

Sacajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Native Women

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Historicized images of First Nations women and the cultural narratives they tell are deeply entrenched in North American popular culture. We construct identities through our identification with narratives that we see, hear, and tell and the ideological messages they carry. These appropriated, commodified representations of Native women circulate in the politics of difference, confining the past and constructing the future. But the identities of First Nations women are also built in the stories of grandmothers, mothers, and sisters. In narratives of Native traditionalism and Aboriginal experience, First Nations women situate, reappropriate, and transform the past as they empower their own futures.

Near Sitting Bull's grave is a bullet-ridden obelisk raised in memory of the Indian woman who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition across the West. A plaque says that her name is "Sakaka-Wea, that she 'guided' the expedition to the Pacific Ocean, and that she died and was buried at Fort Manuel in South Dakota on December 20, 1812" (Duncan, 1987, p. 162). In the years since, Sacajawea has become a figure of popular culture, an Indian maiden with "more statues in her honor than any other woman in American history" (p. 162). Although historians agree that her name is Sacajawea, which means in her native Shoshoni "boat launcher," image-makers have labeled her Sakakawea, an Hidatsa word for "bird woman" (p. 163). No one knows for certain whether she died at Fort Manuel at about age 25 or lived to be an old woman on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming (Howard, 1971). But our image of the Bird Woman is ageless: a shapely Indian princess with perfect Caucasian features, dressed in a tight-fitting red tunic, spearing fish with a bow and arrow from a birch bark canoe suspended on a mountain-rimmed, moonlit lake.

Sacajawea is a recurring representation in the cultural narratives of Native and other North Americans. We imagine her as "blazing the trail" of western exploration, intriguing in the contrast of her actions and our historical images of Indians as passive extensions of the land or obstacles to its development. Her personal experience is lost to us; only pieces of the framework of her life can be drawn from the journals, diaries, and notes of those who were motivated by economic and political purposes to scout the American West between 1804 and 1806. We believe that the Hidatsas took her from her Shosoni people when she was 10 or 12 years old. At the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition she was about 16; she was one of two "country wives" purchased by a member of the expedition named Char-

bonneau; and she was pregnant. Sacajawea traveled with her newborn son, supporting the mission, which would expand the prospects of colonial settlement with the panoply of her person and the amity of her languages. At the end of the expedition she was apparently left in St. Louis when Charbonneau resumed his life as a trapper in the Southwest (Howard, 1971). This, like her experience of the land, the people in her life, and even her death, is conjecture drawn from the imagination of those who write popular history.

Although Sacajawea's experience with the Lewis and Clark expedition is uncommon, our contradictory mythical memory of her is not. As a child growing up on the Lac du Flambeau reservation in Wisconsin I remember Sacajawea. And I remember her postcard sisters that are still sold in Lac du Flambeau today, smiling Indian princesses frozen in time and deadpan women captioned "squaws" covered in baskets or beadwork, or surrounded by children. I was drawn to these postcards not because they touched some chord of displaced history of identity, but because they didn't. What was the connection between these images of princesses and squaws and my great-grandmother who lived across the road? I listened to her narratives of Chippewa struggles for empowerment until I was 18 when I went away to school and she died. I knew women whom Others called squaws and women whom we teasingly called Indian princesses. But what did these postcard representations mean in the experience of my great-grandmother who was enrolled as a member of the Lac du Flambeau Band when this reservation was established, and who at 90 bought a car and didn't speak to my father for two months because he didn't want her to get a driver's license?

Imagining Indians

Indians have always been vagrants in the historical, political, and popular impressions of the western frontier. The discourse of the Indian as noble and savage, the villain and the victim—most recently represented in the media coverage of confrontations between Indians and others over issues of land and resources—is threaded through the narratives of the dominant culture and its shifting perceptions of the western frontier as a *Land of Savagery*, *Land of Promise* (Billington, 1981). North Americans have drawn a certain sense of identity from these images of Indians engraved on the cultural landscape, but like the narratives of the West that position them these Indians are largely imagined and severely time-distanced. As Berkhofer (1979) writes, "For most of the past five centuries, the Indian of the imagination and ideology has been as real, perhaps more real, than the Native American of actual existence and contact" (p. 72).

In 1900 Edward S. Curtis, like other photographers and painters of the period, set out for the American West to record images of Indians. He spent 30 years and produced 40 volumes of photographs taken between 1900 and 1930, each retouched to remove any evidence of modernity.

