

CONTEMPORARY LAKOTA IDENTITY IN RELATION TO THE INFLUENCES OF THE SETTLER SOCIETY AND RESERVATION CULTURE

Simona Šilovė
Vilnius University

Introduction

Over the past couple of centuries Native American identity has been researched and documented by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous anthropologists. During the last few decades a growing number of Native scholars with varying persistence have implied that Indigenous identity should be debated more by Indigenous themselves (Deloria, Salisbury 2002; Stanley 1994, Weaver 2001). Their claim appears well grounded given the fact that in the academic literature Indigenous identity oftentimes is argued as culturally and ideologically constructed and stereotyped by the dominant society, leaving Native Americans powerless in changing it (Smith 2009; Brubaker, Cooper 2000). Identity is framed as either situational ethnic, bicultural, marginal or conforming to an orthogonal model¹ (Weaver, Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1999; Lucero 2010; Mihesuah 2004). All these frameworks tend to create a generalized view of Native American identity without taking into account that during the course of colonization new individualistic identities emerged (Biolsi 1995). This fact must be considered, when studying contemporary Lakota identity. In addition, an individual Lakota identity is often shaped by referring to other oppressed cultures and ethnic groups in the dominant society. Weaver and Yellow Horse Brave Heart (1999) briefly touched upon the subject in their study of multicultural identification among Lakota youth. Their findings showed that in some areas young Lakota significantly identified with African American cultures.

¹ Orthogonal model explains the possibility of bicultural or even multicultural identities, as “identification with one culture is independent of identification with any other culture; therefore, increasing identification with one culture does not require decreasing identification with another” (Weaver, Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1999: 21).

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From a different angle, relation to the reservation culture and the symbolic/political role reservation plays in (re)creation of new positive tribal identity is emphasized in the recent studies of Lakota identity. Larissa Petrillo (2007) has paid a considerate attention to how reservation culture affects even urbanized Native individuals and allows them to reconnect with their tribal identity. As reservations are part of the settler society's plan to "civilize the savage" (Biolsi 1995), even more important in identification process are the ancestral lands. The history of Lakota is inextricably linked to Black Hills or Paha Sapa, which, as observed by Alexandra New Holy (1998), work as "a key metaphor of Lakota identity" (319). By maintaining strong spiritual, physical and social ties with the Black Hills, Lakota set their identity against that of the dominant society, and in this way empower it (New Holy 1998). Furthermore, as Paha Sapa is the place, where many important Lakota ceremonies occur, another recent study on Lakota identity (Sheets 2013) explores the ongoing legal fight to protect the sacred ceremonies from appropriation by the so called "plastic shamans" – "non-Native, self-proclaimed New Age spiritual leaders" (593), as well as to defend Lakota religious identity from stereotypization as the "relic of the past" (600) by the dominant culture.

Building on the notions of individuality and exposure to multicultural society, in this article I juxtapose Lakota experience in urban settler environment with that of the more rural reservation community in order to understand how these two fields of different social relations shape contemporary Lakota identity. I provide the context of North America's colonialism and discuss how Native Americans deal with the identity framework set by the settlers. I also describe the atmosphere of a reservation in South Dakota, and acknowledge how it is experienced by contemporary Lakota, and what role it plays for their identification purposes. In an attempt to find a pathway, which Lakota take maneuvering between different identities emerging from settler and tribal societies, I use the concept of cosmopolitanism. Though historically cultural cosmopolitanism is understood as fascination with the Western elite world, generally it implies "empathy, toleration and respect for other cultures and values" (Werbner 2008: 2). I explore how this concept applies to contemporary Lakota.

Fieldwork contexts

In the years 2011-2012 I conducted fieldwork among Lakota (Teton) people in South Dakota, USA, in an attempt to write about their identity. My primary fieldwork site was Spearfish, South Dakota, and Black Hills State University (BHSU), situated in the heart of the town. At BHSU I interacted with

students and teachers who took part in the activities of Center for American Indian Studies (CAIS), informally called *tiospaye* (extended family) or their second home. I joined the Lakota Omniciye (circle gathering of Lakota) club – a student organization, the purpose of which is to adjust the educational system of BHSU to meet the specific needs of Native Americans – where Native students discussed cultural and other activities they could do together, and planned 29th Annual Lakota Omniciye Wacipi (circle gathering to dance, popularly known as Pow Wow), as well as American Indian Awareness Week at the premises of BHSU.

Rapid City and Pine Ridge Indian Reservation were the other two locations, where I got to meet Lakota families, make participant observations, take interviews and in general experience and observe different environments and social settings in which Lakota identity manifested. I made extended visits to a family in Pine Ridge Reservation (attending a Thanksgiving dinner, purification ceremony, memorial and a following traditional giveaway ceremony, a Pow Wow, also visiting a local casino, and meeting with the relatives and friends of the family), and traveled to Rapid City and surrounding areas with Lakota friends and teachers from BHSU. Together we attended the Rapid City Pow Wow, Return of the Thunder Beings at Harney Peak, and Lakota Language Summit in Rapid City. I joined the Lakota Omniciye club on their Christmas trip to the Red Shirt Table Elementary School in Hermosa, and also visited Bear Butte – a sacred site of great religious importance for Lakota and Cheyenne – with a Lakota/Cheyenne Elder. Besides these more formal events, I interacted with Native American students on campus on a daily basis and frequently spent time with them outside of campus as well.

