

Revolt of the Savages: Primitive Revolts Against Civilization

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In 'The Rising of the Barbarians' (*Green Anarchy* #13), the author lays out very clearly his influences for his 'revolutionary perspective' in order to draw out exactly where his lines of solidarity lie. I can respect his clarity on the subject, but I think it demands an equal response on my own part. He writes: "'Primitive' people have often lived in anarchic and communistic ways, but they do not have a history of revolutionary struggle from which we can loot weapons for our current struggle." And this is where I couldn't disagree more (especially regarding to the post modernistic overtones) . However, the question has been raised as to what the contextual limits are on the implication of 'revolutionary struggle', but my response is the same. While I won't argue that more recent 'revolutionary' struggles have nothing to offer me, I'd argue the opposite, that "primitive" people have every bit of a history of revolt against civilization.

So perhaps I should clarify what I'm pointing towards in regards to revolution. For me, revolution comes about through the destruction (or fatal disabling) of civilization in a totalistic sense. Meaning very simply that I'm not talking about overthrowing or grabbing power long enough to rid the current regime or form, but essentially attacking the very thing that makes it possible at all for people to hold power over others: most immediately, the technological grid. I feel the utmost solidarity with those who have rejected and revolted against the civilized order which must impose itself upon others to exist. That system is, by all means, the antithesis of anarchy as it requires the surrendering of autonomy and self-determination for all life.

There is no shortage of literature regarding the plight of those who have been fighting this from inception to date and a minute portion of that will be the focus of this essay. As anthropologist John Bodley writes in *Victims of Progress*, indigenous resistance is generally aimed at being left alone, as the Free Papua Movement has reiterated itself in its current struggles. There are those who will keep away as long as possible, those who will fight, and those who see no other option outside of acculturation (through deception or deprivation).

It is nearly impossible for us to imagine the mentality of peoples who are fighting, not to improve the conditions of their survival, but for their lives. That many of us don't equate genocide and ethnocide comes from the fact that we really have no intrinsically deep connection with what it means to live and be a part of the community of life. Being in a situation that is absolutely bleak by any standard, indigenous people throughout the world and throughout history have fought with absolute conviction and fervor while preserving everything that is beautiful about life. It is impossible for me to convey the feeling I get when thinking of the Tasmanian gatherer-hunters who walked towards their would-be conquerors as if surrendering while dragging a spear between their toes in the face of annihilation. For these people, resistance is not a matter of abstract principle and ideology, but coming from the depths of their being.

Whether we are talking about the Kayapo of northern Brazil, the many indigenous revolutionaries throughout the South Pacific, Traditional Dineh on the Black Mesa, we are talking about resistance that is not just against capitalism, but against the entire artificial order. What I have found looking at indigenous resistance, both contemporary and historic, is a spiritual and tactical arsenal from which I gain nothing but hope and strength, much as I hope any anti-civilization insurgent or revolutionary would hope to aspire. Now I will focus on two particular cases of indigenous resistance that seem particularly important towards attacking the totality of civilization: the Pueblo Revolts of 1680 and the Apache resistance to colonization.

The Pueblo Revolts of 1680

In terms of pillaging the past for clues as to what we can learn and apply for our own resistance, it seems the Pueblo Revolt that swept and successfully removed the yoke of Spanish colonialism for 12 years is as good of a place as any to start. My interests in this particular revolt arose while I was walking through the city center (which has been for up to five thousand years) of Taos, New Mexico and I was told the street I was walking was where the Spanish Governor's head was rolled in the immediate aftermath of the Pueblo Revolt. It stood as a great shame to the 17th Century colonial European powers to be beaten so badly and in every sense, outsmarted. The Pueblo Revolt stands as one of the most relevant understandings of how the weaknesses of civilization could be used against it, as will be laid out.

