UNPFII 2004, 2).

It is the self-determination recognized in this statement that is marked by the strategic capitalization of “Indigenous” elsewhere by many (but by no means all) Indigenous people.

Matters could be put this way: “indigenous” is more broadly applicable than “Indigenous,” pointing to the origins (e.g. of persons, oranges or chickens) in particular places at some point in time. In contrast, the capitalized “Indigenous” can indicate more specific projects of community or world construction in which colonialization, marginalization and the extinguishing, distancing and other manoeuvres of so-called “Modern Western cultures” are contested. (“Modern” and “Western” are also capitalized here for strategic, polemical or heuristic purposes—which could be expanded on by reference to Latour 1993, 2013). Such modes of Indigeneity are not merely reactive (let alone reactionary) but involve creative exploration of the contemporary value and use of customary practices, processes and protocols (see Allen 2012, building on Jahnke 2006).

That such exploration takes place surrounded by settler States and other continuing colonialisms is just one aspect of the relationality of the term “Indigenous.” (The same is true for terms like “indigenous,” “native,” “aboriginal” or any of the myriad specific terms for particular Indigenous nations and other communities when used of people for whom the capitalized Indigenous is employed here.) Relations and challenges work both ways and it is not only those who claim to be Indigenous who distinguish those so labelled from other kinds of person. Distinction and differentiation can involve significant

violence against Indigenous people (individuals or communities). These are matters to be tackled. However, the fact being focused on here is that of the relationship between those people, communities and concerns which are (or can be said to be) Indigenous and those which are nonindigenous. As the Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena argues in relation to Andean world-making (2015, 188), the Indigenous and the nonindigenous emerge together, inseparably even when they seek separation. These are necessarily comparative terms, relations not boxed identities, and, as is the case with all relations, their entanglement leads to their exceeding what they might be alone. Like two threads in a tapestry, it is their embraidedness that shows us more of the picture than we would see were the threads alone.

One more element of the contrast at issue here is raised by the Indigenous botanist Robin Kimmerer's struggles with the question of whether people (specifically North American settlers) can *become* Indigenous. She writes,

Against the backdrop of [settler] history, an invitation to settler society to become indigenous to place feels like a free ticket to a housebreaking party. It could be read as an open invitation to take what little is left (Kimmerer 2013, 211).

She is clear that "Immigrants cannot by definition be indigenous" but (drawing on her botanical expertise and vocabulary) she argues that while some settlers remain invasive, others *can* "naturalize" (2013, 213–214). While the focus of this book is not on settlers but on Europeans still in Europe, Kimmerer's "naturalizing" might have some kinship with the key term at issue here: "indigenizing." Before committing ourselves to a discussion of "indigenizing" there are other comparisons and comparative terms that require attention.

What makes a religion indigenous?

In the essay from which the term "indigenizing" is drawn Paul Johnson proposes that Indigenous religions may be defined "as the religions of those communities that imagine themselves in indigenous style—as organically bound to a land site" (Johnson 2002, 306). This is a good starting point. Indeed, it serves as such for the final chapter of this book: Bjørn Ola Tafjord's powerful response both to Johnson and to the chapters between this introduction and his afterword. The emphasis on land and peoplehood (sometimes conceived of as relationships with specific ancestors and/or what they handed on to current generations) is a common but not uncontested feature of many other discussions of what makes a religion "Indigenous." It is important to be clear that the phrase "Indigenous religions" is more specific than the phrase

“the religions of Indigenous people.” Such people might identify (even to the exclusion of other possibilities) as Baha’is, Christians, Muslims, Rastafarians, or any of the myriad other religions available to them. However, it is equally important to note that indigenizing processes might not only be observable among those thoroughly committed to enacting religious traditions inherited from “traditional” ancestors but also among those Bahais, Christians, Muslims, Rastafarians and others. They too are able to learn from others and to adopt and adapt what seems helpful to them.

Significant recent collections that debate such matters include Greg Johnson and Siv Ellen Kraft’s (2017) *Handbook of Indigenous Religion(s)*, Christopher Hartney and Daniel J. Tower’s (2017) *Religious Categories and the Construction of the Indigenous*, and the four volume set of readings presented by Graham Harvey and Amy Whitehouse (2019) as *Indigenous Religions: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*. These and other publications demonstrate that the question of the meaning or reference of the term “Indigenous religions” remains unsettled and challenging. However, something about the centrality of land and locatedness are clear enough to offer a contrast with religions that emphasize other-worldliness or transcendence. Again, then, we are confronted by another comparison—albeit one that is frequently debated by those involved in the study of Indigenous religions. It is, at any rate, employed strategically here to enable a discussion to continue.

