



---

Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging

Author(s): Renya Ramirez

Source: *Meridians*, 2007, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2007), pp. 22-40

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40314242>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Meridians*

RENYA RAMIREZ

# Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender

## A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging

### Abstract

Too often there is the assumption in Native communities that we as indigenous women should defend a tribal nationalism that ignores sexism as part of our very survival as women as well as our liberation from colonization. In contrast, in this essay, I assert that race, tribal nation, and gender should be non-hierarchically linked as categories of analysis in order to understand the breadth of our oppression as well as the full potential of our liberation in the hope that one day we can belong as full members of our homes, communities, and tribal nations. Indeed, both indigenous women and men should develop a Native feminist consciousness based on the assumption that struggles for social autonomy will no longer include the denial of Native women's gendered concerns and rights.

---

We are American Indian women in that order. We are oppressed first and foremost as American Indians, as peoples colonized by the United States, 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, until it is accomplished.

——Lorelei Decora Means, one of the founders of WARN (Women of All Red Nations) (Jaimes and Halsey 1992, 314)

As evidenced in the above quotation, too often the assumption in Native communities is that we as indigenous women should defend a tribal nationalism that ignores sexism as part of our very survival as women as well as our

[*Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 2007, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 22–40]  
©2007 by Smith College. All rights reserved.

liberation from colonization. This common notion is problematic, since indigenous women in the United States die from domestic violence at twice the rate of other women (Rennison 2001; Smith 2005). Indeed, addressing domestic violence is ultimately a “survival issue.” In contrast, in this essay, I assert that race, tribal nation, and gender should be non-hierarchically linked as categories of analysis in order to understand the breadth of our oppression as well as the full potential of our liberation in the hope that one day, we can belong as full members of our homes, communities, and tribal nations.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, both indigenous women and men should develop a Native feminist consciousness based on the assumption that struggles for social autonomy will not deny Native women’s gendered concerns and rights. First, I will situate myself as a Native woman. Second, I will discuss how Native scholars have privileged race and tribal nation over gender. Then I will examine how the sexual and domestic violence activism of Andrea Smith (Cherokee) and Luana Ross (Salish) brings together race, tribal nation, and gender, thereby redefining nationalism, sovereignty, and gender from a Native and feminist lens. I focus on these two Native women activist/scholars, since they are not only both very strong supporters of tribal sovereignty, but because they also view gender issues as central to their intellectual and activist work. In particular I concentrate on them because they identify as Native feminists. Indeed, this essay aims to contribute to the building of a corpus of Native feminist thought.

I am an enrolled member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska and an academic. I teach Native American studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. As an indigenous woman I have challenged sexism all my life. Since I was a little girl I refused to act subserviently to men and believed that all Native American women should be treated as full members in our homes, communities, and tribal nations. Indeed, I was influenced by the activism of my Winnebago/Ojibwe mother, Woeshia Cloud North, who co-founded the Native Women’s Action Council in San Francisco and became a professor of Native American studies later in life. Following in my mother’s footsteps, I studied for my doctorate. I attended Stanford University where we as Stanford Native women graduate students, including Victoria Bomberry (Muscogee), Verna St. Denis (Cree/Metis), Mishauna Goeman (Seneca), and Tina Pierce-Fragoso (Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape), would discuss the vexed and complicated relationship between feminism and Native American women. We as indigenous women argued about whether we should claim feminism

as an intellectual space in order to confront gendered and other concerns that especially affect us, such as extremely high rates of violence against us in our communities. Verna St. Denis emphasized to me the high rates of violence against First Nations women in Canada, and argued for claiming feminism from Native women's viewpoints. I acknowledge her influence especially on my development as a Native feminist. During this time, I also read many writings by women of color and by Native women. Kate Shanley's 1984 essay "Thoughts on Indian Feminism" and Lee Maracle's *I Am Woman* were especially important to me, as both scholars claimed the term "feminist." From my conversations with my female Native colleagues and from my reading, I have learned that tribal sovereignty should be central to our discussions of feminism, since it is truly a pivotal political concern in Indian country. Kate Shanley, for example, writes, "The word 'feminism' has special meanings to Indian women, including the idea of promoting the continuity of tradition, and consequently, pursuing the recognition of tribal sovereignty" (1984, 215). In order for us as Native Americans to survive culturally and materially, we must fight and struggle for our tribal sovereignty and nationalism so that we can govern ourselves following our own institutions and worldview.

## Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender in Native American Studies

Unfortunately, bringing together race, tribal nation, and gender as important categories of analysis in Native American studies has been viewed as divisive as well as against tribal sovereignty. One of the most well-known examples is "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America," by Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey. They criticize indigenous women who claim the term "feminist" for being assimilated and antagonistic to tribal sovereignty (Jaimes and Halsey 1992).<sup>2</sup> They presume, argues Andrea Smith (2005), that feminism is an imperial project, which assumes the givenness of the federal government's ultimate control of tribal nations. They write:

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 sepa-

rate nations, that Indian people are now a minority within the overall population rather than the citizenry of their own distinct nations. Such Indian women activists are therefore usually more devoted to “civil rights” rather than 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. (Jaimes and Halsey 1992, 330-31)

A number of factors could contribute to these Native women scholars’ as well as others’ decision to criticize feminist consciousness among Native women.<sup>3</sup> First, they could view sexism as a racially divisive issue. In other words, feminist consciousness could cause conflict between indigenous men and women. Second, they could be influenced by the sexism prevalent in the American Indian Movement (AIM). Indigenous women were placed in subservient roles as cooks and helpers, and at times were expected to attend to the sexual needs of the male leaders of the movement. Native women were, therefore, taught that Native men should be in control (Crow Dog and Erdoes, 1991; Smith 2002). Within this sexist context, indigenous women were supposed to defend a Native nationalism that ignored their own needs to be liberated from misogyny and sexism.

Moreover, according to Jaimes and Halsey, one cannot be both Native and a feminist, because feminism is ultimately derived from white culture. They follow dominant notions of acculturation that presume that the culture of the dominant group will overpower the culture of the subordinated and that any mixing of the two will ultimately mean the subordinate group’s assimilation and loss of identity. It is assumed that feminism, therefore, cannot be appropriated or theorized from Native women’s perspectives even though some Native women scholars, such as Lee Maracle (1996), assert that claiming a feminist identity and their involvement and participation in the women’s movement empowered them.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Haunani-Kay Trask (1996) argues that feminism focuses solely on gender and therefore is inconsistent with a Hawaiian nationalist struggle, ultimately positing feminism as a white construct. She uses the terms “feminism” and “white feminism” interchangeably, not acknowledging feminist theory developed by women of color (Hall unpublished; Kauanui unpublished), such as bell hooks and Cherrie Moraga (hooks 1989, 1995; Moraga 1993).<sup>5</sup> She writes:

I recognized that practicing feminism hampered organizing among my people in rural communities. Given our nationalist context, feminism appeared as just another haole [white] intrusion into a besieged Hawaiian world. Any exclusive focus on women neglected the historical oppression of all Hawaiians and the large force field of imperialism. Now that I was working among my people, I saw there were simply too many limitations in the scope of feminist theory and praxis. The feminism I had studied was just too white, too American. (Trask 1996, 906)

Later in the article, she argues that sovereignty for her people is ultimately a more significant goal than educational or political equality with the men of her Hawaiian nation (901). In this way, she also privileges race and indigenous nation over gender issues.

Rather than viewing a Native feminist consciousness as a force that could cause internal conflict or as a white construct, it should be emphasized as furthering an essential goal in indigenous communities: to combat sexism. Moreover, Native scholars' privileging of race and tribal nation over gender is problematic, since indigenous women are disenfranchised simultaneously by race as well as by gender (Smith 2002; 2005).<sup>6</sup> Sexism, therefore, becomes too easily forgotten and is not adequately dealt with in Native scholarship and communities.

Andrea Smith, a Cherokee activist/scholar,<sup>7</sup> in contrast, argues that race, gender, and tribal nation must be connected in order to combat the rampant sexual violence suffered by Native women (Smith 2002). Native women who suffer from sexual violence must too often confront male-dominated tribal councils, governments, and communities. Consequently, sexual violence is ignored more often than not and, therefore, is not adequately addressed. In order to begin to fight against violence against Native American women, in particular, and women of color, in general, Smith organized the "Color of Violence: Violence against Women of Color Conference." The conference was first held on April 28–29, 2000, at the University of California, Santa Cruz and is now an annual event held in different cities across the country. Incite!, an activist organization, was founded there to combat violence against women of color. Here I focus on the inaugural conference in 2000 since it serves as an excellent example of how Native activists support tribal nationalism and sovereignty while working to combat violence against indigenous women as well as its underlying issues of sexism and misogyny.