During eight months of fieldwork, I conducted eleven guided interviews, which were recorded digitally, and then transcribed word for word, with six men and seven women aged 19-63. Two more guided interviews were taken without recording or taking any notes in respect of the wishes of the interviewees. The participants for ethnographic interviews were selected with the help of the staff of CAIS at BHSU, who introduced me to Native American students on campus, and also arranged some interviews outside of campus. Teachers and students from CAIS assisted in finding interviewees as well. Most of the interviews were conducted at BHSU, at the locations picked by the interviewees. One interview was taken at a subunit of BHSU in Rapid City, and three interviews during 25th Annual Black Hills Powwow in Rapid City. The interviews were taken in a one-on-one manner and lasted up to two hours. In most cases, I returned to talk with the interviewees informally on numerous occasions.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were invited to share

their life stories. Later on, they were asked about their tribal affiliations and how being enrolled into a tribe affected their feeling of “Native Americanness”. Among other questions, the interviewees were asked how did they learn their traditional culture and language; what cultural, social and other challenges did they experience, while living off-reservation or in urban areas; did they belong to any Native American organizations and how was it meaningful for their identification purposes; what race/ethnicity people did they surround themselves with, when they were children and later on; was the issue of race/ethnicity meaningful to them.

As for participant observations, I took detailed notes whenever I had the opportunity. I could not take notes while traveling or visiting friends on Pine Ridge Reservation, as I found it to be too intrusive. People treated me more as a friend than as a researcher (perhaps due to my young age), though they were informed I was doing a study on Lakota identity, thus, helped me by telling their life stories and taking me to places which they thought would be interesting and useful for my study (Pow Wows, sweat lodge, visiting relatives, etc.). Nevertheless, I felt rather shy declaring my status as a researcher for the Lakota Elders, since I had an “anthropological complex”, and believed that they would be hostile towards anthropologists. However, I never experienced such a reaction. Only once was I mistaken for a physical anthropologist, and the Elder who thought so made a joke that I would dig his bones after his death. Also, the single time I encountered enmity was, I believe, due to my race and not occupation. The participant observations proved to be of a great use in addition to the formal interviews, thus, allowing me to collect more data by watching, listening, and participating than by merely talking to people. I could observe Lakota in their every day environment, and take part in activities they were involved in, as well as acknowledge their social interactions. This contributed greatly in helping me to understand how Lakota identities manifest in local contexts.

The Concept of Identity within the Context of Contemporary Lakota

Identity has been defined as constituted by narratives – self-reflective dialogues initiated by looking at the self through the eyes of the “others,” – which allows for such qualities as situationality, contextuality, and fluidity. The variety of identities, which one can choose, is limited socially and politically, since the dominant culture (in the case of Lakota – the settler culture set in Euro-American thought, values, and morality) has the control of symbolic resources available in the society. It imposes a selection of possible identities,

and draws boundaries between the dominant and non-dominant groups in that society resulting in potential loss of identity of non-dominant groups, which sometimes forces them to fight back for cultural empowerment (Berger 1974; Castile 1996; Sökefeld 1999; Brubaker, Cooper 2000; Champagne 2007). Historically Native Americans were engaged in a persistent resistance against the loss of their identity, grounded in traditional culture, to that enforced by the dominant society. Thomas King in his unconventional account of Native American history in North America writes: “Throughout the history of Indian-White relations in North America, there have always been two impulses afoot. Extermination and assimilation.” (2012: 106). He continues to argue that “[t]he means of extermination didn’t much matter”, since they were based on the concept of “survival of the fittest” (107). As for assimilation, several social theories, how to civilize and educate “the Indian” (mostly by force), were developed during the later contact period and into 19th century (King 2012: 108).

Over the years of American colonialism, an attitude was maintained by the settlers, that for Indigenous people to be successful in the New World, it was required for them to accommodate to its rules, and adapt its suggested identities. The identities offered by American society were (and still are) determined by race. Such an attitude was based on two premises, which laid the foundation for racist treatment of Native Americans in United States. Firstly, right from the beginning of the contact, the relationship between the colonists and Native Americans was based on a false assumption that Native Americans are on a lower level of evolution than the settlers (King 2012). If we look at the evolution as a transition from one species to another, and as various constantly changing (evolving) features within one species, then we can better understand, why racism flourished in Native American-White relations. In the context of North America’s colonialism, Native Americans were viewed as belonging to a different race, thus being on a lower step in the evolutionary process. Since the White race has always been belligerent and aggressive, and waged the most wars in the entire history of mankind (Waltman, Haas 2011), they believed it is rightful for them to consider themselves as the rulers of the world. War brought progress – at least in technologies – therefore, White race assumed themselves to be the most intelligent as well. On the other hand, Indigenous populations of pre-contact North America did not have a civilization in a European kind of way, thus, they were doomed to be marginalized.

