

Modes of Indigenizing: Remarks on Indigenous Religion as a Method¹

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Romanticisms, not colonialisms, drive the indigenizing and the religionizing in the cases described and analyzed in this special issue. In what follows, I shall explain what I mean by this observation and suggest ways to think about it critically. The task of this essay is to highlight entangled methodological and political contexts for the discussion about ‘indigenizing’ that Graham Harvey opened in his introduction, a discussion that the different case studies then continued and exemplified. Inspired by Paul Christopher Johnson’s theorizing about indigenizing (Johnson 2002a), Harvey asks whether it is useful to employ the concepts ‘indigenous’ and ‘indigenizing’ in studies of contemporary movements in Europe: British Druids (studied by Suzanne Owen), Italian shamans and witches (by Angela Puca), The English Bear Tribe (by Graham Harvey), Irish or Celtic Pagans (by Jenny Butler), English Powwow enthusiasts (by Christina Welch), Anastasians in Lithuania and Russia (by Rasa Pranskevičiūtė), and Goddess devotees in Glastonbury (by Amy Whitehead).² These are movements (and scholars) that have been associated with the study of paganisms and the study of new religious movements, but usually not with the study of indigenous religions (except Harvey and Owen who have worked extensively in both fields of research).³

In the seminal essay ‘Migrating Bodies, Circulating Signs: Brazilian Candomblé, the Garifuna of the Caribbean, and the Category of Indigenous Religions,’ Johnson offers the following explication of his perspective:

Defining indigenous religions as the religions of those communities that imagine themselves in indigenous style – as organically bound to a land site – brackets the impasse between so-called romantic or essentialist and deconstructivist views of indigenous societies. Whether the Lakota actually emerged onto the surface of the earth from Wind Cave and are in an essential, primordial way the people of and from the Black Hills, versus historians’ claims that they migrated into the region and conquered it after acquiring horses around 1700, is less important for my purposes than that their community makes itself imaginatively as of and related to that place. When the Garifuna say they were the first people to settle much of the coast of Honduras and

¹ A short version of these remarks was presented in response to two panels titled ‘Indigenizing Movements in Europe’ at the 2018 conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions in Bern, Switzerland. Thanks to Graham Harvey for inviting me to comment critically on the panels and on the essays, and to the authors of the essays for their sharing of drafts and ideas. Also thanks to May-Lisbeth Brew, Sam Gill, Monica Grini, Rosalind Hackett, Helen Jennings, Greg Johnson, Siv Ellen Kraft, Arkotong Longkumer, Liudmila Nikanorova, Nils Oskal, and Håkan Rydving for their critical and encouraging comments to my remarks.

² I call them ‘movements’ because this is the descriptor that has been used in the discussions that the present essay is part of, but they could equally well be called ‘communities.’

³ In addition to their work in pagan studies, which is what they mainly draw and build on here, Harvey and Owen are widely known also for their studies of indigenous religions in other contexts (see, for example, Harvey 2000; 2013; 2016a; 2016b; Ralls-MacLeod & Harvey 2000; Harvey & Thompson 2005; Owen 2008; 2010; 2017).

Belize and forget that within a generation after their arrival in 1797 they drove the Miskito, already there, east to what is now Nicaragua, this historical fact is less important in this article than how the Garifuna understand and discursively present themselves to make community in the present. (Johnson 2002a: 306)

This is also the analytical stance that Harvey, Owen, Puca, Butler, Welch, Pranskevičiūtė, and Whitehead have attempted to take with regard to the European cases they study. The outcome of their efforts makes me think it is time to revisit some of the issues that Johnson tries to bypass or bracket.

I propose that we, as analysts, try to distinguish, roughly, between three different poles or, better, different modes of indigenizing: between, first, indigenizing in colonial and anti-colonial modes, second, indigenizing in romantic modes, and, third, indigenizing in nationalist modes. There are both analytical and political reasons for making these distinctions and using this triadic scale. Below I shall make plain some of those reasons. Note first that the modes are heuristic ideal types, carved out by abstracting empirical observations of histories and identity politics.⁴ They represent three different but related ideological currents. Deliberations on the meanings and uses of ‘indigenous’ and ‘indigenizing’ cannot escape historical and political realities. Scholarship is perhaps more entangled than ever before in broader ideological struggles that involve these concepts.

In practice, most cases of indigenizing are positioned somewhere in between the extremes of my triadic scale, and the qualities signaled by the different modes often overlap or mingle. But the preceding case studies of contemporary European religious movements produce notably different perspectives on what ‘indigenous’ and ‘indigenizing’ might entail than the one that Paul Johnson has developed in his study of the Garifuna in Honduras and Candomblé practitioners in Brazil (Johnson 2002a; see also Johnson 2002b; 2007). Whereas indigenizing in romantic modes can certainly be found also in Johnson’s material, colonial and anti-colonial modes, which are fundamental as contexts for Candomblé practitioners and the Garifuna, are almost absent in these European cases. The difference between, on the one hand, indigenizing in colonial and anti-colonial modes and, on the other hand, indigenizing in romantic modes is most significant here, and I will focus on that first.⁵

Colonial and anti-colonial versus romantic modes of indigenizing

After reading the essays, my immediate thought was that they would have caused serious controversy if presented in Tromsø, the major town in the Norwegian part of Sápmi, or the Sami territory, where I live. The same would probably have happened if they were presented, say, at a meeting of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) or the American Academy of Religion (AAR), instead of the 2018 meeting of the European

⁴ Johnson (2002a: 311-313), too, presents his use of ‘indigenous’ as an ideal type in the Weberian sense. Like Johnson, I do not intend to suggest that some modes of indigenizing are more authentic than other modes. I agree with his caution that ‘[w]e should take care that the category of indigenous religions, like the primitive and archaic before it, not serve as an epistemological and comparative anchor. [...] that the category not be used as our own [academic] crisis response, a fetish in a quixotian quest for stable, located meanings’ (Johnson 2002a: 327; for comparable perspectives, see Clifford 2013; Johnson 2008).

