CONCLUSION

What could go wrong? With such an ambitious agenda as ours, surely pitfalls lurked. Indeed, we did occasionally stumble, though seldom disastrously, and often the result was comic relief. We can report that the ability to laugh at and with each other should be a precondition of any long-term collaborative project. Our shortcomings are important to address. For instance, as much as the project was designed to help us get beyond our parochial habits, especially conceptual ones, we stand humbled by our limitations to do so. Even on ground central to our project, such as understandings of our core terms, we have continued to talk past each other at times. This is a sobering lesson about the difficulties of effecting real change, for if a devoted group of scholars who work together over years sometimes fail to communicate clearly and persuasively with one another, what hope might we reasonably have for less intensive forms of intellectual engagement?

Yet, in some respects it was precisely our working misunderstandings that enabled us to forge ahead. Had we paused at each impasse to get on the same page, the predictable result would have been collective paralysis. We have worked hard to strike a balance between revisiting points of conceptual incongruity and simply moving on. Overall, this has proved productive if not always satisfying and it mirrors the intellectual biography of our discipline in a general sense. The more troubling feature of our conceptual failures was precisely their unrecognised presence at times, including in the field when we sometimes expected and sought forms of indigenous religion that matched our preconceived expectations of them. Reifications live strong and die hard.

Consider our inheritance. As we have reflected upon throughout this book, both 'indigenous' and 'religion' have numerous usages, intended and otherwise, including a vast range in academic and everyday contexts, evermore so in their conjunction. Functional but not always congruent equivalents of 'indigenous'

in English include native, tribal, local, aboriginal, all of which can and do have specific legal, political, and social frames and consequences. 'Religion' receives articulation as tradition, culture, spirituality, ritual, practice, protocol, ceremony, lifeway, and any number of local idioms. This partial list only notes the variegated landscape in English.

Adding to this complexity, is the incongruence of diverse disciplinary frames and their differential relationships to colonial genealogies. To take only the most obvious examples, consider how anglophone religious studies and indigenous studies construct and refer to each term and their conjunction. Within religious studies, generally speaking, discourse about indigenous religions is more global than what one finds in anglophone indigenous studies circles. Perhaps due to the world religions model and a philological orientation, religious studies conversations about indigenous religions routinely look to Central and South America, Africa, Oceania, and some parts of Asia. Indigenous studies conversations do the same in principle but far less so in practice; there Native American studies and other anglophone colonial contexts and concerns predominate.

With regard to religion and its cognates, approaches in religious studies still frequently reify the category and its presumed turf, shortchanging other domains such as culture, history, and political life as a result. Indigenous studies often has the opposite effect, largely ignoring the category for a variety of understandable reasons in view of the legacies of missionisation and its disciplining tendencies, on the one hand, and anthropology and its fetishising habits, on the other. In both cases, religion and representations of it are often regarded as distorting of indigenous experience. Added to this, certain domains of living practices, which missionaries and researchers historically have associated with religion, are often shielded from scholarly view and regarded as inappropriate subjects of enquiry and analysis. This sets up an impasse of considerable complexity for a project such as ours.

In both contexts – as in the classroom and in courts – each term can be ascribed a positive and a negative valence. 'Religion' can and frequently does signal colonial institutions, ideologies, and practices, and all of the constraints and disfigurements this implies, as noted previously. It can also signal the realm of the spiritual, the more-than-human, and so forth, and, as we have suggested, it sometimes becomes the translative term of choice for globalising movements. 'Religion' is thus, at turns, shielded from analytical view and yet also foundational to some contemporary forms of indigeneity. In many contexts today, 'indigenous' carries a largely positive charge in the communities that invoke it. But this is not always true. Diverse people across the world associate it with negative discrimination and violence. Some communities do not invoke it at all. In others it is mostly rejected.

Hawaiians, to take one example, sometimes announce their sovereign aspirations *against* the category. In this usage, sovereignty is a maximal frame of nationalist memory and future-oriented ambitions. It is also the guiding category for academic and grassroots framing of Hawaiian identity claims (Kauanui

2018). Iterated thus, ‘indigenous’ is at counter-purposes with restored nationhood, at least with regard to United Nations-style frameworks that structurally enforce the idea that indigeneity is predicated on subordination within colonial nation-states. Likewise with ‘tribe’. For many Hawaiians, ‘tribe’ is a construct of the U.S. federal government that implies and enacts encapsulation and usurpation. So whereas many Hawaiians have strong connections to and sympathies with Native Americans, they insist upon decolonised frameworks for articulating such relationships. ‘Native’, ‘aboriginal’ and ‘first peoples’ are terms of choice in such contexts. Similarly, ‘religion’ is not usually invoked when Hawaiians and Native Americans address sacred matters. Here the language of ceremony, responsibilities, and honour is foregrounded. In most locations we visited, members of the group had the unnerving experience of announcing our intention to study indigenous religion only to have locals respond with a bemused look, as if to say: “Good for you. But why here?”

