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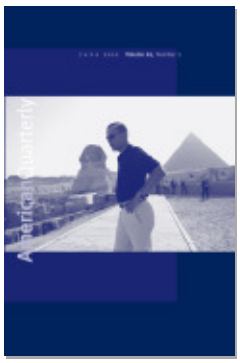

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Writings on Native women and feminism often rely on essentializing claims that Native women cannot be feminists, thus erasing the diversity of thought that exists within both scholarly and activist circles. [1, 2] To the extent that Native women's writings on feminism are cited, their use is often limited to demonstrating the racism of "white" feminism. Such rhetorical strategies limit Native women to a politics of inclusion—let us *include* Native women in feminist theory (or if we do not think that they can be included, let us reject feminist theory completely). This politics of inclusion inevitably presumes that feminism is in fact defined by white women.

Instead, I would contend that the theorizing produced by Native women scholars and activists makes critical and transformative interventions into not only feminist theory, but also into a wide variety of theoretical formations. In this essay, I am not seeking to make representative claims about what Native women think about feminism. Rather, its purpose is to share some of the theoretical insights of Native women organizers currently engaged in social justice struggles.

Beyond the Nation-State

Post 9/11, Bush's evocation of sovereignty has prompted Judith Butler to define sovereignty as "providing legitimacy of the rule of law and offering a guarantor for the presentational claims of state power."[3] According to Butler, the resurgence of sovereignty happens in a context of "suspension of law,"[4] whereby the nation can, in the name of "sovereignty," act against "existing legal frameworks, civil, military, and international . . . Under this mantle of sovereignty, the state proceeds to extend its own power to imprison indefinitely a group of people without trial."[5] Amy Kaplan similarly describes Bush's policies as rendering increasing numbers of people under U.S. jurisdiction as "less deserving of . . . constitutional rights."[6] Thus, Bush's strategies are deemed a suspension of the law. It is said that his administration is unconstitutional,

thus eroding civil liberties and U.S. democracy. From this perspective, progressives are called to uphold the law, defend the U.S. constitution, and protect civil liberties.

The question, then arises, what are we to do with the fact that, as Native scholar Luana Ross notes, genocide has never been against the law in the United States?[7] On the contrary, Native genocide has been expressly sanctioned as *the law*. And, as legal scholar Sora Han points out, none of these post-9/11 practices is actually extraconstitutional or extralegal. In fact, the U.S. Constitution confers on the State the right to maintain itself over and above the rights of its citizenry.[8]

Butler may be arguing that post-9/11 rule of law through sovereignty (seemingly displaced, in Foucault's analysis, during the rise of capitalism) has made a comeback as a legitimizing notion that works to extend state power. But this argument, as the work of Joy James and Rey Chow demonstrates, fails to consider how the state has *always* operated through sovereign power exacted through racial and colonial violence.[9] Thus the argument that we are currently under a resurgence of sovereignty itself normalizes the history of U.S. sovereign power exacted against the bodies of indigenous peoples and peoples of color. In fact, a Native feminist analysis could be used to read Butler's *Gender Trouble* against her analysis of sovereignty. In *Gender Trouble*, she critiques theorists such as Lacan, Irigaray, and Wittig, who posit a naturalized, prediscursive, gendered body as the foundation by which to critique contemporary heteropatriarchal practices. She argues that the very process of theorizing a prediscursive body demonstrates that the body cannot be prediscursive and hence it cannot be represented outside of prevailing power relations. But positing the body as prediscursive, according to Butler, allows the theorist to disavow her or his political investments because the theorist is supposedly rendering an account of the body prior to power relations. Butler's critique could then be more broadly applied to a critique of "origin stories." That is, when we critique a contemporary context through an appeal to a prior state before "the fall," we are necessarily masking power relations through the evocation of lost origins. In even radical critiques of Bush's war on terror, the U.S. Constitution serves as an origin story—it is the prior condition of "democracy" preceding our fall into Bush's "lawlessness." The Constitution's status as an origin story then masks the genocide of indigenous peoples that is its foundation. Thus reading Butler against Butler, a Native feminist analysis might suggest that her analysis of Bush's policies is predicated on what David Kazanjian refers to as the "colonizing trick"—the liberal myth that the United States is founded on democratic principles rather than being built on the pillars of capitalism,

colonialism, and white supremacy.[10] In this way, even scholars such as Butler and Kaplan, who make radical critiques of the United States as an empire, still unwittingly or implicitly take the U.S. Constitution as their origin story, presuming the U.S. nation-state even as they critique it. Consequently, the project of imagining alternative forms of governance outside of the United States remains impoverished within the field of American studies. Certainly, Native feminism should provide a critical resource for this project because the United States could not exist without the genocide of Native peoples—genocide is not a mistake or aberration of U.S. democracy; it is foundational to it.[11] As Sandy Grande states:

> The United States is a nation defined by its original sin: the genocide of American Indians . . . American Indian tribes are viewed as an inherent threat to the nation, poised to expose the great lies of U.S. democracy: that we are a nation of laws and not random power; that we are guided by reason and not faith; that we are governed by representation and not executive order; and finally, that we stand as a self-determined citizenry and not a kingdom of blood or aristocracy . . . From the perspective of American Indians, "democracy" has been wielded with impunity as the first and most virulent weapon of mass destruction.[12]

From this perspective, the Bush regime does not represent a departure from U.S. democratic ideals but rather the fulfillment of a constitutional democracy based on theft and violence.

Rethinking Sovereignty and Nationalist Struggle

In these "postcolonial" times, terms such as *sovereignty* and *nation* have gone out of fashion within the context of cultural studies, postcolonial theory, political theory, feminist theory, and so on. Nationalism and sovereignty, it is suggested, inevitably lead to xenophobia, intolerance, factionalism, and violence. All sovereignty or nationalist struggles are headed down that slippery slope toward the ethnic cleansing witnessed in Bosnia.[13] The assumptions behind some of this analysis are that nations can be equated with nation-states and that the end goal of a national liberation struggle must be the attainment of a state or statelike form of governance.[14]

Native feminism can provide a helpful vantage point for destabilizing normative notions of nations and nation-states. That is, the colonial context of indigenous women provides them an opportunity to critically interrogate the contradictions between the United States articulating itself as a democratic country on the one hand and simultaneously founding itself on the past and current genocide of Native peoples on the other hand. When

we do not presume that the United States should or will always continue to exist, we create the space to reflect on what might be more just forms of governance, not only for Native peoples, but for the rest of the world. Native women activists have begun articulating spiritually based visions of nation and sovereignty that are separate from nation-states.[15] Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, indigenous sovereignty and nationhood are predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility. In opposition to nation-states, which are based on control over territory, these visions of indigenous nationhood are based on care and responsibility for land that all can share. These models of sovereignty are not based on a narrow definition of nation that would entail a closely bounded community and ethnic cleansing. So, these articulations pose an alternative to theories that assume that the endpoint to a national struggle is a nation-state and that assume the givenness of the nation-state system.

These Native feminist critiques of the nation-state are simultaneously critiques of the logics of heteropatriarchy within the structures of colonialism and white supremacy, as well as within the structures of liberation movements designed to dismantle colonialism and white supremacy. What their theorizing suggests is that heteropatriarchy is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural. Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nation-state rule their citizens. Consequently, when colonists first came to this land, they saw the necessity of instilling patriarchy in Native communities, because they realized that indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy. Patriarchy in turn rests on a binary gender system; hence it is not a coincidence that colonizers also targeted indigenous peoples who did not fit within this binary model. In addition, gender violence is a primary tool of colonialism and white supremacy. Colonizers did not just kill off indigenous peoples in this land, but Native massacres were always accompanied by sexual mutilation and rape. As I have argued elsewhere, the goal of colonialism is not just to kill colonized peoples, but also to destroy their sense of being people.[16] It is through sexual violence that a colonizing group attempts to render a colonized peoples as inherently rapable, their lands inherently invadable, and their resources inherently extractable.

Because even many Native sovereignty and other social justice movements have not sufficiently challenged heteropatriarchy, we have deeply internalized the notion that social hierarchy is natural and inevitable, thus undermining our ability to create movements for social change that do not replicate the structures of domination that we seek to eradicate.

Practicing Native Feminist Politics

Today, indigenous peoples are striving to operationalize nonheteronormative visions of organizing through the process of revolution through trial and error. That is, rather than presume a vanguardist perspective on revolution, the philosophy behind this work is that we all need to be part of the collective process of determining how we can create a more sustainable and just world by sharing our struggles, our successes, *and* our failures. We must be committed to our long-term vision, but we must also be flexible with our strategies, understanding that our strategies will change constantly as we strive together for a more just world.

Adjoa Jones de Almeida and Paula Rojas's contributions to *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* detail this organizing philosophy of "Taking Power, Making Power" that is influential in indigenous-led social movements in Latin America and is spreading among many women of color organizing groups in the United States and Canada.[17] On the one hand it is necessary to oppose corporate and state power (taking power). However, if we only engage in the politics of taking power, we will tend 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. These "autonomous zones" can be differentiated from the projects of many groups in the United States that often try to create separatist communities based on egalitarian ideals in that people in these "making power" movements do not just create autonomous zones, but they *proliferate* them. These movements developed in reaction to the revolutionary vanguard model of organizing in Latin America that became criticized as "machismo-leninismo" models. Those models were so hierarchical that, in the effort to combat systems of oppression, they inadvertently re-created the same systems they were trying to replace. In addition, the revolutionary vanguard model of organizing was inherently exclusionary because not everyone can take up guns and go to the mountains to become revolutionaries, including many women, who often care for families. So movements came to develop organizing models that are based on integrating political organizing into one's everyday life so that all people can participate. For instance, a group might organize through communal cooking, but during the cooking process, which everyone needs to do anyway in order to eat, they might educate themselves on the nature of agribusiness.

