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## **“We’re Still Here”: Memory and Commemoration in the Alliances between the American Indian Movement and Welsh Nationalists**

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### **Author’s bio**

Kate Rennard is a Research Associate at the University of Kent, working on the AHRC-funded project, “Beyond the Spectacle: Native North American Presence in Britain.”

Her work has generally focused on transnational activism and how it has shaped understandings of what it means to be Indigenous, and she is currently writing about the relationships forged between the American Indian Movement, Irish Republicans, and Welsh nationalists in the late 20th-century.

## **“We’re Still Here”: Memory and Commemoration in the Alliances between the American Indian Movement and Welsh Nationalists<sup>i</sup>**

The sound of singing filled a quiet cemetery in Wales on a spring afternoon in 1986, as American Indian Movement (AIM) member Mark Banks placed tobacco offerings at the graves of the ‘Abergele Martyrs,’ Welsh nationalists killed during a 1969 bombing campaign, and asked Welsh activists to similarly honour fallen AIMsters at Wounded Knee. While these links seem unexpected, they are part of a larger story of communication and exchange between AIM and Welsh nationalists, in which they shared information and supported each other’s campaigns. Despite the differences between the movements involved, these activists bonded through shared experiences of colonialism; their histories, in particular, were not being remembered. Focusing on the role of historical memory and commemoration, this article explores the exchange of ideology and strategy between these groups in the late-twentieth century and argues for a re-evaluation of AIM’s legacy through the transnational effects of their protests involving remembrance. AIM’s use of counter-commemorations not only shaped the tactics of historical remembering used by some Welsh nationalist groups, but these Welsh activists in turn used the historical memory of AIM to raise awareness of their own causes. This article therefore uncovers some of the complicated and diverse ways that the American Indian Movement has influenced Welsh nationalism.

Keywords: American Indian Movement, Indigenous activism, Welsh nationalism, historical memory, commemoration

The sound of singing filled a quiet cemetery in Wales on a spring afternoon in 1986. Members of Ty Cenedl, a grassroots Welsh nationalist movement, watched as a member of the American Indian Movement (AIM), an Indigenous<sup>ii</sup> rights organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, paid his respects at the graves of the ‘Abergele Martyrs,’ two Welsh nationalists killed in Wales during a bombing campaign in 1969.<sup>iii</sup> During the ceremony, Ojibwe activist Mark Banks, brother of AIM leader Dennis Banks, “proudly

and suitably honoured” the ‘Abergele Martyrs’ by saying a few words and making a tobacco offering at each grave.



In return, Banks asked one thing of the Ty Cenedl members: that one day, a Welsh person should travel to the graves of “fallen AIM dead patriots” from the Movement’s siege at Wounded Knee in 1973 and similarly honour them (Official Tour Report 1986). For the American Indian and Welsh nationalist activists involved, shared remembering and commemorating played an important role in their relationships with each other.<sup>iv</sup> Despite their differences, each movement was fighting against a settler colonial nation-state that had a vested interest in claiming that they did not exist as a distinct people anymore, erasing their colonies’ histories as separate nations and of their resistance to settler colonialism (Byrd 2011, xx). To these activists, the commemoration of those histories, including the activists who had died in the struggle, was itself an act of resistance that they gladly took up on each other’s behalf.

While other common challenges they faced also allowed these movements to forge connections with each other, this article explores the significance of historical

memory to their relationships, particularly how AIM's actions shaped Ty Cenedl's strategies. One of the major challenges faced by these movements, and one that was especially significant during the 1980s visits, was the constructed nature of national historical narratives and commemorations, particularly the normalization of settler historical memory (Bruyneel 2013, 241). One of the central tenets of settler colonialism is that settlers come to stay and, as such, the settler colonial state has a vested interest in promoting historical narratives and anniversaries that declare colonization as natural, complete and in the past, as an issue from which colonized peoples should "move on." Wales, for example, was conquered in 1282 and was declared part of England through the Act of Union in 1536. Despite resistance to English settler rule, particularly in the twentieth-century, even scholars have declared Wales to be "post-colonial," as opposed to still experiencing settler colonialism (see, for example, Aaron and Williams [2005]). For American Indian tribal nations, history books often declared the first Wounded Knee in 1890 as the event that defined the end of the "Indian Wars" and, supposedly, signaled the end of Native resistance to American colonization. Consequently, nation-state narratives and commemorations of these histories often presented colonization as inevitable, with the colonized assimilating into the "melting pot" of settler society in the name of "progress" (Byrd 2011, xx).