⁵ Indigenizing in nationalist modes is not prominent neither in Johnson’s cases nor in most of the cases analyzed in this special issue (the exception is the Anastasians). Nonetheless, indigenizing in nationalist modes needs to be taken into serious account because reflections of it start appearing once we dig deeper into the cases and their contexts, and especially because it plays conspicuous roles in many political practices today both in Europe and elsewhere. I will address the relevance of this in a separate section below.

Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) in Bern, Switzerland. Representatives of communities who are legally and politically recognized as ‘indigenous peoples’ were largely absent in Bern. In comparison, in Tromsø, at NAISA, or at the AAR, there are always persons who self-identify as members of indigenous peoples attending panels on indigenous issues, and the scholar/activist interface is different from the EASR. In these places, it is very likely that some of the audience would have objected strongly to the attempts by European scholars to analyze these contemporary religious movements in Europe as ‘indigenous’ or ‘indigenizing.’

Among the Bribri in Talamanca, on the border between Costa Rica and Panama, where I have done fieldwork several times since the turn of the millennium, the claim that these European groups and their practices can be seen as *indígenas* or indigenous would probably be met with laughter. Most people there would have brushed this off as nonsense. But if one kept insisting that Europeans and some of their practices are indigenous, many Bribris would take offense, because they regard themselves, and not foreigners, and especially not Europeans, as the authority when it comes to questions about whether someone or something is indigenous or not. From their perspectives, Europeans and European practices belong in a completely different category.⁶

In places like Tromsø and Talamanca, people have personal and communal experiences with colonialisms. Colonial histories and situations are also the base upon which a new globalizing movement of ‘indigenous peoples’ has emerged in recent decades, supported by the United Nations and numerous other international organizations (see for example Clifford 2013; Niezen 2003; 2009).⁷ These experiences and this movement have produced a strong anti-colonial discourse of indigeneity. This not only frames how many Samis, Bribris, and Native Americans now self-identify and recognize each other as indigenous, it also makes it unlikely that they would recognize as equally indigenous the groups or movements described in the essays of this special issue.

The international indigenous peoples’ movement is a semi-coordinated act of resistance against historical and ongoing colonialisms (Clifford 2013; Niezen 2003; 2009). Some of these colonialisms have been and continue to be very violent, even deadly, in several cases to the point of extermination or near extermination of people as well as practices.⁸ Religion, especially, is a sensitive topic because missionizing – the imposing of a new religion and attempts to eradicate an old one – has long been a significant component in most if not all of these colonialisms.⁹ Even more important here, historically, the majority of the colonizers have been Europeans and descendants of Europeans. In the perspectives of most members of

⁶ On Bribris’ uses of *indígena* and ‘indigenous’, see Tafjord 2016a; 2016b. From Bribri perspectives, Europeans are *sikuapa*, originally made from a different substance and in a different way than *skowak*, *indígenas* or indigenous peoples (see also Bozzoli 1979; Nygren 1998).

⁷ The major institutional instruments of the international indigenous peoples’ movement include the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the International Labour Organization’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO169).

⁸ The massive and relatively recent – but, by the broader public, largely ignored – genocide of ‘Indians,’ Native Americans, First Nations, or indigenous peoples in the territories that today are the USA and Canada, is a case in point. This has included the extermination of many of their practices, and deep transformations of their remaining practices. Systematic oppression and discrimination of Native Americans or First Nations continue in the USA and Canada today. See, for example, Deloria 1988; Nabokov 1999; Niezen 2000; Simpson 2014.

⁹ Missionizing has often contributed substantially to the altering of identities, sometimes weakening and sometimes empowering both indigenous identities and identities as ‘indigenous’ (see for example Comaroff & Comaroff 1997; Longkumer 2018a; Tafjord 2016b).

the international indigenous peoples' movement, and in the political and legal frameworks sanctioned by the UN and other international institutions, indigenous peoples are those who have endured and resisted European colonialisms over the past five centuries.¹⁰

It is therefore critical to make a distinction between, on the one hand, indigenous peoples and indigeneity as this is articulated and understood by, say, Bribris in Talamanca, or Samis in Tromsø, or by those who congregate at NAISA or at UN meetings, and, on the other hand, the indigeness claimed by or attributed to the religious movements described in the essays of this special issue: British Druids, Italian shamans and witches, the English Bear Tribe, Irish Pagans, European Powwow enthusiasts, Anastasians in Lithuania and Russia, and Goddess devotees in Glastonbury.