At the 2005 World Social Forum in Brazil, participants from Chiapas reported that activists within the movement began to realize that one cannot

combat militarism with more militarism, because the state always has more guns. However, if activist groups began to build their own autonomous zones, proliferating them until they reached a mass scale, eventually there would be nothing the state's military could do. In other words, if the mass-based peoples' movements begin to live life using alternative structures of governance and stopped relying on the state, then the power of the military would become obsolete. Of course, during the process of making power, there may be skirmishes with the state, but conflict is not the primary work of these groups. And as we see these movements literally take over entire countries in Latin America, it is clear that it is possible to do revolutionary work on a mass scale in a manner based on radical participation rather than on representational democracy or a revolutionary vanguard model.

The practice of making power then speaks to the need of building a fun revolution. I was a cofounder of Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, a national organization of feminists of color who organize around the intersections of interpersonal gender violence and state violence through direct action, grassroots organizing, and critical dialogue. Organized in 2000, Incite! currently has approximately fifteen chapters and affiliates in the United States. When we began to develop our structure, we looked to a variety of organizing models for inspiration—not only to groups on the left, but also to Christian Right groups to see why they seemed to be so effective. An Incite! member attended a Promise Keepers rally with me as part of my academic research, and one of our conclusions was that Christian Right events were much more enjoyable (scary politics aside) than were the leftist events we typically attended. At the Promise Keepers rally, there was singing, comedy, sharing, and joy; whereas on the left, we attend long, boring meetings, eat bad food, and yell at each other for being counter-revolutionary—and then we wonder why no one wants to join! In the new spirit, one year, instead of holding a conference, we organized a multimedia tour throughout the United States that featured performance artists, singers, dancers, filmmakers, and others, who not only performed but also helped community groups use arts and media as tools for organizing. In addition to being educational, the events offered massage, day care, good food, and other activities to make the work an act of celebration. The idea behind this work is, how do we build movements that engage our whole selves, and in which we get back as much as we give? What this theorizing of Native feminist activists suggests is that by starting to build the world we want to live in, we create a revolutionary movement that is sustainable over the long term.

Conclusion

Native feminist theorizing points to the importance of disarticulating Native organizing and Native studies—and by extension ethnic studies as well—beyond a politics of multicultural representation. As Elizabeth Povinelli has so aptly demonstrated, the liberal state depends on a politics of multicultural recognition that includes "social difference without social consequence." Alternatively, we can understand Native feminism as rooted in the colonial condition of Native women who put squarely on the table the importance of thinking beyond the heteropatriarchal nation-state in our vision of liberation not just for Native peoples, but for everyone.

Notes

1. Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). See also M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey, "American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in North America," in *State of Native American*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 1992), 311–44.
2. See Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).
3. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), 52.
4. Ibid., 55.
5. Ibid., 57.
6. Amy Kaplan, "Where Is Guantánamo?" *American Quarterly* 57.3 (September 2005): 853.
7. Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 15.
8. Sora Han, "Bonds of Representation: Vision, Race and Law in Post–Civil Rights America" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2006).
9. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Joy James, *Resisting State Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
10. Davis Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
11. Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2005).
12. Grande, *Red Pedagogy*, 31–32.
13. See Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Civil Society: Democracy, Diversity, and Self-Determination," in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994): 304–35; Duncan Kennedy, "A Cultural Pluralist Case for Affirmative Action in Legal Academia," in *Critical Race Theory*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1995): 159–76; Thomas Scheff, "Emotions and Identity: A Theory of Ethnic Nationalism," in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, 277–303; Andrew Vincent, "Liberal Nationalism: An Irresponsible Compound?" in *Nations and Nationalism*, ed. Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 77–100; and Norbert Wiley, "The Politics of Identity in American History," in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*: 130–49.
14. For instance, Mark Beissinger argues that a nation whose existence is not affirmed through "state action" "can hardly be said to exist"; "How Nationalisms Spread: Eastern Europe Adrift the Tides and Cycles of Nationalist Contention," in *Nations and Nationalism*, 264.
15. Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*, and *Conquest*.
16. Smith, *Conquest*.
17. See Incite! *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Nonprofit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007).