For the Welsh and American Indian activists in these relationships, however, the past has had a continued presence because the effects of settler colonialism have continued. Their historical narratives and commemorations highlighted this continuity and, in doing so, advocated for radical political change as a solution. Both Indigenous North American and Welsh peoples faced negative social conditions in this period, although the nature and extent of these differed. The organizations' strategic focus on historical memory drew attention to settler colonialism as the root cause of these social

and economic problems and so suggested that while less radical solutions, such as economic development, might be useful, only a major political change could fully address them. Consequently, in the 1980s, their main concern was the apathy of fellow Welsh and American Indian peoples and how they had been conditioned to celebrate events that elided their distinct histories. AIM and Ty Cenedl did not want their respective nations to forget their own history, to be ignorant of how many of the problems faced by these nations in the present had been a direct consequence of continuing settler colonialism, and so they sought to disrupt the colonizing nation state's historical narratives by exhorting people to remember their own distinct histories. For these activists, their relationships were significant because, despite their differences, the movements shared the struggle against colonial histories and understood the importance of constructing and commemorating their own historical memory. For Ty Cenedl, these similarities also meant that they could look to AIM for strategic inspiration and so these relationships shaped the Welsh activists' tactical choices. In particular, they hoped that general public sympathy to Indigenous North American struggles might awaken Welsh recognition of their own historical and continued colonization.

Through an examination of historical remembering in these relationships between AIM and Ty Cenedl, this article builds on existing scholarship on the transnational in Indigenous Studies and Memory Studies, particularly those that bring these fields into conversation. Red Power historians have begun the critical work of placing Indigenous North American activists in a transnational context, tracing how they understood Native problems as part of larger global struggles of the Cold War era (Cobb 2007, 2008; Eberle 2018; Penny 2013; Rosier 2006, 2008; Shreve 2011; Tóth 2016). Scholars in Indigenous Studies and Memory Studies have also argued for the importance of tracing the role of historical memory in activism, including the “counter-

commemorations” of the American Indian Movement (Bevernage 2008, 2012; Bruyneel 2013; Tóth 2016b), and transnational memory is an emerging subfield in Memory Studies as scholars have sought to understand the connective work of memory in activism by looking beyond the field’s usual national frame (De Cesari & Rigney 2014; Rigney 2016; Rigney 2018a; Rigney 2018b).<sup>v</sup> In this article, I argue for a re-evaluation of AIM’s legacy through the significant transnational effects of their counter-commemorations, their performances of “Native critiques of the Anglo-centered view of the American past” in which they “used media attention to push for historical and social justice for Native Americans” (Tóth 2016b, 131). By exploring the alliances with Ty Cenedl activists, I trace how AIM directly shaped the evolving tactics of that Welsh nationalist group and how transnational memory around events such as Wounded Knee created those connections. While the impact of these relationships on AIM was important but limited, they influenced Ty Cenedl’s activism in significant ways. AIM’s use of counter-commemorations not only shaped the tactics of historical remembering used by some Welsh nationalist groups, but these Welsh activists in turn used the historical memory of AIM to raise awareness of their own causes. Therefore, this article illustrates that in the 1980s, a period in which scholars have often focused on the decline of AIM nationally and their involvement with the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) internationally, AIM’s influence reached beyond those locations to affect minority nationalist activism in powerful ways.

### **AIM and Welsh nationalism**

While these connections between the American Indian Movement and Welsh nationalists might seem surprising, they had actually begun almost a decade earlier, a period in which anti-colonial activists globally were making connections. For AIM, their international links began in earnest after their protest at Wounded Knee in 1973

(Eberle 2018, 96; Tóth 2016, 36; Williams 2012, 39). In February of that year, AIMsters joined some Oglala people to occupy the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, in part due to problems with corruption in the Lakota tribal government there. The protest's focus expanded, however, to include wider Indigenous issues such as sovereignty and treaty violations. The arrival of FBI agents and U.S. officials led to a violent seventy-one-day siege that resulted in the deaths of two AIM members and many injuries, along with the arrests and prosecutions of hundreds of activists (see Smith and Warrior [1996] for more information on the subject). The stand at Wounded Knee served as a catalyst for AIM's relationships with Welsh nationalists. AIM desperately needed financial and legal help as it simply did not have the funds to cover the legal expenses of its members. As a result, they and their Wounded Knee Legal Defense/ Offense Committee (WKLDOC) decided to actively seek international assistance through support networks that would prove to be both financially and psychologically important (Tóth 2016a, 93).<sup>vi</sup> This included setting up a regional AIM office in the UK and, by 1976, AIM UK had reached out to the Welsh nationalist political party, Plaid Cymru, offering support and solidarity. Plaid, arguably the most famous of the Welsh nationalist organizations, worked within the existing political system to address socio-economic problems in Wales, such as lack of rights, and did not use or support militant action (McAllister 2001; Sandry 2011). These communications led to AIM leader Vernon Bellecourt visiting Wales in 1976 to meet with the then-president of Plaid, Dr. Phil Williams (Lewis 1976). While Williams commented on the importance of this meeting to him personally, the impact of these initial connections was very limited and what happened to these links in the following decade is unclear.<sup>vii</sup>