One of the clearest commonalities of these contemporary European movements, as we get to know them through the essays, is their salient romanticisms. They all represent indigeness – or 'imagined indigeness' – in European romantic modes. Each in their own way, they recycle old and invent new ideas about golden but oppressed and almost forgotten local religious pasts, about grand religious ancestors or rare noble Others who can serve as exemplary guides to (post)modern seekers, and about nature worship and nature religion that can be revived or imported. They locate what they see as the ideal – that which they try to rescue and revitalize – either in a different and more glorious time or, as in the case of the Powwow enthusiasts, in a different and more glorious community and place. Primordialism and primitivism are positively valued parts of their ideologies, ethically as well as aesthetically. It is common to interpret the history of romantic ideas and movements in Europe as driven by complex reactions to modernity, including colonialism (see, for example, Bauman & Briggs 2003; Geertz 2004; Lincoln 1999; Penny 2014).

Presumably, most adults are members in these romantic religious movements voluntarily. Thereby, insofar as they represent marginalized minorities in the larger societies, they have put themselves in this position by adopting particular identities, ideas, and practices. Regardless of how wholehearted their commitment and how difficult the discrimination that they face may be, this marks a major difference from indigenous peoples who have not joined their communities by voluntary action, who have been subjugated or marginalized against their own will, and who cannot freely abandon the positions that they are held in by colonial actors and structures.

Due to all of the above, it is crucial that scholars do not copy uncritically, and turn into academic analytical strategies, the ways in which some members of these religious movements in Europe today compare themselves to indigenous peoples around the world. Nor should we duplicate naively, as scholarly analyses, how members of the international indigenous peoples' movement now compare themselves to each other and to others.¹¹ Yet we must take very seriously the comparisons and the analyses that the members of these movements make.

¹⁰ To accommodate the Garifuna and the Candomblé practitioners, who Johnson writes about, in the hegemonic discourse on indigeneity and coloniality is much easier (although not straightforward) than to do the same with the European movements analyzed in this special issue. Note that references to the Garifuna as indigenous (see for example Anderson 2009; Johnson 2002a; 2007; Palacio 2007) occur more often than references to Candomblé practitioners as indigenous. Frequently, members of both these groups are also described as African-Americans, African diaspora, or descendants of Africans. In now dominant international discourses on indigenous peoples, they represent neither prototypical indigenous Americans nor prototypical indigenous Africans.

¹¹ Needless to say, scholars should not adopt colonial or nationalist ways of comparing and analyzing either.

Complicating intersections

But are not some of these European movements also engaging in colonial and anti-colonial modes of indigenizing? Consider, for example, the Powwow enthusiasts who, when they mimic Native Americans, elevate a community that has suffered from colonization and, in the process, offer an implicit critique of the dominant society of which they are a part.¹² I would argue that they do this, too, in a predominantly romantic mode. They celebrate the figure of the noble Indian. Their appropriation of Plains Indian practices and aesthetics comes across as an example of the kind of caricature that many Native Americans and members of other legally recognized indigenous peoples have termed neo-colonial and reacted to with indignation (see, for example, Deloria 1988; Hilleary 2017; 2018; Owen 2008).

What about the critical stances of these European religious movements with regard to contemporary Christianity and their ideas about the historical Christian colonization of Europe? If the propagation and rule of Christianity in Europe can be seen as colonization, then it was arguably a different colonial project than the ones that people elsewhere in the world were subjected to by European powers from the 16th century onwards. The spread of Christianity in Europe was conducted by Europeans in a remoter past. Moreover, by applying Johnson's perspective without further qualifying it, one could easily argue that if any religion has become indigenous or indigenized in Europe in the past millennium, it is Christianity.¹³ When looking beyond Europe from this vantage point, it becomes conspicuous how, over the past 500 years, as part of their colonial practices, Europeans and their descendants have – with relative but often remarkable success – tried to overthrow other indigenous religions in order to establish their own indigenous religion as a universal religion.¹⁴ Without such contextual considerations, the comparison of contemporary religious movements in Europe with the communities that in recent centuries have been most marginalized by European colonialism, through the analyses of the former as 'indigenous' or 'indigenizing', might become an invitation to anachronistic thinking. It also risks relativizing the brutal colonial histories and structures that many members of the international indigenous peoples' movement are facing, and that provide a legal basis for the recognition of indigenous peoples internationally. This, however, does not mean that the druids, the shamans, the witches, the bear tribe, the pagans, the Anastasians, and the goddess devotees may not be marginalized too.

As I have argued elsewhere (Tafjord 2013; 2017; see also Tafjord & Alles 2018), 'indigenous religion' does not always mean the traditional religion of an indigenous people. This phrase has been used in different ways also by scholars. For sure, to introduce general restrictions on uses of categories does not advance serious scholarship. For example, if we, for analytical purposes, employ 'indigenous religion' as a historically and geographically contingent relational concept (as the opposite of 'exogenous religion'), then we might appreciate, from a vast historical distance, reports about druids and paganism as descriptions of elements of pre-Christian European indigenous religions (for example Tacitus' reports, see Woolf 2013). Sound critique of the historical sources is a prerequisite for this approach, which quickly

¹² As shown by H. Glenn Penny (2014), in his study of a comparable German movement, many participants see what they do also as a celebration of values that are indigenous both to their own community and to Native Americans. Some Native American persons have participated in these gatherings and embraced this perspective.