Curtis' photographs represent a "vanishing race," Indians seen through his photographer's lens "dripping dentalia and fur—the sepia kings, shot through spit and petroleum jelly, Lords of the Plains, Potentates of the Potlatch, the Last-Ofs" (Green, 1992, p. 47). His project covered the territory from the Mexican border to the Bering Straits, posing Indians who were now struggling on reservations, fighting the effects of war, disease, poverty, and cultural displacement. All this is forever erased from the fantasies contrived in almost 1,700 Curtis photographs in the Library of Congress, photographs that are reproduced and advertised today as "a rare glimpse of the nobility, passion and tradition of ... people [who] stare out across the decades and invite you into a world that was tragically destroyed" (Brown, 1993). Green (1992) writes about these fictive constructions suspended in the time and space of essentialist discourse:

Quit taking out your fantasies on us. Just give me one in overalls and a cowboy hat. Then we can get serious about what was happening to these people ... Why are we so grateful for his glorious dreams? Every Indian I know has one of them on the wall. Mine came down a long time ago. (p. 47)

Like the cultural narratives of the western frontier that sustain them, representations of Sacajawea and Curtis' photographs of real First Nations people reveal stories of conquest and its legacies told in historical fantasies that place Indians in the 1800s and erase Native histories and cultures. Imagined in North America's long gaze on the Plains Indian in the period of western settlement, Indians are folkloric figures of the teepee and war bonnet, the buffalo hunt and pow wow. These are images of Native nations frozen in time and history, tribal peoples constructed in print and celluloid, silent social imaginaries without a past or a future.

Today these cultural chronicles that absorb Indians are being rewritten by Others and challenged in the writing of Indians themselves. The new narratives and counternarratives of Indians and Others represent contradictory constructions of popular history, stories revealed in the 1992 Quincentennial titles of the Public Broadcasting Service program *Columbus and the Age of Discovery* and the Indian-made video *Surviving Columbus*. In conflicting visions of dominance and survival, these emerging accounts of Natives and newcomers reconstruct the rugged individualism of Frederick Jackson Turner's imaginary American society written in 1893, and the dislocation and desolation experienced by Indians on the frontier at the turn of the 20th century. Both narratives reveal that for newcomers the frontier and the West have never been precisely defined and have always represented promise more than place, fantasy more than fact. But no matter how land or movement are delineated in notions of North American hinterlands or images of Indian Country, frontiers always mark social borders and margins. Our representations of the western frontier are grounded in a politics of difference that circulates in the cultural formation of both Indians and Others. McMaster (1991) writes, "It makes little sense

for Indigenous people to respond to the outrageous historical fictions of the West. On the contrary, we must focus on our own perspectives" (p. 21). But if the perspectives of Natives and newcomers interface in the West, they also intertwine. The West was neither won nor lost, and the social imaginaries that circulate in representations of the West construct the identities of us all.

Today Native North American identity and culture are entangled in ongoing struggle over representation and appropriation—over how Indians are represented and how these representations are appropriated by Others in a political process that confines their past as it constructs their future. This struggle over who can represent whom, who can tell the stories of others—and how they should be told—involves artists, authors, and academics in a growing debate over the politics of Indianness. Indians are caught with other North Americans in a web of conflicting interests and actions, confrontations over dominant cultural and political process and the Native experience of exclusion, or stereotypical inclusion and appropriation. For Native people this contest over the politics of difference is deeply rooted in the social imaginaries that circulate in literary, artistic, and academic and media images. These Indians of popular culture intrinsic to our images of the western frontier travel and transform in the action and events of our everyday lives. And in the conflicting power relations in which our communities are built, imaginary Indians construct identities with different ideologies and meanings that become central sites of cultural conflict for Indians and Others, and for Indians themselves.

Portraits of Pocahontas

Until recently Others have voiced the narratives and images that represent and construct the experience of First Nations. For Indian men there are occasional images of granite-faced Indian chiefs, sometimes named, but the dominant representation—and narrative—of the last century is the warrior of the western plains, the wandering Indian wearing a war bonnet, or posed in warpaint, rallying his horse and ready to shoot. These archetypes of comic book Indians who paraded and battled in hundreds of movie and pocketbook westerns outnumbered the images of their partners in primitivism, Indian women. Portrayed as fetching maidens, Indian women usually fell in love with trappers or traders, or soldiers, the enemies of Indians whose identities and alliances reversed in the process of "going Native." But if visual images of Indian women seem less prevalent and more affable in popular culture, the Indian princess is an ambiguous figure that has deeper roots in North America, and her image has transformed and expanded with the development of its nation states. In their analysis of postcards of Indian women, Albers and James (1987) point out that "if a uniform caricature [of Indian women] has existed, it has been the image of the Indian 'princess,'" and this "visual image of

Indian women as 'maiden' or 'princess' has increased in popularity over time" (pp. 35, 48).

The ambiguous representations of Indian women that we associate with the western frontier have been with us since the earliest colonization of North America. The rough, earthy beauty of the Americas was initially symbolized by pairs of Indian men and women, Caribbean or Brazilian Natives framed in the exoticism of flora and fauna that depict the bountiful resources of the continent. But by 1575 the bare-breasted, Amazonian Indian Queen took on the image of the New World. Draped in feathers and furs, carrying arrows and spears, this contradictory figure incorporated the warrior woman and the Mother-Goddess, drawing from European roots to portray the primitive challenge of America: "exotic, powerful, dangerous and beautiful" (Green, 1979, p. 702). When the colonies began to move toward independence, the Mother-Queen figure of the 1600s was transformed into the more independent princess image of the 1700s. The statue-like figure of "Liberty" or "Columbia" in flowing robes was younger, more classically European, and overtly Caucasian. But armed with a spear and a peace pipe or a flag, this social imaginary wrapped in symbols of peace and power, civilization, and acrimony is equally equivocal. And this ambiguous iconography of North America incorporating the Native and the noble that Green (1979) calls the "Pocahontas Perplex," persists in the portrayal of Indian princesses constructed to accommodate colonial experience, western expansion, and national formations.