The Spanish exploitation of the Pueblo peoples and land dates originates in the very late 16th Century as the European empires tore across the 'New World', attempting absolute conquering over both the human populations and the earth itself. It would seem most ironic that these very factors were the key to the success of the revolts as the Spanish had few other options but to put absolute faith in the power of their technological ability to subjugate both.

The Pueblo were a source of labor and marketable produce in what was an otherwise very dependent colony. The land that the Pueblo had lived on was very ecologically fragile, it had been grounds for empires to collapse in the recent past creating a population of mixed descent that were dependent upon a very ecologically sensitive form of horticulture based primarily off of irrigation and clustering of crops to get the most out of a short and undependable growing season. The ever present ecological stresses alone were enough on a community which was held together very successfully by a much tailored spirituality and rituality. The Spanish attack upon the people and their spirituality only fermented an otherwise patient anger and frustration against the attempt to turn their sacred land into a resource base for mercantile capitalism. The initially passive approach to the Spanish was to be completely altered by the continuation of brutal slaughters and worsening conditions for the Pueblo.

The Revolt

The revolt itself is widely accredited to the work of the prophet Popé, an emerging 'political leader' of the San Juan Pueblo and a traditionalist shaman. As a shaman, Popé was subjected to the most repression from the Spanish as they tried to curb the 'savage religions' and create Christians out of the 'heathens'. Much to their dismay, the more that he was made a symbol of harsh reprisal for enacting his spirituality via public floggings, etc. the more he became a symbol for traditional resistance against Spanish colonialism. This would essentially open the role of spiritual and tactical advisor for a successful revolt and it was here that he began to plot it.

After a four year prison sentence for 'sorcery', Popé relocated among the Taos Pueblo where he was only more adamant in his preaching that "Indians must be Indians again". The revolt was in every aspect ecologically based, he was receiving his council from Po-he-yemu ("one who scatters mist"), meaning that the revolt was taking its command from the sky. He was able to anticipate traitors among the Pueblo, primarily those who had turned towards Christianity, and planned accordingly. The Spanish were well aware that a revolt was being planned, but could get no information other than the leader being Po-he-yemu, whom was believed to be on the

other side of the mountains where captured and interrogated Pueblos would point. The entire time they were looking for an actual being when ironically their unknown ring-leader was the sky.

Popé's plan for revolt was based entirely off an understanding of the weaknesses of the Spanish and the strength of the earth. As they had been unable to fully plant themselves in this exotic and taxed environment, they would be dependent upon bi-monthly shipments which came up the Rio Grande. Popé saw the river as a snake, and recognized that cutting it off at one point would bring about dramatic effects for the rest of the body. He knew that other peoples would carry their support for an attack upon the Spanish and, as had many other indigenous prophet/warriors, was able to unify huge regions of indigenous peoples from various backgrounds to offer their support. He recognized that that the sporadic rains would always slow the shipment of supplies considerably for the Spanish and towards the end of the bi-monthly period they were always scraping the bottom of the barrel for resources and at their weakest point.

By looking towards Po-he-yemu, the peoples were watching the sky, knowing that the revolt would occur when the bi-monthly shipment was delayed by the coming of the rains. At that point, the Pueblo and supporters all along the Rio Grande would carry out a highly organized attack upon the Spanish starting with taking out the supply shipment and moving up the river before the northern towns had even found out the fate of those south of them. The revolt came as a complete surprise even though the Spanish knew a revolt was likely to come at any time and it was completely successful in debilitating Spanish rule.

The revolt was successful when gauged as an anti-colonial revolution as it had kept off the Spanish powers for 12 years (as long as the FSLN were able to hold out revolution in Nicaragua). The reason for the failure of the revolution can be seen as another lesson to learn from past resistance. After the revolt, Popé took it upon himself to claim some bit of the power vacuum that had been created in the chasm between traditional Pueblo culture and that of the Spanish colonizers. He saw the success of the revolution as a heads up to his impromptu leadership position, mocking more appropriately the role of Christian leaders in Spain at the time than shamans among any indigenous culture.

