Revitalizing Indigenous Cultures: Humor and Other Forms of Resistance

Native American

Aboriginal Australian

Māori

Aubree Zimmer
Introduction

This zine presents various ways Native American, Aboriginal Australian, and Māori revitalize their culture through humor and other forms of resistance. In each section, there is a sample of traditional/humorous folklore with the characteristic animal and trickster humor found in all three indigenous cultures. Beyond folklore, different forms of resistance and modes of spreading culture are presented. At the end of each indigenous group's section, there is a page containing modern examples of revitalizing culture. This gives additional information of how humor as well as other cultural aspects are spread by mediums unrealistic for a zine (i.e. movies, books, festivals, etc.).

The purpose of the zine is to show how indigenous groups are restoring their culture after European settlers diminished their cultural identity. The current dominant culture is derived from the European settlers and still serves to oppress the native people. Revitalizing indigenous cultures is resisting this dominant culture by embracing indigenous identity over the identity the dominant group placed upon them. This zine, in itself, serves as a form of resistance, spreading the culture to our Berea community.

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Aubreee Zimmer

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Rabbit Plays Tug-of-War
Retold By: S. E. Schlosser

Now Rabbit had a favorite place on the river where he always went to drink water. It was on a bend in the river, and two Snakes lived there, one on the upper side of the bend and one on the lower. Rabbit soon learned that neither of the Snakes knew that the other Snake lived there.

Ho, ho, ho, thought Rabbit. I am going to have a bit of fun!

Rabbit went to the Snake that lived on the upper bend of the river. "I am a very strong Rabbit," he told the Snake. "I bet I can pull you right out of the water."

"I bet you can't!" said the Snake, who was very strong indeed.

"I will get a grape vine," said Rabbit. "You will pull one end and I will pull the other. If I pull you out of the water, I win the contest. If you pull me into the water, then I win."

The Snake on the upper bend agreed. Then Rabbit went to the Snake on the lower bend and made the same deal. He told both Snakes that he would be standing out of sight on top of the river bank and would give a whoop when he was in place and ready to start the contest. Both Snakes were pleased with the arrangement. They were sure they would win against such a feeble little Rabbit.

Rabbit took a long grape vine and strung it across the wide bend in the river. He handed one end to the first Snake and the other end to the second Snake. Then he gave a loud whoop from the middle of the river bank and the two Snakes started tugging and pulling with all their might.
"That Rabbit is really strong," thought the Snake on the upper bank. He would tug and tug and the vine would come a little closer to him and then he would nearly be pulled out of the water.

"My, Rabbit is much stronger than he appears," thought the Snake on the lower bank after he was almost hurled out of the water by an extra strong pull from up the river.

Rabbit sat on the bank above both Snakes and laughed and laughed. The Snakes heard him laughing and realized that they had been fooled. Letting go of the rope, they swam to the middle of the bend and met each other for the first time.

Both Snakes were angry with Rabbit for making them look foolish. They agreed that Rabbit could no longer drink from his favorite place on the river bend where they lived. In spite of his protests, they sent Rabbit away and would not let him come down to the riverbank anymore. So whenever Rabbit grew thirsty, he had to turn himself into a faun in order to get a drink from the river.

After that, Rabbit decided not to play any more jokes on Snakes.

(Creek/Muscogee Tribe)

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**A Discussion about Indian Affairs**

"One of the deeper ironies in this poem is that these tribal names aren't the names that we call ourselves. The name 'Cherokee' comes from our neighbors the Choctaw who told the Spanish that we were 'the people in the hills.' 'Navajo' and 'Sioux' are imposed names, and so on. Some of the names imposed from the outside almost sound like words developed for comedy. 'Kickapoo' was an imposed name... Beyond that, 'tribe' is a word that was put on us. We think of ourselves as nations, each with its own language and culture."

She was a white woman from some little town in one of the Dakotas.

"I've heard about Cherokees—everybody's heard about Cherokees—but I always thought Chickasaws were some made-up tribe—one that never existed—invented by someone like Al Capp, a word like 'Kickapoo,' you know?"

"There's a Kickapoo tribe, too."

I said. "Oh," she said, and having nothing more to say on the subject, said nothing. I wondered if we'd ever have anything to say to one another.

-Geary Hobson (1990)
“Indian Humor”

It is said that when Columbus landed, one Indian turned to another and said, "Well, there goes the neighborhood."

One day an Indian went to the Public Health Service because he had a bad headache. The PHS doctor decided to operate on him and he cut the Indian's head open and took out the brain to examine it.

