



**Title:** Healing the Impact of Colonization, Genocide, Missionization, and Racism on Indigenous Populations

**Author(s):** Betty Bastien, Jürgen W. Kremer, Rauna Kuokkanen, and Patricia Vickers

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# **Healing the Impact of Colonization, Genocide, Missionization, and Racism on Indigenous Populations**

Betty Bastien, Jürgen W. Kremer, Rauna Kuokkanen, and Patricia Vickers

Jürgen W. Kremer  
3383 Princeton Drive  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405  
jkremer@sonic.net

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Violence, in an Indigenous context, stems from many sources, including the social sciences which wield “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1990). Epistemic violence is a continuation of genocide. Genocide is balanced by survivance stories. Survivance is “the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (Vizenor, 1999, p. vii).

The epistemic violence of the social science is represented by concepts like the “noble savage” and the “vanishing Native.” This chapter attempts to face the genocidal realities of Indigenous peoples, and the politics forced upon them, without succumbing to contemporary expressions of stories of the “vanishing Native.” Stories of survivance contain the greatest healing potential for Indigenous peoples.

## **Who Are the Indigenous Peoples? -- Political Context**

In the legal and political contexts, especially within the framework of international organizations such as the United Nations, Indigenous people often use the definition provided by the International Labor Organization convention: The term “Indigenous peoples” refers to

tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions (International Labor Organization, convention #169, 1989)

Frustrated in their attempts to work with nation-states, many Indigenous people have taken their concerns to the international level. In 1957, the International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted one of the first international instruments to recognize Indigenous issues, the Convention No. 107 on Indigenous Populations. In 1982, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations was established. The Working Group has provided a Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. So far, only a few of

the articles have been adopted by the nation-states. As long as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples remains unadopted, the ILO Convention No.169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples from 1989 provides the strongest support for Indigenous rights internationally. The Convention states that Indigenous peoples have right "to control, to the extent possible, their own economic, social and cultural development" (article 8).

This chapter focuses on three examples that are taken from geographical areas where initial colonial violence has given way to other forms of violence:

- 1) The Sámi people of north Europe.
- 2) The Tsimshian people of the Canadian Northwest.
- 3) The Niisitapi in southern Alberta, Canada.

## **Genocide and Violence**

### **Defining genocide**

In 1946 the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution stating that "Genocide is the denial of the right of existence to entire human groups" (Stannard, 1992, p. 279). Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraum (1994) discuss "ordinary genocide" as a form of genocide that is relevant for many Indigenous peoples:

"Ordinary genocide" is rarely, if at all, aimed at the total annihilation of the group; the purpose of the violence ... is to destroy the marked category (a nation, a tribe, a religious sect) as a viable community. (p. 30)

### **Defining violence**

The word violence means in its root "vital force." In this sense we understand violence as the assertion of one's vital force at the expense of another. This definition is a modification of Galtung who (1996, p. 4) distinguishes three forms of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. *Direct violence* refers to the brutality of murder, slavery, displacement and expropriation. *Structural violence* refers to the direct, everyday policies that impact the well-being of people. *Cultural violence* refers to racism. *Epistemic violence* (Spivak 1990, pp. 125-126) refers to a process whereby colonial and imperial practices impose certain European codes. *Psychospiritual violence* is another term we use to discuss the impact of genocidal policies.

## **The Process of Colonization**

The indirect violence following direct violence can be seen in various dimensions. *Economically* it means the destruction of Indigenous self-sustaining economies and the imposition of market or socialist economies. *Politically* it means the destruction of traditional forms of governance. *Legally* it means that Indigenous oral law and historical rights are invalidated. *Socially* it means the destruction of rites of passage. *Physically* it means the exposure to contagious diseases. *Intellectually* it means the invalidation of the

Indigenous paradigms and the dominance of an alien language. *Spiritually* it means the destruction of ceremonial knowledge. *Psychologically*, survivors of genocide show symptoms of post-traumatic stress symptom.

### **Colonial Violence Among the Sami**

The Sámi are the Indigenous people of Sápmi which spans central Norway and Sweden through northern Finland to the Kola Peninsula of Russia. A rough estimate of the Sámi population is between 75,000 to 100,000. During the early Middle Ages, the surrounding kingdoms became interested in the land and natural resources of Sámiland.

