

Indigenous radicalism

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Indigenous radicalism has a long and important global tradition dating back to precolonial times. Indigenous radicalism represents an anti-colonial response to the horrific psychological and epistemic rupture created by European colonization among multiple aboriginal societies throughout the world. Indigenous radicalism subsequently developed during the traumatic transition from traditional economic and kin networks to a full-blown capitalist economy. Although indigenous resistance began with initial contact, the formation of European colonies and settlements in Africa, the Americas, and Oceania produced a spike in aboriginal anti-colonial radicalism.

Since the colonial period, Native people have used a multiplicity of tactics that may be defined as indigenous radicalism. The four fundamental

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propositions put forth by radical indigenous movements have been:

- 1 Native people are humans and have rights accordingly.
- 2 The right to aboriginal self-determination.
- 3 That indigenous epistemologies, languages, governance, and cultural practice must be sustained.
- 4 That indigenous control of traditional lands must be preserved.

The history of modern resistance is in many ways the history of tribal peoples resisting hegemonic imposition. From time immemorial, larger and more dominant societies have frequently attempted to colonize and incorporate those unlike themselves. In the ancient European world, city-states such as Greece commonly established colonies in areas they deemed previously unsettled and/or uncivilized. In the so-called New World, the Mexica or Aztec Triple Alliance extended their cultural hegemony in a similar fashion. From the view of aboriginal populations, this expansion was an encroachment upon their lands and traditions by an imperial structure. Those societies that are usually referred to as empires, although this concept is frequently and habitually misapplied, serve as the foundation that later colonial systems replicate. According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, empires are “an extensive group of states ruled over by a single monarch, an oligarchy, or a sovereign state.” Through insurrection and quotidian practices, indigenous communities have always fought against empire, while some aboriginal populations have either become empires or been incorporated into one.

With these ideas at their foundation, indigenous movements have taken multiple forms throughout the post-contact world. Importantly, *survivance*, as Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor describes the ongoing and unending process of indigenous struggles to survive, has been the most elemental form of aboriginal opposition. Although most historians have written that the arrival of Europeans in the New World marked the inexorable doom of aboriginal people, local communities often tell a counternarrative about their efforts to remain and resist.

What many western anthropological and historical accounts have not recognized is the countless and continued struggle of Native people resisting colonial oppression and what

effects this may have on its people. In the fifteenth century, Caribbean and Native resistance took two divergent pathways, similar to those seen in other indigenous communities around the world. The first form may be described as direct action or rebellion, while the second process involved the sustaining of precolonial knowledge and lifeways in spite of potential state violence. The former strategy is often viewed more heroically in leftist circles, while the latter is much harder to identify. Both strategies have been used successfully; in fact, both techniques are commonly needed to produce a sustainable indigenous movement.

Resistance in the Americas

Following the arrival of the Spanish to the Americas, the Taíno *cacique* Hatuey, with the help of community elders, led a warrior resistance that lasted from the late fifteenth century into the 1530s. This notable resistance movement is perceived as the first indigenous insurrection and is viewed with pride in contemporary Cuba, as Hatuey is honored with a statue that refers to him as the “first American rebel.” Yet even with these insurrections, settler society considered the Taíno people “extinct” by the eighteenth century; however, Taíno intellectual José Barreiro notes that contemporary Cuban communities in the Sierra Maestra mountains, such as Caridad de los Indios and La Econdida, still maintain an indigenous identity after five-plus centuries of being “extinct.” While settler society desired the “vanishing indigene,” Native people have refused to flee or assimilate.

Much in the manner in which Hatuey led warriors against newcomer oppression, various societies throughout the western hemisphere responded to settler colonialism with both coalescence and dissent. In early sixteenth-century Mexico, for instance, aboriginal populations were split in their alliances against the Spanish. Since the Aztec Triple Alliance (consisting of the Nahuatl-speaking communities of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan) had created many enemies in the Valley of Mexico, the Spanish were able to map their ally network onto those already warring against the Triple Alliance.

