

Review RATIA, Katri (2023), *Alternative, Spirituality, Counterculture, And European Rainbow Gathering – Pachamama, I`m Coming Home*. London and New York: Routledge

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Alternative Spirituality, Counterculture, And European Rainbow Gatherings: Pachamama, I`m Coming Home is a book based on Katri Ratia's PhD dissertation in religious studies. Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and religious studies, and through meticulous historical, religious, and cultural contextualization, the author leads readers through ten chapters that explore the largest European event organized by one of the oldest active counterculture movements in the Western world - the Rainbow Family of Living Light's. Against a contemporary backdrop of alternative spiritualities, the book provides a historical and sociological roadmap of the community, delving into its Gatherings held in various European locations.

In the opening chapter, Katri contextualizes her research process and clarifies key concepts, such as New Age, spiritualities, (neo)pagan, rituals and transformative festivals, and the various names of the Rainbow Family of Living Light group. The author's familiarity with the event – rooted in over twenty years of participation - is noted. The data collection methods are diverse and rigorous, encompassing multiple historical sources over a decade and four years of ethnographic work. The limitations are also outlined, particularly internal biases, which are addressed through feedback and monitoring from academic peers and critical evaluation of the data collection processes. However, the author acknowledges the importance of her 'insider' status for accessing the community and collecting data on spirituality-related themes, acknowledging that such proximity to the study's subject is almost imperative. My own experience reinforces the necessity of insider status in similar communities.

In the following two chapters Katri provides a socio-historical timeline of the movement and highlights the distinctions between the EUA and European Gatherings, respectively. Rainbow is a society that emerged during the 1960s and 70s

counterculture in the U.S., inspired by Woodstock 1969. Centered on self-development, non-institutional spirituality, and environmental restoration, the first meeting took place in 1972. Since the 1980s, the movement has spread globally, fostering a diversity of values and norms.

The following three chapters present the results of Ratia's ethnographic research, describing the spatiality and material culture, communal practices and cultural activities, and folklore of the Rainbow family.

The chapter 'Tall Trees, Warm Fire', sheds light on the spatial arrangements of the Rainbow Gatherings in Europe, portraying them as transformative spaces with potential for both personal and cultural change. This transformative quality is shaped by the spatial layout, which in addition to common spaces characteristic lasting community festivals, it also has specific ones for the development of inwardness, with an emphasis on spiritual self-awareness. These include the holistic medicine area with traditional, alternative, and other energy healing/alignment medicines; spaces for spiritual activities such as communal or individual altars, shrines, or temples; and areas dedicated to physical practices such as yoga and meditation. Other unconventional spaces, such as non-monetary exchange circles, reflect a significant countercultural economic ethos that scrutinizes the materialist mainstream culture. Material culture itself, such as unconventional, eccentric, and do-it-yourself (DIY) fashion, further underscores a rejection of mainstream and hegemonic norms. Though Ratia provides a comprehensive description of the event's layout, she also engages the reader visually through photography. However, in this chapter, despite briefly addressing issues like inequalities, sexism, racism and prejudice, Ratia refrains from an in-depth exploration, acknowledging that there are "complicated subjects", requiring more extensive study – a statement that I consider a sophist manner.

The following chapter explores alternative, non-normative community practices that foster unity among participants. As the title suggests – "Let the Circle Be Open but Unbroken," – the emphasis on circles in decision-making, daily routines, play, ritual moments, and conflict and crisis resolution reflects a dialogical balance between collectivity and individuality, or rather, between cohesion and autonomy. Articulated throughout the chapter are the postmodern transformations within Western religiosity,

the priority given to the self, and the growing interest in Eastern religions, pre-Christian religions, occultisms, and mysticisms, conceptualised under the umbrella of New Age or, alternatively, the term coined by the author as *holistic-alternative spiritualities*. This creative, pluralistic, and heterogeneous field is characterized by a profound connection to nature, and can even be considered as a source of devotion, often personified as Mother Nature, Gaia, or Pachamama (Mother Earth). Part of this justification is the affinity with ancestral cultures. The (unique) folklore of the Rainbow Family explored in the subsequent chapter, precisely mirror these influences through its vocabulary, prophetic stories, the “hipstories” (stories related to the first gatherings), and the musical expressions.

In a necessary task, Katri enlightens the reader on the critique of the “Rainbow Counterculture”, analysing its main alternatives to the state, the market, and institutional religions. It is widely accepted that the Rainbow family aspires to a social ideal free from violence, hierarchies, centralized power, decision-making by consensus - known as a “do-o-cracy” (p. 178).

They also practice a gift economy, de-mercantilizing the economy through communal exchange of goods and services without financial intermediaries. Despite the rejection of religious authorities, particularly the western ones, the author explains how the community integrates a diverse set of ideas and beliefs as a form of religion, a vernacular one.

The final analytical chapters shed light on this integration through folklore studies and the application of the triaxial model of religion - social, temporal and transcendent axis - based on the MAUSSian gift paradigm and the developments of sociologists Camille Tarot (2000) and Alain Caillé (2000, 2009). Exploring “(...) Rainbow as Vernacular Religion” examines the social and temporal axis, enhancing the understanding of symbolic exchanges and interactions between various human groups, individuals, and non-human entities across different yet interconnected time frames. The author delves into the third axis in the penultimate chapter, arguing for the transcendent Self as a challenge to the vertical concept of religiosity. The transcendent self, akin to the “subjective turn” concept, portrays the sacred as an absolute, eternal, and metaphysical otherness that is inaccessible to a subjective interpretation, while

supporting an open, immediate and horizontal access to the transcendent – a sacralisation of the self. The chapter also examines horizontal transcendence, characterized primarily by a communal set of beliefs and personal experiences with the planetary Biosphere/cosmos.

The significance of this study goes beyond prompting reflection in readers by offering ethnographic insight into the event. Rather, it contributes to a deeper comprehension of contemporary holistic-alternative spiritual practices in community settings. The growing public awareness of this belief system, which is frequently criticized in academic circles (see Ratia, 2023b), along with the rise of enigmatic ecological counter-culture communities, underscores the significance of the author's research. By consistently acknowledging the internal dynamics of the community, the author maintains a notable axiological distance, which is particularly remarkable given her extensive, over two-decades-long proximity to the familiarity with the culture under examination.

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