

# *Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change*

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WHEN I WORKED as a rape crisis counselor, every Native client I saw said to me at one point, "I wish I wasn't Indian." My training in the mainstream antiviolence movement did not prepare me to address what I was seeing—that sexual violence in Native communities was inextricably linked to processes of genocide and colonization. Through my involvement in organizations such as Women of All Red Nations (WARN, Chicago), Incite! Women of Color against Violence ([www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org)), and various other projects, I have come to see the importance of developing organizing theories and practices that focus on the intersections of state and colonial violence and gender violence. In my ongoing research projects on Native American critical race feminisms, I focus on documenting and analyzing the theories produced by Native women activists that intervene both in sovereignty and feminist struggles.<sup>1</sup> These analyses serve to complicate the generally simplistic manner in which Native women's activism is often articulated within scholarly and activist circles.

## NATIVE WOMEN AND FEMINISM

One of the most prominent writings on Native American women and feminism is Annette Jaimes's (Guerrero) early 1990s article, "American

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Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America." Here, she argues that Native women activists, except those who are "assimilated," do not consider themselves feminists. Feminism, according to Jaimes, is an imperial project that assumes the givenness of U.S. colonial stranglehold on indigenous nations. Thus, to support sovereignty Native women activists reject feminist politics:

Those who have most openly identified themselves [as feminists] have tended to be among the more assimilated of Indian women activists, generally accepting of the colonialist ideology that indigenous nations are now legitimate sub-parts of the U.S. geopolitical corpus rather than separate nations, that Indian people are now a minority with the overall population rather than the citizenry of their own distinct nations. Such Indian women activists are therefore usually more devoted to "civil rights" than to liberation per se. . . . Native American women who are more genuinely sovereigntist in their outlook have proven themselves far more dubious about the potentials offered by feminist politics and alliances.<sup>2</sup>

According to Jaimes, the message from Native women is the same, as typified by these quotes from one of the founders of WARN, Lorelei DeCora Means:

We are *American Indian* women, in that order. We are oppressed, first and foremost, as American Indians, as peoples colonized by the United States of America, *not* as women. As Indians, we can never forget that. Our survival, the survival of every one of us—man, woman and child—as *Indians* depends on it. Decolonization is the agenda, the whole agenda, and until it is accomplished, it is the *only* agenda that counts for American Indians.

You start to get the idea maybe all this feminism business is just another extension of the same old racist, colonialist mentality.<sup>3</sup>

The critique and rejection of the label of feminism made by Jaimes is important and shared by many Native women activists. However, it fails to tell the whole story. Consider, for instance, this quote from Madonna Thunder Hawk, who cofounded WARN with Means:

Feminism means to me, putting a word on the women's world. It has to be done because of the modern day. Looking at it again, and I can only talk about the reservation society, because that's where I live and that's the only thing I know. I can't talk about the outside. How I relate to that term feminist, I like the word.

When I first heard, I liked it. I related to it right away. But I'm not the average Indian woman; I'm not the average Indian activist woman, because I refuse to

limit my world. I don't like that. . . . How could we limit ourselves? "I don't like that term; it's a white term." Pssshhh. Why limit yourself? But that's me.

My point is not to set Thunder Hawk in opposition to Means: both talk of the centrality of land and decolonization in Native women's struggle. Although Thunder Hawk supports many of the positions typically regarded as "feminist," such as abortion rights, she contends that Native struggles for land and survival continue to take precedence over these other issues. Rather, my argument is that Native women activists' theories about feminism, about the struggle against sexism both within Native communities and the society at large, and about the importance of working in coalition with non-Native women are complex and varied. These theories are not monolithic and cannot simply be reduced to the dichotomy of feminist versus nonfeminist. Furthermore, there is not necessarily a relationship between the extent to which Native women call themselves feminists, the extent to which they work in coalition with non-Native feminists or value those coalitions, whether they are urban or reservation-based, and the extent to which they are "genuinely sovereigntist." In addition, the very simplified manner in which Native women's activism is theorized straightjackets Native women from articulating political projects that both address sexism and promote indigenous sovereignty simultaneously.