One hundred and fifty years later in the northern borderlands of New Spain (present-day New Mexico), Popé (also spelled Popay) led a successful 1680 insurrection against Spanish and Mexican imposition. A citizen of the Tewa-

speaking pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh, Popé had been accused of practicing witchcraft and was imprisoned with approximately fifty other traditional healers. In response to the suppression of indigenous spiritual and cultural practices, Popé and others drove Spanish administrators and settlers out of New Mexico into El Paso del Norte. These events, known as the Pueblo Revolt, are still contentious in New Mexico, where evocations of the colonial past are still very much alive. Although white settlers and their indigenous workers and allies would return to Santa Fe, the specter of insurrection forever changed indigenous-settler relations.

In addition to the indigenous-led resistances, indigenous radicalism also had European-born supporters. One of the best-known was the Spanish-born Dominican Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566). Las Casas wrote many well-known treaties protecting the rights and privileges of the diverse aboriginal peoples of the New World. As a Catholic friar, his support of indigenous rights, however, was aligned with his desire to convert and baptize the “heathen” Indians. In the well-documented 1550 Valladolid Controversy, Las Casas debated fellow Dominican friar Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1494–1573) about the role of Amerindians as “natural slaves.”

In the Yucatán peninsula inter-ethnic conflict between settlers and indigenous peoples reached a head with the Caste War (1847–1901). In 1848 a multi-ethnic coalition of Maya warriors drove white *yucatecos* from the peninsula. Although the Mexican state was violent in its response, the Maya community of Chon Santa Cruz (presently known as Felipe Carrillo Puerto, after the socialist governor of Yucatán) established itself as an autonomous nation. Nearly 150 years later, a similar strategic approach to creating autonomous municipalities is being employed by the Zapatistas Army of National Liberation in the highland state of Chiapas.

In the United States and Canada, many victorious anti-colonial insurrections countered Anglo-American hegemony. The Pequot War (1636–7), King Philip’s War (1675–6), and Pontiac’s Rebellion (1763), as they are known in mainstream historiography, are but three of the more well-known radical Native movements against British rule. Following in the wake of early colonial insurrection, indigenous insurrections transpired on a global level in the late nineteenth century. Many of these have been tied to

millenarian religiosity. On the plains, Paiute spiritualist Wovoka (1856–1932; also known as Jack Wilson) had a divine vision in 1889 and commanded what has been known as the Ghost Dance movement. Wovoka advocated a peaceful termination of Anglo-American expansion. Not allowing such activities, the US military violently suppressed the Ghost Dance movement and massacred over 300 Lakota in the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890.

Farther north on the Canadian prairies, the Michif (usually known as the Métis) rose against the Dominion government in 1869 and 1885. The Red River Rebellion and Northwest Rebellion, respectively, were organized by prophet Louis Riel (1844–85) and guerilla fighter Gabriel Dumont (1837–1906). With the increased settlement of Anglophone Canadians, the Michif instituted a provisional government, confirming their right as a people. Subsequently, Riel was hanged as a traitor and the Michif were crushed. Even though he was despised by many Anglo-Canadians, Riel was elected to the Canadian parliament on three separate occasions. The specter of Riel still looms in the hearts of indigenous people in the United States and Canada. Prior to his execution, Riel is noted as stating: “My people will sleep for 100 years, and when they awake, it will be the artists who give them back their spirit.” Riel’s radical prophecy materialized during the late twentieth century, as the Michif were fully granted aboriginal rights in Canada. Sadly, US Michif still have no legal status or rights.

In Argentina indigenous radicalism is a complex issue, as indigenous populations are commonly seen as extinct. The Qom-lik (commonly known as the Toba) have faced many struggles, as their nation spreads across three nation-states: Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia. Beginning in 1880, the Argentine government began a northern expansion project similar to the western expansion of the US and Canada. This “campaign to the desert” was intended to crush all indigenous radicalism in a nation-state with a small aboriginal population.

Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Australia

Outside of the struggles of Amerindian peoples in North and South America, the Māori people of Aotearoa (the Te Reo Māori word for New

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Zealand) and the “aborigines” of Australia are two of the most recognizable indigenous groups. The Māori, unlike other indigenous groups, have been able to reestablish their national and international presence. Many national materials are available in bilingual English–Te Reo Māori, while numerous national institutions also have bilingual names. This, in many ways, challenges the stereotypes of the marginalized indigene. As Ken S. Coates acknowledges in *A Global History of Indigenous People* (2004), “one of the many challenging aspects of understanding indigenous people is the fundamental difficulty of defining who is an indigenous person.” One common misconception is that indigenous inhabitants are small-scale, transitory, or otherwise insignificant people. In many ways, the Māori debunk this fallacy.