Smith organized the event as a result of her disappointment and frustration with the anti-violence movement's propensity to marginalize women of color and to reject politics (Yeung 2000). Women of color argued that the white mainstream anti-violence movement frequently ignored them and their needs. In the 1980s, workers in anti-violence organizations often chose to provide services rather than to organize politically as the federal government became increasingly involved in addressing issues of violence against women (Yeung 2000). Domestic violence and rape crisis centers, furthermore, were forced to professionalize in order to receive accreditation and funding from government agencies. These centers, for example, were required to hire people with proper credentials. Consequently, they could not rely on peer-based services, which in the past had enabled more women to be involved. Thus, many women, especially poor women and women of color, were no longer able to participate. Indeed, professional service ultimately took the place of political organizing as the main objective of sexual assault and domestic violence agencies (Smith 2000).

Moreover, the mainstream anti-violence movement became more and more hesitant to deal with domestic and sexual violence within the context of inequality and institutional violence (Smith 2000). Smith argues that many state coalitions created to combat sexual and domestic violence refused to challenge anti-immigration laws, asserting that this backlash is not a sexual and domestic violence issue. However, as this backlash intensifies, argues Smith, many immigrant women refuse to report mistreatment for fear of deportation (2000). This approach to working against violence remains problematic, since domestic and sexual violence within communities of color cannot be affected unless larger structures of violence, such as police brutality, attacks on Indian treaty rights and immigrants, institutional racism, and economic neo-colonialism, are confronted (Smith 2000–01). For example, in order to fight interpersonal violence, Smith argues, one must foreground as well as understand the colonial connection. Furthermore, violence against women of color is a particular form of oppression, evidenced in the long history of the genocide of Native peoples. Colonizers targeted indigenous women because they have children. They not only killed indigenous women, but also sexually mutilated and raped them in an attempt to control Native women's reproduction (Smith 2000).

Indeed, this conference uniquely placed Native women's concerns at the center of women of color organizing against violence. During her keynote

address, Angela Davis, an African-American scholar and activist, argued that the experience of Native American women shows that we must especially highlight and emphasize the continual and unrelenting colonial domination and oppression of indigenous nations. She discussed the difficulties in using the legislative and juridical processes of the nation-state, which have caused so many problems for and damage to tribal nations and communities. She talked about the very problematic nature of expecting the federal government to provide any answers to the problem of violence against women when the state is so inextricably linked with male dominance, racism, class bias, and homophobia (Davis 2000; Ramirez 2007).

The conference, furthermore, became a forum for Native women to discuss the interlocking structures of power that support violence against them. Luana Ross, a keynote speaker, for example, argued that the consolidation of male power within tribal councils and communities has created a situation within tribes that fosters the disregard and perpetuation of sexual violence against Native women (Ramirez 2004b, 2007).<sup>8</sup>

And what I have found in my community in Montana, the Salish and Kootenai community is that this kind of violence [rape] is ignored. Why? Precisely because of the example that I just gave you. The perpetrators have very high status in Native communities—cultural leaders and tribal councilmen. Men have the power, and that's why the violence is allowed to continue. (Field notes, April 28, 2000)

The consolidation of male power in tribal councils can encourage tribal governments to ignore rampant gendered violence, for example, by not developing tribal laws that protect indigenous women from violence. Indeed, according to Ross, tribal nation and gender must be linked to understand why Native communities ignore violence against women. Without this linkage, gender issues, such as sexual violence, can be ignored.<sup>9</sup>

The strengthening of this male power is inextricably linked to a long history of colonialism, as well as to federal government policy and law, such as Indian boarding schools in Canada and the United States. The boarding schools' purpose, for example, was to insert patriarchy into tribal communities and to socialize children to believe in patriarchal gender norms (Wall 1997). As a result, male tribal council members influenced by patriarchal/colonial ideas have ignored Native women's cries for gendered justice, such as when indigenous women struggled to change the sexist aspects of the Indian Act in Canada (Silman 1987).



Indigenous nationalists who choose to disregard or ignore sexism and misogyny in general, and violence against Native women in particular, show their ties to other nationalisms and other nationalist projects, movements, and agendas, especially European and Euro-American nationalist movements for the past 200 years. European nationalists used the ideology of bourgeois respectability to help manage and control appropriate and proper gender relationships. This ideology helped the bourgeoisie create and set aside a “private sphere” that integrated and incorporated leisure and family life. Nationalism and respectability became entangled so that the nation-state could intrude as well as impose its norms of proper gender relations. Using state-run institutions, such as prisons, schools, and census bureaus, the bourgeoisie disciplined and controlled people (White 1995). Thus, Euro-centric nationalisms, through policies such as boarding schools, the Indian Act of 1876 in Canada, and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 in the United States, have imposed their patriarchal gender norms on Native communities, encouraging sexism and misogyny and its related potential for violence against women.