Comparisons: “World”

A more widespread debate and a more prevalent contrast involves noting that academics who study religion(s) have vociferously contested the term “World religions” for some decades. This is invaluable surveyed and developed by contributors to Chris Cotter and David Robertson’s (2016) *After World Religions: Reconstructing Religious Studies*. The labelling of particular religions as “World”, “new” or “Indigenous” is not innocent—it is rarely merely descriptive but generally argumentative. Privilege and prejudice is at least implicit in the claim to own the label “world” (as in “world class”). “World religions” is, after all, not contrasted with “Martian religions” but with “minority religions,” “folk religions,” “ethnic religions,” “syncretic religions,” “popular religions,” and other alleged errors of belief or practice. For this reason alone, I have capitalized “World”.

Any claim that “World” *is* in fact simply descriptive actually distorts matters and conversations. Particular approaches, methods and positions are embroiled in its usage. It is arguable that studies of new religions and Indigenous religions have reinvigorated the academic study of religions in recent

decades. They have certainly challenged the dominance of a focus on those so-called “World religions” and, more significantly, they have contested the approaches and attitudes that have infused the study of those religions. It is usually the case that those “World religions” are approached theologically—or at least from an assumption that normative teachings and institutions define the real or proper version of any religion (or of the only versions worthy of study). Meanwhile, “new religions” have more often been approached sociologically and “Indigenous religions” have largely been approached anthropologically. In both cases, the questions asked and the issues explored are often about the doing of religion in diverse and changing ways.

It is, then, the contrast between an approaches which is important. The “World religions” approach imagines that the proper topic of study is a formulation of correctly believed or practiced religions. In contrast, most scholars of religion prefer and promote approaches to that get to the lived, vernacular and material realities of religions. In view of our interest in indigenizing practices, these contests between approaches might also be evoked in the contrast between the terms “syncretism” and “compositions.” The first indicates that it is wrong to mix proper beliefs and practices from one place or community with those from elsewhere. This can only result in confusion and the need for corrective lessons. Some colleagues contrast this with “hybridity,” which indicates that combinations of different ideas and practices generate interesting new combinations. However, in the different context of studying animal-human relations Vinciane Despret argues that

Hybridization remains a matter of “combination,” thus of the reproduction of certain characteristics of the two “parent” species... Metamorphoses, conversely, retranslates “combinations” into a system of “compositions,” a system that remains open to surprise and to the event: “other things” can arise that profoundly modify beings and their relations. (Despret 2016, 190)

The great advantage of Despret’s “composition” is that points to open ended, on-going processes and to the anticipation of surprise in our studies of what happens. It is this that emboldens us to wonder if indigenization can tell us anything new or interesting about European religious movements.

Indigenizing in European religious movements

Since the mid-twentieth century, members of religious movements identified as Paganism, shamanism, native faiths and others have experimented with at least three forms of indigeneity (or “being indigenous”). These might overlap and reinforce one another. The first is seen in claims to be reviving or re-presenting religious practices from ancestral, pre-Christian or pre-Modern

times. The second form of indigeneity is found in lessons learnt (directly or indirectly) from Indigenous peoples (especially Native Americans, Siberians and/or Amazonians). A third form, of increasing prominence since the late twentieth century, has been an emphasis on localizing rather than on universality. In line with broader European cultural trends, some of the rhetoric of these claims to indigeneity have been implicated in the construction of identities (putative ways of being distinct from others). However, arguably they are more helpfully understood as practices, projects or processes. It is the recognition of the performative character of discourses and practices related to indigeneity which led Johnson (2002) to encourage examination of processes of indigenizing. This book tests the interpretive and methodological value of this approach in relation to selected European religious movements and phenomena.

The following chapters present seven case studies. These involve Irish Paganism (Jenny Butler), British animist spirituality (Graham Harvey), Glastonbury Goddess devotion (Amy Whitehead), British Druidry (Suzanne Owen), European powwow enthusiasts (Christina Welch), Italian shamanism (Angela Puca) and Lithuanian Anastasians (Rasa Pranskevičiūtė). They have been selected so as to enable a range of different relations between European movements and (other-than-European) Indigenous cultures. Presentation of relevant data will orientate readers to these movements, and explore the varied processes by which such Europeans have learnt from or among Indigenous peoples, or from the scholarly or popular literatures presenting these for consideration. Authors are also attentive to the possibility that less than respectful practices of appropriation from Indigenous people underlie any apparent similarity between European and Indigenous practices. (It is significant that Johnson published about appropriation and shamanisms some years before he developed his argument about indigenizing, see Johnson 1995.) A response by Bjørn Ola Tafjord focusses on the theoretical and conceptual value of the panellists' reflections and arguments. It considers important questions for the practice of the study of religions—whatever category of religion is in view. In these ways, this book aims to enhance understanding and enrich debate both about evolving European movements and also about the concepts and practices of Indigeneity, indigenizing and of scholarly practices in relation to such phenomena.

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