Due to the competition, Sámiland became a war zone during the 12th and 13th centuries. By the end of the 13th century, Denmark and Novgorod had divided the Sámi area by a mutual treaty and in 1751, in the Treaty of Stroemstad, Norway and Sweden imposed the first foreign boundary on Sámiland. An individual Sámi was no longer able to own land, and grazing and hunting rights on the other side of the border were abolished.

The impact of colonization in Sápmi has various dimensions. Economically, colonialism has destroyed the local subsistence livelihoods of the Sámi. Mining, forestry, hydroelectric power plants, and tourism have put growing pressure on Sámi lifeways. The first churches in Sápmi were built in the 11th century and since then Christianity has gradually destroyed the Sámi world view by banning shamanic ceremonies, executing the *noaidis* (the Sámi shamans), burning and destroying the Sámi drums, and even banning the Sámi way of singing and communicating called yoiking.

Colonialism also gradually eroded the traditional Sámi system of education by imposing a compulsory school system. However, in many ways, the Sámi are in control of their own education through their own education councils. There is a Sámi College which trains Sámi teachers. In most places in the Sámi region, children are able to study the language at least a few hours per week.

In 1992, Sámi language acts in both Norway and Finland gave the Sámi the right to use their mother tongue when dealing with government agencies. In Sweden, the Sámi language is considered one of a number of minority languages. In Russia, there is no special law protecting the Sámi language. Of the four countries where the Sámi live, as of 2001 only Norway has ratified the ILO Convention No. 169 on the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples. In Finland, a recent legal study demonstrated that the Sámi have had an official title to their land as late as in the early 20th century. This has led to a situation in which the state cannot ignore the ownership question any longer.

Considering the material conditions of most of the Sámi, an outsider could come to the conclusion that the Sámi are not colonized. In this sense, the colonial process has found its completion by ideologically cloaking its own violence. Internalized mental colonization has been so exhaustive that even though the Sámi have their own elected bodies, welfare system and some control over education, none of these are based on Sámi cultural. The Sámi movement of the 1960s and 1970s led to the establishment of Sámi parliaments, first in Finland in 1973, then in Norway in 1989 and in Sweden in 1993. The Sámi parliaments are not based on Sámi models of governance or their spiritual and cultural practices, and they do not have much decision making power even over issues directly concerning their own culture.

Spivak's concept of epistemic violence provides probably the best understanding for this situation. The Sámi *episteme*, their knowledge system, has been replaced by colonial Scandinavian and other European systems to such an extent that it has created Sámi subjects with foreign worldviews. Even though a Sámi person may speak the language fluently, it may be used to express the worldview of the dominant culture. The survival of the Sámi language is not matched by the survival of the Sámi Indigenous worldview.

While the recognition of Sámi political issues has led to an improvement, this improvement may have been achieved at the price of the surrender of the Sámi episteme. Epistemic violence is a fact of Sámi reality and it makes colonial violence less visible. Structural violence is largely hidden from view as the structure imposed by the dominant societies has been accepted and is used.

### **Colonial Violence Among the Tsimshian and Niisitapi**

“Cultural evolution” is a concept that has formed the philosophical basis for genocidal policies. Within this framework, Indigenous peoples are commonly seen as in need of development. The ideological rationale of colonization has been the presumed need to alter Indigenous people's lifeways to a way of life considered “civilized.” Such civilization was to be achieved, first and foremost, through the process of Christianization. Despite the fact that today numerous anthropologists and archaeologists disavow it, cultural evolution continues to have an impact (assumptions cf. Kelly, 1995; Kremer, 1998).

The “Norwegianization” policy of 1879-1940 reflected the nationalism and social Darwinistic thinking of the times and regarded assimilation as the only way to bring “enlightenment” to the Sámi people. The current crisis in Indigenous identity formation has resulted in social science theories evolving that fundamentally continue practices of assimilation. Evolutionary thinking, in Nietzsche's (1967) sense of “truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions,” has been the foundation of assimilation policies. It is this cognitive framework that created and perpetuates genocide.