Just then a man came in the door and shouted, "Joe, your house is on fire."

Joe, lying on the operating table, urged the doctor to sew up his head so that he could go and fight the fire. The doctor did as requested and Joe headed for the door.

"Wait, Joe," the doctor yelled, "you forgot your brain."

"I don't need any brain," Joe answered as he went out the door. "After I get the fire put out, I'm going to work for the BIA."

When questioned by an anthropologist on what the Indians called America before the white man came, an Indian said simply, "ours".

Custer was well-dressed for the Battle of Little Bighorn. When the Sioux found his body after the battle, he had on an Arrow shirt.
Things That Make Me Laugh

Prize-winning traditional dancers make me laugh.
White Indian experts make me laugh.
Christian Indians make me laugh.
White artists who paint Indian things better than Indians make me laugh.
Indian tacos being called a traditional food makes me laugh.
Indians who call themselves cowboys make me laugh.
Mixing Indian culture with the dominant society makes me laugh.

Modern Examples of Revitalizing Culture

Literature:
“Indian Humor”—Vine Deloria Jr.
“The Museum of the Plains White Person”—Rayna Green
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian—Sherman Alexie
Ceremony—Leslie Marmon Silko
The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions—Paula Gunn Allen

Comedians:
Donovan Archambault
Jim Ruel
Marc Yaffee
Tatanka Means
Adrianne Chalepah

Other:
Red Earth Native American Cultural Festival—Oklahoma City, OK
28th annual Native American Culture Festival—Tennessee
Hopi Kachinas (Clowns)
How the Kangaroo got her Pouch

Yorta-Yorta People

James Vance Marshall & Francis Firebrace

Mother Kangaroo was finding her baby, young Joey, a real handful. Whenever her back was turned, he would go hopping away to explore. She was afraid that one day she would lose him. One morning, when Joey and his mother were feeding in the plains, a weak and very old wombat came crawling towards them. “I am sick and blind,” he said. “I am hungry and thirsty. And I haven’t a friend in the world.”

Mother Kangaroo felt sorry for him. “I’ll be your friend,” she said. “Hang on to my tail, and I’ll take you to where there’s water.” So off they went.

It wasn’t an easy journey. The old wombat kept letting go of Mother Kangaroo’s tail. And Joey kept getting left behind. But at last they came to a waterhole. And the old wombat drank and drank and drank.

Then he started complaining again. “Oh, I’m so hungry! I’m starving! I haven’t eaten for days.” “Hang on to my tail,” Mother Kangaroo said. “And I’ll take you to where there’s some nice grass.”

This time, the journey was even more difficult. The old wombat kept losing his grip on Mother Kangaroo’s tail. And Joey was tired and cross and wanted his mother to carry him; but her little arms were too short. So they struggled on.

At last, they came to some lovely, lush grass. And the old wombat ate and ate and ate.

Mother Kangaroo watched him, happy that he seemed, at last, to be enjoying himself. Suddenly, she froze. She stood very still and very straight. Her nose twitched. She sensed danger.

A moment later a hunter, carrying a boomerang, came running towards them. His eyes were on the wombat.

“Unless I help the poor old thing,” Mother Kangaroo thought, “the hunter will kill him.” She jumped up and down in front of the hunter, to attract his attention, then went bounding away across the plains.

The hunter told himself that kangaroo steak would be a lot tastier than stingy old wombat. So he ran after Mother Kangaroo. He flung his boomerang at her.

But Mother Kangaroo could run faster than the hunter. And she kept out of range of his boomerang. She led him on and on and on. Through the scrub. Across the plains. Over the hills, until at last the hunter was exhausted, and gave up, and went home disappointed.

Then Mother Kangaroo went hopping back to where she had left her Joey and the wombat. They weren’t there.

Mother Kangaroo was distraught. She rushed this way and that, looking for them. She looked into the scrub. Behind the boulders. And in the shade of the trees. She kept crying, “Joey! Joey! Where are you? And at last she saw him, asleep under a gum tree.
She cradled him in her little arms. “Oh, Joey!” She whispered, “I thought I’d really lost you this time!”

She asked him what happened to the old wombat. But all Joey could tell her was that he “sort of disappeared.”

What neither Joey nor his mother knew was that the weak old wombat wasn’t in fact a wombat at all. He was the Spirit of the Creator who had come down to Earth to find and reward the kindest and gentlest of all the animals.

