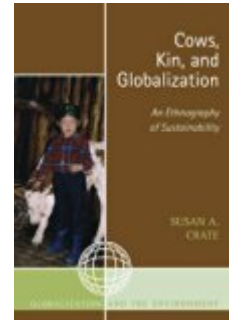


Susan Alexandra Crate. *Cows, Kin, and Globalization: An Ethnography of Sustainability (Globalization and the Environment)*. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006. xxvii + 355 pp. \$31.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7591-0740-3.



Reviewed by Brian Donahoe

Published on H-Soyuz (October, 2008)

Commissioned by Leyla J. Keough (Sabanci University, Istanbul Turkey)

Cows, Kin, and Globalization is an ambitious attempt to link a detailed ethnography of the agropastoralist Sakha of the Viliui River watershed in the Siberian Sakha Republic (Yakutiia) to broader discourses of indigenous politics, globalization, modernization, and the "dialogue of global sustainability" (p. 311).

In keeping with her interdisciplinary training as a human ecologist, author Susan Crate masterfully incorporates approaches from the disciplines of geography, political ecology, historical ecology, folklore, cultural anthropology, and environmental studies. The prologue opens with a lyrical and evocative excerpt from Crate's fieldnotes that both sets the scene and introduces the reader to the symbolic touchstone of the book, the *salama*, "a rope of twisted black and white horse's hair adorned with pieces of colored fabric, animal figures made from birch bark, duck beaks, and fish bones" (p. 35), which is hung in the cow shed as an offering to the sky deity-protectors to protect the animals and ensure fertility. Crate sees the *salama* as a "vital symbol of and testimony to

the adaptive resilience" (p. xix) of the Sakha people and their belief system, which has been and continues to be an integral and indispensable component of their successful agropastoralist adaptation to an extreme northern environment. This leads into a concise introduction to the main themes Crate intends to weave together throughout the text: adaptation and resilience; globalization and modernity; and sustainability.

In the first chapter, "At home in Siberia," Crate simply and elegantly explains the complex hydrological and climatic processes that have resulted in the present-day ecology of the Viliui River watershed, emphasizing the global environmental importance of both the boreal forest ecosystem as the "second lungs of the earth" (after tropical forests) (p. 12), and the permafrost ecosystem, which serves as an enormous sink of greenhouse gasses but which is being threatened by industrial development. The second half of this chapter is a discussion of the Sakhas' human adaptation to extreme northern environments. Most of this part is written in the past tense; Crate

here relies on secondary sources to reconstruct the past life of the Sakha. There is then a rather abrupt shift to the present tense when Crate moves into a discussion of the Sakha belief system. She explains this in a footnote, saying "I change here to the present tense since many Sakha still embrace their traditional belief system" (p. 41, n. 42). However, Crate continues to rely on previously published accounts rather than on her own rich ethnography. Such accounts tend to oversystematize animistic worldviews, and in uncritically repeating them, Crate contributes to the reification of this highly idiosyncratic worldview as a *system*, making it seem static and doctrinaire rather than dynamic, lived and living.

Chapter 2, "Viliui Historical Ecology," does not focus as much on the history of the human-environment interface as the title would lead one to expect. It is more of a cultural history of the region than an exercise in historical ecology. The chapter provides a fine overview of the ethnohistory of the Viliui River area, and is particularly strong in its discussion of the interaction between the Viliui Sakha and Soviet power structures. Crate presents this as a "microcosm of events occurring simultaneously across the country" related to the Soviet policies of collectivization and industrialization (p. 81). She clearly demonstrates the pervasive impact of Soviet policies that led to the relocation and consolidation of populations and to the specialization of labor, and ultimately transformed land-use practices and the surrounding landscape.

Chapters 3 and 4 are the real ethnographic nuts-'n-bolts of the monograph. Chapter 3, "Cows-and-Kin: The Cultural Ecology of Post-Soviet Viliui Sakha Survival," is a colorful, detailed, first-hand account of household subsistence strategies in post-Soviet Sakha. Here Crate lays out the "cows-and-kin system" that gives the monograph its title and which is at the heart of the Viliui Sakhas' "adaptive response to a rapidly changing political context" (p. 96). In many ways it is typical of simi-

lar accounts of post-Soviet survival in Siberia, but in Crate's hands has an immediacy and intimacy that is highly compelling. These chapters (as well as chapter 7) evince solid methodology (household census, time allocations studies, survey material, kinship diagramming, oral histories, focus-groups), the data from which Crate skillfully integrates with participant-observation and case studies.

The monograph then shifts from the fine-grained micro-analysis of subsistence strategies to an overview of diamond mining in the Viliui region and comparisons to mining in other parts of the world. Chapter 5, "An Environmental History of the Viliui," brings to the attention of Western readers two critical but underpublicized environmental and human health issues in the Sakha Republic: diamond mining and underground nuclear testing. Diamond mining represents a double-edged sword for the Viliui Sakha: on the one hand, their economy is highly dependent on mining; it has created new forms of wealth and new opportunities for economic development. On the other hand, mining has contaminated water, irrevocably altered the landscape, and transformed the Viliui Sakhas' way of life. The fact of underground nuclear testing in the Viliui region was a revelation to this reviewer, but Crate never mentions it again, thereby missing an opportunity to incorporate it into her more general discussions of modernization, globalization, and sustainability.