There do not appear to have been visits or any significant communication until those relationships were renewed in 1986, as AIM's Mark Banks toured Wales to



promote the Big Mountain Campaign, a protest against the forced removal of the Dine and Hopi peoples from their ancestral homelands in Big Mountain, Arizona. Over the course of the decade, however, the relationships had shifted, as AIM forged new links with the Cymric-consciousness raising movement Ty Cenedl, who participated in more radical actions than Plaid Cymru, with whom they had previously been involved. As part of their more radical agenda, Ty Cenedl also focused more on the importance of remembering history as part of their decolonizing objectives, a strategy that, as mentioned earlier, justified a more revolutionary solution to address the problems faced in Wales. Initially set up by another movement, Cofiwn, in 1983 as part of its mission to raise awareness of Welsh history, Ty Cenedl continued its work in the “Ysbryd Cofiwn” [the Cofiwn spirit] after its predecessor disbanded in 1984 as a result of police surveillance. As an organization, Cofiwn was dedicated to redressing what it saw as a problem with the Welsh psyche, that “we forgot our history and national identity” (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). They organized annual marches at Cilmeri, where Llywelyn, the last Prince of Wales, is thought to have been murdered, as well as other memorial events for significant Welsh historical anniversaries. As a leaflet Ty Cenedl produced for Banks’s tour of Wales in 1986 exhorted, “Let us learn from our history – these anniversaries tell us we are an invaded, conquered, and colonized nation and that this historical experience took away our liberties and national Independence and made us a colony of England” (“A Message” n.d., 8). For these activists, historical memory and commemoration functioned as an important site of decolonization. To remember a fuller or different version of Welsh history rather than accept the historical narrative promoted by the colonizing nation-state was to recognize Wales’s situation as a colonized nation before beginning to work towards remedying it. The differences between Plaid Cymru

and Ty Cenedl were crucial in allowing a more significant relationship to develop with AIM during these later contacts.

### **Ty Cenedl and the American Indian Movement**

For Gethin ap Gruffydd and Sian Ifan, two of the key officers of Cofiwn and its successor, Ty Cenedl, there were significant problems with existing Welsh nationalist efforts, such as those by Plaid Cymru, that led to them looking to AIM's strategies for solutions. First, they felt that nationalists disregarded the urban working class in Wales, since their base was in mainly rural farming communities in the west and north of the country (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). They also thought that the Welsh had a mindset of defeatism, related to their acceptance of a historical narrative that declared the conquest of Wales complete and taught them not to fight back (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). In looking internationally for inspiration from movements that had been addressing these deficiencies, Gruffydd and Ifan identified with AIM in part due to what they understood as the Movement's urban and working-class origins. As Ty Cenedl pointed out, "AIM was founded by off the reservations 'city Indians'" (Official Tour Report" 1986) and so, Gruffydd stated, he did "see the similarities, especially from a working-class perspective" (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). Gruffydd and Ifan were conscious that, in many ways, the Welsh did not face the same struggles as Indigenous North Americans. To them, however, this only made AIM's strategies more important as it meant that those tactics addressed a broader range of issues than the limited scope of Welsh nationalist protests (Gruffydd and Ifan, 2010). For Gruffydd and Ifan, AIM's protests of the early 1970s in particular had enabled Indigenous North Americans to get past the barrier of a colonial mindset, of being too defeated and apathetic to fight back, and so it was important to learn from their strategies. Gruffydd stated: "I'm constantly pointing out...Be militant but do things practical. AIM has always done that" (Gruffydd and Ifan

2010). It is interesting to note that in a period in which AIM was moving towards more policy-directed activism, such as their involvement with IITC, and away from direct action (Eberle 2018, 2, 101), those militant protests were still inspiring others.

Frustrated by the apathy of Welsh people and the inability of the country's nationalist groups to take a stand, Ty Cenedl activists were trying to learn lessons from AIM, drawing on their militant tactics and strategies to inspire change in Wales.

In particular, Ty Cenedl activists appreciated AIM's attention to history and, through exploring their beliefs and actions, it is possible to locate the direct influence of AIM on their tactics and how they contested English historical narratives. As Kevin Bruyneel (2013, 240, italics in original) has argued, "the political problem with white majority settler nations...*is not what they forget but how they remember,*" particularly how the nation-state's historical narrative focuses on distancing the past from the present. The counter-commemorations in which AIM and Ty Cenedl engaged, including on each other's behalf, functioned as a way to disrupt the construction of this national narrative. To Gruffydd, AIM seemed to have been quite successful in their campaigns to change the way American history is commemorated: "You can't get away with a European commemoration of American history now [2010]. When they had that Lewis and Clark commemoration [2004], they had two versions, and they gave money for the two versions - the Indian version and the European version - so we're using that as an example because we've got the same thing in Wales" (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). While various Native organizations have been instrumental in ensuring that official commemorations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century could not elide Indigenous perspectives to the extent that they had previously, Gruffydd understood AIM to be primarily responsible for this evolution (see Williams [2012, 121] on how AIM came to represent Indigenous North American activism for Europeans). For the American Indian Movement,