The Spirit of the Creator decided that no animal could possibly be more kind and more gentle than Mother Kangaroo. So that night, while Mother Kangaroo slept, the Spirit left beside her a gift: a daily bag made of string.

When Mother Kangaroo woke and saw the dilly bag, she wasn’t sure what to do with it. So she tied it round her waist. And in an instant, the Spirit turned it into a pouch.

So now young Joey had a place where he could rest, sleep, keep warm and hide. And Mother Kangaroo had a place where she could keep Joey close beside her when he was little or in danger.

And ever since, kangaroos and their fellow marsupials have been the only animals in all the world that have pouches, in which they give birth to and look after their children.
Why the Platypus is such a special Creature

Yorta-Yorta People

James Vance Marshall & Francis Firebrace

In the Dreamtime, the Creator made three different types of animals. First, he created Mammals. He told the Mammals they were to live on the land, and he have them fur to keep them warm.

Next, he created Fish. He told the Fish they were to live in the water, and he gave them gills to help them breathe.

Then he created Birds. He told the Birds they were to live in the sky; he gave them wings to enable them to fly, and he gave the mother birds the ability to reproduce by laying eggs.

When the Creator had made these three different types of animal, he found there were a lot of bits and pieces left over. So he joined these bits and pieces together, and created Platypus.

Platypus are like no other creature on Earth. They have fur, like a mammal. They can swim underwater, like a fish. And the mother platypus lays eggs, like a bird.

At first, the Mammals, the Fish and the Birds all lived happily together. But after a while they began to quarrel and fight. For each group thought it was best and most important.

The Mammals held a meeting. Big Bagaray, the Kangaroo, thumped the ground with his tail. "We Mammals are the greatest!" he shouted. "We are special. Only we have fur."

"What about Platypus?" said his wife. "He has fur."

The Mammals thought about this. And they agreed to visit Platypus, and ask him if would join them in their fight against the Fish and the Birds.

Platypus listened very carefully to all the Mammals had to say. Then he replied, "Thank you for asking me to be one of your family. I'll think about it."

A few days later, the Fish held a meeting. Goodoo, the big Murray Cod, leapt out of the water and came down with an almighty splash. "We Fish are the greatest!" he shouted. "We are special. Only we can swim under the water."

"What about Platypus?" said his wife. "He spends most of his life under water."

The Fish thought about this. And they agreed to visit Platypus, and ask him if he would join them in their fight against the Mammals and the Birds.

Platypus listened very carefully to all the Fish had to say. Then he replied, "Thank you for asking me to be one of your family. I'll think about it."

Next, the Birds held a meeting. Bungil, the Eagle, spread and flapped his wings. The sound was like a tree falling. "We Birds
are the greatest!” he shouted. “We are special. Only we can fly and lay eggs.”

“What about Mrs. Platypus?” said his wife. “She lays eggs.”
The Birds thought about this. And they agreed to visit Platypus, and ask him if he would join them in their fight against the Mammals and the Fish.

Platypus listened very carefully to all the Birds had to say. Then he replied. “Thank you for asking me to be one of your family. I’ll think about it.”

Platypus thought and thought about what he should do. But no matter how hard he thought, he couldn’t decide which group to join. After a while the animals got tired of waiting for him to make up his mind. They gathered outside his home on the bank of the billabong. The Mammals shouted, “Join us. We are the best!” The Fish shouted, “Join us. We are special!” The Birds shouted, “Join us. We are the best and special!”

At last, in the cool of the evening, Platypus came out. And all the animals fell silent.

“I’ve made up my mind,” Platypus said. “I am part of each of you, and part of all of you. And that’s how I want to stay. So thank you very much for asking me, but I’ve decided not to join any of you.” The animals didn’t like this.

So Platypus went on, “Please let me explain. When the Creator first made us, he made each of us different. So each of us, in our own way, is special. But special doesn’t mean better. None of us is better or worse than his neighbor. Only different. So we ought to respect each other’s differences, and live together without fighting.”

When the animals thought about this, they agreed that Platypus was very wise, and had made a good decision.

Now it happened that, standing among the animals listening that evening to Platypus, was a hunter of the Pintubi tribe. This hunter was so impressed by what Platypus said, that he made his people promise to never harm such a wise creature.

Which is why no Aboriginal Australian will ever hunt and kill a Platypus— even if he is hungry.
In the News...

An Aboriginal language crushed under the weight of European colonisation in Australia has been revived, thanks to the dedication of researchers and the vision of 19th Century German missionaries.