¹³ This resonates with the ideas of some contemporary European nationalists. See below.

¹⁴ Over the course of the past century, in the study of religion, it has become common to refer to Christianity as a 'world religion' (see for example Masuzawa 2005; Smith 1998), a classification which suggests that it is different from and even more than an indigenous religion (see also Cox 2007).

discloses that the contemporary religious movements in Europe are very different from the ancient communities who they purport to revive. Such a historical-critical approach furthermore reveals that these religious movements are relatively new and that they have emerged and become socially embedded somewhere in Europe. But beyond laying bare these rudimentary facts, this approach has little to offer the analysis of the cases.

Much like Johnson, I find it more interesting to notice, through the essays, how members of these new religious movements claim that they actually *represent* a pre-Christian European religion today. The religious or spiritual continuity from pre-Christian times to the present seems to be a key component in the movements' narratives about themselves, or a vital part of their myths. What I would have liked to see even more of in the case studies is detailed descriptions and analytical unpacking of *how* different actors discursively connect with distant local religious pasts. What I miss, except in Welch's study of the Powwowers, is deeper discussions of the histories of their ideas, which would have led us to European Romanticism. I also wonder how the authors reflect on their own analyses in relation to this ideological current.

Of course, heavily colonized and widely recognized indigenous peoples are also often romantic and imaginative in their dealings with their past (see, for example, Gill 1987). In fact, now and then, everyone seems guilty of romanticism in some shape and degree. But colonial situations and structures, as well as colonial and anti-colonial histories and horizons, catalyze and condition romanticizing in critical ways. Experiences of discrimination, violence, and loss make the imagining and idealizing of bygone times, and of a community without the colonizers, a key tool for resilience and endurance.

To inscribe oneself in some of the romantic images of the colonizers, for example by joining forces with environmentalists who envision indigenous peoples as ecological sages living in harmony with nature (see, for example, Conklin & Graham 1995; Ødemark 2017), is one strategy that members of indigenous peoples have sometimes used. Widespread romantic stereotypes about indigenous peoples have been effective also in and for the international indigenous peoples' movement, by offering informal criteria for mutual identification between otherwise very different peoples, and by providing international organizations and states, which are still strongly influenced by colonial gazes, with platforms for intuitive as well as formal recognition of certain communities as indigenous (see, for example, Hodgson 2014). 'Strategic essentialism' (see, for example, Bell 2014; Spivak 1996) is a term that leaders in this movement often use when they talk about this.

When members of the contemporary religious movements in Europe try to indigenize by comparing themselves to indigenous peoples, what they tap into are usually romantic stereotypes developed first by European colonizers and later – now appropriated and deployed more or less strategically – by indigenous peoples themselves.¹⁵ The essays show remarkably few examples of direct and deliberate dialogue between members of the European movements and members of indigenous peoples from other continents. The most influential sources for these European religious movements' ideas about indigenous peoples seem to be travel

¹⁵ See, for example, Longkumer 2015 for an instructive case study of how an indigenous community has appropriated and taken advantage of once colonial stereotypes about themselves.

reports and fiction – films as well as literature – but also scholars and academic texts. For the English Bear Tribe, for example, Graham Harvey’s work plays a vital role.¹⁶

Nationalist affinities

A lack of firsthand engagement with internationally recognized indigenous peoples comes through also in the anthology *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses* edited by Kathryn Rountree (2015), which contains thirteen case studies of comparable European groups.¹⁷ Surprisingly, although Rountree’s book has ‘colonialist impulses’ in its subtitle, there is hardly any mentioning of European colonialism and its consequences for indigenous peoples, not even in her introduction called ‘Context is everything.’ Insofar as she and the other contributors speak about colonialism, they mean something very different, namely how mainly British and North-American pagan leaders of different stripes influence local pagans in places like Malta and Flanders.

Many of the case studies in Rountree’s anthology focus on overt nationalists. In comparison, only some of the groups described in the present volume, most notably the Anastasians in Russia, openly express support of political nationalism. Yet, the fact that others, like the British Druids, on their webpages and elsewhere, repeatedly must underscore that they do not back nationalist and racist ideas, indicates that they attract sympathies from the far right and that their teachings to some extent have affinity, at least structurally, with current right-wing ideologies.

In Europe today, nationalist movements are expanding rapidly and many of them thrive on a rhetoric of indigeneness. They, too, indigenize in romantic modes as they link national culture and peoplehood to territory and religion while imagining, idealizing, and wanting to restore a more pure and glorious society of the past. In Norway, where I live, the most extreme and infamous examples of attempts to indigenize religions in romantic nationalist modes are those of the convicted individuals Anders B. Breivik, with his ideas about Christendom (see, for example, Juergensmeyer 2017: 20-23; Bangstad 2014), and Varg Vikernes, with his ideas about pre-Christian Norse traditions (see, for example, Hagen 2011).¹⁸ But they are far from alone in their ways of thinking. Much like Breivik, the Nordic as well as the British Defense League cast Christianity as the indigenous religion of Europe in opposition to Islam, which they portray as alien and invasive (see, for example, Meleagrou-Hitchens & Brun 2013). Viktor Orbán’s political and ideological movement in Hungary does the same (see, for example, Fekete 2016; Orbán 2007), as do several other comparable movements across Europe today.¹⁹

¹⁶ They also report being inspired by bear poetry and traditions from Finnish, Sami, Khanty Mansi, Ainu, and Nivkh peoples. See the English Bear Tribe’s homepage http://www.ancientmusic.co.uk/bear_tribe/about.html (accessed 8 October 2018).