The foregoing is not intended as an exercise in excuse-making. It is an attempt to render explicit some of the dilemmas we faced throughout the project and the writing of this book. Overall, collaborative comparison has inspired new questions and ideas, but it has also chastened us, and motivated us to assume less.

Initial questions – preliminary answers

Bringing our project to a close, we return to two of the questions that we presented in the introduction, and reflect upon some of our findings. In doing so, we draw on our five chapters primarily, but also on the work of other INREL collaborators, including our Ph.D. students. The following is thus a short synthesis, an exercise in critical comparison, and a starting point for future research.

Who speaks about indigenous religion, when, where, to whom, for which reasons, on which scales, and what are the consequences of such discourses?

All of our five case studies comprise examples of usages of the term ‘indigenous religion’ by different actors, with divergent referents, and for varied purposes. We encountered more extensive and elaborate usages in Hawai‘i, Sápmi, and especially at Standing Rock, than among the Bribri, the Naga, and the Rathva. In her INREL dissertation, Liudmila Nikanorova (2019) found that scholars, tourists, and UNESCO classify the Siberian Sakha as an ‘indigenous people’ and speak about an ‘indigenous religion’ much more frequently and categorically than most Sakha people themselves. In comparison, INREL Ph.D. student Helen Jennings has reported the extensive usage of ‘indigenous religion’ and especially ‘indigenous spirituality’ in tourism run by indigenous persons in British Columbia, while her colleague May-Lisbeth Brew has identified this terminology in Mapuche translations of their own practices to wider audiences in Argentina, Chile, and Europe.

These varied findings resonate with our earlier studies published in the *Handbook of Indigenous Religion(s)* (Johnson and Kraft 2017), in special sections of the

journals *Numen* (Tafjord and Alles 2018) and *Religious Studies and Theology* (Alles and Tafjord 2017), and in diverse conference panels over the past five years. Overall, a globalising discourse of indigenous religion seems to have a marked presence in North America and Scandinavia, as well as in parts of Central and South America, the Pacific, New Zealand, and Australia. The forms this discourse takes in these 'Western' regions, seem somewhat less audible and visible in Africa and Asia, including India and Siberia, although they are becoming increasingly present there, too. Many who speak about indigenous religion today make global claims and refer to a global indigenous 'we'. Paralleling this maximally upscaled discourse and outlook are numerous pan-indigenous movements and orientations in or across states or regions of different size.

Contexts of usages of indigenous religion(s) include protests, celebrations, politics, tourism, education, scholarship, missionisation, litigation, art, exhibitions, and popular culture and media. The users are similarly diverse, and have shifted over time. For instance, self-identification as indigenous was embraced by some politicians and artists in Sápmi during the 1970s, and more broadly from the 1980s. In India, references to some people as indigenous became used from around the 1990s, but disproportionately. In many Indian contexts, 'tribe/tribal' is the preferred term because it conveys a certain legal designation and constitutional rights associated with positive discrimination ('Scheduled tribes'), or articulates more vigorously cultural and social self-understandings.

Emerging from our material, are usages of 'indigenous religion' for several purposes. Many of them relate to sovereignty in a broad sense of the term, as protection of identities, homelands, and traditions. Indigenous religion often serves as a scaling and translation device, a foreign relations tool, and a diplomatic register (cf. Tafjord 2016a, 2016b, Kraft 2017): a method and a language for building and extending communities and solidarities, or a means through which people recognise each other, form alliances, and distinguish themselves from others. Indigenous religion is also a language of sacred claims – directed to one's community and to others, including state institutions (evident in the Standing Rock protests and the protection of Mauna Kea). The communities that rally around and become constituted through articulations of indigenous religion are sometimes much larger, and reach much farther, than distinct cultural groups locked in their nation state contexts. When mobilised as a global movement, indigenous peoples are collectively a substantial group and alliance. The Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2014) shows how sacred claims come with the potential for refusals, as they imply appeals to ultimate concerns and authorities, situated above the mundane political world of negotiations and compromises.

Furthermore, indigenous religion is sometimes used as a frame, model or format for the reclaiming, rebuilding and restoring of partially lost or threatened traditions, as when traditional practices become animism, and traditional specialists become shamans. Indigenous religion is also used as a resource for indigenising new, mixed or foreign traditions. The ways in which Christianities in many places have been indigenised is an obvious example, for instance

through Naga assimilation of Baptist Christianity with indigenous practices (see Longkumer 2018a; 2018b), or through recent theological portrayals of the pre-Christian Sámi religion as an equivalent to the Old Testament (e.g. Johnsen 2007). In tense opposition to such indigenisation stands uses of indigenous religion as a synonym for idolatry, superstition or primitive religion, when this phrase is deployed to reject or demote traditional knowledges and practices, such approaches also exist in and around the communities where we do research. One finds a somewhat different use of the concept in eastern Gujarat, where missionaries within various ‘caste Hindu’ movements, building on claims that *Adivasis* are actually degenerate Hindus, represent conversion to their movements as a return to the true, purified indigenous religion (Alles 2016, 2017).