The second false assumption, on which was based the Indigenous-settler relationship, originated in 18th century. It declared Native Americans to be a homogeneous group of people, erasing all cultural differences, yet making the control of them much easier for the settler governments (King

2012). In accordance with this approach, reservations were established during the second half of the 19th century. While reservations were supposedly lands “reserved” for Native Americans, many suffered removals and relocation, thus, finding themselves far away from their ancestral lands. In the oral history of Lakota, their populations have lived in the Black Hills area from times immemorial. According to Teton mythology, Paha Sapa, spanning across western South Dakota, northeast Wyoming, and southeast Montana, is the place of origin for the Lakota Oyate (nation). Though historical sources can not confirm the preceding statement, it is known that by 1800s Lakota had claimed the Missouri River region and western part of the Black Hills area, and socio-politically dominated it until late nineteenth century, being “aggressively independent and economically successful” (Hassrick 1964: 61). It might be considered good fortune that Lakota reservations are not that far away from the Black Hills, however, the whole reservation system, along with killing of the buffalo, brought only misery and subjugation to the Lakota people. Furthermore, forced assimilation through boarding schools, Christianization, and destruction of traditional social organization, stripped Teton off their traditional way of life. All of this was justified by the supremacy of the White race, as well as the ever growing need for land (Garrette, Pichette 2000).

Having in mind this history of colonialism, a question arises: how Native Americans, and specifically Lakota, managed to survive and uphold their tribal identity? If identity can be described as both specific and common characteristics individuals acquire – then it is fragmented and multiple (Kim et al. 1998). Such qualities account for identification with groups possessing contradicting values. Provided that, bicultural identities can be employed to explain how non-dominant groups, representing different ethnicities² in a dominant society, are able to handle the pressures of assimilation on the one hand, and conservation of their own culture on the other. Though options for identities are determined socially and politically, still a person has the right to choose, which group of people to conform to³. By applying their knowledge of Euro-American and American Indian worlds – including knowledge of social relations, values, norms, etc., – Indigenous people of United States

2 To define Native Americans as an ethnic group is perhaps incorrect, as there is a multitude of Indigenous cultures in North America, thus, to ascribe all of them to one ethnic group would be to blur the historical realities by using the narrative of the settlers (Hutcheon et al. 1998). Another term used in anthropological literature for similar purposes is *ethnorace* (e.g. Gone 2007), however, race is not an appropriate indicator to describe and classify contemporary people. In this context, the term ‘ethnicities’ is used to name various non-dominant cultural groups in society, without classifying all Native Americans as one ethnic group.

3 Since humans are social beings, I do not consider the possibility of rejecting society and everything it has to offer.

took on bicultural identities: White-oriented and Native American-oriented (Wilmoth 1987). Bicultural identity means to be accepted by both, dominant and tribal, societies, while simultaneously knowing, accepting, and practicing mainstream values and behaviors, as well as traditional values and beliefs encrypted in the cultural heritage (Garrette, Pichette 2000: 6). However, in contradiction to this definition, values and behaviors which one has may not necessarily be those of the dominant group in society or even those of the ancestors (Hutcheon et al. 1998).

Admittedly, some Native Americans hold White values more than Native American, and tend to partake in activities, which are in accordance with this attitude, as well as with the situation they are facing (Wilmoth 1987; Strong, Van Winkle 1996; Horse 2005). Still a tendency can be observed of diminishing popularity of White-oriented identity as compared to, e.g. fifty years ago. It appears that almost nobody from Indigenous non-dominant groups wants to be White anymore, i.e. to take on the Euro-American values, worldviews, and identities. Surely, they all are consumers, most of them speak English/French, some adopt dominant religions or go to mainstream universities (Horse 2005), though does the same pattern of behavior not apply to all of us? To lead a life of a Westerner does not imply identifying with one. The position previously held by Euro-Americans is nowadays occupied by other oppressed groups in society (e.g. African Americans), which come to play as role models, especially for Native youth (therefore, it is also possible to discuss Black-oriented identity). Likewise, distant cultures, e.g. Korean or Japanese, increasingly prevail as possible identity choices.

The identities of contemporary Lakota transcend biculturalism, as it is formally defined. Biculturalism relies on race, and defining identities in terms of race gives rise to racism. Race, according to Lowery (2010) is “a layer of identity that springs from inherited characteristics but is primarily used to rank and divide the human population into groups” (xv). Toni Morrison, an American novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize, has declared that there is no such thing as race – there is only the human being. According to her, racism, as a social construct with certain social functions, can be discussed scientifically and anthropologically, however, the same does not apply to race (Colbert Report 2014). These words appear true in 21st century, when mixed marriages are becoming a standard (Rockquemore et al. 2009). Several thousands of years ago perhaps it was possible to talk about race, as people were divided into distinct groups by their character, actions, and nature⁴. Ella

4 Many anthropologists today assume race to be a social construct and ignore the biological aspect of it. To compare, in Srimad Bhagavad Gita – one of the most influential and mysterious philosophical Hindu texts of post-Vedic period – the humanity is divided into four races.