contesting historical narratives formed an integral part of their protests, one that continues to the present day. AIM's story often centered on correcting the history being told and reminding Euro-Americans that Indian peoples had not vanished, despite centuries of mistreatment. As Mark Banks reflected, "By and large, the story's been untold and there's a complete lack of knowledge about the history of what happened to the Native Americans in their dealings with the United States government...It's a story of tyranny, a story of subjugation, a story of genocide" (Banks 2010). This theme was also clear in the stories of AIM leader Clyde Bellecourt, brother of Vernon Bellecourt, who spoke of how "nothing was being taught in the public and parochial school systems about Indian people, not our culture, tradition, our form of government, what were the contributions made, how did we help people who come here?" (Bellecourt 2011a)

These views were also reflected in AIM's protests focused on historical monuments, such as the Thanksgiving 1970 takeover of the *Mayflower II*, a replica of the original *Mayflower* ship on which the Puritans sailed from Plymouth, England to present-day Massachusetts. They were also an important part of AIM's stand at Wounded Knee, where the defenders drew on the legacy of the first Wounded Knee, and on Euro-American understandings of it as a tragedy, during the siege. In March 1973, for example, AIM leader Russell Means stood by the mass graves of those who had died in 1890 and noted, "The white man says that the 1890 massacre was the end of the wars with the Indian, that it was the end of the Indian, the end of the Ghost Dance. Yet here we are at war, we're still Indians and we're Ghost Dancing again" (Anderson et al. 1974, 89).<sup>viii</sup> In invoking the first Wounded Knee, AIM leaders not only drew attention to previous instances of government brutality, but also suggested that there was continuity between the events. The 1973 struggle therefore directly contradicted the Euro-American historical narrative by showing that Native peoples and the injustices

against them had continued long after 1890. The point of AIM's commemoration at Wounded Knee in 1973 was that Indigenous North Americans had not only survived this history but also continued to be distinct peoples with distinct cultures. In effect, the Movement sought to disrupt the US national narrative about Wounded Knee 1890 as the 'end of the Indian Wars' by replaying the events of the original Wounded Knee but with a different outcome (Tóth 2016b, 138).

Despite such concerted efforts to challenge the nation-state's historical narrative, it is interesting and important to note that Ty Cenedl's and AIM's versions shared similarities with the official accounts in that they were constructed to focus on male figures. Women leaders played significant roles in each of these movements and their global actions, such as Patricia Bellanger and Madonna Thunder Hawk in AIM and Sian Ifan in Ty Cenedl, but this did not preclude the gendering of their respective histories for nation re-building. Indeed, both of these movements focused on male warriors who had died fighting for their nation and its freedom, from Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and their defeat of Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn to Llewelyn and Glyndwr, the last Princes of Wales.<sup>ix</sup> This emphasis, whilst undoubtedly problematic, did enable the movements to play on the existing historical narratives of "the proud" Plains or Celtic "warrior fighting the overwhelming" colonizing forces "that sought to erase him," stories that had easily recognizable heroes and villains. In this way, they could engage with public audiences, settler and non-settler, through stories with which they might already be familiar and which might more easily garner sympathy for the groups' campaigns (Treuer 2019, 306). The movements could then go beyond this spectacle to educate these audiences, to challenge the narrative of their assimilation and argue for the continued existence of these nations as distinct peoples.

In engaging with broader audiences, Ty Cenedl activists were especially inspired by the occupation of Wounded Knee and implemented its tactics in their own campaigns. In tracing the process and development of how Gruffydd and Ifan adapted AIM's ideas, it is evident that not only did American Indian activism serve as an inspiration for Welsh nationalists, but they also scrutinized it for practical strategies to achieve their goals. While generally motivated by AIM's struggle and their contestation of historical narratives, there are specific moments in which Gruffydd and Ifan locate a direct influence of the American Indian Movement on their own actions. One of the first instances in which Gruffydd traced the influence of AIM's actions was the stand the Movement made at Wounded Knee, particularly in relation to his disappointment with the Welsh nationalist response when Tryweryn, a small village in North Wales, was forcibly flooded in the 1960s in order to build a dam to provide water for the English city of Liverpool (see Clews [2001] and Humphries [2008] for more on the Tryweryn protests). To Gruffydd and other activists, the lack of sustained direct action in response to Tryweryn was frustrating, particularly when compared to AIM's success at Wounded Knee: "Now I always said, why didn't the Welsh do that at Tryweryn? Why did they walk out? They should have done that, made this big last stand...And that stand at Wounded Knee was superb" (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). They understood AIM's actions at Wounded Knee as a brilliant example of effective protest, one that had been far more successful than any protest employed at Tryweryn, and so it represented a possible strategy in future activism.