Last but not least, it is important to note how scholarship and schooling continue to function as prime venues and motors for claims about and presentations of indigenous religion. Tourism and art are perhaps the only other venues where it is performed and taught with similar frequency all across the world today. In diverse educative settings, people learn to translate their own and others’ traditional knowledges and practices into indigenous religion. Across all the contexts we have mentioned, indigenous religion is a resource. It enables people to do, pursue, and sometimes achieve divergent things which are on their agendas, including things which they consider urgent and even existential.

How are indigenous and religious registers – acts, words, gestures, material objects, or assemblages that somehow index indigeneity and religion – means through which people recognise each other, form alliances, and distinguish themselves from others?

As we have shown in our case studies, there are multiple answers to this question, depending on the context. Here we present a few provisional observations of acts, words, gestures, material objects, and assemblages that recur in the globalising discursive formation that we have come to discern from the vantage points of our joint project – what we call indigenous religion (in the singular). Their recurrence is central in making things recognisable as ‘indigenous’ and ‘religious’. Our original project proposal identified indigenous religion as a “globalizing discourse, consisting of notions of an indigenous *we* and a flexible, but fairly standardized, vocabulary of assumed similarities: harmony with nature, healing and holism, antiquity and spirituality, shamanism and animism” (Kraft *et al.* 2014). This observation still holds, even though many of our findings have taken us beyond the domain of words.

What we, the people with whom we work, and others recognise as indigenous religion is evoked also by materials (e.g. skins, feathers, bodily decorations, clothing), artefacts (e.g. drums, bows and arrows, spears, scythes, shawls, necklaces), architectural structures or decorations (e.g. *ahu*, *lávvu*, *morung*, palm roofed Bribri houses, Pithora paintings), substances (e.g. herbal medicine, rice beer, kava, mahua liquor), performances and gestures (e.g. song, dance, *pow*

wows), patterns (e.g. on clothes or as tattoos), competences (e.g. in native arts, languages, and skills, such as archery), and sounds (e.g. drumbeat, yoik, throat singing, ukulele, ululations, whistles). Alone, any one of these elements may be insufficient for a person to be recognisable as indigenous and religious, and for an act or a setting to be recognisable as indigenous religion. Collectively they constitute a dynamic pool of resources, comprised by connected inventories, repertoires, and vocabularies, that through various assemblies enable articulations of indigenous religion.

Also circulating is what one might term liturgies or protocols of indigenous religion, used particularly in cross-cultural encounters, ranging from events hosted by the U.N. or the World Council of Churches, to protests like the one that took place at and for Standing Rock. Welcome ceremonies is one example of such liturgies, which often include the extension of kinship to brothers and sisters from other parts of the world.

Issues left insufficiently explored

What did we not notice? What has been marginalised through our approach? From a global perspective, this book (and project) merely scratches a surface. The U.N. estimates there are 400 million indigenous peoples spread across the world with highly diverse cultures and histories. Yet, since indigenous religion(s) in practice involve not only indigenous people, the globalising networks that we have begun to engage actually reach much farther than this U.N. estimate.

Our bottom up approach has implications for what we have found and what has been left out of our descriptions and analyses. All of us have focused on specific local grounds, and the ways in which they are connected to globalising processes and discourses (through travels, encounters, media, and translations). None of us have done fieldwork at relevant international venues like the U.N., the Parliament of the World's Religions, or the World Council of Churches, and none of us have followed networks starting from these institutional grounds.

Among the dynamics left insufficiently explored are gender, class and economy. Our targeting of sovereignty has foregrounded colonial histories and contemporary processes of defending ancestral grounds, performing identities, and renewing traditions. We have generally focused less on internal diversities and disputes. Some of us have discussed gender issues, but surely there is much more to say about the ways in which gender is shaped at the intersection of ancestral traditions, contemporary revivals, and encounters with near and distant selves and others (cf. Kuokkanen 2019). Questions about class are hardly raised at all, although the roles of different indigenous elites are noticeable in all our case studies. Economic issues are basic to all the processes we have explored, but have only been mentioned in passing. Among our thematic shortcomings as historians of religion, the most obvious is perhaps our relative lack of attention to Christianities. This has happened despite the fact that, apart from the Rathva in Gujarat,

Christians are the majority in all of the communities where we do fieldwork. In the present book, Longkumer's chapter is the only one to focus extensively on Christianity (cf. Longkumer 2018b; Opas 2017).

One of the most important issues we have seen, but not engaged enough, concerns the importance of 'nature' in many articulations of indigenous religion(s). Ideas and practices of special relationships to nature have become entwined with notions of sacred places and actions to protect them, more broadly with environmentalism and combating climate change, and operationalised as a means of establishing indigenous, as distinct from non-indigenous, identity. This issue was not addressed in our original project proposal. We left it out partly in fear of confirming established stereotypes. Since then, we have realised how important such ideas and practices have become for collaborations between activists within and across different indigenous and religious communities, and how articulations of indigenous religion(s) increasingly take place in such collaborations. Claims and practices of sovereignty and sustainability meet and merge here. No longer merely a matter for particular peoples and their particular places, sovereignty is increasingly claimed for the sake of the planet or Mother Earth, for her sustainability and the future of humankind at large.

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