¹⁷ A notable exception is shown by Siv Ellen Kraft (2015) in her study of Sami neo-shamanism in Norway. Whereas the other case studies in Rountree’s anthology all fit comfortably in the academic box of neo-paganism, Kraft’s study fruitfully disturbs the customary boundary between the study of neo-paganism and the study of indigenous religions. Kraft sheds light on a conceptual and empirical middle ground, or ‘third space,’ where complex interaction between not only indigenous traditions and neo-pagan movements but also scholarship takes place. This middle ground deserves much more attention from scholars.

¹⁸ For more examples of groups who idealize and practice what they see as pre-Christian European religions, and who are hostile to Christianity, see Rountree 2015.

¹⁹ Examples of comparable movements with similar strategies abound also outside of Europe. To mention just two, take Christian nationalists in the USA (see, for example, Whitehead, Perry & Baker 2018), or the Hindutva movement in India (see, for example, Longkumer 2017). Evidently, these two cases, one in a colonial settler

I must underscore immediately that neither the British druids nor the Italian shamans and witches, the Bear Tribe, the Irish pagans, the Powwow enthusiasts, or the Goddess devotees do seem xenophobic or obsessed with nationhood. On the contrary, in the essays, they come across as cultural introverts, or in the case of the Powwowers, as dedicated fans of a foreign culture. Instead of being concerned with the policing of borders, they seem occupied with a search for insights in what they regard as the heart of their own traditions or, again in the powwowing case, in what they regard as the core of a spiritually superior civilization. They are depicted as seekers who are open-minded towards other societies and cultures, contemporary as well as historical ones, and who are mostly inclusive in their practices and attitudes. Nevertheless, it is evident that many of the arguments that inspire them also inspire right-wing nationalists, and both these camps align their own discourses with international discourses on and of indigenous peoples.

In their struggles for sovereignty, and against continuing colonization, many of those who are recognized as indigenous peoples in UN fora practice some sort of nationalism linked with religion, too.²⁰ Naga movements in Northeast India is one obvious example (see, for example, Longkumer 2018a; 2018b), and some Native Hawaiian movements is another (see, for example, Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Hussey & Wright 2014; Johnson 2017). However, these practices are, in most cases, reactive and secondary to indigenizing in colonial and anti-colonial modes.²¹ Therefore, analytically, it is crucial to consider the explicit or implicit nationalisms of different indigenous peoples' rights and sovereignty movements as visionary assemblages of alternative orders, advanced in long-lasting and at times violent struggles against coloniality. Then we can also examine how they draw on and conjure up (often romanticized) memories of pre-colonial or early contact institutions, and how they imagine (often in romanticized fashion) new collective paths towards a decolonized future.

As all of the above suggests, in practice, the boundaries between indigenizing in colonial and anti-colonial modes versus romantic modes versus nationalist modes are far from clear-cut. Yet I do think it is important for scholars to take into account the differences between these three modes of indigenizing. I will return to this toward the end of this essay, but first I shall tackle Harvey's question about the usefulness of the concepts 'indigenous' and 'indigenizing' from another angle.

Useful for whom, for what, and in which contexts?

Harvey's invitation to test the utility of the concepts 'indigenous' and 'indigenizing', and the responses that have come in the foregoing essays, call for three clarifying questions: Useful for whom? Useful for what? Useful in which contexts?

state, the other in a post-colonial state, further complicate the issue of relations between indigenizing in colonial and anti-colonial, romantic, and nationalist modes in ways that are beyond the scope of this essay.

²⁰ Due to the colonial history and ring of 'religion,' in many communities the preferred term for practices that would otherwise fit in scholarly definitions of religion is 'spirituality.'

²¹ Fifteen years ago, the anthropologist Adam Kuper started a heated debate with the publication of the essay 'The Return of the Native' (2003). In it, he claims that the indigenous peoples' movement promoted by the UN thrives on old notions of primitive peoples and 'exploits the very general European belief that true citizenship is a matter of ties of blood and soil' (Kuper 2003: 395). Numerous responses critical of Kuper's critique followed, among them Ramos 2003; Kenrick & Lewis 2004; Saugestad 2004; and Barnard 2006.

To the first question: The case studies have demonstrated that scholars, as well as the folks whom they study, can and do use the term ‘indigenous’ successfully, or creatively, in their differing projects, which in spite of diverging purposes (see below) all contribute to an indigenizing of certain European people, practices, objects, and ideas. Actually, there is a larger lexicon of indigeneity doing effective work for the scholars as well as for the communities studied. ‘Native,’ ‘tribe,’ ‘spirituality,’ and ‘shamanism’ are just some among the many other concepts that circulate in and travel between scholarly language and the religious, political, or otherwise ideological and pragmatic rhetoric of the people populating the studies.