In response to this all-too-common violence, Luana Ross, during the “Color of Violence” conference, highlighted the importance of linking tribal sovereignty and violence against women to discover solutions. She emphasized the significance of reconceptualizing approaches for combating violence using indigenous frameworks of sovereignty instead of relying on the government for help. Ross, for instance, argued that finding appropriate redress for gendered violence against Indian women should happen in tribal rather than federal courts. She therefore argued for tribes’ right to self-determination and sovereignty in gendered terms when they use traditional modes of justice to remedy rampant sexual violence in Native communities (Field notes April 28, 2000; Ramirez 2004b, 2007).

## Rethinking Tribal Sovereignty

Ultimately, Native women need to be protected from potentially oppressive laws passed by male-dominated tribal governments, and violence should no longer be condoned or ignored. In order to accomplish this, tribal sovereignty must be reconceptualized from Native women’s perspectives. In Western culture, the most accepted meaning of self-determination is the notion of independent sovereignty and nation-state status. In this model, self-

determination means that a government has total and complete control and authority over what happens in its jurisdiction, and no outside agent should interfere or challenge this jurisdictional power. This freedom from intrusion assumes that sovereign nations should be free of any need for relations with, or effect by, others (Young 2001). This is a dangerous definition, since governments then have free reign to dominate others. They do not have to take seriously individuals' claims or rights. Consequently, indigenous women's claims are too easily ignored when this definition of tribal sovereignty based on selective aspects of the nation-state is followed.

Similarly, Taiaiake Alfred (1999), a Mohawk scholar, argues that sovereignty is an unsuitable concept with regard to indigenous peoples' fights for liberation and freedom, because it is a Western notion. Therefore, as long as Native people use Western notions of sovereignty to control their governmental actions, argues Alfred (1999), Western types of power colonize them (Smith 2002). In contrast, Craig Womack, a Muscogee scholar, argues that tribal sovereignty is flexible and fluid and that the needs of tribal nations can ultimately influence their practice of tribal sovereignty (1999). Like Womack, Andrea Smith and Luana Ross assert that sovereignty is not a static Western notion, but can be appropriated by Native people (Smith 2002). Consequently, rethinking sovereignty from Native women's viewpoints can lessen this tension between Western notions of tribal sovereignty and Native women's gender rights.

Indeed, indigenous women in Mexico have been articulate about indigenous women's gendered rights. The document that discusses the agreement reached by the Zapatistas, for example, supports the right of indigenous communities to elect their political and judicial authorities, to create their own political organization, and to follow their own rules, norms, or ways of delivering justice. At the same time, it argues that the human rights of indigenous women should be protected within their communities (Collier 2001). Similarly, in the United States there should be mechanisms within tribes that are as integral as notions of Native sovereignty that protect the human and civil rights of Native American women.

For instance, Lakota philosophy encompassed in the phrase "all my relations" offers an alternative approach to tribal sovereignty that considers how people are related and embedded within social relationships with one another. Using this approach, all people are interconnected and valued and at the same time they are expected to listen to and respect those around them.

This Native philosophical concept, rather than creating a hierarchy between group and individual rights, assumes that a respectful interchange between the two can be established. Therefore, this indigenous notion, for example, could be incorporated as integral to tribal court systems so that tribal sovereignty would no longer be privileged over gender issues and so that gendered concerns could be heard and addressed. Sovereignty can no longer mean that Native men have the right to control Indian women's lives. It can no longer simply mean separation and independence. It must also involve respect, interdependence, responsibility, dialogue, and engagement with indigenous women's rights and claims. Following this indigenous concept, race and tribal nation can no longer be privileged over gender issues; Indian women's gender rights will have to be respected and taken seriously.

Both Smith and Ross argue for the importance of reworking Native frameworks of nationalism and sovereignty in order to struggle against violence against Indian women. In this way, they challenge the frequent disregard of nationalism and sovereignty based on dominant notions that contribute to xenophobia, factionalism, and violence, including events in Bosnia (Smith 2002; Calhoun 1994; Scheff 1994). They are, therefore, committed to supporting tribal nations that struggle against the colonizing influence of the United States. In this way, their activism is similar to that of Chicana feminists, such as Elisa Laura Perez, who, on the one hand, challenged sexism within Chicana/o nationalism and, on the other hand, were very invested in working within a Chicana/o movement, which declared itself in direct opposition to dominant U.S. ideology that privileges Anglo-American cultural and political norms (Perez 1999). Thus, indigenous women, similar to Chicanas, are often committed to working *inside* Native nationalist movements for the freedom of *both* men and women.