The Canadian Indian Act of 1867 (Sec. 24 subsection 91 of British North American Act) had given the Canadian federal government exclusive control over Indigenous territories. The Royal Proclamation of 1873 strengthened the economic base of the dominant culture by establishing procedures for acquiring the lands occupied by Indigenous peoples. Although recognizing Indian title to lands not colonized, it outlined the beginning of an apartheid system. This gave rise to the 1885 policy, which forbade Indigenous people to leave the reserve. These acts gave the government exclusive control over economic activities.

Colonialism engenders dependency through legislation, destroys the traditional economic base, and enforces an alien education system. Colonialism denies people the capacity to make intelligent decisions based on cultural knowledge. Such knowledge was repressed by the Canadian legislation of the 1920s and 1930s. Legislation in 1920 made attendance compulsory for Indigenous people's children, and, in 1930, non-compliance was legally defined as a criminal offense. These efforts characterized the spiritual and psychological violence that altered the worldviews of Indigenous people.

While residential schools were introducing the new imperialist culture that defined Indigenous peoples as “savages,” the newly formed colonial government of Canada had already introduced the Indian Act of 1867 declaring Indigenous peoples as wards of the government. Chief Joe Mathias (Mathias & Yabsley, 1991) defined the Indian Act as the conspiracy of suppression of Indian rights in Canada. While Indigenous children and youth were being conditioned by British imperialist values, the government of Canada was imposing a political structure in all Indigenous communities. All communities were redefined as reservations and reduced to smaller territories ignoring tribal history, land use, and understanding of landownership (cf. Wa & Uukw, 1989).

The federally imposed political body of Chief and Council ignores the traditional systems in Indigenous communities. All federal funding is relegated through this system creating a fertile environment for internalized oppression to flourish. The Tsimshian live on the northwest coast of British Columbia where their territory is divided between two areas. Having been banished to reserves, the Tsimshians are now struggling with internalized oppression in the attempt to find balance in a rapidly changing world.

The notion of cultural evolution, the rationalization of necessary progress, perpetuates violence through psychological control. Indigenous peoples have been described as “victims”. Victimry is a pose and dynamic that feeds the game governed by rules of dominance. The social sciences serve this ideology. The notion that the objectified self is the universal nature of humanity describes the process for the desacralization of Indigenous relationships within a universe that is premised on the concrete relationships of a harmonious nature. The detachment from these processes, as enforced by those who design the policies for Indigenous peoples, is the distinguishing mark of ordinary genocide.

### **Internalized Colonization In Residential Schools**

The theoretical frameworks that are used in the perpetuation of psychospiritual violence can be found in the European epistemology. Theories of psychological development are freighted with assumptions that violate the essence of Indigenous peoples’ understanding of human nature. Such assumptions include: each human being has an isolated cognitive self that can best be understood through its components. This assumption underlies all manifestations of European life and constitutes violence to the holistic identity of Indigenous people. In psychospiritual violence the holistically constructed Indigenous self is forced to become the fragmented Western self.

These assumptions of the nature of humankind have allowed for the genocidal policies of residential schools. The residential school era was the most significant and comprehensive governmental effort, in cooperation with the churches, to alter the reality of Indigenous people. Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraum (1994) point out that, “in any intellectually honest appraisal, Indian Residential Schools were genocide” (p. 30). In these institutes the Tsimshian were systematically conditioned to believe that their ancestral ways were inferior to British ways of interpreting the world. When they returned to their communities they found themselves alienated. It is no surprise that addictions and family violence increased.

### **Post-traumatic stress symptoms**

The consequences of the survival of the direct violence of genocide and of the subsequent structural and cultural violence can be interpreted in terms of what Western psychiatry calls "post-traumatic stress symptoms." The statistics published in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Chrisjohn, Young, & Maraun, 1994) reveal dramatic figures. The rate for suicide among the total Indigenous population is 25.4 %, for family violence it is 36.4 %, for sexual abuse it is 24.5 %, and for rape it is 15%. Beahrs (1990) discusses post-traumatic stress disorders as follows:

PTSD is characterized by intrusive *re-experiencing* of the trauma, persistent *avoiding* of the trauma or *numbing* of responsiveness, and persisting symptoms of *increased arousal*. (Beahrs 1990 p. 15)