Central to developing a Native feminist politic around sovereignty is a more critical analysis of Native activist responses to feminism and sexism in Native communities. Many narratives of Native women's organizing mirrors Jaimes's analysis—that sexism is not a primary factor in Native women's organizing. However, Janet McCloud recounts how the sexism in the Native rights movement contributed to the founding of the Indigenous Women's Network in 1985:

I was down in Boulder, Colorado and Winona LaDuke and Nilak Butler were there and some others. They were telling me about the different kinds of sexism they were meeting up with in the movement with the men, who were really bad, and a lot of these women were really the backbone of everything, doing a lot of the kind of work that the movement needed. I thought they were getting discouraged and getting ready to pull out and I thought, "wow, we can't lose these women because they have a lot to offer." So, we talked about organizing a women's conference to discuss all the different problems. . . . Marsha Gomez and

others decided to formally organize. I agreed to stay with them as a kind of a buffer because the men were saying the "Indignant Women's Organization" and blah, blah, blah. They felt kind of threatened by the women organizing.<sup>4</sup>

My interviews with Native women activists also indicate that sexism in Native communities is a central concern:

Guys think they've got the big one, man. Like when [name of Native woman in the community] had to go over there and she went to these Indians because they thought they were a bunch of swinging dicks and stuff, and she just let them have it. She just read them out. What else can you do? That's pretty brave. She was nice, she could have laid one of them out. Like you know, [name of Native man in the community], well of course this was more extreme, because I laid him out! He's way bigger than me. He's probably 5'11", I'm five feet tall. When he was younger, and I was younger, I don't even know what he said to me, it was something really awful. I didn't say nothing because he was bigger than me, I just laid him out. Otherwise you could get hurt. So I kicked him right in his little nut, and he fell down on the floor—"I'm going to kill you! You bitch!" But then he said, you're the man! If you be equal on a gut and juice level, on the street, they don't think of you as a woman anymore, and therefore they can be your friend, and they don't hate you. But then they go telling stuff like "You're the man!" And then what I said back to him, was "I've got it swinging!"

And although many Native women do not call themselves feminists for many well thought-out reasons, including but not limited to the reasons Jaimes outlines, it is important to note that many not only call themselves feminist but also argue that it is important for Native women to call themselves feminists. And many activists argue that feminist, far from being a "white" concept, is actually an indigenous concept white women borrowed from Native women.

(INTERVIEWEE 1)

I think one of the reasons why women don't call themselves feminists is because they don't want to make enemies of men, and I just say, go forth and offend without inhibition. That's generally why I see women hold back, who don't want to be seen as strident. I don't want to be seen as a man-hater, but I think if we have enough man-haters, we might actually have the men change for once. . . . I think men, in this particular case, I think men are very, very good at avoiding responsibility and avoiding accountability and avoiding justice. And not calling yourself a feminist, that's one way they do that. Well, feminism, that's for white

women. Oh feminists, they're not Indian. They're counterrevolutionary. They're all man-haters. They're all ball-busters. They've gotten out of order. No, first of all that presumes that Native women weren't active in shaping our identity before white women came along. And that abusive male behavior is somehow traditional, and it's absolutely not. So I reject that. That's a claim against sovereignty. I think that's a claim against Native peoples. I think it's an utter act of racism and white supremacy. And I do think it's important that we say we're feminists without apology.

(INTERVIEWEE 2)

[On Native women rejecting the term "feminist"] I think that's giving that concept to someone else, which I think is ridiculous. It's something that there has to be more discussion about what that means. I always considered, they took that from us, in a way. That's the way I've seen it. So I can't see it as a bad thing, because I think the origins are from people who had empowered women a long time ago.

This reversal of the typical claim that "feminism" is white then suggests that Native feminist politics is not necessarily similar to the feminist politics of other communities or that Native feminists necessarily see themselves in alliance with white feminists. In addition, the binary between feminist versus nonfeminist politics is false because Native activists have multiple and varied perspectives on this concept. For instance, consider one woman's use of "strategic" feminism with another women's affirmation of feminist politics coupled with her rejection of the term "feminist." These women are not neatly categorized as feminists versus nonfeminists.