The Kaurna language once thrived and was spoken by the original inhabitants of Adelaide. But it began to disappear from daily use in South Australia as early as the 1860s.

Iwaritji, an elder who was thought to be the last fluent speaker of Kaurna, died in the late 1920s. More than 80 years later, its unique sounds have been brought back to life.

"It is about self-identity and cultural identity as well," explained Vincent "Jack" Buckskin, who runs evening courses for both Aboriginal and non-indigenous students.

"At first it is a little bit difficult to learn and is very different to English, which is what we all grew up with," he said.

"To say hello to one person, you say 'niinamarni'. It means 'are you good' as well. To ask if someone is having a good day, you'd say 'niinamarnitidi'.

"Our language was pretty much banned in the 1800s, and it wasn't until around the 1980s that a linguist started doing his PhD on the revitalisation of the language and re-teaching a lot of our elders," Mr Buckskin explained.

Modern Examples of Revitalizing Culture

**Literature:**

*Survival in our Own Land* — Christobel Mattingley

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* — Doris Pilkington (Nugi Garimara)

**Movies:**

*Samson and Delilah* (2009) — Warwick Thornton

*Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984) — Werner Herzog


*Beneath Clouds* (2002) — Ivan Sen

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) — Phillip Noyce

*The Tracker* (2002) — Rolf de Heer

*Ten Canoes* (2006) — Rolf de Heer

*Charlie’s Country* (2013) — Rolf de Heer

**Comedy:**

Kevin Kropinyeri

Sean Choolburra

Andy Saunders

Steph Tisdell
How Māui brought fire to the world

One evening, after eating a hearty meal, Māui lay beside his fire staring into the flames. He watched the flames flicker and dance and thought to himself, "I wonder where fire comes from."

Māui, being the curious person that he was, decided that he needed to find out. In the middle of the night, while everyone was sleeping, Māui went from village to village and extinguished all the fires until not a single fire burned in the world. He then went back to his whare and waited.

The next morning there was an uproar in the village.

"How can we cook our breakfast, there's no fire!" called a worried mother.

"How will we keep warm at night?" cried another.

"We can't possibly live without fire!" the villagers said to one another.

The people of the village were very frightened. They asked Taranga, who was their rangatira, to help solve the problem.

"Someone will have to go and see the great goddess, Mahuika, and ask her for fire," said Taranga.

None of the villagers were eager to meet Mahuika, they had all heard of the scorching mountain where she lived. So Māui offered to set out in search of Mahuika, secretly glad that his plan had worked.

Māui rāua ko Mahuika
"Be very careful," said Taranga. "Although you are a descendant of Mahuika she will not take kindly to you if you try and trick her."

"I'll find the great ancestress Mahuika and bring fire back to the world," Māui assured his mother.

Māui walked to the scorching mountain to the end of the earth following the instructions from his mother and found a huge mountain glowing red hot with heat. At the base of the mountain Māui saw a cave entrance. Before he entered, Māui whispered a special karakia to himself as protection from what lay beyond. But nothing could prepare Māui for what he saw when he entered the sacred mountain of Mahuika.

Mahuika, the goddess, rose up before him, fire burning from every pore of her body, her hair a mass of flames, her arms outstretched, and with only black holes where her eyes once were. She sniffed the air.

"Who is this mortal that dares to enter my dwelling?"

Māui gathered the courage to speak, "It is I, Māui, son of Taranga."

"Huh!" Yelled Mahuika. "Māui, the son of Taranga?"

"Yes the last born, Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga."

"Well then, Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga, welcome, welcome to the essence of the flame, welcome my grandchild."

Mahuika stepped closer to Māui, taking a deep sniff of his scent. Māui stood completely still, even though the flames from Mahuika's skin were unbearably hot.

"So... why do you come, Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga?" Mahuika finally asked.

Māui said, "The fires of the world have been extinguished, I have come to ask you for fire." Mahuika listened carefully to Māui, and then she laughed. She pulled a fingernail from one of her burning fingers and gave it to him.

"Take this fire as a gift to your people. Honour this fire as you honour me."

So Māui left the house of Mahuika taking with him the fingernail of fire.

As Māui walked along the side of the road he thought to himself, "What if Mahuika had no fire left, then where would she get her fire from?"

Māui couldn't contain his curiosity. He quickly threw the fingernail into a stream and headed back to Mahuika's cave.

"I tripped and fell," said Māui. "Could I please have another?"

Mahuika was in a good mood. She hadn't spoken to someone in quite some time and she liked Māui. She gladly gave Māui another of her fingernails.