Pocahontas is the paragon Indian princess of North American popular culture who "inspired countless works of art ... idealizing the image of the Indian woman" (Berkhofer, 1979, p. 121). Green (1979) writes, "As a model for the national understanding of Indian women, her significance is undeniable" (p. 701). And Donnell (1991) on the cover of her book entitled *Pocahontas* says, "She was a princess, a lady and a legend. Her story is the story of America." Like Sacajawea, who did not trample the wilderness, pointing West to "blaze the trail" for Lewis and Clark's western expedition in 1804, but acted as an interpreter and mediator, the romantic myth of Pocahontas is constructed around her alliances with men.

In the legendary narrative of North America, fictive history constructs an imaginary Indian princess, a noble savage named Pocahontas, who saves the life of an Englishman for whom she feels a romantic attraction. Her actions bring peace between the Indians and the colonists of Jamestown, Virginia, the first permanent colony in North America. She inevitably marries a non-Indian, becomes civilized and Christian, and assimilates with the settlers.

There is, of course, a counternarrative, parts of which can be pieced together from documents of the Virginia Historical Society. The child who was nicknamed "Pocahontas," which means "playful" or "mischievous"

was born in 1595, but her real name was Matoaka. Unlike the Walt Disney animated film that portrays her as a woman in her early 20s, Pocahontas was a child of 12 when she encountered Captain John Smith, who was then 27 years old. Historians disagree about whether Pocahontas saved John Smith's life or even met him; but they agree that, in contrast to Disney's golden-haired hero, Smith was not an innocent bystander to the armed conflict that occurred between the Chickahominy Indians and the Jamestown settlers. He was known more as an Indian-fighter than the peacemaker created for the Disney film, and "his conduct may have landed his head on Powhatan's clubbing block, where Pocahontas supposedly intervened and saved his life" (Beam, 1995, p. 17). For their part the colonists apparently identified her father Powhatan, who was Grand Chief of a confederacy of 30 tribes, as an "emperor" or "king," and his daughter Pocahontas therefore became a "princess." But our knowledge of this, like the story of her life, is drawn from historical fragments and individual conjecture. Like Sacajawea, Pocahontas' experience is lost to us.

When fighting broke out in 1612 between Powhatan's confederacy and the colonists who settled on Chickahominy Indian Territory, Pocahontas was married to an Indian who was an aide to her father. No one knows how she became friendly with the Jamestown settlers and brought food to the starving colonists. But on a visit to Jamestown in 1613, she was lured aboard a ship, kidnapped, and held hostage for over a year as a safeguard against Indian attacks. During her captivity she learned English, converted to Christianity, and was baptized Rebecca. In 1614 John Rolfe, a widowed tobacco farmer and her religious instructor, married the 18-year-old Pocahontas about whom he wrote her "education has bin rude, her manners barbarous" (Woodward, 1969, p. 162). Now hostage to a new persona, her role as an intermediary took her to England with her young son Thomas, where she was presented at Court as Lady Rebecca.

Like the Indian "country wives" of trappers and traders who succeeded her, Pocahontas' mediation between Indians and Others had important political and economic implications. Her presence built a bridge between the Indians and the settlers. Strengthened by eight years of peace and the cultivation of tobacco, the Virginia colony initiated a new empire in North America. But like many Indian women who became economic and political go-betweens, her own life was short. She died of smallpox or tuberculosis in England in 1617 when she was 22 years old.

Pocahontas' untold story might have been the first of what became known later as *captivity narratives*, populist tales that tell the exotic and arduous experiences of female settlers who were kidnapped by Indians in books like Fanny Wiggins Kelly's 19th-century best-seller *Narrative of My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians* (Reiter, 1978). The encounter of Pocahontas and John Smith that became legend did not appear in Smith's book about his life written in 1608. But in 1624 he wrote a second book entitled

General Historie of Virginia (Scriba, 1995), which built the scaffold for the 17th-century cultural narrative of assumed friendship and harmony, cooperation, and assimilation at a time of colonial expansion. Smith's storied Pocahontas inspired the play entitled *The Indian Princess; or La Belle Sauvage* that was performed in Philadelphia in 1808 (Black & Weidman, 1976); and the narrative of the fantasy princess has multiplied and diversified through the ensuing years of conflict between Natives and newcomers. In the modern period Disney's historical revisionism emerges at a time of new tension between Indians and Others over land and resources, sovereignty and self-determination. As Fusco (1990) writes:

For me, the issue of "the other" is one of power, of a dynamic between those who impute otherness to some and those who are designated as other. So the questions I ask about otherness have to do with how others or the other are spoken of, who is speaking about them, and why have they chosen to speak of the other at the given historical moment. (p. 77)