## Native Feminisms

Analyzing what occurs at the annual "Color of Violence" conference not only helps us rethink tribal nationhood and sovereignty, but also feminism from Native women's points of view. Lessons from the conference, for example, have the potential to empower Native women, and claiming the term "Native feminist" could be part of this awakening. Native feminisms could be based on Indian women's activism against and varied experiences with issues, such as sexism, that specifically concern us. Similarly, women of color, in general,

challenge their various ethnic communities to become conscious of sexism. Cherrie Moraga, for example, discusses what home and community mean. She argues that her feminism forced her to leave home; she ran away from her mother who said that men should be in control of women and if she did not place men first she was a traitor to her race. She also explains that she would not accept the arguments of Chicano nationalists who claimed she would be seen as a traitor to her race if she challenged and/or criticized unequal gender relations (Moraga 1993).<sup>10</sup> Thus, like other feminists of color, indigenous women “talking back” (hooks 1989) to dominant society could influence our discussions of Native feminisms (Hill-Collins 1995; hooks 1995). Talking back has the potential to disrupt negative stereotypes and enables us as indigenous women to be viewed as full human beings with agency and worth (Arredondo et al. 2003).

Certainly, as Native women we must decide for ourselves what terms are appropriate to describe our struggle against sexism and our overall emancipation, as well as to highlight the contested nature of the term “feminism.” Some indigenous women, for example, choose not to use the word “feminism,” since this word cannot be found in their tribal language (Tohe 2000). At the same time, however, Smith’s study of Native women’s organizing shows that many Native women argue that feminism is important (Smith 2002). Some Native women assert that indigenous women’s unwillingness to call themselves “feminists” is not only a result of theoretical and philosophical differences with white feminists, but also demonstrates an unwillingness to focus on and confront sexism and gender discrimination (Smith 2002). In fact, I choose to claim the term “Native feminist” in order to fight against misogyny and gender oppression. For me, this term has empowered me to battle against the all-too-present reality of violence against indigenous women by choosing to write about this important issue. Claiming the term has also empowered me to teach about sexism in Native American communities within the context of the classroom. It has encouraged me to speak out against gender discrimination in my daily life. It has also motivated me to imagine a world where sexism no longer hurts both indigenous women and men.

Overall, feminism has been a hotly contested issue in indigenous communities and scholarship, as shown in both the Jaimes and Halsey and Trask articles. Too often this heated debate rests on the assumption that “white feminism” can be conflated with “feminism” in general, as already discussed. Another argument for Native women not claiming the term “Native

feminist” is that no one term could possibly encompass the complexity and diversity of Native women’s experience (Mihesuah 2003).<sup>11</sup> Because of this diversity, I, however, argue for the need to articulate many Native feminisms rather than a singular feminism.<sup>12</sup>

Since indigenous women constitute a diverse group, it is important to base any Native feminist theories on how indigenous women themselves view the world.<sup>13</sup> Native women come not only from divergent tribal backgrounds, but also from different relationships to their respective settler nation-states. In the United States, for example, some are members of federally acknowledged tribes and others are struggling for federal recognition. Many live on reservations (in the United States), reserves (in Canada), or villages (in Mexico), whereas many others live away from their Native lands in urban or rural areas. These very dissimilar life experiences influence how we as indigenous women view the world and prioritize our needs. In fact, how we identify ourselves varies according to tribe, geography, and country of origin. In Canada, indigenous women call themselves “First Nations” or “aboriginal,” while in the United States, we often identify ourselves as “Native American” or “American Indian.” In Mexico, Native women frequently call themselves “indigenous.” Many other indigenous women identify themselves only by tribe and refuse to use any of the above terms. I employ the term “Native” in the term “Native feminisms” in order to focus on our common experiences as indigenous women throughout the Western Hemisphere.<sup>14</sup> But regardless of whether one uses “First Nations,” “indigenous,” “Native,” a tribal name, or another term, understanding heterogeneity is critical to understanding our overall experiences as indigenous women.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, Native feminisms are necessarily very different from white feminism. Native women, argues Andrea Smith (2002), consider tribal rights, sovereignty, and colonization to be feminist issues.<sup>16</sup> Smith, for instance, discusses that if we place Native women at the very center of feminist history, we must begin with 1492 when indigenous women began to fight back against colonization. Therefore, struggles against colonization, argues Smith (2002), would become central in a history of Native feminisms. In contrast, Smith argues that the feminist movement is typically divided into first, second, and third waves. The first wave incorporates the nineteenth-century women’s suffrage movement; the second wave includes fights over abortion rights, the creation of the National Organization for Women, and the struggles for the Equal Rights Amendment; the third wave involves the battle of women of color in the

late twentieth and early twenty-first century to change feminism to include their experiences (Smith 2002). As a result, white feminist history, argues Smith, marginalizes women of color by placing white experiences and history at the center.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, we as indigenous women must put our own issues, struggles, and experiences with racial, gender, sexual, class, and other oppressions at the center of our analysis in order to create and articulate Native feminist thought and practice. The development of Native feminisms must also be inextricably linked to decolonization of indigenous nations, which must incorporate remembering and discussing precolonial egalitarian gender systems. It must also include how both indigenous men and women experience gender, sexual, and other oppressions.