Gruffydd and Ifan then applied the lessons they learned from AIM's militant actions in one of their most successful campaigns in 1983, when Cofiwn organized demonstrations to challenge the nation-state historical narrative being promoted by Cadw (the Welsh heritage society's) campaign "Gwyl y Cestell" – "Festival of Castles."

As Cofiwn pointed out, it was ironic for Welsh people to celebrate the historic building of these fortifications, which had been constructed to subdue them, and of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conquest of the country. To do so was to effectively celebrate the colonial conquest and oppression of Wales. Consequently, they called their campaign, “Sarhad ’83” – “Insult ’83.” In this event, they demonstrated outside Caernarfon Castle and, “taking inspiration from AIM, [they] closed the castle down for the day,” echoing the Movement’s disruption of the Thanksgiving celebrations in 1970 (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). Protestors also carried a black coffin to the gates of the castle, representing the death of the Welsh nation in 1283, when the last recognized Prince of Wales, Llywelyn, was killed and the English conquest was viewed as complete. As police followed the procession away from the main gate, Gruffydd suggested to the crowd of 500 that they rush the castle. By the time castle officials had realized what was going on and locked the gates, Cofiwn supporters were already inside, locked in with unsuspecting tourists. Their protest succeeded in making the English news headlines that day (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010. See Gruffydd [2007] for examples of the newspaper reports). As such, according to Gruffydd and Ifan, they took the lessons they had learned from AIM’s approach of direct action in challenging historical narratives and put those ideas into action with “Sarhad ’83,” one of Cofiwn’s most successful and newsworthy protests.

By Mark Banks’s visit in 1986, Cofiwn had dissolved and Ty Cenedl activists were working on Wake Up Wales, one of their final campaigns that was aimed at inspiring the people of Wales to rise up in popular rebellion. While using AIM’s strategies of militant action had been successful at Caernarfon, Ty Cenedl was still fighting Welsh apathy and they still hoped to wake up Welsh people to their colonization and exploitation. Banks travelled to the UK as part of a tour to raise awareness of the US Government’s imminent relocation of Hopi and Navajo peoples

from their homelands in Big Mountain, Arizona, in order to allow the Peabody Coal Company to mine the area. While Ty Cenedl supported the tour through raising awareness of the Big Mountain Campaign, for example organizing letter writing campaigns and a rally outside government buildings in Cardiff, Wales, they also regarded Banks's visit as an opportunity to try a new strategy to challenge Welsh indifference (see Ty Cenedl [1986] for more information on the Big Mountain Campaign). Gruffydd stated: "if you can compare certain things, in a mind frame, in a mindset, then they say, 'Oh yeah, I can see that. Yeah, that's it'" (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). By comparing Welsh and American Indian histories of colonialism, Ty Cenedl hoped to stimulate the public's recognition of the historical colonization of and the continuing colonial rule in Wales.

A fuller understanding of Welsh history, as opposed to the colonial historical narrative, was key to ensuring that the Welsh could find a successful strategy to counter their own colonization. As Ty Cenedl stated in one of the leaflets they produced for Banks's tour, "A Message from the Black Hills of Dakota to Wales: Lessons in History": "unless we learn from our own history and relate the past to the present and draw comparison and conclusion, we will ever be condemned to relive past mistakes and never find solution to our present problems" ("A Message" n.d., 5). As these Welsh activists argued, to accept the colonizing nation-state's narrative that these issues were in the deep past and that history had moved on from them was to continue to repeat that trauma and continue to suffer from the problems caused by colonization, including "economic exploitation, social deprivation and cultural genocide" ("Official Tour Report" 1986). As the Official Tour Report emphasized, it was not just an awareness of Welsh history that was an important element of decolonization strategy. Acknowledging that "our social conditions are nowhere as grim as they are for American Indians," Ty



Cenedl insisted that “we have much in common, and an awareness of each other’s histories and struggle can indeed work to our mutual advantage” (“Official Tour Report” 1986). Subsequently, they took Banks on a tour of important Welsh historical sites during his visit and made sure that the public knew, through interviews and the tour report, that Banks himself had noted the similarities between Welsh and American Indian histories. They also drew comparisons between AIM and Ty Cenedl’s work on contesting historical narratives, particularly teaching History in schools and holding rallies at sites of historic importance, and argued for its significance by quoting Banks: “‘Important work,’ stressed Mark, ‘to give the Indians back their identity, pride, and integrity, to sweep away the imposed image that they were savages and drunks and stupid as colonialism stereotyped them to be – incapable of ruling themselves’” (“Official Tour Report” 1986). While Ty Cenedl activists had often espoused a similar message, Gruffydd and Ifan hoped that people who heard an Ojibwe activist express that sentiment would be more convinced by it, given the widespread sympathies to Native peoples and their struggles.<sup>x</sup>