The second question draws attention to the particular ends that ‘indigenous’ and the related concepts here serve. Obviously, detailed uses are best described and contextualized in the case studies. However, on a more general level, several sorts of uses may be observed. First, note how these concepts are used for *analysis*. They are employed as theoretical tools, either heuristically or with more fixed meanings and results. Scholars use them for analysis all the time, and so do others.²² Those whom scholars study (with) do their analyses, too, often with the same concepts that scholars use. What Arthur Pendragon, one of the leaders of the British Druids, offers in the BBC interview quoted by Owen where he says that ‘We are looking at the indigenous religion of these isles – it’s not a new religion but one of the oldest,’ is clearly also an analysis that parallels (and competes with) scholarly analyses. To make his claim, he has sought, observed and interpreted data, and theorized based on his findings.

The same concepts are used for *politics*, that is, for making and influencing agendas, decisions, programs, and projects. For example, as Owen notes, Pendragon seeks not only official recognition of Druidry as a historical British religion but also special access to Stonehenge, and he wants a reburial of the human remains found there to take place. Furthermore, the concepts are used for making *history*, either to tell alternative histories or to authenticate a more or less established narrative about the past, or to give an account located somewhere in between alternative and established versions. Puca, for example, reports how those who identify as witches and shamans in Italy today speak about the continuous existence of persons like themselves in their families or local communities throughout history.

Another field of usage for ‘indigenous’ and the related concepts is *ethics*. They are deployed to sanction particular kinds of behavior, for instance in the English Bear Tribe where an emphasis on humans’ place in the food chain generates critical reflections about and ritual protocols for the treatment of animals and eating. There, indigenous foodways become synonymous with ethical foodways. The concepts are used also for *aesthetics*, to convey or create certain expressions, impressions, expectations, gazes, emanations, auras, appreciations, or sensations. Feathers, ponchos, and moccasins are not the only things that the English Powwow enthusiasts put on; they also dress up in concepts like ‘Indian,’ ‘native,’ ‘indigenous,’ and ‘spiritual.’ Moreover, the concepts are used frequently for doing *theology* or theologizing, for instance, in Glastonbury, in order to think about a Goddess in particular ways. *Sociality* and *identification* are yet other uses of the concepts, including the formation and maintenance of social groups, or of ‘Us’ and ‘Others’, through inclusion and exclusion, association and disassociation. Take, for example, Butler’s Irish or Celtic Pagans. By making ‘Celtic’ a central node in their articulations of indigeneity, they are able to bypass troubled connotations of Irishness, and include people beyond Ireland in their group, as well as practices that others would see as Catholic in their activities. At the same time, they

²² For an overview of various ways in which scholars use ‘indigenous religion(s),’ see Tafjord 2017.

distinguish themselves from those who are not Celtic and their activities from those with a Christian and not Celtic pedigree. Hence they attain senses of both sharedness and specialness. *Legal recognition* is sometimes sought and made possible by uses of these concepts. The context of Pendragon's claim to BBC was the British Charity Commission's official classification of Druidry as a religion. The concepts are also making certain *economies* thrive, as they brand and add value to products, including religious objects or practices, and make them more attractive on some markets. They are handy, for example for the Anastasians, when they make efforts to spread, grow, and root their ideas and practices in different Slavic and Baltic communities. Not to forget, the use of 'indigenous' and related concepts also make the study of paganisms (and its scholars) more interesting on a larger academic marketplace. These are just some of the sorts or fields of uses that can be observed in and generalized from the foregoing case studies.²³ It is important to note that in practice, it is rarely if ever possible to speak about only one such usage without leaving out important aspects of an enterprise or an event. Multiple simultaneous uses – some more conscious or foregrounded than others – seems to be the rule.

The third question, about contexts, is impossible to answer in general terms. The successfulness of the deployment of 'indigenous' and 'indigenizing' is contextually contingent. Like I have pointed out above, uses of 'indigenous' and 'indigenizing' that may be welcomed in some scholarly contexts, for example in the study of paganisms, may be met with criticism in other scholarly contexts, for example in indigenous studies. The case studies in this special issue demonstrate a bewildering array of situations in which indigenizing is efficacious, often in various ways at the same time, both for scholars and for others. Comparable selections of case studies of indigenizing of religions among legally recognized indigenous peoples, or among nationalists, would have provided insights into significantly different contexts, where the usefulness of the concepts would have played out in other ways.

Indigenizing and religionizing

In addition to shedding light on indigenizing, the case studies in this special issue provide glimpses of processes that we might think of as 'religionizing' (or 'religionization,' or 'religionification,' see Dressler 2013; 2019; Tafjord 2016a; 2016b). By religionizing, I mean the assembling and translation of practices, practitioners, objects, and ideas into representations or instances of 'religion' or 'religiosity.' The treatment of these contemporary European movements as religions or religious depends on such procedures. Even if the authors of the essays do not address this issue explicitly, they all engage in religionizing in this sense, as do many of the members of the movements that they study. Those who take for granted that they study or participate in religion do this unconsciously. If we think of indigenizing in parallel terms, we become attentive to the double translational move – the indigenizing and religionizing – that is required to constitute something as 'indigenous religion.'