### Native Feminisms and Nationalism?

Overall, the activism of indigenous women as part of the “Color of Violence” conference encourages us to combine gender and nation to develop a Native feminist/nationalist sensibility. Andrea Smith (2005), for example, discusses how tribal sovereignty should be linked together with the Native feminist issue of violence against Indian women. As Native feminists, Luana Ross and Andrea Smith not only emphasize an identity separate from white feminists, but also turn to indigenous frameworks of respectful gender relations rather than sexism to develop an inclusive Native nationalism, ultimately working to decolonize Native nations. Thus, in order to combine Native feminisms and nationalism, indigenous women ultimately need to rely on concrete experiences and Native philosophical values. Moreover, they need to imagine an indigenous nationalism that simultaneously challenges racism and sexism.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, a Native feminist consciousness, rather than being divisive, has the potential to help indigenous men and women understand the underlying causes of many social problems that plague our communities, such as high male unemployment rates and the very large numbers of Native men as well as women in prison (Ross 1995). These social maladies can be attributed to the operation of sexism in society. Native feminist consciousness could, furthermore, encourage both sexes to rid themselves of dominant notions of masculinity and femininity, building stronger senses of well-being and at the same time strengthening interpersonal bonds that sexist notions of proper gender relations erode. Most importantly, a Native feminist consciousness could persuade both genders to rethink dominant notions of nationalism, sovereignty,

masculinity (that are about power and control), and femininity (that are about passivity), which all contribute to violence against indigenous women.

For example, in order to encourage this feminist consciousness, Native community members could mount exhibits that show how colonialism has affected indigenous women's roles and how egalitarian gender relations were prevalent in many tribes (Allen 1986). Both indigenous men and women should be involved in organizing these exhibits to make everyone aware of various colonial forces that have encouraged sexism and misogyny. In 1996, one such exhibit occurred in San Jose, California (Ramirez 2004a). During this exhibit, colonialism was discussed as a primary cause of widespread violence against Native American women; traditional Cherokee gender norms were also presented.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, unpacking how colonialism has caused much gendered violence within indigenous communities must be at the very core of all Native feminist work.

## Conclusion

Native scholars have privileged race and tribal nation over gender issues, citing the importance of tribal sovereignty. In contrast, according to Smith and Ross, gender must be linked to discussions of tribal sovereignty and nationalism in order to address the reality of rampant violence against indigenous women. Tribal sovereignty can no longer simply mean independence and separation, but must also incorporate a sense of respect embedded within social relationships. Indeed, it should not be defined as indigenous men's right to control the lives of Native women. Certainly, both indigenous men and women need to develop a Native feminist consciousness in order to combat the sexism and misogyny that deeply hurts our communities. Moreover, Native women's activism as well as scholarship about the "Color of Violence" conference ultimately helps us rethink indigenous nationalism, feminism, as well as tribal sovereignty. All of these theoretical and practical strategies are essential to create a world where we as indigenous women can one day become full members of our homes, communities, and tribal nations, waking up from the nightmare of unrelenting violence against us.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I especially want to thank Andrea Smith (Cherokee), J. Kehaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli), and D. Anthony Tyeme Clark (Meskwaki) for their very



thorough feedback. I also want to thank Jennifer Denetdale (Dine), Sarah Deer (Muscogee), Mishauna Goeman (Seneca), Audra Simpson (Mohawk), Lee Maracle (Salish), Luana Ross (Salish), Lisa Hall (Kanaka Maoli), Anna Tsing, Aida Hurtado, Olga Najera-Ramirez, and Pat Zavella for comments on various drafts of this essay. Finally, I want to thank the anonymous reviewers who read and gave thoughtful comments on this essay.