C. Deloria (1979) justifies this by claiming that all Native Americans belong to one race (4). Yet nowadays, humanity is, in fact, becoming one super race or a global entity as boundaries between different races are disappearing. In such circumstances and with the efforts of Indigenous people, Black people, and other oppressed people to shake off racial categorization, the concept of race is even more so becoming a redundant relic of the past. Nevertheless, racism still flourishes in a 'postracial' way. This is particularly obvious in multicultural societies, where people continue to suffer from racial injustice. In U.S. the politics of 'color blindness', instead of bringing racial equality, often results in updated social structures of race and racism (Winant 2004). This undeniably holds true for South Dakota – home to one of the largest populations of Native Americans in the whole country (U.S. Census Bureau 2014), – which is stereotypically considered a “redneck” state.

Identifying with Native American and Euro-American Cultures: “It’s Kind of Like Being in Two Worlds”

The Lakota word for White man, still used today both in private conversations and during public events, sometimes in an insulting manner, is wasicu. However, according to Deloria (1979: 50): “The word carries no connotation of ‘White.’ It (...) is simply a transfer of the name for one’s helper in the spirit world, one’s mentor, peculiarly capable of impossible feats through his superhuman cleverness and insight, with a dash of trickery in it, legitimate for him, though not for man.” During the course of fieldwork, I have heard the word in various contexts from both, Native Americans, who are openly hostile towards Whites, and the one’s who see themselves as teachers to the non-Native society, and are fully integrated into it with no hidden ill-feelings. According to Rose (63)⁵, an Elder now living in Denver, she chose to give her children Lakota names, instead of wasicu ones, in order to ingrain their Native identity from the young age:

I have three kids of my own. (...) I chose to give them all Lakota names because I think one thing just to be another (...) Mary Beth, Jane or Joe, or Phillip. Any of that. (...) I was gonna make sure they all had Lakota names for their street names or wasicu name(s). (...) And then I diligently encouraged my three children to give their children Lakota names, so they won’t have any wasicu names, White names.

⁵ All the names of interviewees are changed in order to ensure their anonymity.

Rose's usage of the word *wasicu* is somewhat offensive, even though she does not state it openly. At the time of the Red Power Movement⁶ the word took on a negative, racist meaning, therefore, its contemporary usage allows to identify the level of animosity or friendliness Lakota express towards the dominant society. It also unveils racial tensions evident among Lakota living in Euro-American predominated areas, especially the so called "border towns" – off-reservation towns close to the reservation boundary. To illustrate, over only the last few years six bodies of Lakota were discovered in the Rapid Creek – a stream running through Rapid City, which is the second most populous city in South Dakota. No arrests were made to this day (Semán 2013). Similarly, the fatal shooting of 17-year-old African American Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida on February 26, 2012, whose killer was not sentenced for murder until after a major uproar in the media and among common people, for many Native Americans became a symbol of racial discrimination. Native Americans all over the country could empathize with Martin's family in their loss, as it "brought back memories of the tragic and in most cases unsolved deaths of Indians in border towns throughout Indian country" (Semán 2013). Furthermore, resemblance with the Black communities in racial profiling, which, as observed by Sissons (2005), mostly takes place in urban settings, is a unifying aspect between Native Americans and African Americans in their enmity towards the dominant White society, and might elucidate why some Native Americans adopt Black identities.

In general, the animosity which many Indigenous people of North America feel towards the settler society can be explained by the genocide experienced by them since the arrival of the first Europeans. It is estimated that in year 1492, when Columbus came ashore to North America, there lived more than 7 million Native Americans on the land (Thornton 1987). From the end of 15th century until 1900, there was a steady decline of Indigenous populations, mainly due to killings, diseases and starvation – all brought upon by the settlers (Thornton 1987, King 2012). This genocide continues to this day as a historical trauma passed through generations, also by means of racism, which is best seen in numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous people, and especially women. From the point of view of Lakota, members of the dominant society do not care to look into Indigenous culture, acknowledge and understand it:

⁶ American Indian activist organizations, which originated during the 1960s and 1970s Civil Rights Movements era, and produced a number of Native American protest actions, were generally called the Red Power Movement (Nagel 1995: 956).

They don't really understand a Native American culture. I think (...) like the Pow Wows that we have here. We have 65-70 thousand people here in Rapid City, not Natives. And the door is open for them to come in and see a Pow Wow. (...) Three quarters even have probably never seen a Pow Wow. They don't know anything about the culture, what we have to offer, you know, come in here, look. You know. What you have to offer, who are you, you know. They don't ask these questions, they'd rather be back in their their city (...) and continue their ignorance, (...) they make their own icon, uneducated, I guess it's statements. It is in a sense (Tom, 63).

The ignorance of the dominant society results in prejudice and discrimination of Native people, and this, in turn, causes their ongoing racial treatment:

I think the most difficult part or challenging part is really facing the stereotypical ideology of what Native Americans are in the mainstreams eyes. I mean we're viewed as drunks and we're viewed as people that just get handouts... (Nathan, 51).