In the United States the privilege of defining indigenous identity has regrettably been controlled by the federal government that connects tribal identity to a system of blood quantum (the amount of “Indian blood” an individual has). In Aotearoa and Australia these same racist ideologies are not as visible as in North America. Instead, as is the case within most indigenous societies, kinship forms the foundation for ethnic or tribal identity. Even though the Māori and Aboriginal Australians have a different – although very similar – relationship to European colonization, their relationship to the state remains strong.

Nonetheless, British colonial incursions met a number of violent Māori insurrections during the nineteenth century. Between 1845 and 1872 the Land Wars developed into frequent clashes between white settlers and Māori warriors. These battles occurred when the guarantees of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which ensured continued land-control by specific Māori *imi* or tribes, were not upheld. Māori resistance came to a head with the First and Second Taranaki Wars in 1860–1 and 1863–6, respectively. These movements were tied to the emergence of the Hau Hau movement, a pro-indigenous, anti-Pākehā or settler ideology.

In late eighteenth-century Australia, Pemulwuy directed the initial resistance to colonialism. For over 200 years black Australians defied settler rule in the face of forced child removal and placement into boarding schools. These survivors, known collectively as the Stolen Generations, fought for legal recognition. In response to these ongoing

struggles, on February 13, 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued a formal apology.

Red Power and American Indian Movement

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the world was in flames. The colonized in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were smashing the yoke of colonialism. The Cold War was in full swing and the US was fighting “communism” in Viet Nam. Around the world, from Prague to Paris to Mexico City, students were demanding the university work for them. In the US the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was patrolling African American communities against police aggression.

In a similar vein, the US-based American Indian Movement (AIM) and Canadian Red Power Movement struggled to regain aboriginal territories for American Indian, First Nations, and Chicana/o peoples. AIM was founded in Minneapolis in 1968. A year later, a coalition of indigenous activists living in California, known as the Indians of All Tribes, reclaimed the former penitentiary island Alcatraz as “Indian Territory.” In a similar maneuver to reclaim indigenous education, American Indian and Chicana/o activists squatted an abandoned military base in Davis, California. In 1971 D-Q University was formed on this former squat.

Contemporary Radicalisms

Indigenous radicalism continues today. Contemporary insurrections materialize in a multiplicity of structures. The 1990 standoff between the Francophone community of Oka, Quebec and the Mohawk village of Kanesatake is one model based on direct action. When plans were released to build a new condominium development and extend the grounds of a private golf course onto disputed Mohawk territory, the Mohawk Warrior Society constructed a makeshift road-block halting the development. After a 78-day armed confrontation, expansion of the golf course was canceled.

Another model, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation, is a movement against taking power. Instances such as the Zapatista Rebellion (1994–present) in Chiapas, Mexico, demonstrate that many indigenous communities do not want to replace the neoliberal state with a Marxist-Leninist model. Instead, what may

be ascertained from the Zapatista movement and its global network of solidarity is a model of radicalism that “changes the world without taking power,” paraphrasing the work of John Holloway.

A third but equally crucial form of indigenous radicalism can be seen in the 2005 election of Evo Morales as the first indigenous president of Bolivia. Morales, a former coca grower and union activist, placed indigenous issues at the forefront of Latin American politics. Morales’ identity as Aymara, as well as his commitment to traditional Aymara practices, connects indigenous radicalism to the growing Latin American dissent from American-backed globalization. His mainstream version of indigenous radicalism is not from one that exists on the margins, but has become the center of electoral politics.

Other forms of contemporary radicalism include revitalizing traditional knowledge, as seen with the current work of the Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways (an Australia-based network working in Australia, Aotearoa, and North America), indigenous feminism, and indigenous intellectualism.

Indigenous Feminism

There is a common misconception that “feminism” is a manifestation of white society. But as feminist Andrea Smith (Cherokee) recognizes, indigenous feminism centers on anti-colonial practice within its organizing structure. Smith is one of the founders of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, a radical organization by and for women of color. According to Smith, indigenous feminists confront the way we conceptualize aboriginal sovereignty by challenging the nation-state system itself. This foundational differentiation demonstrates the disparity between settler and indigenous societies.

