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**BOOK REVIEW:  
INDIGENOUS EFFLORESCENCE. BEYOND  
REVITALISATION IN SÁPMI AND AINU MOSIR**Katarina Parfa Koskinen<sup>a</sup>**ABSTRACT**

This is a book review of an anthropological anthology, *Indigenous Efflorescence. Beyond revitalisation in Sápmi and Ainu Mosir* edited by Gerhard Roche, Hiroshi Maruyama and Åsa Virdi Kråik (2018). The volume acknowledges ongoing efforts around the globe to revitalise languages and cultures, defining Indigenous efflorescence as a slow revolution occurring almost unnoticeably. Examples from two Indigenous peoples are provided, Sámi and Ainu, giving voice to thirty contributors who describe contexts and practices of 'Indigenous efflorescence' in a broad variety of settings. The review focuses on the merits of the concept of Indigenous efflorescence with a special emphasis on three of the chapters where digital contexts are provided. (Indigenous) efflorescence is an interesting theoretical concept to investigate in relation to theory and practice in remote teaching, online learning, and distance education for K-12 schools as it stresses the aim with any educational practice, which is the growth and flourishing of those involved. It also offers leverage against simplistic narratives of both decline and progress. This volume does what it sets out to do: offer hope and stimulate projects for supporting Indigenous efflorescence.

Keywords: Indigenous; efflorescence; colonialism.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The volume under review, *Indigenous Efflorescence. Beyond revitalisation in Sápmi and Ainu Mosir*, is an anthropological anthology giving voice to thirty contributors who describe contexts and practices of ‘Indigenous efflorescence’ in a broad variety of settings. Examples from two Indigenous peoples are provided; Sámi, the Indigenous peoples of Sápmi, the northern parts of what is today more commonly known as Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Scandinavia), and Ainu in Ainu Mosir, the northern parts of today’s Japan. Conceptually,

the term Indigenous efflorescence is, on the one hand, a descriptive one, which refers to the under-studied phenomenon of the multi-sited demographic and cultural flourishing of Indigenous peoples. As a coinage, the term helps us to talk about a previously diffuse set of events and trends, to bundle them together and slot them seamlessly into sentences, and thus start new conversations. It is, furthermore, a concept that gives us critical purchase on the present—the historical moment in which ‘the native’ was supposed to have disappeared—and provides leverage against simplistic narratives of both decline and progress. Beyond being a descriptive term, however, Indigenous efflorescence is also an analytical frame that provides new ways of looking at the contemporary Indigenous situation, /.../ (Roche, Maruyama & Viridi Kråik, 2018, p. 5).

This review focusses on the merits of the concept of Indigenous efflorescence. However, as the theme of the special issue where this review is published is “Theory and practice in remote teaching, online learning, and distance education for K-12 schools” three of the contributions in the first part of the reviewed volume are of particular interest. Chapters 7-9 focus on new technology (Oscar Sedholm, 2018, chapter 7), virtual learning spaces (Hanna Outakoski, 2018, chapter 8) and a multimedia narrative (Coppellie Cocq, 2018, chapter 9), which provide digital contexts for Indigenous efflorescence. Therefore, I dedicate a section to these chapters.

## 2 EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION OF INDIGENOUS EFFLORESCENCE

The Editors, Gerard Roche, Hiroshi Maruyama and Åsa Viridi Kråik introduce the theme of the volume, Indigenous efflorescence as a slow revolution occurring almost unnoticeably. Attempting to highlight these processes, they wish to provide optimism and hope for communities most commonly associated with, and described as unsolvable problems. The content is a mix of peer-reviewed research articles and contributions from non-academics involved in a wide range of projects aimed at strengthening endangered languages and cultures. Focusing on cultural and linguistic revitalisation, equally important examples of narratives involving contexts and practices of Indigenous efflorescence are provided. As Markus Nyström (2018), the author of the first chapter expresses it: ‘Narratives, or stories,

are, I believe, the perfect middle ground between these two concepts, between culture and language' (p. 29).

According to the editors, referring to Indigenous languages as vanished or disappeared is misleading. Instead, they mention that successful efforts are made all over the globe within various Indigenous communities to revive, revitalise, reclaim and other re-workings of cultures and languages. The main argument for the concept of Indigenous efflorescence is that it exceeds re-workings by focusing on processes and opening up different futures. As 'to be Indigenous is not to reproduce precolonial ways of being, but to translate them into the present, to draw on them as inspiration and authority for generating Indigenous ways of living in the twenty-first century' (Clifford, 2013 here cited in Roche et al., 2018, p. 8). Concluding that efflorescence can take place in all aspects of life, they want the readers who conduct such projects to realise that they are part of a larger movement, expressing a hope that the content inspires, raises issues and provides solutions 'that are helpful in navigating the complex terrain of efflorescence' (p. 15). The overarching aim of the volume is to inspire further projects towards efflorescence and start new discussions on the concept as a topic of anthropological analysis.