On the other hand, racism is not a "one-way street", as the popular catchphrase goes. Being racial from Indigenous point of view, may be a way to strengthen their tribal identity. Since the dominant culture challenges American Indians to give up their cultural practices, values and moral codes in order to fit into Euro-American society, their reaction to this pressure is to stick to their ancestral culture and build their identities on it. As pointed out by Rose, such a stance of Native Americans, distances the two cultures even more:

...everyone is so set in their ways, in their own ways: their language, their action, their upbringing, their, their prejudices, all that is hard to change, so I don't think that's gonna change any time soon.

Then again, Lakota, as well as other Native Americans, believe that racism can be overcome through education, thus, many involve themselves into the field of teaching, for it is a discipline "without borders", and allows to work through the biased beliefs of the feuding sides. Also, some of Native Americans, deprived of the knowledge of their cultural roots in childhood, receive cultural education in this manner, i.e. through teachings of other Indigenous people and due to this education begin to identify with their tribal

culture. For instance, John, a two-spirited (attracted to both men and women) young man, whom I met on the first day of arrival to Spearfish, was extremely proud to be a Lakota, always willing to learn and pass on the knowledge of his tribal culture to non-Natives. Due to the fact he was not raised traditionally – never knew his father, lived with a White foster family in New York before moving back to the reservation to find his mother – he was learning about Lakota culture at University. Perhaps because of the tough childhood, John made great efforts in figuring out who he was and where he belonged. In addition to learning about Lakota ways, he tried to identify with other cultures, especially Chinese. His multicultural background ensured him a high level of integration into the mainstream society with friends from all ethnicities.

Such integration as John's, and ability to "walk in two worlds": Native American and White, is apparent among many Lakota. Rose illustrated how it was possible in her experience:

...my grandsons are educated in the classroom, and educated outside the classroom, in our culture. And they're both equal. (...) I made it work for myself, born and raised on the reservation, and I chose to go to (...) urban city environment by choice, and I made that working and I kept my culture, I did that with my children, and now (...) they're doing it with their children (...). It's very important, very very important to keep both worlds in our homes and make it work, because we come from two worlds.

Rose's story of her children and grandchildren upbringing reveals that identity is pretty much determined from birth, as cultural knowledge, on which identity is grounded, is inextricably linked to the immediate family and other kin ties. This somewhat contrasts John's experience, as he had to create his identity by himself by combining the little knowledge he had about his tribal culture with his upbringing in a non-Native environment. As John's story can be considered successful, some Lakota experience more difficulties in connecting the two worlds. These people do not see themselves fitting into neither Native American nor White world, yet walking a line betwixt and between, as recalled by Robert (27):

...I was on the reservation running with Indian boys, and still didn't have a place, and then there is the vice versa where I'll be out here, running with my White friends, and then somebody will make a Native American joke and offend me there, so.

and Stacey (25):

...I would never define myself as all one way or all the other because I grew up (...) with influences from both sides, you know, so. It's in two worlds. I'm not rejected from both worlds but I'm not, I don't really fit completely in one or the other, I guess.

Being viewed with suspicion by both Euro-Americans and American Indians is usually based upon one's appearance, and applies more to mixed-blood Lakota whose one parent is White, whereas having ancestors among Native Americans and other non-White ethnicity (e.g. Mexican or Samoan), allows a person to fit into Native community with more ease, while making affiliation with the dominant White society more complicated. Becky, who is half Philippine and half Lakota, confirms this:

...I moved to South Dakota, and realized, you know, I'm Indian. But I didn't know (...) that I was different until I moved here. (...) Which was a really big cultural cultural shock for me. Like I was almost ashamed to be dark.

Furthermore, young people of mixed descent seek cultural models with which they can identify and not necessarily from the Native community. Since many Lakota families, especially the ones living on reservations, are struggling with poverty and abuse, and hence, give in to alcohol, drugs and depression, as recollected by Sharon, a 19-year-old: "Almost every household has a drunk. Not just a person who gets drunk occasionally but who gets drunk every day," there are not as many role models in the closest environment to look upon. This allows for "a lack of self-confidence about one's own culture" (Smith 2007: 112), thus, other ethnic groups come into view. In the case of young Lakota it is the African Americans. One can notice from the style of clothes, appreciation of rap and other African American music and musicians, as well as comedians, actors, athletes and other public figures, and even from the manners of some Native Americans, that they are trying to identify with the African American culture. Some even endeavor to empower their own Native culture through the behavioral models adopted from African Americans. The reason of the big influence of the African American culture can be found by recalling the history: though Black people are another oppressed group in the dominant White society of U.S., they are also more assimilated into it than Native Americans ever were or wished to be. The ma-

For example of African Americans success in the dominant society is Barack Obama – the first Black⁷ president of United States. Also, a great number of prominent, influential figures of African American descent in the mainstream society makes them the second biggest and most successful group in United States after Euro-Americans. Both the fact of African American oppression, and their success attracts Native Americans to follow them as role models.

