

Dancing to the Beat of Indigenous Resistance

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Black Indian identity charts a course that, by its own hybrid nature, sails beyond the simplistic binaries commonly associated with racial nationalism, while at the same time carving out its own cross-cultural position in the struggle against white supremacy.

In relation to the anarchist/Black Indian connection, as Wilson Harris has noted, “The very ground beneath us has been stolen. I think that’s why Proudhon wrote his book, *Property IS Theft*.” Harris then goes on to trace his own struggle as a Black Guyanan to the anti-colonial revolt of 1687 fomented by the combined forces of African maroons and Arawak Indians.

Cultural provocateur Kokonda Dub (aka Raging BlakkIndian Dub) was born and raised in Jamaica of Jamaican/Haitian parents, and his lineage includes Native ancestry. Through the inclusion of Harris’ work and related ideas and musical explorations in his new book, *Understanding the Connections Between Black and Aboriginal Peoples*, Kokonda dub confirms his affinity with the anarchist movement.

As he recently explained to me when he heard that I was reviewing his current audio, visual and print endeavors for The Fifth Estate, “Not surprisingly it’s anarchist and anti-authoritarian folks who are the most supportive. When the right time comes we know who our real friends and allies are.”

Potential anarchist allies will find much of interest in not only his book, but the intrinsically-related edutainment video compilation of Black Indian music culled from the “Dancing on John Wayne’s Head” series issued under the banner of yet another Kokonda Dub project, *The Fire This Time (TFTT)*. Similarly, his new music label, Indigenous Resistance (IR), is the perfect companion to both the book and video. Its initial releases point a musical blowtorch at the present shitstem while simultaneously engaging in the process of illuminating the revolutionary horizon beyond the miserabilism of the here and now.

Fully living up to its label name, IR’s hard-hitting musical salvos range from that of hip hopper DJ Hap, whose band, Nuk Posse, makes music that is rooted in the resistance of the Thule people of Greenland (forced off their land by the Danish government in order to build a US military base) to a politically-charged techno mix that samples the music of the Krikati Indians of Maranho, Brasil.

The Krikati recently destroyed power lines erected in their territory, causing widespread urban power outages, as a way to force the Brazilian government to seriously deal with them on territorial demarcation after the former had ignored years of peaceful negotiations. This vinyl recording has been made available free of charge in Brazil and, like the aforementioned Nuk Posse one, was mixed by UK-based Dr Das of the decidedly radical Asian Dub Foundation band, and features the vocals of Mad Mike (Banks) of Underground Resistance, whose Black Indian ancestry is part of the untold story of the Detroit techno scene which is further documented in Kokonda Dub’s book.

The flipside of “WOO’ is devoted to the martyred Patoxi Indian, Galdino, and features Portuguese narration by Marcello “Troublemaker” Yuka of the Brazilian band, O’Rappa.

The instrumental mix included here, “Remembering Galdino, Remembering Jenin,” seeks to make links with other oppressed indigenous peoples around the world. By piecing together a combination of orally transmitted

“reasonings,” personal on the road experiences, and related library research, the Kokonda Dub book, which is the end result of thirteen years of travel, offers a vital historical context for these recordings, and gives us much food for thought.

The book’s cultural mapping of a Black Indian network includes comments on the aboriginal/African connection by such dub poets of Jamaican descent as Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora, Jean “Binta” Breeze and ‘dm Cooper. As Cooper, who lives in Toronto, puts it, “I don’t think I can speak of the history of the Caribbean without making reference to the original inhabitants who, in the case of Jamaica, were Arawak people. Black people’s history did not begin with slavery. At the same time, the history of Jamaica didn’t begin with Black and European people coming into the island, there was a history prior to that.”

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, Kokonda Dub’s book rings in the voice of Trinidad’s Brother Resistance who, like Cooper, is the sworn enemy of Columbus. In the words of the rapsoman, “It’s important that the people become aware of the Holocaust that happened to Native people.” On the East Coast of Central America, we make cultural stops at Puerto Viejo in Costa Rica, Where Bribri Indians mixed with the descendants of enslaved Africans, and on the Garifuna trail we pass through Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama.