But Māui soon extinguished this fingernail as well and returned to Mahuika with another excuse.

"A fish splashed my flame as I was crossing the river," Māui said

Mahuika provided another of her fingernails, not suspecting that she was being tricked.
This continued for most of the day until Mahuika had used all her fingernails and had even given up her toenails. When Māui returned to ask for another, Mahuika was furious. She knew Māui had been tricking her and threw the burning toenail to the ground.

Instantly Māui was surrounded by fire and chased from the cave.

Māui changed himself into a hawk and escaped to the sky, but the flames burned so high that they singed the underside of his wings, turning them a glowing red.

Māui dived towards a river, hoping to avoid the flames in the coolness of the water, but the immense heat made the water boil.

Māui was desperate. He called on his ancestor Tāwhirimātea for help. "Tāwhirimātea atua o ngā hau e whā, āwhinatia mai!"

Then, a mass of clouds gathered and a torrent of rain fell to put out the many fires. Mahuika's mountain of fire no longer burned hot.

Mahuika had lost much of her power, but still she was not giving up. She took her very last toenail and threw it at Māui in anger. The toenail of fire missed Māui and flew into the trees, planting itself in the Mahoe tree, the Tōtara, the Patete, the Pukatea, and the Kaikōmako trees. These trees cherished and held onto the fire of Mahuika, considering it a great gift.

When Māui returned to his village he didn't bring back fire as the villagers had expected. Instead he brought back dry wood from the Kaikōmako tree and showed them how to rub the dry sticks together forming friction which would eventually start a fire. The villagers were very happy to be able to cook their food once more and to have the warmth of their fires at night to comfort them.

Māui satisfied his curiosity in finding the origin of fire, although he very nearly paid the ultimate price in doing so. To this day the - Kahu, the native hawk of Aotearoa, still retains the red singed feathers on the underside of its wings, a reminder of how close Māui was to death.

This is the story of how Māui brought fire to the world.
Māui Seek for Immortality

Māui decided to return home to the land of his parents and after being home for some time his Father said to him that when he was baptising Māui he omitted a portion of the fitting prayer and as a result he fears that Māui will one day be overcome by his great ancestress Hine-nui-te-po, goddess of death.

Māui asked about Hine-nui-te-po and his Father pointed to the region where flashes appear as the horizon meets the sky and described her as having red eyes, sharp teeth, the body of a man and the teeth of a barracuda.

Māui was not fearful and told his father that if he was able to overcome Tama-nui-te-Ra so easily then surely he could also overcome Hine-nui-te-po, his Father wished him luck, and Māui promptly set out to face her with his companions (various small birds, his closest friends since childhood)

After reaching the home of Hine-nui-te-po, Māui asked his bird companions to keep quiet while he approached the goddess least she wake up and thwart the attack.

Just as Māui was entering the body of Hine-nui-te-Po, Piwakawaka (fan-tail) laughed out loud and woke the Goddess who promptly killed Māui by crushing him with the obsidian teeth in her vagina.

This is how death was introduced to the world, and it was believed that if Māui had successfully passed through the goddess then no more human beings would have died.

Māui is a trickster central in Maori and Polynesian mythology. While these myths help explain the natural world, they are meant to be humorous due to Māui's cunning, yet heroic, tricks.
Modern Examples of Revitalizing Culture

**Movies:**
- Hunt for the Wilder People—Taika Waititi (2016)
- Thor: Ragnarok—Taika Waititi (2017)
  - Māori director and actors with a plot that shows overt Māori themes and humor
- Moana—Ron Clements and John Musker (2016)

**Comedians:**
- Billy T. James
- Mike King
- Pio Terei
- Jermaine Clements
- Taika Waititi

**Other:**
- Sailing of Hokulea
- Matariki Festival, NZ
- All Blacks Rugby Team Haka

Pakaka is modelled on the artist’s tuakana (older brother) Paratene, a security guard and a very large person in real life. This stereotype of the Māori male, can be linked to after-dark bars, clubs and large events that need crowd control. In the gallery context this work suggests that Pakaka has the power to deny or offer protection... but against what and whom? The title adds to this uncertainty because ‘kapa haka’ is a contemporary term associated with a positive assertion of Māori identity and culture.
Sources (in order of appearance)


Marshall, J. V. (2009). Why the Platypus is such a special Creature. In Stories from the Billabong.


"When a people can laugh at themselves & laugh at others & hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that that people can survive." —Vine Deloria (1969)