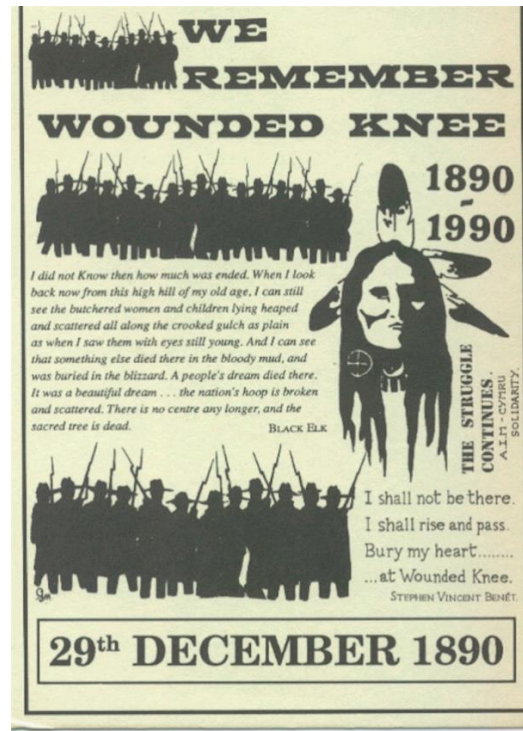
For Ty Cenedl activists, this aspect of the tour was a particular success. As Ifan suggested, they appreciated that Banks alluded to the similarities, and, as a result, Welsh people were becoming more aware of the links between the two: “There was a bond in showing that...they were campaigning to save a national identity and so were we in Wales. And people who came to these meetings and these talks, they knew that...so we did benefit from it in that that was achieved” (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). That people saw the similarities was also important because while many had immense sympathy for American Indian struggles, and even the tactics employed by AIM, they had little patience when those tactics were used in Wales. As Ifan noted, while Plaid Cymru and the Welsh media had condemned the confrontational tactics of Welsh militant

movements of the 1960s, including Mudiad Amdiffyn Cymru and the Free Wales Army, they were ready to openly support Banks, even though AIM had often waged a militant campaign, including the stand at Wounded Knee (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). Therefore, if Ty Cenedl could awaken Welsh people to the similarities between the campaigns, they could possibly remove some of the stigma from direct action tactics and “Wake Up Wales” to stand up for their rights, as they wanted.

For the activists involved, these relationships went beyond inspiring decolonization tactics to have a deeply emotional significance. Their governments and dominant public discourses had labelled the more militant of these movements, AIM and Mudiad Amdiffyn Cymru, as “terrorists” or “extremists.”<sup>xi</sup> As Clyde Bellecourt remarked during a visit to Northern Ireland in 1985, “We too are called terrorists in our homeland....They have criminalised this Movement as they attempt to criminalise the struggle that is taking place here” (Bellecourt 1985). This served to further isolate the movements involved by portraying their losses as insignificant. When activists died at protests, the deaths were depicted as almost deserved and not worthy of mourning (Butler 2009, 31). In the face of nation-state narratives that dismissed their histories as distinct peoples and of continued apathy from the public, the relationships between AIM and Ty Cenedl activists therefore resonated deeply with those involved. As the Official Tour Report noted, the “Abergele Martyrs” had “for the most part...been forgotten by our own people and indeed many so-called Welsh nationalists avoid ever making a pilgrimage there” (Official Tour Report, 1986). Here Ty Cenedl activists suggested that many Welsh nationalists consciously forgot these deaths, in part because a majority did not support militant tactics and so marked this loss of life as not worthy of commemoration. Therefore, that an American Indian Movement activist would visit and pay his respects was significant. It marked those deaths as grievable and signified that

Mark Banks stood in solidarity with those Welsh activists who would “never ignore or forget that sacrifice,” that he would also commemorate the part they had played in Welsh history, no matter how ungrievable their deaths seemed to most (“Official Tour Report” 1986). To Mark Banks, the visit was also emotionally important, as he recalled the Welsh activists dedication to Indigenous causes and how it motivated him: “They believed me and they were behind me...All that support gave me the strength, saying there are people out there who believe in me, and believe in AIM and believe in Native Americans and believe in justice, in the integrity of equal justice. It makes you go on” (Banks 2010). For these activists, the relationships underscored that despite how isolated they might feel in their struggles, they were not alone.