(INTERVIEWEE 1)

Well, you know I vary that from situation to situation. Because when I'm back home, I'll say I'm a feminist just to rile the guys so they know where I still stand. So there's nothing tricky about who I am and what I'm doing. And when I'm out here in a white women's studies department, I won't call myself, because I don't want to align myself with their politics.

(INTERVIEWEE 2)

It's not the term that fits within my culture. I'm an Indian woman, first and foremost. I'm a strong Indian woman, very directed, and I believe in feminism as I understand society, and that I would be a part of that. . . . The word doesn't equate with any Indian word that I would know. That's what I mean, there isn't a word.

Thus, these analyses suggest that sexism is not necessarily a secondary concern to Native women, and Native women's engagement with feminist politics to address sexism is much more complex than generally depicted.

#### NATIVE FEMINISM AND SOVEREIGNTY

If we successfully decolonize, the argument goes, then we will necessarily eliminate problems of sexism as well. This sentiment can be found in the words of Ward Churchill. He contends that all struggles against sexism are of secondary importance because, traditionally, sexism did not exist in Indian nations. Churchill asks whether sexism exists in Indian country after Native peoples have attained sovereignty? His reply, "Ask Wilma Mankiller," former principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>5</sup> Well, let's ask Mankiller. She says of her election campaign for deputy chief that she thought people might be bothered by her progressive politics and her activist background. "But I was wrong," she says:

No one challenged me on the issues, not once. Instead, I was challenged mostly because of one fact—I am female. The election became an issue of gender. It was one of the first times I had ever really encountered overt sexism . . . (people) said having a female run our tribe would make the Cherokees the laughing stock of the tribal world.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of its origins in Native communities, then, sexism operates with full force today and requires strategies that directly address it. Before Native peoples fight for the future of their nations, they must ask themselves, who is included in the nation? It is often the case that gender justice is often articulated as being a separate issue from issues of survival for indigenous peoples. Such an understanding presupposes that we could actually decolonize without addressing sexism, which ignores the fact that it has been precisely through gender violence that we have lost our lands in the first place.<sup>7</sup> In my activist work, I have often heard the sentiment expressed in Indian country: we do not have time to address sexual/domestic violence in our communities because we have to work on "survival" issues first. However, Indian women suffer death rates because of domestic violence twice as high as any other group of women in this

country.<sup>8</sup> They are clearly not surviving as long as issues of gender violence go unaddressed. Scholarly analyses of the impact of colonization on Native communities often minimize the histories of oppression of Native women. In fact, many scholars argue that men were disproportionately affected by colonization because the economic systems imposed on Native nations deprived men of their economic roles in the communities more so than women.<sup>9</sup> By narrowing our analyses solely to the explicitly economic realm of society, we fail to account for the multiple ways women have disproportionately suffered under colonization—from sexual violence to forced sterilization. As Paula Gunn Allen argues:

Many people believe that Indian men have suffered more damage to their traditional status than have Indian women, but I think that belief is more a reflection of colonial attitudes toward the primacy of male experience than of historical fact. While women still play the traditional role of housekeeper, childbearer, and nurturer, they no longer enjoy the unquestioned positions of power, respect, and decision making on local and international levels that were not so long ago their accustomed functions.<sup>10</sup>

This tendency to separate the health and well-being of women from the health and well-being of our nations is critiqued in Winona LaDuke's 1994 call to not "cheapen sovereignty." She discusses attempts by men in her community to use the rhetoric of "sovereignty" to avoid paying child support payments.

What is the point of an Indian Child Welfare Act when there is so much disregard for the rights and well being of the children? Some of these guys from White Earth are saying the state has no jurisdiction to exact child support payments from them. Traditionally, Native men took care of their own. Do they pay their own to these women? I don't think so. I know better. How does that equation better the lives of our children? How is that (real) sovereignty?

