
Book Review

Siv Ellen Kraft, *Indigenous Religion(s) in Sápmi: Reclaiming Sacred Grounds* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 203 pp., \$120 (hbk) ISBN: 9871032019239.

In her new book, Siv Ellen Kraft deals with Sámi religion today, or to be more exact, with the return of indigenous Sámi religion to public discourses from the end of the 1970s to the present. Or, to be even more exact, the book is about how notions of a global indigenous religion, considered more or less common to so-called indigenous peoples all over the world, has taken shape in Sápmi, the traditional homeland of the Sámi, the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia. In particular Kraft focuses on the Sámi of Norway, where she has performed most of her field studies. She defines the concept of indigenous religion(s) as ‘neither a type of religion, nor a catch-all category for religion in indigenous contexts’ (p. 16). Rather it refers to ‘that which counts as “indigenous” and “religious” in an increasingly connected world, and to translations between a globalising discourse (indigenous religion in the singular) and distinct local traditions (indigenous religions in the plural)’ (p. 16).

In identifying this globalizing discourse, she relies on previous mappings by scholars such as Ronald Niezen (2012) and James Clifford (2013), the latter of which lists examples of a shared symbolic repertoire in this discourse, for example: ‘shamanism’, ‘Mother Earth’, ‘the sacred’, wisdom of ‘elders’, stewardship of the ‘land’ in question, and ‘sovereignty’ (p. 4). Together with typically Sámi religious-cultural features—such as the *yoik* (traditional Sámi singing), the *noaidi* (translated as the Sámi version of a shaman), and the Sámi drum—a local Sámi indigenous religion has been formed on the model of global indigenous religions. However, Kraft maintains that it is not as simple as to say that the return of religion in Sápmi constitutes a mere ‘invention’, modeled on a global new religious movement, or just a renaissance of some elements from a past religion or spirituality. Instead, she approaches these formations of indigenous religion(s) in Sápmi as ‘drift matters’ (driftwood). They are ‘afterlives in the making’, as she puts it. In choosing these concepts, she is inspired by Þóra Pétursdóttir and Bjørnar Olsen (2018), who, for archaeological analyses, use the metaphor of things from the past that float ashore seemingly haphazardly and are reassembled in the present in unexpected, but useful ways. With the concept of afterlives, Kraft wishes ‘to invoke a *before* that differs from that which is *now*, connected through a past that never ended’ (pp. 34–35). These afterlives ‘restrict and enable articulations in the present’ (pp. 34–35).

The metaphorical theoretical approaches might seem vague at first glance, but they help Kraft to handle this very complex—and, it seems, somewhat contested—field, and to balance between simplified dichotomies such as tradition/innovation,

authenticity/construction, religious/secular, and even past/present. She also manages to orient at least this reader in the rather messy landscape of religion, spirituality, contemporary urban shamanism, contextual Lutheran theology, indigenous protest movements against extractive industry, ethno-political strivings, art, music, and much more.

In Chapter 1, Kraft identifies the main components involved in the study: Sámi present-day shamanism and contextual Lutheran theology that emerged (albeit with precursors) in the 1990s, and the popular notions of a particular Sámi spirituality (*vuoiŋŋalašvuohta*). The latter is supposed by some to have survived through the centuries, despite Christianization and other changes in Sámi culture. The idea behind this hypothesis is that Sámi have kept beliefs and practices from the past to themselves, revealing little or nothing to outsiders. From the perspective of historical science, such a thesis is problematic, because without consecutive documentation nothing can be sustained about continuities. What Kraft shows in the following chapters is that the continuities between present-day expressions of Sámi spirituality (as well as a few instances of more organized forms of Sámi 'religion') and global indigenous religions (not least with Native American spirituality in the front rank) that emerged from the 1970s and onwards, are much more obvious.

In Chapters 2 ('Let the river live—water is life') and 3 ('Sacred mountains—spiritual activism') she accounts for the role of indigenous religion(s) in several ethno-political protest movements against exploitation of traditional indigenous lands, both in Sápmi and in North America. The account contains many detailed and empathetic biographies of some of the main protagonists involved. Chapter 4 ('Mari Boine—vocal resistance, sonic sovereignty') is an equally empathetic biography of the arguably most renowned Sámi pop music artist, and Chapter 5 ('Drum-time revisited—the heritagization of shamanism') is dedicated to how the Sámi *noaidi* and the drum have come to the fore in Sámi cultural heritage—in popular culture, the tourist industry, art, and museum exhibitions since the 1970s. This process coincided with the formation of a common notion of indigenous peoples on the global arena. These chapters are, to a considerable part, based on Kraft's own extensive participant observations and interviews with key agents involved.

Among Kraft's most interesting findings are that indigenous Sámi religion became topical in Sámi ethno-political struggles only from the 1980s and 1990s through the beginning of the 2000s. Up until the 1970s, the rhetoric of Sámi struggles was secular. She also shows that references to Sámi religion are more pronounced at a distance from core Sámi areas and traditional Sámi settings, which are dominated by Lutheran Christianity. She finds the references to Sámi religion more in the south of Norway than in the north, more in the cities than in the countryside, more in non-Sámi news and popular media than in Sámi media and the Sámi Parliament, and more pronounced among those Sámi who have been assimilated to the majority culture of Norway and just recently started to cultivate their Sámi identity than among those growing up in more traditional settings. Several of her biographies of individual Sámi activists and artists also reveal that the indigenous spirituality has emerged as a common language in the international relations Sámi have with other indigenous peoples from other parts of the world.

Indigenous Religion(s) in Sápmi: Reclaiming Sacred Grounds is a well-written, nuanced, and thoroughly researched study that will be important not only

for students of contemporary Sámi culture and religion, but also for those interested in the international indigenous movement and in new religious movements more generally. It adds a lot to our knowledge. Kraft makes no predictions for the future development of the trends she outlines, which is wise. The appearance of indigenous religion(s) in Sápmi, as a trope in public discourse, came rather suddenly and perhaps for some surprisingly. Whether this means that it may disappear just as suddenly, and be replaced by other repertoires that better serve the purposes of the Sámi in future conditions, we do not know.

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References

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