The fairy tale of Pocahontas that absorbs or expresses the Otherness of Indians ignores not only the presence of sovereign Indian nations and occupied Indian lands, but the spread of disease and settlement conflict that slaughtered Indians, killing "some ten million at the outside between 1492 and the 1700s" (Green, 1988, p. 31). The narrative of the fantasy princess dismisses the manifestation of Indian death in the illness that killed Pocahontas, along with the intriguing life of Motaoka who experienced the contradictory cultural realities—and the cultural hybridity—of Pocahontas and Lady Rebecca. Like the Walt Disney film and the 50 Pocahontas products launched by Mattel Toys to exploit it, Pocahontas' social imaginary is monolithic, a representation rooted in ambiguous, sexualized fantasies that construct her cultural identity. Rock musician Neil Young's song is explicit:

I wish I was a trapper
I would give a thousand pelts
To sleep with Pocahontas
And find out how she felt.
(Colt, 1995, p. 69)

For Indians the counternarrative to Young's song is expressed in Jimmie Durham's (Mulvey, Snauwaet, & Durant, 1996) painting entitled "Pocahontas Underwear," an image of blood-red panties decorated with feathers and beads, fabric and fasteners. As Dearborn (1986) writes about the sexualized images of Pocahontas,

Pocahontas' imaginative power lies in her sexuality, or, more precisely, in the promise she holds out of sexual union between a white male representative of the dominant culture and an exotic, or ethnic, woman. Her story functions as a compelling focus toward what W.E.B. Dubois has called the "stark, ugly, painful, beautiful" fact of American life: miscegenation, or sexual relations between white men and ethnic women. (p. 99)

From the "ministering maiden" (Stedman, 1982, p. 21) image of the princess Pocahontas to her darker twin the squaw, both the nobility and

the savagery of Indian women have been defined in relation to white males—as women who rescued them, served them, married them, and who even gave up their Indian nation for them (Green, 1979). Although the story of Pocahontas came to represent “the ideal merger of Native and newcomer,” the image of the squaw became what Francis (1992) calls the “anti-Pocahontas” about which he writes,

Where the princess was beautiful, the squaw was ugly, even deformed. Where the princess was virtuous, the squaw was debased, immoral, a sexual convenience. Where the princess was proud, the squaw lived a squalid life of servile toil, mistreated by her men—and openly available to non-Native men. (pp. 121-122)

Adding to the indignity of this representation that devalued, defiled, and objectified Native women, the label that names the stereotype may derive from the Indian *squa* or *skwa*, a word that in some Algonkian languages is a suffix added to build a feminine form of certain words (Herten, 1997, p. 2). But in the primal meanings that emerge in lived realities this floating image not only moves, but merges.

As the ambiguous imaginary of Pocahontas suggests, it is the conjoined image of the princess and the squaw that is most destructive for Indian women. Dearborn (1986) remarks, “It is precisely because the Pocahontas figure is expected to embody *both* [italics in original] aspects of this image that hers is so convenient, compelling and ultimately intolerable a legend” (p. 99). The progression of these intertwined narratives that are so deeply entrenched in North America’s popular culture is summarized in an excerpt from Mojica’s (1991) play entitled *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*:

Princess, Princess Amazon Queen.
 Show me your royal blood,
 Is it blue? Is it green?
 Dried and brown five centuries old,
 singed and baked and
 covered with mold?
 Princess, priestess Caribe Queen,
 What are you selling today,
 Is it corn, tobacco, beans?
 Snake oil or a beaver hat.
 Horse liniment,
 You just can’t beat that!

Princess, Princess, calendar girl,
 Redskin temptress, Indian pearl.
 Waiting by the water
 For a white man to save.
 She’s a savage now remember—
 Can’t behave. (pp. 20-21)

Illusory Sisters

Populist images of Indian princesses emerge in the late 1800s as lithographs of delicate, demure Indian ladies and printed paintings of

buckskin-clad maidens. Through the long North American gaze on Indian women, images shift with the vicissitudes of North American motives for marketing the West and its material and cultural products. The social imaginaries of historicized and romanticized Indian women were appropriated and propagated to accommodate the growth of immigration and industry and the interrelated expansion of railroads, mail service, and advertising.

At the turn of the 20th century some images of Indian princesses are seeming transformations of Sacajawea in a birch bark canoe; others depict wistful princesses looking at handsome warriors, sometimes inscribed as "Hiawatha's Wedding." Indians were now relegated to reservations, but both whimsical and woeful images of women became frontier tropes that "reinforced the belief that the best Indian was the historical Indian" (Francis, 1992, p. 176). There are goldleaf princesses on cigar boxes and the bare-breasted, primitive princesses—and sometimes squaws—promoting foods and natural medicines like "Swamp-Root" herbal cures.