The U.S. government is so hypocritical about recognizing sovereignty. And we, the Native community, fall into the same hypocrisy. I would argue the Feds only recognize Indian sovereignty when a first Nation has a casino or a waste dump, not when a tribal government seeks to preserve ground water from pesticide contamination, exercise jurisdiction over air quality, or stop clear-cutting or say no to a nuclear dump. "Sovereignty" has become a politicized term used for some of the most demeaning purposes.<sup>11</sup>

Beatrice Medicine similarly critiques the manner in which women's status is often pitted against sovereignty, as exemplified in the 1978 *Santa Clara Pueblo v. Martinez* case. Julia Martinez sued her tribe for sex discrimination under the Indian Civil Rights Act because the tribe had dictated that children born from female tribal members who married outside the tribe lost tribal status whereas children born from male tribal members who married outside the tribe did not. The Supreme Court ruled that the federal government could not intervene in this situation because the determination of tribal membership was the sovereign right of the tribe. On the one hand, many white feminists criticized the Supreme Court decision without considering how the Court's affirmation of the right of the federal government to determine tribal membership would constitute a significant attack against tribal sovereignty.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, as Medicine notes, many tribes take this decision as a signal to institute gender-discriminatory practices under the name of sovereignty.<sup>13</sup> For these difficult issues, it is perhaps helpful to consider how they could be addressed if we put American Indian women at the center of analysis. Is it possible to simultaneously affirm tribal sovereignty and challenge tribes to consider how the impact of colonization and Europeanization may impact the decisions they make and programs they pursue in a manner which may ultimately undermine their sovereignty in the long term? Rather than adopt the strategy of fighting for sovereignty first and then improving Native women's status second, as Jaimes suggests, we must understand that attacks on Native women's status are themselves attacks on Native sovereignty. Lee Maracle illustrates the relationship between colonization and gender violence in Native communities in her groundbreaking work, *I Am Woman* (1988):

If the State won't kill us  
we will have to kill ourselves.  
It is no longer good etiquette to head hunt savages.  
We'll just have to do it ourselves.  
It's not polite to violate "squaws"  
We'll have to find an Indian to oblige us.  
It's poor form to starve an Indian  
We'll have to deprive our young ourselves



Blinded by niceties and polite liberality  
 We can't see our enemy,  
 so, we'll just have to kill each other.<sup>14</sup>

It has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender relationships on Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place. If we maintain these patriarchal gender systems in place, we are then unable to decolonize and fully assert our sovereignty.

#### NATIVE FEMINIST SOVEREIGNTY PROJECTS

Despite the political and theoretical straightjacket in which Native women often find themselves, there are several groundbreaking projects today that address both colonialism and sexism through an intersectional framework. One such attempt to tie indigenous sovereignty with the well-being of Native women is evident in the materials produced by the Sacred Circle, a national American Indian resource center for domestic and sexual violence based in South Dakota. Their brochure *Sovereign Women Strengthen Sovereign Nations* reads:

##### Tribal Sovereignty

All Tribal Nations Have an Inherent  
 Right to:

- 1) A land base: possession and control is unquestioned and honored by other nations. To exist without fear, but with freedom.
- 2) Self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning the Tribe without the approval or agreement of others. This includes the ways and methods of decision-making in social, political and other areas of life.
- 3) An economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries the

##### Native Women's Sovereignty

All Native Women Have an Inherent  
 Right to:

- 1) Their body and path in life: the possession and control is unquestioned and honored by others. To exist without fear, but with freedom.
- 2) Self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning themselves, without others' approval or agreement. This includes the ways and methods of decision-making in social, political and other areas of life.
- 3) An economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries that

Tribe chooses. This includes resources that support the Tribal life way, including the practice of spiritual ways.

4) A distinct language and historical and cultural identity: Each tribe defines and describes its history, including the impact of colonization and racism, tribal culture, worldview and traditions.

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*Colonization and violence against Native people means that power and control over Native people's life way and land have been stolen.*

*As Native people, we have the right and responsibility to advocate for ourselves and our relatives in supporting our right to power and control over our tribal life way and land—tribal sovereignty.*

Native women choose. This includes resources that support individual Native women's chosen life ways, including the practice of spiritual ways.

4) A distinct identity, history and culture: Each Native woman defines and describes her history, including the impact of colonization, racism and sexism, tribal women's culture, worldview and traditions.