In a discussion about Native American genocide Rivers-Norton has pointed out that Genocide is often viewed within the psychological literature as the most devastating and debilitating form of traumatization because it causes enormous physiological and psychic overload, shock, numbing, and grief. It involves the severe devastation caused by cultural destruction, enslavement, relocation, and massive loss of life. (Bastien, Kremer, Norton, Rivers-Norton, & Vickers, 1999, p. 18)

## **Cultural Affirmation and Healing Colonial Violence**

### **Understanding the masks of violence**

Within Northwest Coast art forms, the mask is a representation of a character's or animal's spirit. "Masks give form to thoughts. Masks are images that shine through us from the spirit world" (Steltzer & Davidson, 1994, p. 96). The dancer wearing a mask portrays the characteristics and behavior of the spirit the mask represents and in doing so becomes familiar with the function of that spirit. We can understand this process as the deconstruction or decolonization in Spivak's (1990) sense: "The only things one really deconstructs are things into which one is intimately mired. It speaks you. You speak it" (p. 135). Naming the mask and knowing the song and dance of colonization is the process of deconstructing our present reality.

The Tsimshian have a societal structure that is matrilineally comprised of four Clans or *pteex*. Each clan has a number of houses or *walp* that has a head Chief with Chiefs of lesser rank. The hereditary names in each house or *walp* hold territories and rights to fishing and hunting within those territories. The Tsimshian societal structure contains methods to address conflicts, disputes, and violations as well as protocols for naming, rites of passage, marriage, and divorce; they also regulate inter-tribal relationships. Individuals within the clans and families were trained to implement the procedures to resolve and bring restitution to any challenging circumstances within village life. If there was an accidental death through carelessness, the family of the offending party is responsible for recounting the incident in a family meeting where they were responsible for giving gifts of restitution to the victim's immediate family members. Once the victim's family decided the gifts were sufficient, the incident was forgiven and the offending party was cleansed of their wrongdoings.

#### **Four critical aspects in healing colonial violence**

1) “Re-membling” acknowledges the destruction that colonization brought; it is identifying the impact of destruction with the willingness to let go of the blame. Each Indigenous nation on the northwest coast of British Columbia has a cleansing ceremony for the purpose of washing away grief and hatred to prepare for healing. The initial step in preparing for the cleansing and washing ceremony is to name the offense. “Research suggests that through a narrative process, through sharing the stories of suffering, individuals begin to organize, structure, and integrate emotionally charged traumatic experiences and events” (Bastien, Kremer, Norton, Rivers-Norton & Vickers, 1999, p. 18).

2) The re-connection with ancestral healing methods is another critical ingredient. Ancestral teachings have remained in the conscious and unconscious of Indigenous people despite the changes wrought by ongoing colonial and genocidal policies. For example, an individual may approach an Elder to ask how to wash away the shame and grief from the past. The individual may be advised to fast and bathe for four days all the time letting go of hatred and destructive energy that surfaces each day. This is called *si'satxw* in the Tsimshian language. Through the act of cleansing the individual practices awareness. This awareness is one where individuals observe their behaviors and beliefs following each to the root of behavior (Levine, 1979). Healing takes patience, requiring cultural support. Indigenous healing programs, such as NECHI (a Cree word meaning “friend”) in Canada, use Indigenous approaches combined with Western psychotherapy, in order to deal with issues of alcoholism.

3) The third crucial ingredient in healing the impact of colonization is through reaching out to others. Once one has learned to love and value one’s self, it is much easier to love and value one’s neighbor. Confronting oppression in communities requires education and a willingness to make relationships that respect self and others.

4) A fourth crucial ingredient in healing from colonial violence is the reconstruction of Indigenous concepts of community. By reconstructing Indigenous understandings of community we are able to restore our values and spirituality, not as something arbitrary and superficial limited to occasional prayer or song, but spirituality as our personal and daily relationship with the environment and our community (cf. Brascoupé, 2000, p. 415).