From about 1915 through the 1940s the dominant representation of the Indian princess was the "lady in red," a maiden draped in a red tunic, wearing the requisite headband and feather, and posed with picturesque and pristine mountains, waterfalls, and moonlit lakes. These romanticized princesses that adorned calendars, advertisements, paintings, and postcards—with names like Winona, Minnehaha, Iona, and even Hiawatha—worked in consort with their male counterpart the Indian warrior to establish the romanticized Indian as "one of the icons of consumer society" (Francis, 1992, p. 175). Images of Indian women that "garnered good will but bore no referential relationship to the goods they advertised" (Coombe, 1996, p. 213), proclaimed products that were now mass-produced, including corn and peas, apples and Mazola oil, Land o' Lakes butter and Kraft foods, beer, and beverages. In the move from inviting territorial expansion to enticing commercial enterprise, imaginary Indian women became the first North American pin-up girls.

Calendar-girl princesses gazing wistfully or looking longingly appeared in a remarkable range of poses and settings. There are paddling princesses and fishing maidens, sewing princesses and maidens of the feathers or the flowers. But the most common are maidens—sometimes almost twinned—merely posed as fanciful Indian princesses amid chaste, romanticized scenery. These statue-like figures of the imagination marketed the North American West as alluring, unoccupied, and available and now open to railroad travel. Francis (1992) writes, "More than any other single aspect of White civilization, the railway transformed the world of the Indian" (p. 176). A paper parade of Indian princesses promoted settlement and tourism on Indian land that was captured or claimed, treated or just taken, and then advertised as "1001 Switzerlands rolled into one" (Francis, 1992, p. 177). With the onslaught of settlement

and tourism between 1880 and 1910, princesses urged audiences for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and the rodeos and pow wows it spawned. As the West mined the imaginations of Easterners, these posed princesses spread throughout the continent and the decades. After World War I some images of Indian women took on the "flapper" fashions of the 1920s. Indian maidens appeared in the wilderness wearing long strands of corn or beads, feathered headbands, and fringed shawls, sometimes tied around their hips. They were joined by calendar princesses who were more enticing, with low necklines, net stockings, slit skirts, and outfits that were more sexually explicit. But years earlier regular mail service had created a new market for both calendar princesses and historicized images of Indian women.

Picture postcards, which were introduced in the United States in 1873, became the common means of popular communication after the turn of the 20th century (Smith, 1989). Scenic views of unoccupied and rugged nature were transformed into reproductions of fantasies carrying greetings for every occasion. By the 1920s there were travel postcards with sad-looking squaws lined up all in a row, or browbeaten Indian squaws surrounded by children, or ancient Indian women heavy with beadwork. Contradicting this sense of the uncivilized were endless variations of picture postcards with fantasy princesses, some single-feather ladies, and some wearing full war bonnets.

At the same time, Indian maidens, princesses, and "Chieftain's daughters" began to appear on a wide range of cultural products that reflect the imaginary landscape of the West. Indian princesses decorated wood-burned plaques and mirrors, puzzles and playing cards, thermometers and ink blotters. Like the Indians in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show at the turn of the 20th century, three-dimensional maidens became the props of popular culture, adding to the indignity on bookends and paperweights, cups, and salt and pepper shakers. Princesses emerge as romanticized subjects in popular songs entitled "Red Wing," "Falling Star," "Laughing Water," and "Pretty Little Rainbow"; and as objects of history in textbooks, children's stories, and ethnographic studies. Princesses abound in the popular literature that was published by the mid-1800s, when Lydia Huntley Sigourney (Black & Weidman, 1976) wrote of Pocahontas, "A forest-child amid the flowers at play! ... Her spirit-glance bespoke the daughter of a King" (p. 205), and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote about the imaginary Minnehaha in his famous poem "The Song of Hiawatha." When dime novels appeared, "in the tradition of Pocahontas, some of the heroines were brave Indian maidens. *Malaeska, The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* sold briskly" (Reiter, 1978, p. 22). Publishing circulated the imaginary Indian women through generations of comic books and pulp magazines like *Western Story*, *Wild West Weekly*, and *Ranch Romances* (Pronzini, 1994). Princesses and squaws sold books like Zane

Grey's (n.d.) *Spirit of the Border* or Paul Joseph Lederer's (1982) *Manitou's Daughters*, which as part of Signet's Indian Heritage Series proclaims on the cover, "proud women of a proud people—facing the white invaders of their land and their hearts." The invented social imaginaries of the Indian princess and her sisters became a staple commodity in movies and plays, paintings and photographs that celebrate frontierism in the West.

In contrast to the representations of Indian squaws, the images of Indian princesses share one thing in common: they all look like replicas of Brooke Shields. As Sneve (1987) writes, "The models for the original paintings were not American Indian women but attractive Caucasian women who frequently besieged the artists to be allowed to pose as an Indian princess" (p. 72). These models, like children enacting pow wow or Cowboys and Indians, were engaged in what Green (1988) calls "playing Indian" (p. 30). In her article entitled "The Tribe Called Wannabee," she finds that the performance of "playing Indian" is "one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of American cultural expression, indeed one of the oldest forms of affinity with American culture at the national level." And "playing Indian" situates Indian princesses in the politicized construction of North American and First Nations identity.