Consequently, the two examples of Lakota trying to emulate African Americans as role models, and those not fitting into neither White, nor American Indian worlds, reveal two attitudes of contemporary Lakota. The first outlook is of those born and raised on reservations, with both parents having at least half of Indian blood running through their veins – they have stronger connections with tribal culture, and yet some are trying to escape it or at least relate to other culture than their own. Second posture is assumed by those born off-reservations and having one White parent – they are struggling to be accepted as Native Americans, and put all their efforts in learning about their ancestral culture, and finding ways to practice traditional customs. They also face the challenge of being a Lakota – a quality, which one can not consciously educate himself/herself with by learning certain myths and occasionally participating in ceremonies. It should be ingrained without effort through constant encounter with the tribal culture because “being a Lakota” is a way of life, and if one thinks otherwise, s/he might risk exploiting traditional practices and beliefs, and appropriating the culture, as observed by Tom:

...they are sacred. They were ceremonies that our ancestors had used, had practiced for years and years, and then suddenly we come along and we try to learn it, and we end up abusing it.

Push-And-Pull Mechanisms of Urban Settings and Reservations: “We Didn’t Wanna Stay on The Rez”

Teton reservations, judging by statistical data, belong to the poorest counties in South Dakota and United States with exclusively high unemployment rates. Many Native people living there get governmental help through food stamps, reduction of bills, and free housing. Moreover, reservations, as observed by Smith (1998: 194), are contaminated with “sexual abuse, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and teen suicide – the legacy of colonization and particularly of boarding schools...” And yet, though grievous events happen on reservations, the people living there are able to keep their culture alive and

7 Perhaps its dubious to consider Barack Obama Black in a true sense, as he is a progeny of a mixed marriage, and has a rather cosmopolitan background (Adamson 2012).

find strength in it:

...no one know[s] how good (...) other people are able to live growing up on the reservation, because within the reservation you, you only know that.” (Jordan, 23).

Here Jordan refers to the traditional Lakota way of life, which is characteristic to one of the two types of localities found on the reservations. First is the “countryside” with sweatlodges operating on private land, Sun Dances grounds and ceremonies being performed by medicine and holy men and women for people in need. It differs for families but on Pine Ridge Reservation one can find an inipi (purification) ceremony going on every other day. Also there are the community events, such as Pow Wows or festive dinners.

The second type of locality is the modern and more densely populated areas like Pine Ridge Village or Oglala, where people struggle to fight harsh living conditions and sometimes boredom – especially the young ones. Many Lakota in this second locality possess a number of high quality devices: wide-screen televisions, computers with internet, mobile phones and cars, which provide for easy travels and communication with the on- and off-reservation world, and yet the reservation life is still considered rather slow, unless a person is willing to travel a lot, visit relatives or take part in ceremonies (which many of them do). Maybe due to this fact young people try to escape reservations, find jobs in off-reservation cities, and seek for higher education in Euro-American populated towns. The narration of Tom on the issue is quite revealing:

I was sitting in my, in high school one spring just before school was out, and looking out the window, and (...) occasionally I would see Indians walking by. (...) One day I was watching this one gentleman, he was walking staggering. Then he fell down. He was trying to get up and fell again. He got [up] finally. I thought that was kind of amusing at first. And I started to kinda smile and make a joke of it in a sense but (...) as I watched him, I suddenly realized that was my own uncle (...), and I sat there watching, and then I got to thinking more serious, I got to thinking on how pitiful, you know, how depressing, how you know. (...) We shouldn't be living like that. My mind started to change gradually, and I started to realize that (...) by stay[ing] on the reservation chances are I'll be similar or like that. (...) my life end up being an alcoholic perhaps. So, I decided back then that once I graduate, I would leave the reservation. Try to make something, do something on my own.

One of the strongest pushes and biggest motivations to leave the reservation is a desire for better education. Even now, when tribes establish their own schools in reservation territories, those are considered not good enough to provide with high quality education, and to make their students eligible to compete in the national and global job markets. Stacey, a major in American Indian Studies and Sociology, describes why she did not want to attend the tribal school:

The tribal school just sucks, and I'm glad I didn't have to go there, to be honest with you. (...) Just because the education standards like, they don't have enough textbooks. Like on any given day teachers will just not show up. Like half of the teachers are subs. They don't have financially, they're just not doing very well, and a lot of the teachers aren't there. The thing about it is a lot of the teachers look at those students like they already see them failing, before they even get the opportunity to do well, and so.

The problem of tribal schools, Stacey describes, is not only technical (insufficient funding, temporary teachers, poorly stocked libraries), but also psychological, which drives several individuals to seek higher education outside of reservations. Also if schools administrations neglect discipline, then it is even more challenging for the students to motivate themselves, as observed by Becky:

Obviously there's not as much, many opportunities for (...) young people on the rez besides, you know, drinking, and partying and stuff...

If one wants to escape the vicious cycle of poor education, unemployment and poverty, indicating reservation life, larger cities or at least Euro-American populated towns are chosen instead. Rose recalls the reasons why she and her sister decided to leave the reservation:

...we were really really really looking forward to living in the city because we already knew in high school that we're going not gonna live on the reservation, we did not wanna be stuck, we did not wanna (...) end up like a lot of our relatives, having babies at 16-17 years old, and being stuck. We knew we didn't want that.