#### NOTES

1. Renato Rosaldo's notion of cultural citizenship, which is based on discovering subordinated groups' own *vernacular* notions of citizenship and belonging and Yuval-Davis's notion of the *multilayered citizen*, whose rights and entitlements are not only affected by the nation-state, but also by different religious, diasporic, local, and other communities, both influence my approach (Benmayor and Flores 1997; Yuval-Davis 1999). Instead of concentrating on how Native Americans struggle to belong to a *singular* nation-state, I highlight their relationship to multiple social and political communities (see also Siu 2002). Lok Siu (2002) discusses how the Latino Cultural Citizenship Project and Aihwa Ong (1996) mistakenly frame their discussion of cultural citizenship around a singular nation-state, leaving out Chinese diasporic experiences. Similarly, I argue that Native notions of belonging must be redefined to include Native Americans' membership in multiple communities, most importantly their tribes. I discuss Native peoples' fight for full membership in tribal nations, communities, homes, and nation-state(s)—at the same time stressing that some Native Americans do not want to “belong” to any nation-state, since some are concentrating their struggle on their sovereign rights as tribal citizens. I argue that full membership not only must incorporate the right to be treated with dignity and respect in all contexts along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, and age, as well as other differences, but includes legal entitlements as well. Thus, citizenship for Native Americans can mean legal entitlements, but is not reducible to those privileges; it is ultimately about Indians' multi-sited and multilayered struggles to belong (Ramirez 2002, 2004b, 2007).
2. It is important to note that this is an example of Jaimes's early work and that she later changes her stance and argues that race, gender, and tribal nation must be linked (see Guerrero 1997). I cite the article, however, because it is very prominent; it is published in many anthologies and influences many students. It also represents a common argument against the development of Native feminism in Indian country that must be discussed openly.
3. See also Terrelonge 1995. She discusses the factors that interfere with black women developing a feminist consciousness.
4. See also Allen 1986, who argues that white feminism was influenced by the matriarchal and matrilineal traditions of tribes.
5. See also Grande 2004, who also uses feminism and white feminism interchangeably, not acknowledging the theorizing of women of color.



6. See also Crenshaw 1995, who argues against looking separately at race or gender dimensions when exploring how women of color experience violence. See also Yuval-Davis 1997 and Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999.
7. Smith is an assistant professor in American studies and women's studies at the University of Michigan. She has been a community organizer for over seventeen years. She was the co-founder of the Women of All Red Nations chapter (an American Indian woman's organization) in Chicago. She has struggled together with other communities of color on issues such as reproductive rights, environmental justice, prison abolition, and sexual and domestic violence. She ultimately understands that alliances must be forged through the process of working together and that there are no certain loyalties and/or allegiances between women of color. Consequently, she firmly believes in the importance of coalition-building in order to encourage social and political change.
8. It is important to note here that not all tribes are male-dominated. Many have strong female leadership.
9. See Field Notes, "Color of Violence Conference," UC Santa Cruz, April 28-29, 2000.
10. See also White 1995.
11. What Mihesuah does not discuss is how women of color of feminism relates or does not relate to Native women's struggles with racial and gender oppression.
12. Similarly, Chicana scholars discuss the need for Chicana feminisms in order to reflect the heterogeneous and complex nature of their community and experience. See Arredondo et al. 2003.
13. Similarly, Zavella discusses the diversity within the Chicana community. See Zavella 1994.
14. This essay focuses on the experiences of Native women in the United States and Canada and does not address the analysis and life experiences of indigenous women in Mexico and farther south. However, with this notion of Native feminisms, I want to open up the possibility for dialogue with indigenous women feminists and activists who struggle with sexism and overall oppression.
15. Similarly, Chicana feminists discuss the diversity of how women of Mexican origin identify themselves. See Arredondo et al. 2003, 3.
16. See also Justine Smith 2002. She discusses the importance of sovereignty for the survival of Native communities.
17. See also Trask 1996 and Maracle 1996.
18. See also White 1995. She discusses how African-American women combine feminism and nationalism.
19. See Ramirez 2004b for a more elaborate discussion of these points.