As we might deduce, for example from Amy Whitehead's study of the Goddess movement in Glastonbury, there are different degrees of indigenizing and religionizing going on. Whereas some – the scholars here in particular – translate practices, practitioners, objects, and ideas *all the way into* 'indigenous religion,' that is, articulate them with these precise words, others

²³ By all means, scholars of religion are engaged not only in analysis and the commodification of their products and services. Either individual scholars recognize it or not, their work and their uses of 'indigenous religion' may interfere in politics, history making, ethics, aesthetics, theology, sociality, identities, legal recognition, as well as in numerous other institutions and domains of life.

translate them only part of the way, *toward* ‘indigenous religion.’²⁴ Different paths or registers are available for partial translations toward indigenous religion. As we have seen in the foregoing case studies, instead of speaking about indigenous ‘religion,’ many actors prefer indigenous ‘spirituality’ or indigenous ‘tradition.’ Instead of ‘indigenous,’ some favor ‘native’ or ‘tribal.’ Terms like shaman and shamanism, or animist and animism, may in many contexts index or hint at both indigeneity and religion. In other words, special vocabularies – alongside special repertoires of symbols, gestures, and other actions – are available for anyone who wants to represent or frame particular practices, practitioners, objects, and ideas as more or less indigenous and more or less religious, and thereby as strongly or loosely associated with an indigenous religion.

The translation of something or someone towards or into ‘indigenous religion’ might be mindful, strategic, and heuristic, as is the case for the researchers in this special issue. The members of the movements that they study may also be mindful, strategic, and heuristic with their translations. Still, most translations are part of a tradition, that is, they refer to and build on previous translations and demonstrate various degrees of so-called ‘path dependence.’²⁵ Over time, many translations have become naturalized and taken for granted. There are long colonial histories and genealogies of both indigenizing and religionizing (see, for example, Chidester 1996; 2014; Todorov 1982; Wenger 2009). The indigenizing and religionizing of certain practices, practitioners, objects, and ideas are historically particular European enterprises (see also Balagangadhara 1994; Mandair 2009). Others have taken up such translations in reaction to European practices. Only in recent decades, with the emergence of the relatively influential international indigenous peoples’ movement, has a reconstitution of indigenous religion as a mostly positive formation taken place, at least in some contexts, partly supplanting earlier and usually pejorative ideas about primal religion, primitive religion, superstition, and idolatry (see, for example, Cox 2007; Johnson 2002a: 309). For indigenous peoples, the new positive recognition of indigenous religions has been hard-fought, and in many settings, they continue to face entrenched negative and even demonizing attitudes as missionaries and modernizers keep targeting their practices. This is why representatives of indigenous peoples are often zealous when it comes to protecting the new status that they have won through a partial conquest and recalibration of a conceptual apparatus that used to be controlled by their colonizers. Presumably, this increasingly positive status of indigenous religion is also part of the explanation of why members of some new movements in Europe now want to sail under this flag. Moreover, I believe it is one of the reasons why some scholars now choose this concept for their analyses of new religious movements who are otherwise often marginalized both in scholarship and in society at large.

Indigenous religion as a method

If we follow the anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena’s lead, we can think of concepts as methods (de la Cadena 2015; Taguchi 2017; see also de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). In this perspective, the translating of subjects and objects into indigenous religion – the combined indigenizing and religionizing – becomes an act of ‘thinking conceptually.’ It becomes a reflexive, creative, critical, constructive, and sometimes systematic method for

²⁴ Scholars of religion are among the most eager to translate things all the way into religion, often even if the informants do not do this themselves. Since to study phenomena as ‘religion’ is the basic business idea of our discipline, this observation should not come as a surprise. In fact, for this special issue, the authors have been given the explicit task to translate their cases into indigenous or indigenizing religion, in order to test the fruitfulness of this particular translation.

²⁵ On the concept of ‘path dependence,’ see, for example, Mahoney 2000.

(re)assembling, (re)framing, (re)connecting, comparing, and transforming entities: histories, groups, and practices. Conceiving of indigenous religion as a method foregrounds the question: What do different actors *do* with ‘indigenous’ and ‘religion,’ or, what do they achieve with their indigenizing and religionizing? The same question ought to be asked of everyone, scholars included. While the useful-for-what question above made us aware of several generalized fields of uses, thinking about indigenous religion as a method encourages us to scrutinize individual speech acts and the particular situations in which they are performed, and hence to appreciate more in detail the work that the concepts are employed to do in each instance.

Instead of constructing a test of the usefulness of a concept based on a universalized measure, such an approach requires that we follow Wittgenstein’s recommendation to look for the job that a concept is put to do in different ‘language games’ (Wittgenstein [1953] 2009). In order to identify what ‘indigenous’ (or indigenizing) and ‘religion’ (or religionizing) are achieving in each instance, we need to detect what the game played is all about. We need to consider the double move – the indigenizing and the religionizing – in relation to the ‘rules’ and the ‘world’ of the game. Take, for example, the Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria’s move (in Deloria 2003), that Owen mentions in her essay. Deloria suggested that Europeans and their descendants go study their own indigenous religion, Paganism. They should do that instead of bothering or intruding on Native Americans. With this move he was (re)creating and emphasizing a ‘we’ and an ‘other’ – and making a distinction between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ or ‘yours.’ To understand Paganism was not Deloria’s project here. In this occasion, he was not interested in the details of Paganism, and he did not care much about what Europeans and their descendants did, as long as they did their own thing instead of interfering in Native American practices. His ‘game’ was all about the distinction – the drawing and policing of a border. The momentary establishment of an equivalence, the making of the comparison, between Native American indigenous religion and European indigenous religion, was pragmatic and served an overarching task. Apart from being ancient and belonging to particular people in particular places, and sharing a role in Christian doctrine, Deloria was not saying that Native American practices and Paganism are similar, comparable, or exchangeable – quite the opposite.²⁶