### 3 CONTEXTS AND PRACTICES OF INDIGENOUS EFFLORESCENCE

The contributions in the volume are divided into two parts; contexts and practices of Indigenous efflorescence, both of which Gerard Roche introduces (pp. 23-27; pp. 123-127). In the first introduction, he presents political background factors. This provides a starting point for answering the question posed by Roche - how it is that Indigenous efflorescence has occurred in so many different contexts at the same time. Roche points out common international endeavours from Indigenous representatives, mainly from the Canada–Australia–New Zealand–United States (CANZUS) block, have resulted in a stable representativeness within the establishment of the United Nations. This has provided a supportive political environment necessary for Indigenous efflorescence. To broaden the perspectives beyond the CANZUS block the editors decided to pick up examples from Sámi and Ainu contexts.

The first chapter in the first section of the volume works as a backdrop for the following chapters. By exploring official narratives as constrainer of Indigenous efflorescence, Nyström (2018) emphasises that counter narratives are important and reminds us that there is still a lot of work to be done in order for Indigenous efflorescence to take place. Nyström (2018) has found that 'politicians who actually promote colonialism, but call it something else, sincerely believe themselves not to be promoting colonialism' (p. 34). This paradox is one of the conclusions regarding the official political discourse in chapter one. Thematically, the following chapters present case studies, which deal with settler epistemologies, digital technologies, land and sovereignty, and Indigenous social movements, further exploring their role

in Indigenous efflorescence. Following Nyström's argumentation, these case studies can be read as counter narratives, as do the case studies in the second part of the volume. Whether referring to land, natural resources, people from the same culture, ancestors or oneself, the sense of belonging is present in most of the stories and/or narratives. The contexts exemplifying Indigenous efflorescence in the first part of the volume often contain micro steps towards a culturally and linguistically sustainable future obtained by overcoming different kinds of hardships.

Part two, 'Practices of Efflorescence', provides articles where people do efflorescence and give voice to their subjective experiences. Introducing the second part, Roche (2018) describes the contributions as being about colonialism and the 'ways it impacts on individual efforts to reclaim language, identity and culture, and to be Indigenous' (p. 124). Through personal stories, we can follow what it is like being Ainu and Sámi today. The stories contain a complex relationship between positive experiences like pride and joy, and negative ones like loss, sadness and shame. When the editors claim that Indigenous efflorescence offer 'leverage against simplistic narratives of both decline and progress', this is probably what they refer to. As such, the chapters in the volume capture the complexity surrounding Indigenous efflorescence in contemporary society. The illustrated efforts seem to slowly counteract colonialism, assimilative policies and historical oppressive practices, and even the smallest initiative can make a huge impact on a personal, but also societal level.

Roche (2018) raises a number of issues in the concluding chapter of the volume, where ethical aspects, ongoing colonialism as a system rather than an event, intergenerational trauma etc. maintain colonial structures. Most often, he argues, such structures are not even acknowledged, or even realised by those upholding them, which leads to Indigenous efflorescence being restrained. He also points out that 'for those of us who are settler academics, situating ourselves as beneficiaries of colonisation is essential to an ethical approach to Indigenous efflorescence' (Roche, 2018, p. 226).

#### 4 INDIGENOUS EFFLORESCENCE AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

In chapter 7, Sedholm (2018) describes a project aimed at saving the Ume Sámi language from extinction through creation of content on a free online learning platform called Memrise. The work, although conducted on a non-profit base, still managed to attract both people from the Ume Sámi community and Memrise who established a working relationship. A concluding conference gathered around 15-20 participants (p. 87), which is a lot considering the amount of known Ume Sámi speakers to be roughly 50 at the time of the project. Sedholm reports several hardships and setbacks in the chapter, where lack of funding appears to have created the largest challenges. Another major setback was the dropout rate of participants

during the process. At the time of the writing of the chapter, the project was looking for further funding to continue the work.

