

Conclusion

When Noe Silva and Stéfano Varese attempted, at the close of our conference in Madison, to summarize our discussions as a frame for our last plenary session, they highlighted both the promises and the difficulties in taking the kind of international and comparative perspective we have attempted in this book. In this brief conclusion I revisit some of the general themes and challenges associated with such a perspective. I cannot presume to represent here the richness of the perceptions and conclusions contained in each essay. Instead, I highlight three general points that emerge from the overall conversation, reiterating the desire—present in the work of all the contributors to this book as well as of all those present at the conference—that we can contribute in some way to a deeper and more productive dialogue among Native peoples and between Native and other forms of knowledge.

At the core of the project envisioned by the authors represented in this book is the understanding of Native histories and narratives in international and comparative context. As the recent history of indigenous movements has demonstrated, international collaboration has fostered new possibilities for indigenous mobilization and empowerment. At the same time, the process of examining Native histories and narratives in comparative and international perspective extends and deepens our understanding of each one. Both the similarities and the differences we find among them sharpen our appreciation of how, and for what purpose, these narratives are elaborated and constructed. Finally, our comparisons of North and South America as well as of the continental Americas with the Pacific world help remind us how deeply geography itself, and through it the relationships among distinct indigenous peoples and traditions, has been affected by colonialism.

A second theme that arises from the essays collected here is that decolo-

nization begins at home. Taken together, the authors demonstrate the multiple ways in which Native narrative and history can be rendered, from local community history or personal story to discussions of indigenous rights on an international level. That each provides a different but necessary perspective on Native histories is an important lesson that we all relearn, again and again, as we labor to decolonize indigenous narratives with the very same tools we have inherited from colonialism. And as we continue to strive toward this goal, we see the importance, also represented in this book, of the work that has been done by generations of activist-intellectuals, both Native and non-Native. In the context of collaboration and solidarity, the authors suggest, it is also possible to speak about and analyze internal divisions and differences in productive and inclusive ways.

A third and final salient theme here is that indigenous theorizing and translation—understood as the interpretation, reinterpretation, and improvement of ideas and concepts in their transition from one language or epistemology to another—transform our understanding of national and global processes and histories. Indigenous histories themselves have never really been local, except in the eyes of the colonizers. Rather, they have from the very beginning participated and been embedded in, transformed by, and resistant to globalization. At the same time, with the powerful revitalization worldwide of indigenous identity-based politics and in the new globalized context that has emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the long and critical engagement of Native peoples with world histories and processes can more easily and clearly come into view. Our goal is that the multiple experiences and perspectives offered here can contribute to a deeper, more grounded debate over our common, global, and hopefully ever more decolonized future. As became clear from the plenary session at our conference, the work of decolonization will not be done until Native narratives and epistemologies not only occupy a prominent position within the circle where knowledge is produced, but also constitute a central part of the knowledge that everyone seeks out.