Encountering Princesses

Deloria (1969) writes in *Custer Died for Your Sins*,

All but one person I met who claimed Indian blood claimed it on his grandmother's side. I once did a projection backwards and discovered that evidently most tribes were entirely female for the first three hundred years of white occupation . . . Somehow the white was linked with a noble house of gentility and culture if his grandmother was an Indian princess who ran away with an intrepid pioneer. (p. 11)

In Dearborn's (1986) words, "intermarriage seems to yoke in a rather neat fashion the concepts of ethnicity and American identity" (p. 100). If, as Deloria and Dearborn suggest, non-Natives overcome a sense of North American alienation by being distantly related to Indians, the great-grandmothers and grandmothers who married fur traders, trappers, and settlers were caught in a maelstrom of cultural misunderstanding and conflict that produced both personal acceptance and rejection.

In the formative histories of the nation-states in North America, "there is an important Indian woman in virtually every encounter between Europeans and Indians in the New World" (Kidwell, 1992, p. 97). But the roles of wife, interpreter, mediator, and even trader that engaged Indian women as "country wives" in the early days of the western frontier ultimately reverted to mixed-bloods, who were in turn replaced by non-Indian women. The exclusion of Indian women from "civilized" society was built not only on the images of Indian women as workers and drudges, but Indian women as competing sexual and marriage partners. In this context of erasure, displacement, and competition, "despite her important contributions and influence in certain areas, the Indian woman in fur-trade

society was at the mercy of a social structure devised primarily to meet the needs of European males" (Van Kirk, 1960, p. 88). The long shadows of the Indian princess and her sister the squaw wind through Indian experience of this tenacious social structure and its cultural constructs. Braided together, these images of the primitive princess framed the voice of Indian women who performed or spoke publicly about Indian culture and living conditions in later years.

Winnemucca's autobiography published in 1883 was one of the first books written by an Indian. But when she lectured in California, she was identified as "Princess Sarah," and the report in the *San Francisco Chronicle* referred to her "extensive and diversified matrimonial experience, the number of her white husbands being variously estimated at from three to seven" (Canfield, 1983, p. 163). Years later Emily Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake reappropriated her imaginary sister the princess in performances that established her as "the voice of the Indian" (Francis, 1992). To be heard Pauline Johnson replaced the formal gown she wore to recite her poetry with a buckskin dress and "toured the world as the 'Indian Princess' regaling crowds with romantic tales of Native American Life" (*Altitude*, n.d.). Native women gained greater visibility in ethnographic studies that broke the male-focused mold of anthropology in documenting women's roles and lives, like Landes's (1971) *The Ojibway Woman* and Lurie's (1961) *Mountain Wolf Woman*. But if ethnography neither analyzed nor promoted the images of the princess and the squaw, this research reflected assumptions of time-distanced, tribalized, traditional culture that were misleading.

Today feminist writers may recognize the fragmented and contradictory representations of Indian women in the ambiguous, male-oriented images of all women. But the meaning of conflicting cultural narratives is negotiated in the historical and contemporary context of a culture's experience and political process. From the unpredictable and perplexing experience of being "country wives" that Van Kirk (1960) documents in her book *Many Tender Ties*, to the "Bush Lady" of Alanis Obomsawin's poignant song of a reservation woman's painful experiences in the city, Indian women have lived emerging traces of the image that devalued and defiled Indian women in the past. And fragments of the persistent fantasy of fetching maidens have been reappropriated in the counternarratives of Indian popular culture. Like Pauline Johnson's performance, the pow wow princess is a transformation of the enduring representations of Indian princesses, appropriated and redefined in hybrid expressions of contemporary Indian culture. And related to these images that continually transform and emerge, Native women experience daily struggles with identity—and with men, Indian and Other—that are neither simple nor straightforward. The economic and political presence of Native women has grown significantly since the 1960s. But battles over blood and belong-

ing, over exclusion and reinstatement, over position and power expose the political landscape of Indian communities today. In Canada Native women still struggle over issues of acceptance, membership, and roles related to the Indian Act, which until 1985 declared Native women legally non-Indian if they married a non-Indian; and their challenges to issues of male-dominated governance and policies are shared by Native women in the US. Across both countries Native men and women struggle with appropriations of the western chief or warrior and impositions of the princess or the drudge. There are also open wounds of personal abuse perpetrated by Others and by each other. And floating through these contests over reconciliation, recognition, and inclusion is the recurring apparition of mutual uneasiness built in representations of the past that shadow the relationships between Native women and other women, who even as they speak of Native sisters find it difficult to bridge the distance between different lived realities and contested ideologies and to recognize themselves in the expressions of Native women.

