

Information Technology—A Tool to Protect Indigenous Cultural Sovereignty

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Generally, People believe that the information technology is a way used to assimilate the indigenous people. However, in the article *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet Across Indian Country*, Duarte (2017) downplays the view that considers information technology as a threat to indigenous identity and lays greater stress on the opposite view— the Internet is needed for the native Americans, not only for education purpose but also for defending their cultural identity. She claims that it is not a wise idea to isolate themselves from the world to protect their culture, philosophy, and self-identification, on the contrary, it is the current system which is shaping their attitudes, values, and behaviors in a colonial way and preventing them from being distinct people. She points out that the colonial way of taking lands from indigenous people has not extinct yet. For example, the Stephen Harper's plan of the construction of transborder oil pipeline and tar sands extraction breaks treaty obligations to tribes, and the state government of Mexico had built a dam without getting the permission from the tribe. She also emphasizes that information technologies, like the smartphone, social media, and the Internet, play a decisive role in defending indigenous people's right and resisting the colonialism. For instance, in Harper's case, tribal people are gathered to protest for their right through smartphones, and a young tribal man in Mexico used his phone to record and post a video of Mexican state police beating up tribal people to attract attention and raise awareness of their situation among indigenous people (Duarte, 2017).

I agree with Duarte's opinion since we are in a digital age which the Internet

has become an indispensable part of modern life. History, thoughts, and cultures can be permanently preserved on the Internet, while the indigenous cultures are facing the threat of being assimilated by dominant culture without injecting vitality offline. From my personal points of view, a culture needs vitalities, innovations, and most importantly users, to keep flourishing. According to Duarte (2017), the natives are forbidden to speak their original language in school and forced to speak American-English. Also, only Eurocentric American history narratives are taught in public school textbooks (Duarte, 2017). Under this kind of assimilation system, they will lose their culture, their roots, and their identity. However, with the help of the Internet, they can create their own cultural or linguistical communities which develops the contemporary American Indigenous culture.

In conclusion, the information technology is like “wings” which help indigenous people fly out of the cage of the “reserved land” and release themselves from the colonial chains. For centuries, the initiative of deciding the way of the coexist between the natives and immigrations were held on the colonists’ hands, while the information technology will become a powerful tool to help indigenous people seize it back and let them decide their lifestyle on their own.

Reference

Duarte, M. (2017). *Network sovereignty: Building the Internet Across Indian Country*.

1st ed. Seattle: University of Washington Press, pp.1-25, 144-149.