
Christophe Giudicelli and Gilles Havard’s edited collection *Les Révoltes indiennes: Amériques, XVIE-XXIE siècles* constitutes a useful and relevant contribution to the Indigenous studies of the Americas. It will surely benefit any scholar interested in the recent academic considerations pervading this active and ever-evolving field of study for it allows for a thorough rethinking of intercultural interactions in the “colonial” context through the prism of indigenous resistance against any form of imposed authority and oppression that colonization resulted in. Not only is the reflection engaged in this collective book perfectly in line with international ethnohistorical scholarship, since it aims at reconsidering the initiatives taken by indigenous populations to adapt to and survive the colonial order as a whole; it also offers a strikingly comprehensive analysis of the multi-faceted realities of indigenous peoples as they faced (and still face) settler colonialism at different times – from first European settlement to internal or national expansion in the wake of independences, for instance – and in various areas throughout the Americas.

Here, the specific paradigm chosen to address Native American resistance to subjugation is that of “revolts” or “rebellions,” terms that, according to the authors, were coined, used and reused – more often than not wrongfully – by historians in the 19th and 20th centuries (14). The authors contend, and rightly so, that such notions of “revolts” and “rebellions” stem from a purely colonial perspective and apprehension of the violent events colonists have had to face as they consolidated their undertaking of territorial, economic, cultural, and political appropriation of Native America and that they thus are puffed up with distorted visions of Indian realities. Therefore, the main goal of the book – that of deconstructing semantic categories developed by those who represented the colonial power (and appropriated by historiography) when it came to describe indigenous “uprisings” against the established order – is to complicate the study of violence in colonial America as New Indian History demands in terms of methodology. This core reflection on terminology as to the choice of terms historians should use to describe the events studied in the most accurate manner (“revolt,” “rebellion,” “war,” “massacre,” “revolution,” etc.) serves a deeper analysis of indigenous agency in asymmetrical conflictual contexts through time and space. Indeed, as stated by the authors in the introduction, “one needs to take into account all the identifiable actors in the context of these uprisings and examine the very reasons for their actions” (15–16). In other words, conflicts that have emerged from colonization must also be
studied from an indigenous perspective, which implies both a reinterpretation of colonial primary sources in the light of recent historiography and the taking into consideration of indigenous anthropological complexity – in terms, for example, of social and political structures, geopolitics, and the ways “conflict” is apprehended.

The project of the book is extremely ambitious in the sense that it attempts, through the juxtaposition of thirteen case studies, to perceive common traits in the reaction of indigenous populations to colonial oppression throughout the whole American continent and over a span of five centuries. Right away, the authors concede that exhaustiveness is not an achievable goal and that the purpose of the thirteen contributors was never to reify one specific field of study that could be defined as “Indian revolts,” pointing out, for instance, that the term “revolt” was much less present in the historiography of North America than in that of South America (15) and reaffirming – if need be – that Native America could never be considered as a monolithic ethnic and cultural whole. Yet, through its comparative dimension, the series of thirteen articles, sorted chronologically, aims at highlighting a certain historical continuum in the way indigenous populations organized locally to maintain their sovereignty and integrity in the face of imperial and republican colonial incentives. Also, in considering two periods of time – the “colonial” period and the contemporary era – the book puts to the fore potential echoes between the past and the present in the way colonial powers perceived and adapted to Indian “uprisings” as well as the very reasons that have led indigenous communities to resort to violence. In the process, readers are confronted by the methodological challenges imposed by the proper practice of indigenous studies, and some articles provide outstanding examples of ethnohistorical reflections. Gilles Havard’s study of the Natchez “revolt” of 1729, for instance, offers fascinating anthropological insight regarding the social reality of the Natchez and shows that the so-called “revolt,” though it occurred in the context of colonial intrusion, could be studied as part of the Natchez traditional ritual of mortuary sacrifice. Capucine Boidin’s study of the Guarani language correspondence of the Indian elites of Paraguay (1752–1753) points out the ambiguity of translated documents as far as the analysis of indigenous reality is concerned and reaffirms in the meantime the need for ethnohistorians to master the language of the population they intend to study. Both Louise Bénat-Tachot’s chronicles of the rebellion of cacique Enrique in Santo Domingo (1519–1534) and Ignacio Telesca’s analysis of the abolition of “Indian villages” in Paraguay (1848) allow for a nuanced interpretation of Indian “uprisings” (or absence thereof), pointing out the ambivalence of indigenous forms of resistance depending on the context of oppression. Finally, Gilles Rivière’s study of recent “wars” in Bolivia and Kyra
Grieco’s interpretation of the reappropriation of Indianness in contemporary Peru perfectly illustrate the ongoing consequences of colonization on Native America and lead the reader to current decolonial considerations, while also proving the assumption that the study of “conflict” in colonial America implies a certain continuity in the strategies developed by Indians and their apprehension by colonial powers.

Despite the undeniable contribution of this collective work to the field of indigenous studies, one might regret the fact that only six out of the thirteen articles have bibliographies and the absence of translation into French of important quotes in certain chapters. Besides, concluding remarks to address the questions raised in the introduction would have been appreciated, given the laudable original intention to engage a transnational reflection on conflict in Native America.

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