#### **Reaffirmations of Cultural Knowledge**

The pervasive impact of colonial violence needs to be healed not just on the individual but also on the cultural level. The self within its Indigenous cosmos is the necessary context for healing. At this point, our chapter turns full circle as we explain one particular Indigenous worldview. This is important in order to avoid psychologizing the ongoing structural and cultural violence to which Indigenous peoples are exposed. It also prepares our discussion of what non-Indigenous people working with Indigenous populations are to do. It gives an opportunity to retract the idealizing or discriminatory projections of the dominant cultures.

The example we give is an attempt to develop a curriculum based in Niisitapi epistemology and ontology. Niisitapi can literally be translated as *Real People*. They consist of the following tribes: *Aamsskaaiippiianii* -- South Peigan; *Aapatuxsipiitani* --

North Peigan; *Kainah* -- Blood/Many Chiefs; *Siksika* -- Blackfoot. Early explorers estimated the population of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples to be 30,000 – 40,000 (McClintock, 1992, p. 5). At present, there are 8,840 members who occupy 535.6 square miles of reserve land. There are 3,072 members between the ages of 5 and 19 among the *Kainah*, but only 20 of these members are now fluent speakers (0.65 %).

### **Affirmation of the Niisitapi worldview**

The Niisitapi self exists only in relationships. The self is intricately linked with the natural world. The process of knowing is founded upon an intricate web of kinship, the relationships of natural alliances. Knowledge is understood as a source of life, which strengthens the alliances among the cosmic and natural worlds. Knowledge is created and generated through interrelationships with natural alliances. The alliances among the Niisitapi are regenerative and renew the ecological balance of the world.

These alliances can be understood by examining the word *po'nstaan*, “the giving of gifts in ceremony.” The cultural meaning provides us with two natural laws: one, that the universe is cyclical and it works on the basis of reciprocity; two, reciprocity is founded upon the principle of “strengthening and supporting life,” *niipaitapiiyssin*. *Po'nstann* refers to what one is willing to give up in exchange for something sought or desired. The common usage refers to giving up aspects/orientations of one’s life in exchange for the rebirth of a way of life governed by responsibilities.

The second principle is the nature of truth -- *niitsii-issksiniip* – “knowing.” Truth is the essential meaning of experience. This principle guides the process of knowing and the knowledge revealed as both are consistent with natural laws. These natural laws support the framework for the interpretation of experiences and are the keys to understanding the meaning of the sacredness of life. Understanding this worldview is crucial for anybody outside the culture attempting to understand the depth of genocide and the requirements for healing.

### **Niisitapi ontology**

Education and socialization are guided by cultural orientations. In “seeking to understand life,” *nipaitapiiyio'pi*, and in “coming to knowing the source of life,” *ihtisipaitaoiiyio'pi*, the primary medium is through “transfer,” *a'poomo'yiopi*.

The method of inquiry among Niisitapi is entering into relationships and alliances with the spirit of knowledge. The way of coming to know is through participating with and experiencing the knowledge of the natural order. “Knowing,” *issksiniip*, is the active participation in relationship with the natural order. Knowing is “experiential,” *omohtaanistsihsp*. Knowing and knowledge are living entities, which, through relationships, live in the actions of the participants. In this case, reference can be made to “the way of life of the Niisitapi,” *Niipaitapiiyssin*, which encompasses the knowledge and wisdom.

### **Niisitapi epistemology**

In the traditional context, knowledge is connecting with *ihtisipaitaoiiyio'pi* (spirit). *Ihtisipaitaoiiyio'pi* manifests through a sacred power, one that is pervasive and manifests through all of creation. This sacred power is gained in the “dream world” and is incorporated in to the everyday world of work and play (Harrod 1992). Knowledge and

wisdom come through the ability to listen and hear the whispers of the wind, the teachings of the rock, the seasonal changes of weather, and by connecting with the animals and plants. Knowing and knowledge are the expression and manifestations of relationships that align with the natural order of the universe.

Knowledge or knowing is not directly transferable; it is gained through the alliances of interdependent relationships. Knowing is a process of “interpreting experiences with the alliances of the natural world,” *isskskataksini/aisskskatakiop'i*. This knowledge and understanding becomes a basis for effectively participating and functioning in society.