Moving to study and live to urban areas, though opens up more

possibilities for economical prosperity, nevertheless, enhances a feeling of otherness among the Lakota, which may lead to several outcomes. On the one hand, being used to living a communal life, Lakota in the cities, where people become more isolated⁸ – relating only to their nuclear family, working in cubicles – prevail in creating communities and gathering families. The urge to do this in an urban environment is even stronger than on the reservations where everybody is related anyhow:

We have a tendency of seeking each other out more than they do on the reservation because, being in an urban setting, in fairly urban environment, there seems to be more of a limited, a limited (...) opportunity to have specific organizations or (...) resources to lean on that they have on the reservations... (Rose).

The origin of such communities might also be a result of governmental policy implemented through the American Indian Relocation Program in the 1950s by which Native Americans were placed to live in certain urban areas – districts with houses provided specifically for Indigenous people of Native American descent – which thereby formed ghettos. However, and this is the second possible outcome, even though such communities retained ties of *tiospaye* to some extent, they were unable to stop the process of diminishing interest in American Indian culture by its people, as illustrated by Nathan:

...some of them left reservation and became part of the inner city, they became another little society within a society. They became almost a reservation within a city. But as the generations continued, you know, to live in those areas, (...) some of them didn't maintain their culture. A lot of them didn't. And the second and third generations, they became more like non-Native people. You know, with just dark skin.

Individualism, which characterizes Euro-American societies, changed the values of some urban Lakota, thus making them not as communal but more

⁸ A great story illuminating differing dispositions in socialization of urban Lakota and Euro-Americans was narrated by an Elder from Rapid City: I live in Rapid Valley, next to these people five years. I always peak out, my son played with their son, and they were real good friends. But every time I, they were military and they work at nights. And so, they came and went. And I would be like watching for a chance to run over there and say: hi, my name is, you know. Never happened. Five years. Five years. I get close, you know, I practically have to stand on their driveway, you know, to try to get to know them. But they had responsibility, but also, you know, American mind is, I always call it a bunch of little bubbles. Individualized existence.

oriented to personal prosperity.

On the other hand, sometimes a traditional upbringing, especially on reservations, makes for a strong cultural background, which in the case of moving to an urban area and confronting people of different ethnicities, can result in a cultural shock. Jordan, who was raised traditionally (attending ceremonies, Sun dances, surrounded by Lakota speaking relatives, and being guided by Lakota values), moved to study to a state across the country in a college, where most of the students were of Euro-American or African American descent, which made him feel a cultural misfit:

...whenever I went away to college, I realized that (...) I was a lot different. Even though I didn't think I was, than Caucasians or other races, (...) but I felt different because a lot of my classmates were really loud, they were really outgoing, and they always had money, their parents were doctors, lawyers, you know, all these like really sought after professions. And here I was just this kid from the rez, just trying to make it.

Jordan identifies his difference through economical and social facets, which are related to the contrasting values possessed by dominant and Indigenous societies. In such a case reservations are viewed as a safe harbor and work as a pull towards home and family mechanism:

Whenever I'm on the reservation, it's like an entirely different world. And no matter who you are or where you come from, whenever you go home to the reservation, it's like you'll always be loved. And you won't be judged. So it's kinda like my safety net, my safety place (Jordan).

In other words, it is a universal human need to belong and to socialize, and yet, according to Deloria (1979: 93), it is peculiarly accentuated in the Native American nature, originating from centuries of close tiyospaye, clan and tribe ties. Moreover, due to symbolic resources it possesses (familial relations, ceremonies, traditional teachings), reservation is sometimes experienced as a habitual state of mind, judging from the account of Carroll:

...when you're going back to the reservation, you, you could feel a sense of like, this is home, this is where I am, it's like a different area, and like a different state of mind almost.

Perhaps the pull back to reservation mechanism is so strong because for Native Americans the mainstream society has not as much to offer, besides

financial security, therefore, after some time they return to a place where the biggest obstacle is money, not acceptance. Still other people, like Rose, choose to live their lives to the fullest outside of reservation:

To this day, we're 60, we're almost 61 by a month short at being 61. We are still choosing not to go live on the reservation, not, there's a lot of people, like when they turn past 60, they're ready to revert and go back to the reservation and, and depend on the government to take care of them. And, we're still not ready to go home cause I'm still very independent. I wanna do things on my own and I wanna help myself cause I'm raising two grandsons right now. So, I'm not ready to go back to Rosebud. I love to go home, to visit, to go back home for a Sun dances, and then to go home for our Pow Wows. But other than that, if I have, I still have a choice, and my choosing is to live in the cities.

What is more, urban environment may even stimulate a rediscovery of Native Americanness and strengthen one's tribal identity, as further explained by Rose:

...when I lived on the reservation I didn't know anything about (...) Sun dancing or sweats, or all the praying or anything cause (...) I didn't have anybody to go to, to teach us that, because we were in the boarding school. (...) But in Denver we got to know some other people from Denver that knew a lot about our language, a lot about the Sun dancing, and praying, and other. Treat our pipe with respect and pray with it, and offer food to the spirits, and all those small things that are really working now, and and I'm teaching my, my children and we're teaching all the grandbabies.

