

KRAUSE, FRANZ. *Thinking Like a River: An Anthropology of Water and Its Uses Along the Kemi River, Northern Finland*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2023. 294 pp. ISBN: 9783837667370 (paperback); 9783839467374 (E-book).

At a time when ‘anthropocene’ and ‘infrastructure’ are buzzwords in the academy, Franz Krause’s book provides a rich ethnographic account of the Kemi River and its dwellers in scarcely populated Lapland, enabling the reader to understand how the river and people inhabiting its surroundings mutually constitute and continuously transform each other. The relations between the river and the people always contain wider economic and political agendas. These relations are subject to global rather than national interests, whereby it is difficult to identify the real decision-makers behind the scenes. In recent years, especially with the EU’s attempt to eliminate its dependency on China’s mineral resources, Lapland has garnered attention as a promised land of valuable minerals. Public discussions often depict Lapland as a ‘resource periphery’, producing a mere burden to the Finnish national economy. This is due to the high costs of maintaining Lapland’s infrastructure and basic public services in relation to its sparse population, forgetting that northern Finland has been a ‘resource pool’ for the entirety of Finland and beyond throughout the twentieth century (Ranta-Tyrkkö 2018). These issues are more often discussed in the context of the global South, whereby Krause’s book, by applying both a sharp ethnographic lens and detailed historical description, offers a fascinating perspective on how the periphery of the European North is equally a subject of global financialisation.

This book presents Krause’s ethnographic research on the environmental engagement and

mutual constitution of Kemi River dwellers and the river based on his fieldwork in Finnish Lapland during 2007–2008. The content is distributed across ten chapters. The introductory section presents the main avenues of his research, the relevancy of the topic, its theoretical groundings in phenomenological anthropology and environmental studies, and a brief overview of the fieldwork and methods. The subsequent nine chapters can all be considered empirical accounts stressing different aspects of what constitutes life in the catchment. Chapters 2 through 4 disentangle the geographical and historical aspects of the places, people, and activities involved.

Chapter 2 argues that river dwellers, notwithstanding their age, gender, profession or specific location in the catchment, perceive their lives on the shores of Kemi River as living along ‘the stream of life’ in which movement and friction play an equal role. Furthermore, it paints a picture of dwellers not as a historically grounded population, but as one that has been constituted by movement and contact over time. The newcomers have been accommodated by the more settled population and above all the river itself and its seasonally endowed practices. At the same time, the dwellers are subject to industrial modernisation and economic change exposed by the state and large companies, all of whom take hold of the river’s streams, limiting habitual livelihoods, and introducing specialised employment and salaried jobs. When livelihoods became diversified, some of those become increasingly understood and treated as leisure,

diminishing their importance in the eyes of the authorities, companies, and, eventually, the dwellers themselves.

Chapter 3, which focuses on the flow of the Kemi River, conceptualises the river as a space-maker. The direction of the flow of water in the river defines the direction and intensity of human relations. Krause demonstrates how placenames along the Kemi River, for instance, illustrate which places have occupied a larger importance and how in some cases that importance has diminished as the flows have changed, even if the names continue preserving the memories of this spatial change.

Chapter 4 interrogates the past and present hegemonies on the river. It captures the evolution of how different actors view the flow of water as a resource, which can be applied for different economic means: initially, salmon weir fishing, then timber floating, hydroelectricity production, and, most recently, leisure tourism. When priority is granted to one activity, others need to gradually withdraw and power strugglers result. Krause argues (p. 111) that the changing interests of different actors and their ability to technologically re-invent the river water as a new profitable resource renders the river a subject of continuous transformation with no hope for permanency.

Each of the next chapters (5–9) focuses on one dominant activity practiced in the Kemi River. Chapter 5 disentangles the deeper meanings of fishing. Krause goes far beyond fishing as a form of subsistence or recreational practice in open air to explain it as a deeply phenomenological process: '[river] dwellers engage with water, the rhythms of discharge, temperature and biological processes' (p. 136) in which habitat, observation, sociality, sharing, and accumulating skills simultaneously emerge. Similarly, boating on the river, discussed in Chapter 6 in close conversation with Ingold's

work (2000 and elsewhere), emerges as a deeply embodied practice. Krause explains the river dwellers' profoundly skilled long durée relationship with the river as one that allows them to 'claim the stream'. Timber floating down the river, the topic of Chapter 7, is another skilled embodied practice of river dwellers, which should be understood through the concomitant processes of movement and friction (Tsing 2005).

This and the subsequent chapters (8–9), the former depicting the impact of the broadening road network in the catchment and the latter focusing on hydroelectricity production on the Kemi River, describe how traditional livelihoods have gradually withdrawn to be replaced by a small number of industrial jobs. The local livelihoods are no longer controlled by the river dwellers, but the managing enterprises and the water flow have shifted initially into a national and, later, global commodity. Furthermore, the industrial production criteria and infrastructure built, drawing from efficiency and productivity demands, impact local life in multiple ways. As the tempo of life speeds up and dwellers become increasingly dependent on centralised consumption and services, the river slowly transforms into an obstacle rather than a facilitator in dwellers' everyday lives. The reader gains insights into how, for example, hydraulic infrastructures act to transform relations between place, people, and materiality (see Hommes et al. 2022). From my personal point of view, this is the most fascinating chapter for someone like me, interested in the interplay of the financialisation, global connections, power, future aspirations, and often colliding interests between the state, corporate actors, engineers, and dwellers, all whom might hold different conflicting subjectivities simultaneously.

In the final chapter, Krause dwells on the rhythms and seasonality emerging from

the bounded lives of the river and its dwellers. Seasonality implies that dwellers are in a continual process of preparing for the future ‘in order to act appropriately at the moment that social and environmental conditions are right’ (p. 240). This realisation, in fact, captures the idea of ‘thinking like a river’, reflecting the book’s title: successfully dwelling with and through the river requires incorporating its flow, rhythms, and ongoing changes into oneself as a dweller.

Krause covers a wide range of vital issues defining lives in northern Finland. What he does not do is provide some answers regarding the impact of nature tourism on local livelihoods and outlining the competing interests there from locals’ perspectives—considering the lengthiness of the book, this is likely an informed choice from the author. Perhaps, more importantly, readers whose prior interests lay with the political and economic situations of the various parties—and the competing globalising interests involved in industrial resource extraction and similar activities—only feel as if they received an appetizer after reading the hydropower chapter of Krause’s book. After gaining insights from engineer dwellers, readers may also want to know more regarding other possible competing interests among the river dwellers themselves.

I recommend this book as an enjoyable read for anybody interested in nature–human relations, their historical evolution, and

prospective futures, in peripheral areas globally and in Northern Europe specifically. It is exceptionally rich in describing the various river practices and their embeddedness in dwellers’ lifeworlds, and Krause is highly convincing in analysing those within his chosen conceptual framework.

JAANIKA KINGUMETS  
POST-DOC RESEARCHER  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
TAMPERE UNIVERSITY  
jaanika.kingumets@tuni.fi

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