Now, how does indigenous religion as a method help different actors achieve different things in the case studies that make up this special issue? Due to the complexities of each case, and the limited space available here, I can only mention a few of their many accomplishments. Here are some of the most obvious: Harvey, Owen, Puca, Butler, Welch, Pranskevičiūtė, and Whitehead all use this method to create a new angle from whence to approach and analyze their materials. British Druids use this method to relate to land, a place, and its history, as well as to connect and identify with something (imagined as) pre-Christian. Members of the English Bear Tribe use it to compare themselves to both pre-Christians and contemporary indigenous peoples, and to imagine certain things as nature and natural. So do the Anastasians, who also use it to claim superiority. Some use this method to import and export practices like witchcraft and shamanism, or powwowing. Almost everyone who uses it do so to accommodate something or someone in one’s own group, culture, place, or practice. The Powwow enthusiasts use it to play Indians, but also to deal with colonial guilt. Anastasians

²⁶ Deloria’s argument, and the language game that he plays, is reminiscent of arguments and language games that I have heard numerous times among the Bribri in Talamanca (see, for example, Tafjord 2016a; 2016b). Bribris, too, tend to recommend – and even demand – that *sikuapa* (‘foreigners’) do their own things; that what is right for foreigners, is not necessarily right for Bribris, and vice versa, especially but not only with regard to religion.

and Bear Tribe members use it to imagine and deal with the future. The Goddess devotees in Glastonbury and Celtic Pagans in Ireland use it to construct a new past, or, – as they see it – to reconstruct and revitalize almost forgotten practices from the past, and to mark space and (re)draw borders. Practically all the practitioners described in the essays use it to contest the dominant religion in their broader home societies, which in all these cases is some version of Christianity. And, importantly, the authors of the essays use it to contest the marginality of the movements they describe, by suggesting that they are comparable to indigenous religions elsewhere in the world.

Indigenous religion as a figure of power

Let us return to the observation that ‘indigenous religion’ has become an increasingly positive figure across a number of academic, political, cultural, and religious discourses in recent years.²⁷ We might even say that, in some contexts, especially where multiculturalism and liberal democracy are influential ideologies, indigenous religion has become a figure of power (Tafjord & Alles 2018; cf. Povinelli 2016; Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). Relatively widespread international recognition – if not always in practice then at least formally – of indigenous peoples’ rights and of religious rights, sponsored by powerful institutions like the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, international legislation, numerous nation-states, and countless NGOs, has made indigenous religion not just part of the vocabulary but also part of the functional apparatuses of contemporary politics, law, economy, education, healthcare, and theology. In short, sometimes it has leverage in powerful institutions and muscle against mighty opponents (see Tafjord & Alles 2018; Johnson & Kraft 2018; Årsheim 2018; McNally 2017; Tafjord 2016a). In many contexts, it offers some protection for ideas, practices, places, and groups, and it might pave the way for benefits or privileges.²⁸

This has made it attractive to many actors, and, in principle, the figure is available for anyone who wants to try to inscribe his or her own group, or some other group, and the group’s practices in it. To start benefitting from such inscriptions, one need not gain the recognition of everyone. It is enough to convince the right audiences in each context. Not entirely unlike how clever representatives of indigenous peoples with long colonial histories and an anti-colonial agenda have managed to appropriate and change to their own advantage what was once a colonial method and figure, representatives of new religious movements in Europe, and the scholars who study them, now try to adopt and adapt the method and the figure of indigenous religion for their own purposes.

The groups addressed in this special issue are relatively small and marginal. Their influence is quite limited, so, at first glance, it might not seem to matter much politically that they compare themselves to, and that scholars do not distinguish them clearer from, those who today indigenize and religionize themselves and their practices, objects, and ideas in anti-colonial modes. However, because these romantic new religious movements in Europe and their ethnographers are not alone in challenging the meanings and borders of indigenous

²⁷ Yet we must not forget that, simultaneously, in other discourses, for example in Christian mission networks, ‘indigenous religion’ is often associated with primitivism and superstition, negative associations that often have real consequences for the practices and the practitioners who become assembled and targeted under and by means of this figure.

²⁸ Concepts like ‘indigenous religion’ (see Tafjord 2016a) and ‘indigenous knowledges’ (see Whyte 2018) have become efficient foreign relations tools for many indigenous peoples today. Furthermore, like Whyte (2018) points out, in many cases, such concepts may now have what he calls ‘governance-value’ also in the internal affairs indigenous communities.

religion, but joined by other much larger movements that also indigenize and religionize in romantic modes, namely right-wing nationalist movements both within and beyond Europe, they do contribute seriously to a diluting and potential jeopardizing of the fragile anti-colonial project of the internationally recognized indigenous peoples' movement. What will this do to the future utility of this method and this figure for people who continue to be heavily caught up in colonial or colonializing structures? And how do we as scholars contribute to that future?

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