Virtual learning spaces for learning Sámi language is also the topic in chapter 8, but Outakoski (2018) argues for a different approach to distance learning of heritage languages compared to other types of subjects at university level. Instead of using flexibility and capacity as main arguments, Outakoski highlights accessibility, availability and relative anonymity as the main arguments for arranging distance language courses, also implying that some of the flexibility has to be sacrificed (p.91):

Further, virtual 3D environments (such as SecondLife or OpenSim) offer the possibility of adjusting and altering the teaching environment to resemble, in as much detail as possible, the settings for natural learning situations. This, in turn, gives the online Sami language teacher the opportunity to teach speakers and learners of Sami in a setting that can, in the best case, strengthen the ties to the ancestral place of origin and, at the same time, offer the learner a language learning experience that frees them from potential internal stigmas (Outakoski, 2018, p. 92).

By using digital technology with the above intention, the ontological as well as epistemological prerequisites for learning heritage languages are based on relationships to the past. At the same time, they point towards a new future where Indigenous languages play a huge part in meaning-making and identity processes. Although Outakoski identified epistemological issues in the project when using virtual learning platforms (p. 83), alongside financial and technical issues, she argues that they have a huge potential in providing access to students outside of areas where the heritage languages are used.

The third contribution in chapter 9 focusing on digital technologies is an examination of a born-digital multimedial narrative in Lule Sámi, Tjutju (Cocq, 2018), where the participant can create a relationship to the narrative through interactive elements. Although the written word is still the main narrative tool, the increased level of interactivity invites the participant to make use of visual and aural elements. The main issue raised by Cocq (2018) is that the fluidity characterised in oral storytelling is somewhat lost when converted into a digital multimedia product. Furthermore, she emphasises that there is a strong connection between online and offline activities that is difficult to study. ‘In former times, storytelling as a social practice was central in the transmission of social norms and codes within the community. Narratives did not function only to entertain, they also played important roles in education and socialisation’ (Cocq, 2018, p. 97). The multimedia narrative Tjutju is thus both widening and narrowing the possibility for participants to build relationships through stories, illustrating the complexity of Indigenous efflorescence.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The theme of the special issue where this review is published is “Theory and practice in remote teaching, online learning, and distance education for K-12 schools”, and for that reason three of the chapters were of particular interest as they provide digital contexts for Indigenous efflorescence. Surrounding these chapters is a framework highlighting the importance of acknowledging ongoing colonialism, something rarely talked about in these contexts, to my knowledge. Although acknowledging ongoing colonialism is an important first step towards social justice for peoples who have lost languages, land, cultural practices, self-governing and even lives, it is far from enough. Digging deeper into colonial structures is essential in order to change the pathway towards respect and valuing of Indigenous peoples, languages and cultures, i.e. all peoples, languages and cultures. In other words, promote efflorescence. One such structure is education. Roche suggests for anthropologists to leave the fascination for the suffering subject and look more into positive anthropology. In the educational field, however, there is a strong tradition of looking at what works. Still, who is defining what works? For whom does it work? Who sets the agenda? By lifting Indigenous’, and other minorities’ voices in a similar manner as in this volume, Indigenous’ (and others’) voices are strengthened, which promotes and supports (Indigenous) efflorescence.

Several contributions in the volume highlight relational aspects as an important feature of Indigenous efflorescence, which I find particularly interesting in the research field of online education, distance education and remote teaching. Enabling relationships to be established, maintained and strengthened has a positive impact on identity. As this special issue refers to issues involving ‘Theory and practice in remote teaching, online learning, and distance education for K-12 schools’, (Indigenous) efflorescence is an interesting theoretical concept to investigate, also outside of the Indigenous research community. How are relationships to other people, the past, land or other aspects promoted and supported in remote teaching, online learning and distance education? Besides that, how are relationships established and maintained when neoliberalism ‘exposes Indigenous people to various forms of violent capitalist exploitation that destroy not only social ties between Indigenous people, but also between people and land’ (Roche, 2018, p. 227)?

This volume does what it sets out to do: offer hope and stimulate projects for supporting Indigenous efflorescence. Therefore, if asking how well the volume explains itself, the answer would be, as well as it can regarding such a complex issue as Indigenous efflorescence. Especially so when reading the volume as a first attempt to capture these processes through this concept.

When attending a conference in 2002 gathering Indigenous women from the Arctic circumpolar area, many conference delegates cried as they could relate to each others' issues and hardships. This is why there is a need to focus on the positives without letting the challenges and hardships slip away, as ‘Colonisation is not

simply something that happened in the past and is now finished, nor is colonialism a debunked and interred ideology that no longer impacts on policy or daily life' (Roche, 2018, p. 226). Many peoples' daily lives are still affected. Taking a moment to reflect upon all efforts and struggles made around the world just being able to speak one's heritage language and be proud of it is important.

Finally, I recommend that you read the book and form your own opinion. The contributors have bravely invited you.

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