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I work as a Junior Researcher in Political Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lapland, Finland. I am currently writing my doctoral thesis on the body politics of continuity and change in the Nordic revivalist movement Laestadianism. In addition to research, I get to teach undergraduate courses at the Faculty. I especially enjoy teaching the bachelor's seminar in Political Science and International Relations and supervising BA theses, as well as working as a tutor for new students each autumn. Various administrative tasks also keep me busy.

There is an ongoing debate on whether we live in a secular or post-secular age. My premises are that cultural, social and political ideas and practices are often shaped by religion, and the study of the role of religions and religiosity helps us understand developments in the world today. In Finland, Laestadianism, a conservative Lutheran revivalist movement founded on the spiritual work of the Swedish-Sami botanist and preacher Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), exemplifies an interesting tradition of religiosity which appears in many ways to be unchanging and unmoved by the ways of the world.


Laestadianism can be seen as a product of Northern culture and the Barents region. The movement originated in the northern parts of Finland and Sweden around the mid-1800s and rapidly spread through the North Calotte among the indigenous Sámi population, as well as among the Finns. Laestadianism also managed to interweave Sámi traditions and beliefs into Lutheran teachings. The movement's birth and widespread popularity can be linked to the living conditions and historical situation in the North. Laestadianism has had a profound religious, cultural and social impact in the area.

It is quite apparent that the effects of religious conviction, thought and actions are not limited to religious institutions, but can extend to almost all aspects of society and life. This is especially true of Laestadianism, which is both a very communal and very comprehensive faith and lifestyle. What distinguishes Laestadians from the majority of

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Photo credit: Pasi Korkalo



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the inhabitants of western (secular) society is that they live in accordance with strict moral codes and practices, and standards of religiosity. They do not, for example, use alcohol, listen to rhythmic music, watch television, use make-up, or allow contraception. Instead, they participate very actively in their congregations and emphasise strong personal religious conviction.

Studying religion from the perspective of social science makes it possible to examine themes such as the links between the individual, the collective and society, the organisation of a collective, power, ordering and legitimisation, and the impact of social change. Religion is a force of both cohesion and conflict. It constructs as well as divides collectives and groups; it has both world-maintaining and world-shaking power.

I approach Laestadianism primarily as a social structure, a system of being and acting in the world, and hence the continuity of Laestadianism appears as the continuity of a social order. This order is expressed in the body and bodies. In the body, society and the individual, nature and culture, institutions and desires intersect. The body, then, provides an excellent context to look at control, the use of power, and possibilities for action and subjectivity.

Especially women's lives and position in the Laestadian community are regulated strongly by normative, conservative and patriarchal doctrines. The opposite is also true: women are pivotal to the fate and vitality of Laestadianism; the continuity of the Laestadian movement is in many ways in the hands – or in the wombs – of the women. I seek to call into question the inevitability and neutrality of continuity as a phenomenon, and claim that the continuity of Laestadianism is a construction that manifests itself in time, place and flesh, and that it is produced and upheld by different strategies of power and order(ing).

Besides religion and politics, and gender and embodiment, my research interests include northern culture and social change, representation, and the politics of memory. I have also worked on several research projects on the interrelations between art and social science. Recently, I became one of the editors-in-chief of *Kosmopolis*, the journal of the Finnish Peace Research Association, which has taken me into intriguing new areas of study.

I live and carry out research in the North and largely about the North. I enjoy the annual change of seasons and the fact that there is a river flowing nearby and squirrels and hares living in my backyard.