Consequently, I have found that a decision to live (even if just for a short period of time) in urbanized off-reservation areas lead to several identity-related outcomes. To rephrase the poem by Adrian C. Louis (1989) – a famous Lovelock Paiute author – Tetons are in the reservation of their minds. It is likely that many times the relationship with the reservation is just like that. If one was born and grew up on a reservation, then it stays with him/her forever both as a place and as a state of mind. Due to this reason Native communities are created in the cities. And if it happens that for younger generations the values of the dominant society overpower tribal traditions, then it is a duty for the Elders to guide the youngsters back to their roots and help them rediscover their tribal identity. This can be done even without giving up the material wealth obtainable by living in an urban environment. When

asked, whether it is difficult to stay traditional while also being urban, Rose answered: “Oh, no. Ooooh, no. It’s all up to individual. I was just headstrong and just, absolutely sure that that’s how I wanted to bring my children up in our culture.” And yet, if one finds it too difficult to live in a society which often has contradicting values, or if the pull back to the reservation is as strong, it is always possible to choose to travel more or to live in smaller towns close to the reservation and visit tiyospaye as much as intended.

Conclusion

In this article I attempted to show the dynamics of identity choices among contemporary Lakota using two dichotomies: urban – reservation and tribal – settler. These categories are symbolic labels, which do not imply certain groups with strict boundaries (or that such groups exist at all), nor do they necessarily oppose each other. In fact, they only indicate the different possible identity choices of Lakota and function as a tool in exposing which groups Lakota choose to be included and of which excluded. They emphasize the individual qualities of Lakota identity, and allow distinguishing the so called push-and-pull mechanisms of the urban settings and reservations, as well as Lakota identification with their tribal and with settler cultures.

I put large portions of interviews into the text to let the people speak for themselves. Through their narratives I sought to demonstrate several qualities of Lakota identity. The strengthening of Indigenous identity through racial categories, powered by the dominant society’s ignorance towards Native American culture, is one of them. In many cases the foundation of Lakota’s identity is laid at a very young age and results either in a conscious identification with the tribal culture and its people, or allows for the so called outsiders to come back to the culture and restore their knowledge or re-learn it with the help of the family members, Elders, and, in cases of urban Lakota – unrelated urban Native Americans. Contemporary Lakota endeavor to take what is best from both - Euro-American and Native American - worlds by integrating and treating those worlds as equal in their daily lives, thus an ability to “walk in two worlds” comes to the fore.

Additionally, a feeling of otherness may follow Lakota’s decision to move to urban settings, and may result in several outcomes. Firstly, Indigenous people tend to create communities in the cities to escape the emotional stress under the rules of urban environments, predominated by non-Indigenous people who often have racial attitudes towards Native people. Lakota, who have strong connections with their traditional culture and who live a cul-

turally rich life on the reservations, experience a cultural shock after moving to large and distant off-reservation cities (mostly in pursuit of better education or higher income), therefore, the pull back home is stronger for them, sometimes to the extent that they decide to return to the reservation after some time spent living and/or studying and working in urban areas. Yet others, who prefer life in the cities to reservation, often seek out people in urban environments who have the knowledge and resources pertaining to their tribal culture and who act as a platform in helping to reconnect with the traditional culture.

Secondly, second and third urban generation Tetons alienate themselves from their tribal culture by dismissing it as inferior to that of the dominant society or to cultures of other oppressed groups within that society. As Indigenous people continue to struggle against racial profiling, their identity is no longer embedded solely in tribal cultures. The identification with the African American culture is especially visible among the Native youth. Moreover, resemblance with other than Indigenous non-dominant groups in a multicultural society allows Lakota to question identity models offered by the settler culture and to experience more of a cosmopolitan identity. Indigenous cosmopolitanism emerges as individual, rooted in traditional tribal/reservational cultures, and having shared discourses with oppressed people of other ethnicities in the dominant White society.

Finally, I would say that contemporary Lakota do not follow one cultural identity model. Instead of talking about two confronting cultures, either merging into one or distancing from each other, the stress should be on Indigenous individualism on the one hand and cosmopolitanism on the other. To paraphrase the popular saying among American Indians: one cannot be looked upon as an apple that is Red on the outside and White on the inside, since the apple might be Black on the inside, or White on the outside, and Red on the inside.

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Simona Šilovė

Contemporary Lakota Identity in Relation to the Influences of the Settler Society and Reservation Culture

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide a new perspective on the sociocultural identity of contemporary Lakota and to examine the construction of that identity by using several dichotomies, namely urban–reservation and tribal–settler. These dichotomies emerge not as oppositions, but rather as dimensions of possible identity choices. The first one works as a push-and-pull mechanism of the urban settings and reservations, while the second reveals Lakota identification with both Native American and Euro-American (in some cases with Afro-American) cultures. I argue that Lakota identity transcends biculturalism and is set in an individualized cosmopolitan worldview, which in turn is rooted in traditional tribal/reservation culture.

Keywords: identity; Lakota; urban; reservation; settler society; cosmopolitanism.