Native Sister Stories

Amid yesterday's Curtis-like historical photographs and today's "Leanin' Tree" greeting card teepee princesses with longing looks and unruly hair, Mojica (1989) is moved to write, "I am not your princess—I am only willing to tell you how to make fry bread" (p. 40). The imaginary Indian princess is interwoven in the lives of Native women and their social struggles over its significance, but as Mojica's comment suggests, neither the princess nor the squaw have led to the "loss" of Indian identity or alienation from community or culture. The identity of Native North American women is simultaneously constructed in the discourses of grandmothers and mothers, daughters, and others. In narratives that situate, appropriate, and transform the past, Native women take up the tales of trials and empowerment, identity and community. Native women speak of themselves or people they know—real, memoried, or imagined—in stories that construct individual and collective identities. Erdrich (1992) reminds us, "There once were women named Standing Strong, Fish Bones, Different Thunder. There once was a girl named Yellow Straps. Imagine what it was like to pick berries with Sky Coming Down, to walk through a storm with Lightning Proof" (p. 132). And Green (1984) writes, "the taking of new names and the reshaping of old names is the essential process for becoming" (p. 7). These voices that sound nostalgic or sentimental appropriate the past in new representations of cultural continuance.

Ojibway elder Solomon (1990) says of his narratives, "I have borrowed this story from someone who had borrowed it from someone else who had borrowed it from someone else" (p. 132). Passed on through kinship and gossip, ceremony and social drinking, books and lectures and paintings, Indian stories are stitched to a polyvocal past as "acts encapsulated in time, 'enacted' every time they are spoken aloud or read silently" (Anzal-

dua, 1987, p. 67). Tales told in books like Silko's (1977) *Ceremony* and Erdrich's (1984) *Love Medicine* intertwine with the experience of history and heritage and everyday life. The traditional knowledge that proclaims women as "the heart of the nation," the "center of everything" is conjoined with the seemingly contradictory images of Niro's (1991) playful photographs of her own sisters, posed with captions like "Mohawks in Beehives" and "The Rebel." And spliced within the kaleidoscopic representations of contemporary Native realities that interweave the mundane, the humorous, and the prophetic, are the recurring words of traditionalism voiced in the empowerment of mother earth and grandmother moon.

Natural Sisters

Allan (1988) writes,

Native American roots of white feminism reach back beyond Sacajawea. The earliest white women on this continent were well acquainted with tribal women. They were neighbors to a number of tribes and often shared food, information, child care and health care. (p. 21)

If this were ever the reality of colonial experience, it is erased in the politics and policies of populist images, which present Indian women as posed, paper-doll princesses, as homeless vagrants of the imagination. These women are alone, alienated from each other and Others in the scenic backdrops of the land and of nature that they entice Others to occupy, first as settlers, then as tourists. In the parallel representations of tribalized "real" Indians, women are equally isolated or grouped with other women, among children, or the material objects of Indian culture that are valued by Others. In these historicized or exoticized worlds, there are no families, no clans, no communities, and no kinship networks. In fact there is no recognition of the formative social relationships that not only place Native North Americans in relation to the land and to each other, but construct the colonial polices of Native exclusion, assimilation, or containment. As Carter (1997) suggests, "the contrasting representations of white and Aboriginal femininity articulated racist images that confirmed cultural difference and the need for repressive policies. Powerfully negative images of Aboriginal women served to symbolize the shortcomings of that society" (p. 161). But laced through the heritage of repressive policies and different practices is an enduring sense of cultural continuity and Indian community, however transformed and conflictual.

Even in the current contests over power and placement Native women know that the narratives of the princess and the drudge have not been experienced by women alone. Through the difference of their gendered experience, Indian men and women are yoked together in the narratives of cultural heritage and the lived realities of their subaltern status. And in the traditional narratives that express identity and community, women hold a place of empowerment. In the words of Solomon (1990), "The women is

[sic] the foundations on which nations are built. She is the heart of her nation. If that heart is weak, the people are weak ... the woman is the center of everything"; and he tells us why: "The women 'were of the earth,' they were connected to the earth mother and to the grandmother moon whose work was to govern when all things were to be born, plants, animals, humans" (pp. 34-35).

From a feminist perspective this traditional Indian image of women as close to nature is essentialized and problematic. The feminist critique is an ideological knot tied to Western culture's project of conquering the natural world, an undertaking articulated to frontierism that constructs culture and nature as oppositional. The assumption underlying this critique is that nature is more basic than culture; and because the project of Western culture is to transform nature, culture is conceived as not only different from, but superior to, nature. Historically women have been characterized by natural qualities in opposition to men; and because men, not women, are identified with the institutional and symbolic forms of Western civilization and cultural change, this distinction between culture and nature supports the suppression of women. From this perspective the physiological and social roles that constitute women "the heart of the nation" support the ideology that constructs both the romanticized image of nature's pristine beauty, the Indian princess, and her earthy, beast-of-burden sister, the squaw. But from a Native perspective the collective experience and traditional teachings express conflicting representations of nature and culture. This position prompts Mohawk lawyer Montour (1992) to tell us, "I used to shrivel when people called me a feminist. The issues that feminism has tried to focus on are not the issues that occupy First Nations lives," and she adds, "We have to remember to respect Mother Earth. A lot of ways women are treated on this earth are reflective of the ways Mother Earth gets treated." And Allan (1988) writes, "We as feminists must be aware of our history on this continent" (p. 18).