The discussion of diamond mining in the Sakha Republic leads into a comparative study of diamond mining in Canada (chapter 6), and mining and indigenous peoples more generally (chapter 8). After establishing the geological, ecological, and historical similarities between the Viliui region and Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT), Crate focuses on the distinct dissimilarities between Canadian and Russian diamond mining practices, especially with regard to indigenous peoples' rights. While diamond mining in Canada

is clearly not without its problems, it has served the indigenous peoples better than in Russia, mostly because of the recognition of aboriginal title in Canada. Crate presents this as a better-case scenario and possible model for diamond mining in Russia. Chapter 8, "Global Mining, Indigenous Peoples, and Sustainability," is intended to bring her discussion up to the global level. Unfortunately, it reads like a chapter out of a high-school textbook and really does not add much to Crate's arguments.

Sandwiched in among these three chapters on mining is chapter 7, "Investigating Viliui Sakha Sustainability." The chapter describes an NSF-funded project that Crate and her Sakha husband carried out to define what "sustainability" means for the Viliui Sakha. While this chapter is central to Crate's concept of an "ethnography of sustainability," the change in tone, style, and level of abstraction is abrupt and the chapter appears out of place here among the more distant and abstract chapters on mining. It is a return to the more fine-grained ethnographic approach of chapters 3 and 4, and would have been better placed immediately after chapter 4.

The epilogue revisits the central themes and engages in an extended discussion of the concept of "sustainability." This is the most explicitly theoretical part of the book. Crate recognizes that definitions of sustainability are context-specific, and calls on researchers, communities, and governments to "make it their priority to develop locally determined definitions of sustainability that are culture-and-environment-specific" (p. 299). She concludes that "Self-government (political devolution) and self-determination ... are the central foci of indigenous sustainable development in the Arctic" (p. 303), and notes that Russia's indigenous peoples lag far behind other indigenous peoples of the Arctic in these areas.

Cows, Kin, and Globalization is based in large part on Crate's previously published articles. This contributes to the unevenness of tone between

some of the chapters. The second half of the book lacks the intimacy of earlier chapters, and the people, the Viliui Sakha, somehow get lost. At times this reads like two or three different books (indeed one of the blurbs on the back cover praises it as "three books in one"), with chapters tenuously strung together by introductory and concluding paragraphs.

Crate's text is also slightly marred by a tendency toward overstatement and numerous careless oversights. For example, at the end of chapter 2 Crate concludes that "Despite these pervasive forces and due to a resilient adaptive capacity, Viliui Sakha maintained much of their cultural ways and subsistence skills that served to sustain their communities in the turmoil of the USSR fall" (p. 81). This seems inconsistent with the overwhelming evidence of a fairly complete transformation of Viliui Sakha way of life presented in the chapter, and sounds more like a perfunctory overstatement of the politically correct emphasis on the "agency" of an oppressed population. In her section titled "The Centrality of Kin" [(pp.124ff)], Crate asserts that "well over half (57 percent) of all households surveyed said their lives would be difficult or significantly changed without their kin." But the single largest response to the question was "Could live without kin--don't depend on kin at all now" (31 percent), and in fact 59 percent said they could get by without kin. This is overlooked in order to more strongly make her point of the importance of kin.

Regarding careless oversights, Crate writes that the Elgeei State Farm encompasses "150,000 hectares, an area the size of Indiana" (p. 73). The area of the state of Indiana is approximately 9,400,000 ha. She claims that between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries, the Russian Empire's territory increased from "200 to 2 million square kilometers" (p. 225). There was no Russian Empire until 1721, and by the twentieth century its territory was more than 20 million square kilo-

meters. There are also numerous inconsistencies with the transliteration of Russian words.

These are minor flaws that do not detract from Crate's excellent scholarship or from the overall contribution this book makes to studies of processes of globalization and modernization, sustainability research, analyses of indigenous peoples' interactions with state governments and multinational corporations, and the anthropology of Siberia. *Cows, Kin, and Globalization* is a clearly written, easy-to-read monograph that is not overburdened with jargon or theory. It should find its way onto the bookshelves of anyone interested in indigenous politics and the impacts of large-scale industrial mining on indigenous populations and the environment. It also represents an important contribution to the growing body of literature on indigenous peoples' survival strategies in post-Soviet Siberia. Chapters 3, 4, and 7 could be productively used in undergraduate and graduate anthropology courses as examples of solid methodology and to give students a sense of what fieldwork is about and how to turn fieldwork experience into finished ethnography.

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Citation: Brian Donahoe. Review of Crate, Susan Alexandra. *Cows, Kin, and Globalization: An Ethnography of Sustainability (Globalization and the Environment)*. H-Soyuz, H-Net Reviews. October, 2008.

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