Chapter 3
Fourth World Theory and Methods of Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Fourth World Theory (FWT) emerged in the experience of political leaders and scholars seeking to explain the position of non-state nations and peoples in their political and sometimes violent interactions with other non-state nations and with states’ governments that pursue dominance and control over territories and peoples inside claimed boundaries. The conceptual framework of FWT is rooted in the dynamic and evolving relationships between people, the land and the cosmos. Authors explain the globally shared Four Directions metaphor as symbolic of the relational connection of human experience with the land and the cosmos; and how this emblematic instrument blends qualitative, quantitative and relational reasoning to apply knowledge systems that have local, regional and global applications. The authors seek to present a tested conceptual framework that permits one to explain social, economic, political, environmental, strategic and cultural phenomena blending indigenous scientific knowledge with conventional sciences.

OVERVIEW

There is a widely accepted tendency in political, academic, and social institutions to take for granted what we mean when using the word “indigenous.” “Indigenous” or “Native” are terms of political art and academic convention often used interchangeably as an adjective describing “people” or “peoples” (Fenstad, Hoyningen et al. 2002, Agrawal 2004, Atleo 2004).

Using the terms in this way draws distinctions between those persons who are members of an ancestral community with ancestral ties to land and territory versus settler populations or their descendants that
cannot claim such ancestral ties. Imperialism or colonialism is implicit in naming these distinctions. “Indigenous peoples” are distinct cultural and political societies colonized, for example, by European kingdoms, Chinese imperial dynasties, and Arabic Emirates from the 13th to the 20th centuries, and who were eventually declared minority populations within newly proclaimed political jurisdictions comprised of settler populations or controlled by a ruling nation. Consequently, “indigenous” is a category borne of statism or centralized control through the enforcement of universal laws within bounded territory by virtue of exercising power through the state political apparatus. It has become a political term of art adopted by the United Nations, International Labor Organization, states’ governments and many Fourth World nations to designate the peoples colonized and re-colonized by newly formed states. Indeed, neo-colonial processes are at the root of sub-regional and regional conflicts that are widely referred to as “civil wars” when in fact they are wars of self-determination or land control between the state and internally colonized peoples (Ryser 1985). The neo-colonial process could have incorporated peoples into the new states formed from crumbling empires in the 20th century by establishing negotiated power sharing, but the colonial patterns established from the 15th century proved unbending for the most part despite efforts to establish unified pluralistic state governments (Ryser 1994) (Ryser [b] 1994).

**Colonialism**

Colonialism is only one of at least four expressions of European imperialism since the fifteenth century (Smith 1986, 1987, Smith 1999, 2012), with one of those expressions originating in the perspective of indigenous societies or original nations. European expansionism occurred within Europe for hundreds of years before the fifteenth century, and was not limited to European Kingdoms. Waves of imperialism also swept across Asia from China and Manchuria, the Middle East from Saudi Arabia, and Moors of Northern Africa into southern Europe itself hundreds of years before the fifteenth century. After the collapse of the British and Ottoman Empires the decolonization movement of the early twentieth century, moreover, left behind complex political disruption among original nations, frequently resulting in what is today call “civil war.”

Imperialism involves the invasion of the territories of pre-existing nations, deemed as “tribes,” “primitives,” “nomads” or similar terms signifying inferior otherness. Long before the emergence of the modern state in the 17th century, nations were struggling to maintain their cultural and political identities against the backdrop of invading and assimilative forces. Those assimilative forces were military victors and invasive migrating peoples who came to control the historical narratives that eventually became the origin stories of today’s states, with the nations (or their remnants) becoming subsumed discursively into those narratives. Some of those nations are recognizable to us today; aside from the original nations of the Americas (Méxica, Maya, Anishinabe, Lakota, etc.), Scotland, Frizland, Waripiri, Euskadi, Maasai, Palestinians, Dinka, Bedouins, and Catalonia are examples of countries and peoples who maintained their national identities but have been incorporated into states. Many more are far less well known—such as the Kurds of Kurdistan, the Rohingya of Myanmar, the Naga of India, and the Otomi of Mexico—but they can be found on all of the world’s continents except Antarctica.

These historical circumstances and political/cultural clashes created a need to understand how the world and relations between peoples were changing. There had been no conceptual framework to explain what had happened between nations and emerging states or what changes began to unfold in the 20th century where nations that had been captive in empires acted to extricate themselves to become internally autonomous, independent states. The need for a theoretical framework that provides concepts aiding