In the years following Banks’s visit, direct contact between AIM and Welsh nationalists appears to have ended, and indeed both movements faced internal challenges in this period. Interestingly, however, remembering American Indian histories have continued to be an important strategy for Gruffydd and Ifan. This suggests that the influence of these relationships have continued even while the alliances themselves have not. The “Message from the Black Hills of South Dakota to Wales” leaflet that Ty Cenedl produced announced a plan to “‘adopt’ significant historical anniversaries in the history of the American Indians” in order to “show their solidarity and support for the Indian peoples’ struggle” (“A Message” n.d., 2). In 1990, those activists were raising awareness of the centennial anniversary of Wounded Knee 1890. They produced postcards to commemorate the occasion, one in English and one in Welsh.



While the English-language version declared “We remember Wounded Knee” and mentioned that “the struggle continues – A.I.M. – Cymru solidarity,” the Welsh language poster was even more explicit in drawing the links and reflecting AIM’s narrative. It urged people to “cofia cyflafan” (remember the massacre) and asserted that American Indians and Welsh people stood together. It also reflected AIM’s story that this was a continuing struggle against American colonialism, not one that had ended at Wounded Knee, by stating: “Daeth y Cyflafan yn Wounded Knee, Rhagfyr 29ain, a’r ‘Indian Wars’ i ben. Ond mae brwydr Indiaid America yn parhau.” (The massacre at Wounded Knee, December 29th, 1890, brought the ‘Indian Wars’ to a head. But the American Indian struggle continues.) As such, these Ty Cenedl activists also suggested that the challenges faced by American Indian peoples still existed, as did their activism. The stand by American Indian peoples had not ended with either of the Wounded Knee events, implied the postcard, since the struggle continued. In producing and distributing these postcards, Ty Cenedl were continuing to raise awareness in the UK of Native histories and to contest the US national narrative about Native peoples.

Despite the lack of recent contact, Gruffydd and Ifan still draw inspiration from AIM and point to similarities in Welsh and American Indian struggles in an effort to galvanize Welsh nationalists. However, their tactics have continued to evolve. Due to continued police surveillance, they have taken their campaigns online, and both maintain a number of blogs for activist purposes (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). As Gruffydd himself noted, he often references AIM in his posts and informs readers about the latest campaign, in order both to raise awareness of Native issues, but also to continue to inspire Welsh nationalists to reflect on their struggle and strategies: “Whenever I can put something in, I’ll put something in. If it’s just going to get a few people to go and look at something and start thinking a little bit, that’s the main thing” (Gruffydd and Ifan 2010). In one post, for example, Gruffydd (2011) mirrored the message of AIM’s story and of the 1990 postcards, arguing that while Wounded Knee in 1890 was a “symbolic end to the Native American Wars of Independence,” it was not the end of “Native American resistance as they remember their history.” The Welsh, he argued, have been taught to forget, especially how to fight back. As such, there are still important lessons to be learned from other movements. In another post, Gruffydd reprinted an e-mail he had sent in Christmas 2005, reminding people of the anniversary of 1890 Wounded Knee and expressing solidarity with Indigenous peoples. In it, he noted that many Welsh nationalists fixated on the Easter Rising of the Irish in 1916. “Nothing wrong in this,” he stated, “but I cannot help thinking much more would be gained if Radical Nationalists seeking to be true ‘Adfywiadyr Gwladgarol’ [roughly translated as “patriotic revivalists”] cast their eyes towards the American Indian Movement,” especially given their continued campaigns and initiatives (Gruffydd, 2006). Consequently, Gruffydd has not only continued to draw on the stories of Wounded Knee to inspire new protest, but has also suggested that the sustained

initiatives and campaigns of the American Indian Movement should also serve as motivation for other Welsh nationalists.

This exploration of AIM's relationships with Ty Cenedl, particularly their focus on historical memory and commemoration, has illuminated how communal acts of remembering can function as acts of decolonization (see Recollet [2019] on community acts of remembering as an act of decolonization). Not only did the Movement inspire Ty Cenedl activists in their tactics but, for the activists involved, this transnational remembering created a larger community, based on shared histories of settler colonialism and the common goal of disrupting the accepted colonial historical narrative. In recent years, these connections have certainly dimmed, as direct contact has ceased and the recognition of Indigenous and Welsh concerns in other forums, such as the UN and the Welsh Assembly, has largely undercut the more radical change called for by AIM and Ty Cenedl (Eberle 2018, 101). Welsh activists have also not embraced the political framework of Indigenous rights in their activism further distancing the movements from each other. However, the actions of AIM and Ty Cenedl activists in recent years demonstrate not only their continuing presence in campaigns on behalf of their peoples, but also how lessons learned from this period continue to shape Ty Cenedl's campaigns. Perhaps most importantly, as a new generation of Indigenous North American and Welsh activists take the lead, the strategic use of historical memory is still creating connections between these nations, especially as global concerns like environmental degradation offer new avenues for connections. For example, in 2016 three Welsh activists sent a letter of support to the Standing Rock, applauding protesters' "resilience to survive despite the harsh blows of history" and drawing on the historical memory of the environmental and cultural damage done at Tryweryn to explain their solidarity with NoDAPL protesters (St. David's Society

2016). As Clyde Bellecourt commented in reflecting on the achievements of the Movement: “[w]e’re still here” (Bellecourt 2011b). As such, the story of the American Indian Movement and the legacy of their relationships with Welsh nationalists has not yet reached its end.