In summary, Niisitapi epistemology manifests in the “transfers,” *a'poomo'yiopi*, the theory of knowledge that all knowing comes from the source of life and through kinship alliances. It is through a complex web of relationships that Niisitapi “come to know.” Inherent in knowing is the responsibility of living the knowledge; and living the knowing is a fundamental aspect of identity and the source from which “self” emerges. These characteristics become the essential elements for interpreting the environment and for experiencing the world.

### **Niisitapi pedagogy**

Transfer, *a'poomo'yiopi*, is a process of renewing the alliances of kinship relations. Transfers are found in ceremony. The ceremonies take the form in which a common sense of transformation and transcendence is experienced, and the people (Harrod, 1992, p. 67) share the meanings associated with the transfer. As long as the people retain their connection through their ceremonies, they will retain their transformational and transcendent ways of being through the renewal of their responsibilities as instructed in the original transfer from the sacred spiritual alliances.

Knowing comes with the participation and experience of alliances. Learning is a developmental process that involves an all-inclusive process of living life. *Aatsimoyihskaani* is a concept that addresses the inter-dependencies that are involved in the processes of coming to knowing. Knowing is through the “active participation with all the alliances of life,” *kiipaitapisinnooni*, and, subsequently, knowing is the living knowledge of these relationships.

Niisitapi language education is essential in the process of coming to understanding the alliances essential to participation in a balanced world. Language is spirit. Language is the medium for entering into the relationships forming the Niisitapi culture and society; it allows humans to define their reality and the social order in which they exist. The language is the expression of the natural alliances of Niisitapi and embodies the consciousness of the people. Language has the ability to distinguish and define humanity. In other words, language links “self” to the “universe” (Bastien, 1998).

### **Decolonization for people of the Euro-centered or “white” mind**

Non-indigenous persons may wonder how they can be helpful in the healing of colonial genocidal violence. From an Indigenous perspective the primary need is dialogueing about epistemic violence. Confrontation with the history of genocide and colonization is urgent. Structural violence must be addressed. Persons who are working with Indigenous peoples should reflect critically on the context in which they are

working, whether their work explicitly or implicitly is continuing colonial violence. Persons who are invited to work with Indigenous people need to work particularly on the unconscious forms of epistemic violence their mere presence may perpetrate. Helpers of European descent need to be willing to face the impact of Euro-centered dominance in their personal history and to talk openly about its dynamics with the willingness to work toward positive change.

The importance of awareness of the significant difference in self-construction cannot be stressed enough, as should be obvious from the preceding sections in this article. Working with Indigenous peoples in the process of decolonization means that people who are not Indigenous are willing to decolonize themselves and to confront their own historical Indigenous and ancestral origins (Kremer, 2000). This is a difficult task that goes to the core of reality. In this way there can be a gradual interruption of the cycle of genocidal violence.

### **Conclusion**

In the process of healing colonial violence the fundamental step is to remember and affirm an Indigenous, culturally specific framework that provides the context for the consideration of educational, psychological, and other interventions. Use of Indigenous culturally available resources is a mandatory ingredient in any healing endeavor. The participation of Indigenous healers and Elders, both in education and psychological interventions is important. Use of Indigenous languages are invaluable, both as a means of cultural remembrance and affirmation as well as the expression of the Indigenous self. The narration of the experiences of genocidal violence holds tremendous healing potential both for individuals and communities. Witnessing the impact of past and present violence may lead to the release of generative visions that facilitate the remembrance of cultural knowledge, the celebration of relationships and alliances, the impact of Euro-centered knowledge on the basis of Indigenous paradigms, and the expression of Indigenous self and community not as retro-romantic folklore, but as viable, vital, and creative knowledge for future generations -- sovereignty, in a sense, that transcends Euro-centered notions and deletes their epistemic and other violence.

*This article is dedicated to the memory of Ingrid Washinawatok.*<sup>[i]</sup>

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<sup>i</sup>[1]We dedicate this article to the memory of Ingrid Washinawatok, a Menominee woman and the co-chair of the Indigenous Women's Network, who in 1999 was kidnapped and killed by Colombian left-wing guerilla forces during her visit to the U'wa people who have been struggling against the intrusion of oil companies, such as Occidental Petroleum and Shell Oil. The purpose of her trip was to support the continuation of Uwa traditional ways of life by assisting them in establishing a cultural education system.