As is the case with Jamaica, those on the African side of the Black Indian heritage equation were often seeking freedom by escaping slavery to live among aboriginal people. In South America, we travel with Kokonda Dub to Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Brasil. Music is usually a signpost in this journey, whether it’s the saya music of Bolivia with its combination of Andean instrumentation and African percussion which is showcased in the accompanying video or the bumbu boy of Maranhao and the maracutu and coca de samba music of Pernambuco in Brasil. Speculation is that the proximity of Brazilian quilombos (fugitive slave communities) and aboriginal communities birthed the present day Black Indians found as far south as Rio Grand de Sul which borders Uruguay.

Returning to North America, in Oakland, California, circa the early Nineties, Kokonda Dub recounts a meeting with collaborator Michael Franti. On that occasion, Franti discussed the search for his own Black Indian history to Kokonda Dub, while he busily prepared to participate in an anti-Gulf War protest back in the reign of King George I. Deja vu, anyone?

Moving south, we get to visit a bit with Bubble, a member of the Wild Magnolias, a Mardi Gras Indian band in New Orleans. Bubble recalls that “masking Indian” is done in solidarity with the Seminole, Natchez and Choctaw peoples of Louisiana who gave refuge to African American maroons and joined with them in uprisings against the plantation system: Chuck D of Public Enemy ushers in the hip hop connection, being not only a longtime Kokonda Dub stalwart on TFFT productions like, “At Least American Indian People Know Exactly How They Have Been Fucked Around,” but someone who regularly addresses aboriginal youth groups, including appearances sponsored by the American Indian Movement.

Similarly, on the youth tip, we meet Sid Bobb, whose mother, Lee Maracle, is a fiery Native American writer living in Vancouver. Moving to eastern Canada, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, once an underground railroad destination, we are introduced to the rapping son of activist Rocky Jones, whose Black Indian heritage shines on one of TFFT’s earliest ‘singles, the anti-rape track, “Aboriginal Hitch Hike Rap.”

Even jazz has its own Black Indian history, and Adrade hooks us up with Lee Mixashawn Rozie, who is descended from the Mohegan, a people who refused to live on reservations. Mixashawn has played tenor sax with Ornette Coleman’s former drummer, Ronald Shannon Jackson and the latter’s band the Decoding Society, and With his own brother, Rick Rozie, he formed a jazz group with the telling name of Afro-Algonquin. In a similar vein, jazz drummer, Jack Dejohnette, has explored his Black Indian roots in what he calls a “fifth world” context. As the book’s story unfolds, the reader becomes increasingly aware that creole music throughout the Americas has always included Indian components.

In essence, Kokonda Dub sums up his project as follows, “Searching for the knowledge that has been left out of the pages of history books has been a long standing passion for me. Finding that has meant not being satisfied with just going to libraries and scouring academic tomes. To locate that knowledge I have committed myself to endless hours on buses, trudging alone on dusty roads, climbing mountains in remote locations and surviving near perilous encounters with military forces.” As is true of The Fire This Time video, his book length chronicle of the resulting spiritual/musical/political journey is not meant for an audience breathing only the thin air of the ivory tower, but is geared to be widely accessible to all and especially to Black Indian youth in search of their identity.

It seeks to focus on contemporary Black Indian struggles, alliances and rebellions. These are not images of quaintly exotic indigenous people sitting around a fire in the jungle. Unlike Sting, Kokonda Dub is not the paternalistic pop star tourist having his picture taken with painted Indians in the romantic Amazon, as if their cause is equivalent to that of extinct animals. Referencing Brasil, Kokonda Dub seeks to not only connect with Guarani people living in the rain forests, but those living in the dirt poor favelas of Sao Paulo. By refusing cynicism and despair, Kokonda Dub's book/music/video project burns ever so brightly celebrating acts of insubordination and fuelling dreams of insurrectionary desire.

Rage on Blakk Indian ... Understanding The Connections Between Black and Aboriginal Peoples is available from: www.bookstream.biz or tft3000@yahoo.ca. Music, videos and photos can be obtained at www.firethistime.com.



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