



First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and their Futures (FOCI)

Jeff Sissons

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First Peoples argues, controversially, that far from disappearing in the face of global capitalism, indigenous cultures today are as diverse as they ever were. Rather than being absorbed into a uniform modernity, indigenous peoples are anticipating alternative futures and appropriating global resources for their own, culturally specific needs. For Sissons, however, the traditional and the modern are not mutually exclusive: indigenous cultures and nation-states are aspects of the same contemporary condition, and their apparently opposing position is an expression of the contradictory nature of modernity in the 21st century. Indigenous peoples often define themselves in terms of their struggle against oppressive exterior forces; by contrast, the metropolitan cultures they struggle against often cling precariously to the surfaces of their new land. But indigenous identities have also been forged through alliances between indigenous peoples at international forums and in other settings. The loose alliances throughout the indigenous world constitute an alternative political order to the global organization of states. For Inuit, Eskimo and Saami in the northern hemisphere, for Mayan, Maori and Aboriginal Australians in the southern, and for more than a hundred distinct peoples in between, culture has become more than a heritage: it is a project. The numerous cultural renaissances that occurred throughout the indigenous world in the second half of the 20th century were more than passing events. Their momentum has continued into the new millennium, while the challenges they pose to states and their bureaucracies have become increasingly urgent. While the economic and political issues addressed by indigenous groups were and are depressingly similar – racism, loss of land and resources, inadequate health and education services – the solutions have been characterized by enormous cultural diversity.

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