Popé's new found tendency towards power created divisions and distrust amongst the Pueblo leaving them more apt to be re-conquered by the Spanish as they did. What can be exhibited best by the Revolt then, is not only a sight at attacking the weaknesses of civilization, but at the importance of doing so in a manner that can prevent a position of power to remain open. For all intensive purposes, this suits us rather well. The Pueblo society, while being under heavy attack by Spanish colonizers, was still in a physical shape much like it had been for thousands of years. It was relatively localized and the face of power was within physical grasp as was proven. In this sense, the complete alienation that our society creates between the people and the 'people in power' creates a scenario in which the role of power is out of reach. Disabling the technological system that fuels this highly stratified society would create a jolt towards localization that is almost completely unknown to us. Either way, the Pueblo Revolts give us a glimpse of vital elements of guerrilla warfare tied to the ecological situation more so than any of the civilized 'revolutions', and therefore something that seems more applicable in an assault on the whole of civilization.

Apache Resistance

The Apache carried on one of the most successful campaigns against colonization during the peak of westward expansion. In every sense, their resistance speaks of the beauty and conviction of a people who would risk everything in order to flee a life out of their own hands. When thinking of the Apache, we are often left with the image of Geronimo despite his role as more of an exception than the rule among warriors. While ensuring the need to not write him off, he was far more of a 'loose cannon' than many of the other legendary Apache warriors who fought and died against the tide of civilization, of which Victorio comes to mind who, among other warriors, took his own life before being taken captive. This stands as a confirmation of why after exhaustive and complete efforts to annihilate (physically and culturally, respectively) the Apache, the colonial powers were never able to capture an Apache warrior unless s/he had surrendered.

The Apache resistance is extremely interesting in that these were gatherer-hunters which seems to have been the key to their relative success (while arguably a larger reason for conviction as this lifestyle was/is impossible to fully acculturate into civilization). In this respect they completely embody any kind of ideal as far as attempting to figure the ideals of guerrilla warfare against civilization. Unlike the later leftist guerrillas, they were completely self-sufficient (or able to steal from the army whatever they needed additionally) and thus not reliant upon a peasantry for support or for knowledge of the area.

One of the greatest testimonies of the strength, physically and spiritually, of the Apache is Eve Ball's recorded narrative from a then young Apache, James Kaywaykla who grew up through a period of prolonged warfare and still leaves us with a beautiful account not only of resistance, but the beauty of Apache life: *In the Days of Victorio*. Apache of all ages were brought into the life and death battle against those who sought to tame them either by physical elimination or 'eliminating the savage' in them. The young were as much a part of the warfare as were the warriors, and under these conditions the Apache fought with only an increase in motivation. Kaywaykla sums by pointing out:

“[The American forces] have admitted frankly that they were outwitted, out-manuevered, and out-fought by a handful of ill-equipped, half starved warriors, handicapped by the presence of their families, and dependent upon what they could steal of food and ammunition. They testified to the caliber of my people by placing thousands of theirs in the field against a few — a very few — of ours.” (pg. 73)

It was the standard for the Apache to have a minimal amount of warriors against hundreds and more of well armed and prepared soldiers and the Apache would be able to hold out against them. The Apache would learn to adapt and incorporate every aspect of warrior life into their culture, which, much to their benefit, was still able to leave their core values and beliefs relatively intact.

Questions of Applicability

So the question that now opens is what can be learned from this very brief look into the nature of Apache resistance and what ultimately brought about its failure. The Apache were far

more successful when gauged on a per battle basis with any of the successful civilized ‘revolutions’ that have been carried out over the last centuries. They were far more mobile and flexible than Cuba’s 26 Julio Army, the Sandinistas, and the Shining Path and so on, and were capable of bringing about a more exhaustive assault on the enemy. What seems to stand out the most is that the lifeway of the Apache were completely at odds with the nature of the civilization they were fighting against. It’s noteworthy to recognize that Cuba achieved its highest rates of sugar production for international export after the revolution; it was still in a viable position for the market. The failure of the Apache could easily be seen as more akin with the fate of the Sandinistas who Reagan saw as a part of the communist threat ‘in his back yard’ and thus carried out a lengthy counter-revolutionary guerrilla war to ensure that the FSLN wouldn’t be able to assert themselves politically and economically.