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*Violence against women, and victimization in general, means that power and control over an individual's life and body have been stolen.*

*As relatives of women who have been victimized, it is our right and responsibility to be advocates supporting every woman's right to power and control over her body and life—personal sovereignty.*

Another such project is the Boarding School Healing Project, which seeks to build a movement to demand reparations for U.S. boarding school abuses. This project, founded in 2002, is a coalition of indigenous groups across the United States, such as the American Indian Law Alliance, Incite! Women of Color against Violence, Indigenous Women's Network, and Native Women of Sovereign Nations of the South Dakota Coalition against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. In Canada, Native peoples have been able to document the abuses of the residential school system and demand accountability from the Canadian government and churches. The same level of documentation has not taken place in the United States. The Boarding School Healing Project is documenting these abuses to build a movement for reparations and accountability. However, the strategy of this project is not to seek remedies on the individual level, but to demand collective remedy by developing links with other reparations struggles that fundamentally challenge the colonial and capitalist status quo. In addition, the strategy of this project is to organize around boarding schools as a way to address gender violence in Native communities.

That is, one of the harms suffered by Native peoples through state policy was sexual violence perpetrated by boarding school officials. The continuing effect of this human rights violation has been the internalization of sexual and other forms of gender violence *within* Native American communities. Thus, the question is, how can we form a demand around reparations for these types of continuing effects of human rights violations that are evidenced by violence *within* communities, but are nonetheless colonial legacies. In addition, this project attempts to organize against interpersonal gender violence *and* state violence simultaneously by framing gender violence as a continuing effect of human rights violations perpetrated by state policy. Consequently, this project challenges the mainstream anti-domestic/sexual violence movement to conceptualize state-sponsored sexual violence as central to its work. As I have argued elsewhere, the mainstream antiviolence movement has relied on the apparatus of state violence (in the form of the criminal justice system) to address domestic and sexual violence without considering how the state itself is a primary perpetrator of violence.<sup>15</sup> The issue of boarding schools forces us to see the connections between state violence and interpersonal violence. It is through boarding schools that gender violence in our communities was largely introduced. Before colonization, Native societies were, for the most part, not male dominated. Women served as spiritual, political, and military leaders. Many societies were matrilineal and matrilocal. Violence against women and children was infrequent or unheard of in many tribes.<sup>16</sup> Native peoples did not use corporal punishment against their children. Although there existed a division of labor between women and men, women's and men's labor was accorded similar status.<sup>17</sup> In boarding schools, by contrast, sexual/physical/emotional violence proliferated. Particularly brutalizing to Native children was the manner in which school officials involved children in punishing other children. For instance, in some schools, children were forced to hit other children with the threat that if they did not hit hard enough, they themselves would be severely beaten. Sometimes perpetrators of the violence were held accountable, but generally speaking, even when teachers were charged with abuse, boarding schools refused to investigate. In the case of just one teacher, John Boone at the Hopi school, FBI investigations in 1987 found

that he had sexually abused more than 142 boys, but that the principal of that school had not investigated any allegations of abuse.<sup>18</sup> Despite the epidemic of sexual abuse in boarding schools, the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not issue a policy on reporting sexual abuse until 1987 and did not issue a policy to strengthen the background checks of potential teachers until 1989. Although not all Native peoples see their boarding school experiences as negative, it is generally the case that much if not most of the current dysfunctionality in Native communities can be traced to the boarding school era.

The effects of boarding school abuses linger today because these abuses have not been acknowledged by the larger society. As a result, silence continues within Native communities, preventing Native peoples from seeking support and healing as a result of the intergenerational trauma. Because boarding school policies are not acknowledged as human rights violations, Native peoples individualize the trauma they have suffered, thus contributing to increased shame and self-blame. If both boarding school policies and the continuing effects from these policies were recognized as human rights violations, then it might take away the shame from talking about these issues and thus provide an opportunity for communities to begin healing.