Indian women, of course, enact the identities of the contradictory and essentializing images related to the nature-culture paradigm of the Western society. But their identities are also constructed in the circling discourse of Native traditionalism and Aboriginal experience, including women's relationship to the land, to nature, and to each other. The narratives that move and multiply in transforming traditionalism and the practice of everyday life express the multivocal play of power and identity linked to the earth and the Creator. The spiritual and the natural encode the power and practice of Mohawk Clan Mothers and Ojibway Odgichidawque. In the cultural and political struggle of contested identities, the unity of culture and nature is expressed in transforming stories of Indian experience and the spiritualized land that positions its meaning.

It is the land—real and imagined, lived in heritage and current political process, and expressed in discourse—that constitutes the connection be-

tween nature and culture for Indians. And the struggle over appropriation of the discourse related to land and to nature is struggle over land rights and treaty rights, Aboriginal rights and women's rights, over New Age spiritualism and ethnographic accounts, over the words and representations of history and culture and power.

Today Native and non-Native women recognize a connection between domination of the land and domination of people on the basis of race, class, and gender. In asserting the link between ecology and feminism, Eco-feminism both supports historicized images of Indians who lived on the land without disturbing it and recognizes a point of social and political connectedness between Native and non-Native women—and men. The struggle over clearcutting forests and diverting rivers and building nuclear waste dumps sometimes expands to include Indian land rights and treaty rights, a prospect that holds the political possibility poised in plural narratives, plural representations that are different but allied.

First Nations Frontiers

Indians are entangled in the interests of Others, and these interests are always linked to the politics of difference in which Indians themselves are absorbed. Native North American communities struggle over issues of membership, money, and cultural meaning. The expression of these battles over economic strategy and political power can be blunt and blistering. But the Native battles over different ideologies, and appropriated Indian identities can be understood only in the context of common culture and history, experience, and political purpose: in shifting unities built in collective memory and the continual formation of community. It is the negotiation of relations of power—hierarchical, conflictual, and communal—expressed in contested ideology and identity that both cuts through and knits together Indian communities in their struggle with domination and resistance. This political process, which is rooted to the western frontier, frames today's debates over traditionalism and treaty rights, representation and appropriation, and constructs the strained connectedness between Native North Americans and Others.

Green (CBC *Ideas*, 1992) expresses the inevitable predicament that the image of the ministering maiden poses for communication in saying, "Once you put on the princess costume ... you can't ever take off the princess outfit" (p. 19). And speaking on the same CBC program, Mallet tells us, "Squaw? I remember being called that word and I just kind of froze. You know, it's like somebody shot you. That's how I felt: like a bullet went right through me." These contradictory images of Indian women continue to objectify and degrade in transformations of the villain or the victim, the torturer or the sufferer; and neither the romanticized Indian princess nor the primitive squaw allows newcomers to identify First Nations as equals, as owners of this land, Indians with homes and families, jobs, and community institutions. The cultural distance of eleva-

tion or debasement that these conceptions reflect is contrary to the actual process of "One set of people in overalls displacing another set of people in overalls" (Green, 1992, p. 53), which removed Indians from their homelands and their resources as the frontier moved west. Women's voices now shatter the silence of the past, expressing real experiences and imaginary tales that challenge and recast the old narratives of dominance. But the distance built in difference continues in the current cultural and political struggles over spearfishing and hydro dams, mining and timber, land and resources. As newcomers and Natives transpose the representation of the primitive Plains warrior into the media warrior, and women press tribal governments for recognition and reform, First Nations communities struggle with the factionalism of power relations entrenched in the threats and promises of appropriated and continually constructed identities. Filmmaker Todd (1992) tells a story:

of how [like Curtis] a European painter in the nineteenth century journeyed into the great plains of this continent to "record" Native people, a common occurrence of the time, born of the ethnographic.

While he was painting a Native man on a horse, another Native man observed the artist's work and remarked how his painting was wrong. The artist, painting the horse from the side, had shown only two legs of the horse and one leg of the rider. The Native man reminded the artist that the horse had four legs and the rider two, which should all be shown. (p. 72)

The difference in perspective between the artist's horse and the Indian's horse is compounded, of course, through appropriation. Whether one is appropriating New Age Native spiritualism through the books of Andrews (1981), Native culture in the film *If Only I Were an Indian ...* (Paskievich, 1995), warriors and Indians as team mascots or militants, or representations of Indian princesses and squaws, the horse has only two legs. In privileging the perspective of a two-legged horse, dominant cultural narratives continue to detach and essentialize, entice and deceive in a progression of social imaginaries that not only limit First Nations access to voice, but blur the understanding of the pluralistic experience that Indians and Others share.

In the images that circulate today Sacajawea remains romanticized as the "guide" of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Her experience is impossible to retrieve. The meaning of her presence, which must have signified to Indians that this group of men traveling with a woman and child was not war party, is silent in the discourse. Like the bulletholes in the obelisk that bears her name, "the monument stands, the plaque calls her the expedition's guide, and the public [including Indians] considers anything that says otherwise vandalism" (Duncan, 1987, p. 165). But like Sacajawea's contradictory social imaginaries, we are all rooted together in the construction and appropriation of images of Indians that build different identities and enact our ideologies in an ageless western frontier.

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