So what is the message here? Are we as doomed as the Apache and the Pueblo if we look towards their resistance as our own arsenal? From what I see, the problem isn’t necessarily the conviction or necessarily the tactics, as the Apache, like most indigenous peoples (such as the revolutionaries in Bougainville) put in practice the principles of guerrilla warfare as good if not better than other civilized revolutionaries that would follow or coincide with them. The problem is the nature of this particular stage of civilization with hyper-specialization, mega-technology, and a huge surplus of people as potential ‘cannon-fodder’. The only reason that the United States has jurisdiction over what was ‘Apache land’ was that they had the numbers and the capital to just continually throw into ‘westward expansion’. It’s not a question of ability, but of how much you have on the table to lose. Fortunately, it seems entirely possible to just disable the whole thing with minimal warfare as the vital organs of civilization become more centralized and more self-dependent.

My decision to limit this brief bit on the topic to the Pueblo Revolt and the Apache resistance was far from unintentional. It seems that a critical reprisal of what any resistance has to offer us should focus on both targets and on methods of hitting those targets. The ability of Popé to plan ecologically against the weaknesses of Spanish colonization mixed with the spiritual and physical determination and fighting ability of the Apache create an extremely volatile mixture against the current order. The question of what can be achieved is intrinsically tied to what it is we are going to attack as Wolfi had appropriately pointed out. Looking at the history of civilizations and our current state, it becomes apparent that this global civilization is bound to collapse, and soon. Of course collapse comes about as much internally as externally, and I think that situation is far preferable. From what I know, it is entirely possible that a calculated attack against the technological grid could bring about a huge enough pulse in the mainstay of this civilization to give it a lethal blow. This requires a dedication not towards abstract principles, but an understanding of what it is we are losing and what we have to gain and to fight for.

Is what I’m fighting for just the enactment of my own will? I have no policy to impose upon the world or any kind of ‘master plan’ that I seek to put out after that vacuum may potentially be created. What I hope to achieve is the elimination of a system that eliminates the potential of all life to live free by virtue of existence. That limiting comes as much by contaminating the air, soil, water, and flesh of all life as it does by direct control over individuals, and as an anarchist, I see that system: civilization, as the impediment to a truly autonomous existence. This is a target that has been recognized by indigenous resistors who merely want to “be left alone”, fighting for their autonomy and self-determination. Knowledge of how ‘primitives’ have lived plays an equal part in the destruction of the totality of civilization. I see it as in many ways being an insurrection for

the mind against the linear, rationalized, Future obsessed thought that allows the continuation of civilization within our own minds.

Culminating a successful attack against this entire order seems to point towards the tactics and conviction which indigenous people have used against civilization every step of the way. The knowledge of life that a gatherer-hunter has creates a situation of absolute independence which has always been a weakness for 'civilized' guerillas. Past and current civilized revolutionaries have only been successful so long as they use and ultimately exploit the indigenous and peasant populations of the areas they seek to claim . The underlying populism of creating a huge solidified force has always been a trap for the few to impose their social policies and must therefore always be viewed critically . Any successful revolt will only be the product of determined individuals fighting for their absolute autonomy. Essentially, like the author, I'm laying out what I see as a part of my own 'revolutionary' will, and with it my sources of inspiration and my desires, hoping that it will serve in some way as a stepping stone for others to look into the beautiful and tragic history of indigenous resistance. It's not so much an issue of 'primitive' or 'civilized' revolts, but a question of whether you are fighting civilization or not. My deepest inspiration and solidarity goes out to those who have recognized this as their enemy and have resisted appropriately.

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