Unfortunately, we continue to perpetuate this colonial violence through domestic/sexual violence, child abuse, and homophobia. No amount of reparations will be successful if we do not address the oppressive behaviors we have internalized. Women of color have for too long been presented with the choices of either prioritizing racial justice or gender justice. This dualistic analysis fails to recognize that it is precisely through sexism and gender violence that colonialism and white supremacy have been successful. A question to ask ourselves then is, what would true reparations really look like for women of color who suffer state violence and interpersonal gender violence simultaneously? The Boarding School Healing Project provides an opportunity to organize around the connections between interpersonal gender violence and state violence that could serve as a model for the broader antiviolence movement.

In addition, this project makes important contributions to the struggle for reparations as a whole. That is, a reparations struggle is not necessarily

radical if its demands do not call into question the capitalist and colonial status quo. What is at the heart of the issue is that no matter how much financial compensation the United States may give, such compensation does not ultimately end the colonial relationship between the United States and indigenous nations. What is at the heart of the struggle for native sovereignty is control over land and resources rather than financial compensation for past and continuing wrongs. If we think about reparations less in terms of financial compensation for social oppression and more about a movement to transform the neocolonial economic relationships between the United States and people of color, indigenous peoples, and Third World countries, we see how critical this movement could be to all of us. The articulation of reparations as a movement to cancel the Third World debt, for instance, is instructive in thinking of strategies that could fundamentally alter these relations.

#### NATIVE FEMINISM AND THE NATION STATE

Native feminist theory and activism make a critical contribution to feminist politics as a whole by questioning the legitimacy of the United States specifically and the nation-state as the appropriate form of governance generally. Progressive activists and scholars, although prepared to make critiques of the U.S. government, are often not prepared to question its legitimacy. A case in point is the strategy of many racial justice organizations in the United States to rally against hate crimes resulting from the attacks of 9/11 under the banner, "We're American too." However, what the analysis of Native women activists suggests is that this implicit allegiance to "America" legitimizes the genocide and colonization of Native peoples, as there could be no "America" without this genocide. Thus by making anticolonial struggle central to feminist politics, Native women make central to their organizing the question of what is the appropriate form of governance for the world in general. Does self-determination for indigenous peoples equal aspirations for a nation-state, or are there other forms of governance we can create that are not based on domination and control?

Questioning the United States, in particular, and questioning the nation-state as the appropriate form of governance for the world, in general, allow us to free our political imagination to begin thinking of how we can

begin to build a world we would actually want to live in. Such a political project is particularly important for colonized peoples seeking national liberation because it allows us to differentiate "nation" from "nation-state." Helpful in this project of imagination is the work of Native women activists who have begun articulating notions of nation and sovereignty that are separate from nation-states. Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, indigenous sovereignty and nationhood is predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility. As Crystal Echohawk states:

Sovereignty is an active, living process within this knot of human, material and spiritual relationships bound together by mutual responsibilities and obligations. From that knot of relationships is born our histories, our identity, the traditional ways in which we govern ourselves, our beliefs, our relationship to the land, and how we feed, clothe, house and take care of our families, communities and Nations.<sup>19</sup>

This interconnectedness exists not only among the nation's members but among all creation—human and nonhuman. As Sharon Venne states:

Our spirituality and our responsibilities define our duties. We understand the concept of sovereignty as woven through a fabric that encompasses our spirituality and responsibility. This is a cyclical view of sovereignty, incorporating it into our traditional philosophy and view of our responsibilities. There it differs greatly from the concept of western sovereignty which is based upon absolute power. For us absolute power is in the Creator and the natural order of all living things; not only in human beings. . . . Our sovereignty is related to our connections to the earth and is inherent.

The idea of a nation did not simply apply to human beings. We call the buffalo or the wolves, the fish, the trees, and all are nations. Each is sovereign, an equal part of the creation, interdependent, interwoven, and all related.<sup>20</sup> These models of sovereignty are not based on a narrow definition of nation that would entail a closely bounded community and ethnic cleansing. For example, one activist distinguishes between a chauvinistic notion of "nationalism" versus a flexible notion of "sovereignty":

Nationalism is saying, our way is the only right way. . . . I think a real true sovereignty is a real, true acceptance of who and what's around you. And the

nationalist doesn't accept all that. . . . Sovereignty is what you do and what you are to your own people within your own confines, but there is a realization and acceptance that there are others who are around you. And that happened even before the Europeans came, we knew about the Indians. We had alliances with some, and fights with some. Part of that sovereignty was that acceptance that they were there.