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## Captions

Figure 1. Mark Banks (left) at the grave of George Taylor, one of the Abergele Martyrs, in 1986. Credit: Gethin ap Gruffydd and Sian Ifan (Gruffydd and Ifan 2019).

Figure 2 and 3. Ty Cenedl posters commemorating centennial anniversary of Wounded Knee in 1990. Credit: Gethin ap Gruffydd and Sian Ifan (Gruffydd and Ifan 2007).

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- <sup>i</sup> This article is based on two chapters of my dissertation, "Cyd-Safiad (Standing Together): The Politics of Alliance of Welsh and American Indian Rights' Movements, 1960s-Present" (University of Minnesota, 2012).
- <sup>ii</sup> Throughout this article, I have capitalized the term "Indigenous" where used as a proper noun because this is the standard practice in the field of Indigenous Studies. Also, where possible, I have identified Indigenous activists by their tribal nation. When referring to Indigenous North Americans more generally, I have used "American Indian," "Native American," "Native," and "Indigenous North American" more or less interchangeably.
- <sup>iii</sup> George Taylor, aged 37, and Alwyn Jones, aged 22, were killed when the explosives they were carrying detonated prematurely. They were rumored to be members of Mudiad Amdiffyn Cymru [MAC], a militant Welsh nationalist group who carried out bombing campaigns in the mid-1960s, and they were reportedly targeting the Royal Train that took Prince Charles to Caernarfon for his investiture as Prince of Wales. However, the circumstances surrounding their deaths are contested; family members have denied their involvement with MAC and the official inquest into their deaths found that they were intending to target government buildings in Abergele, not the Royal Family. As a result, while they have become known as the "Abergele rigs" and they are commemorated as such by some Welsh nationalists, their deaths have not come to symbolize the same sort of sacrifice in Welsh history as the Irish hunger strikers have in Irish Republican narratives (see Hopkins [2016] on the importance of martyrs to Irish Republican history). The American Indian Movement and Welsh nationalists were not the first movements to use historical memory of martyrs and defeats to rouse nationalist sentiment. For more examples, see Kachun (2017), Riall (2010), Sanyal (2018), and Volk (2010).
- <sup>iv</sup> By historical memory and remembering, I refer to society's collective remembering of certain events from that society's shared history, ones that have been deemed too important to forget. By commemoration, I refer to the enactment or practice of this remembering.
- <sup>v</sup> Very little has been written about the role of historical memory in Welsh nationalism. For more on the relationship between historical memory and Welsh identity, a key part of Welsh nationalism, see Lisa Lewis (2018).

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- <sup>vi</sup> For more information on these networks in Europe, see Tóth (2016a), especially chapter 3, and Williams (2012), particularly chapter 2.
- <sup>vii</sup> The Minutes of the National Executive Committee of Plaid Cymru in April 1976 suggest that the Committee did resolve that Plaid’s chairman should meet Bellecourt, but there is no other mention of the visit in Plaid Cymru’s archive (“Minutes” 1976). Then-president of Plaid Cymru Phil Williams did discuss meeting with representatives of AIM in one of his books, where he is likely referring to Bellecourt’s visit (Williams 1981, 90).
- <sup>viii</sup> For more discussion on the role of historical memory during the Wounded Knee siege in 1973, see Tóth (2016b, 137-9).
- <sup>ix</sup> For more on Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, see Treuer (2019) and Dunbar-Ortiz (2014). For more on Llywelyn and Glyndwr, see Jenkins (2007) and Davies (2007).
- <sup>x</sup> Welsh peoples’ sympathies towards Indigenous peoples had diverse roots, much like those of British and European supporters generally. Some traced their engagement to cultural factors, such as watching popular cowboy films during their youth, while others’ interest had been awakened by reading Dee Brown (1970). For more on Welsh people’s responses to Indigenous North Americans, see Williams (2012). For more on British and European sympathies, see Mackay and Stirrup (2013) and Tóth (2016a).
- <sup>xi</sup> On the movements being labeled terrorists, see “An Unterrifying Band of Terrorists” (1974), Humphries (2008), and United States (1976). Recent debates over commemorations of the Abergele Martyrs, two Welsh nationalists killed when a bomb they were carrying exploded unexpectedly, have also utilized the rhetoric of terrorism. See, for example, Devine (2009) and Hughes (2019).