For indigenous feminists, gender, culture, spirituality, and sovereignty are all interconnected in a complex social system. As Joyce Green (2007) writes, “Aboriginal feminists raise issues of colonialism, racism and sexism, and the unpleasant synergy between these three violations of human rights.” Haunani-Kay Trask (Kānaka Maoli or Native Hawaiian), Winona LaDuke (Anishnaabek), Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee), Emma LaRocque (Michif), and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori) are at the forefront of contemporary indigenous feminist praxis.

Intellectual Projects

Anti-colonial indigenous intellectual projects expanded during the mid-twentieth century as transportation and communication allowed disparate indigenous populations to create cultural, economic, and intellectual networks. The national liberation movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s began to challenge the overtly anti-indigenous agenda of the colonial nation-state.

Sadly, even many revolutionary governments continued (and continue) to oppress indigenous groups unwilling to submit to the nation-state. For instance, during the Cold War, Sami fishermen in the Soviet Union were removed from their traditional lands along the Barents Sea, while reindeer-herding Sami were relocated away from the Soviet borderlands. In Nicaragua the Miskitu struggles against the socialist Sandinista government have been well documented.

What these struggles between indigenous communities and revolutionary regimes demonstrate is a conflict between two fundamentally different structures: one based on the nation-state and the other that struggles against it. Because of situations such as these, indigenous people have turned their struggles inward and against the notions of recognition. As Dene political scientist Glen Coulthard demonstrates, aboriginal recognition by settler states has continually proved unsuccessful. Instead, indigenous intellectuals have struggled on the epistemological and ontological front. The struggles now are frequently, although not entirely, intellectual.

The writing of black psychologist Frantz Fanon was instrumental in this transition from an overtly action-based revolutionary project to a dialectical and dialogical intellectual project based on engaged praxis. The ideas of Fanon are continued in the activist-centered writings of contemporary indigenous intellectuals such as Howard Adams (Métis, now deceased), Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk), Glen Coulthard (Dene), Andrea Smith (Cherokee), Esteban Ticona Alejo (Aymara), Silvia Rodriguez Cusicanqui (Aymara), and Margaret Maaka (Māori), to name only a few.

The work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori), particularly her seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, best represents the growing intellectual radicalism of a new generation of indigenous scholars.

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In *Decolonizing Methodologies* Smith presents a cogent argument on the history of colonial knowledge and articulates a vision of what an anti-colonial indigenous agenda may look like. Basing her research in post-Marxist western theory united with engaged aboriginal thought, Smith proposes 25 indigenous projects as a strategy to reclaim the colonized space of indigenous knowledge.

Following Smith's groundbreaking directives, hundreds of indigenous intellectuals were joined by their non-aboriginal colleagues to claim the academy as their own by forming the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) in April 2008. With aboriginal representation from North and South America, Hawai'i, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Australia, NAISA became the first international indigenous-run intellectual organization.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations (UN) adopted a landmark declaration outlining the rights of nearly 400 million indigenous people throughout the world. This maneuver followed nearly three decades of debate within the UN and 500 years of indigenous resistance to European colonialism. The Declaration establishes a framework for indigenous self-determination, as well as future reconciliation.

Although approved 143–4, including 11 abstentions, it is telling that the four countries unwilling to adopt the Declaration of Rights on Indigenous People include the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. While this does not preclude the failures of other states to address the issues brought forth by aboriginal peoples, it nonetheless highlights the unwillingness of these four governments to engage with indigenous peoples on an equitable and diplomatic basis. Problematically, the declaration was attacked, not for its *esprit de course*, rather for its “impracticality” in western constitutional democracies.

SEE ALSO: Alcatraz Uprising and the American Indian Movement; Argentina, Indigenous Popular Protests; Canada, Indigenous Resistance; Colombia, Indigenous Mobilization; Ecuador, Indigenous and Popular Struggles; Guaicaipuro (ca. 1530–1568); Katarismo and Indigenous Popular Mobilization,

Bolivia, 1970s–Present; Maori Indigenous Resistance; Mapuche Indian Resistance; Mexico, Indigenous and Peasant Struggles, 1980s–Present; Native American Protest, 20th Century; Oka Crisis

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