It is interesting to me, for instance, how often non-Indians presume that if Native people regained their landbases, that they would necessarily call for the expulsion of non-Indians from those landbases. Yet, it is striking that a much more inclusive vision of sovereignty is articulated by Native women activists. For instance, this activist describes how indigenous sovereignty is based on freedom for all peoples:

If it doesn't work for one of us, it doesn't work for any of us. The definition of sovereignty [means that] . . . none of us are free unless all of our free. We can't, we won't turn anyone away. We've been there. I would hear stories about the Japanese internment camps . . . and I could relate to it because it happened to us. Or with Africans with the violence and rape, we've been there too. So how could we ever leave anyone behind.

This analysis mirrors much of the work currently going on in women of color organizing in the United States and in other countries. Such models rely on this dual strategy of what Sista II Sista (Brooklyn) describes as "taking power" and "making power."<sup>21</sup> That is, it is necessary to engage in oppositional politics to corporate and state power ("taking power"). However, if we only engage in the politics of taking power, we will have a tendency to replicate the hierarchical structures in our movements. Consequently, it is also important to "make power" by creating those structures within our organizations, movements, and communities that model the world we are trying to create. Many groups in the United States often try to create separatist communities based on egalitarian ideals. However, if we "make power" without also trying to "take power" then we ultimately support the political status quo by failing to dismantle those structures of oppression that will undermine all our attempts to make power. The project of creating a new world governed by an alternative system not based on domination, coercion, and control does not depend on an unrealistic goal of being able to fully describe a utopian

society for all at this point in time. From our position of growing up in a patriarchal, colonial, and white supremacist world, we cannot even fully imagine how a world not based on structures of oppression could operate. Nevertheless, we can be part of a collective, creative process that can bring us closer to a society not based on domination. To quote Jean Ziegler from the 2003 World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil: "We know what we don't want, but the new world belongs to the liberated freedom of human beings. 'There is no way; you make the way as you walk.' History doesn't fall from heaven; we make history."

#### NOTES

1. Quotes that are not cited come from interviews conducted in Rapid City, New York City, Santa Cruz, Minneapolis, and Bemidji in 2001. These interviews are derived primarily from women involved in Women of All Red Nations (WARN) and the American Indian Movement (AIM). All are activists today.
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3. *Ibid.*, 314, 332. WARN was established as a sister organization to AIM in 1974.
4. Janet McCloud, "The Backbone of Everything," *Indigenous Woman* 1, no. 3 (n.d.): 50.
5. Ward Churchill, *Struggle for the Land* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993), 419.
6. Wilma Mankiller, *Mankiller* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 241.
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10. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 202.
11. Winona LaDuke, "Don't Cheapen Sovereignty," *American Eagle* 4 (May 1996): n.d. [www.alphacdc.com/eagle/op0596.html](http://www.alphacdc.com/eagle/op0596.html).
12. Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 63-69.
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14. Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman* (North Vancouver: Write-On Press Publishers, 1988).
  15. Smith, "Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide," 31-52.
  16. Paula Gunn Allen, "Violence and the American Indian Woman," *The Speaking Profits Us* (Seattle: Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, n.d.), 5-7. See also *A Sharing: Traditional Lakota Thought and Philosophy Regarding Domestic Violence* (South Dakota: Sacred Shawl Women's Society, n.d.); and *Sexual Assault Is Not an Indian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Division of Indian Work Sexual Assault Project, n.d.).
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  18. "Hello New Federalism, Goodbye BIA," *American Eagle* 4, no. 6 (1994): 19.
  19. Crystal Ichohawk, "Reflections on Sovereignty," *Indigenous Woman* 3, no. 1 (1999): 21-22.
  20. Sharon Venne, "Mining and Indigenous Peoples," *Indigenous Woman* 2, no. 5 (1998): 23-25.
  21. Personal conversations with Sista II Sista members, ongoing from 2001-2005.