#### WORKS CITED

- Alfred, Taiaiake (Gerald). 1999. *Peace, Power, Righteousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Allen, Paula Gunn. 1986. *The Sacred Hoop*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Arredondo, Gabriela et al., eds. 2003. "Introduction." In *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Benmayor, Rina and William Flores, eds. 1997. "Introduction." In *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Space, Identity, and Rights*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Calhoun, Craig. 1994. "Nationalism and Civil Society: Democracy, Diversity and Self-Determination." In *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, edited by Craig Calhoun. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Collier, Jane. 2001. "Durkheim Revisited: Human Rights as the Moral Discourse for the Postcolonial, Post-Cold War World." In *Human Rights: Concepts, Contests, and Contingencies*, edited by Austin Sarat and Thomas Kearns. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberly. 1995. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." In *Critical Race Theory*, edited by Kimberly Crenshaw et al. New York: New Press.
- Crow Dog, Mary and Richard Erdoes. 1991. *Lakota Woman*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Davis, Angela. 2000. "The Color of Violence against Women," *Colorlines* 3, no. 3: 4-8.
- Field notes, "Color of Violence Conference," University of California, Santa Cruz, April 28-29, 2000.
- Grande, Sally. 2004. *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Guerrero, M. Annette, 1997. "Civil Rights versus Sovereignty: Native American Women in Life and Land Struggles." In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty. New York: Routledge.
- Hall, Lisa (unpublished). "Navigating Our Own 'Sea of Islands': Hawaiian Women and the Limits of U.S. Racialization." Paper Presented at "Native Feminisms without Apology Symposium," April 28, 2006, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.
- Hill-Collins, Patricia. 1995. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: New Press.
- hooks, bell. 1989. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press.
- . 1995. "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: New Press.
- Jaimes, Annette and Theresa Halsey. 1992. "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America." In *The State of Native America*. 314. Boston: South End Press.
- Kauanui, J. Kehaulani (unpublished). "Essay Notes." Paper Presented at "Native Feminisms without Apology Symposium," April 28, 2006, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.
- Maracle, Lee. 1996. *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective On Sociology and Feminism*. North Vancouver, BC: Write-On Press.

- Mihesuah, Devon. 2003. *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Moraga, Cherrie. 1993. *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasa por sus labios*. Boston: South End Press.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1996. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-making." *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5: 737–62.
- Perez, Laura Elisa. 1999. "El desorden, Nationalism, and Chicana/o Aesthetics." In *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, edited by Caren Kaplan et al. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ramirez, Renya. 2002. "Julia Sanchez's Story: An Indigenous Woman between Nations." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 23, no. 2: 65–83.
- . 2004a. "Healing, Violence, and Native American Women." *Social Justice* 31, no. 4: 103–17.
- . 2004b. "Community Healing and Cultural Citizenship." In *A Companion to the Anthropology of American Indians*, edited by Thomas Biolsi. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- . 2007. *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Rennison, Calle. 2001. *Violent Victimization and Race 1993–1998*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Ross, Luana. 1995. *Inventing the Savage*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Scheff, Thomas. 1994. "Emotions and Identity: A Theory of Ethnic Nationalism." In *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, edited by Craig Calhoun. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Shanley, Kate. 1984. "Thoughts on Indian Feminism." In *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women*, edited by Beth Brant. Rockland, ME: Sinister Wisdom Books.
- Silman, Janet. 1987. *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Siu, Lok. 2002. "Diasporic Cultural Citizenship: Chineseness and Belonging in Central America and Panama." *Social Text* 69: 7–28.
- Smith, Andrea. 2000. "Colors of Violence." *Colorlines* Winter, 3, no. 4: 4–7.
- . 2002. *Bible, Gender, and Nationalism in American Indian and Christian Right Activism*. Ph.D. diss. History of Consciousness Department. University of California, Santa Cruz.
- . 2005. "Native American Feminism, Sovereignty and Social Change." *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 1: 116–32.
- Smith, Justine. 2002. "Native Sovereignty and Social Justice: Moving toward an Inclusive Social Justice Framework." In *Dangerous Intersections: Feminist Perspectives on Population, Environment, and Development*, edited by Jael Silliman and Ynestra King. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Terrelonge, Pauline. 1995. "Feminist Consciousness and Black Women." In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press.

- Tohe, Laura. 2000. "There is No Word for Feminism in My Language." *Wicazo Sa Review* 15, no. 2: 103-10.
- Trask, Haunani-Kay. 1996. "Feminism and Indigenous Hawaiian Nationalism." *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 21, no. 4: 906-16.
- Wall, Wendy. 1997. "Gender and the 'Citizen Indian.'" In *Writing on the Range: Race, Class, Culture in the Women's West*. 202-30. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- White, E. Francis. 1995. "Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counterdiscourse, and African-American Nationalism." In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press.
- Womack, Craig. 1999. *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Yeung, Bernice. 2000. "Fighting for the Many Faces of Violence." *Colorlines* 3, no. 4: 26-30.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2001. "Two Concepts of Self-Determination." In *Human Rights: Concepts, Contests, and Contingencies*, edited by Austin Sarat and Thomas Kearns. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publications.
- . 1999. "The 'Multi-Layered' Citizen: Citizenship in the Age of Globalization," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1, no. 1 (April 1999): 119-36.
- and Pnina Werbner, eds. 1999. *Women, Citizenship and Difference*. London: Zed Books..
- Zavella, Patricia. 1994. "Reflections on Diversity of Chicanas." In *Race*, edited by Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek. 199-212. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.