# The Indigenous Matriarch Manifesto

## Kinship, Matriarchy, and Indigenous Healing

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Indigenous matriarchy as a dynamic framework for healing intergenerational trauma and sustaining cultural continuity. Grounded in Diné (Navajo) and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) knowledge systems, it employs an Indigenous feminist, narrative-based methodology that positions lived experience as theory. Situating personal and familial histories within the broader context of colonial boarding school policies, the paper argues that disruptions to matriarchal roles and kinship systems have had lasting impacts on community wellbeing. Through analysis of women-centered practices—including foodways, ceremony, and relational accountability—it demonstrates that healing is enacted through collective relationships rather than individualized models of care. The article identifies Indigenous women as central agents in maintaining cultural knowledge and facilitating intergenerational recovery. It concludes that Indigenous matriarchy remains an active, adaptive system of governance and care, and calls for its greater recognition within Indigenous health frameworks and feminist scholarship.


**Keywords**: Indigenous matriarchy, intergenerational trauma, kinship systems, Indigenous feminism, cultural continuity

### Introduction

This paper examines Indigenous matriarchy as a foundational framework for healing, through which trauma-informed recovery, resilience, and cultural continuity are sustained through kinship. Employing a blended Indigenous theoretical–narrative methodology, the author situates lived experience within Indigenous feminist, matriarchal, decolonial, and historical trauma scholarship grounded in Navajo (Diné) and Nez Perce (Nimiipuu) knowledge systems. Raised by parents impacted by residential boarding school policies, the author contextualizes personal healing within broader colonial disruptions of Indigenous matriarchal structures, women's cultural knowledge transmission, and relational systems of care and kinship that establish a universal manifesto of understanding.

Through self-reflective analysis of women-centered teachings, relational responsibilities, and everyday cultural practices, this paper demonstrates how Indigenous matriarchy functions as an embodied practice and healing system rather than a symbolic or romanticized tradition.

Without pathologizing unresolved historical grief and trauma, Indigenous matriarchal knowledge is demonstrated through culturally and trauma-informed care, nourishment with first foods and gathering, ceremonial practices, relational accountability, and intergenerational responsibility grounded in kinship systems and language.

By weaving theory with lived experiences, this work affirms Indigenous women as healers, cultural knowledge keepers, and sustainers of life whose labor is central to disrupting trauma through ancestral healing practices that move beyond survivance. The paper posits that Indigenous matriarchy remains a living, adaptive system of healing and governance, and calls for greater awareness and recognition of matriarchal frameworks within Indigenous health and healing, and for the creation of an Indigenous feminist manifesto that is relatable and universal to Indigenous women around the world.

This work is grounded in an Indigenous matriarchal epistemology in which kinship functions as methodology, ethics, and theory. Within Diné (Navajo) and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) knowledge systems, Indigenous feminism emerges from relational accountability to land, clan, and community rather than individualist or abstract feminist frameworks. Self-location and lived experience are, therefore, not supplemental to theory but constitute theory when situated within collective histories and cultural teachings. This anchor framework allows subsequent narrative and analytic sections to be read as Indigenous feminist praxis rather than personal reflection.

## Blended Indigenous Theoretical–Narrative Approach and Autoethnographic Orientation

This article employs a blended Indigenous theoretical–narrative methodology grounded in Diné (Navajo) and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) knowledge systems.[1,2,3,4,5,6,7] Rather than separating theory from lived experience, this approach understands Indigenous knowledge as relational, land-based, and enacted through kinship responsibilities, first foods practices, ceremonial participation, and everyday cultural responsibilities. Narrative is not treated as anecdotal evidence but as an analytic site through which Indigenous matriarchal theory is practiced and examined.

This methodology is inherently trauma-informed, centering safety, relational accountability, cultural continuity, and intergenerational responsibility. Healing is

[1] Esther Belin, *From the Belly of My Beauty* (University of Arizona Press, 1999).

[2] Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses: The Navajo Nation, Gender, and the Politics of Tradition," *Wicazo Sa Review* 21, no. 1 (2006): 9–28, https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.2006.0003.

[3] Cheryl Ellenwood, *Contributions to Indigenous Leadership and Community Development Initiatives* [Report] (Center for Native American Research and Collaboration, Washington State University, 2021).

[4] Rebecca Paul, *Listening to the Birds: A Nez Perce Woman's Journey of Self-Discovery and Healing* (Washington State University Press, 2025).

[5] Beth Piatote, *Antíkoni* (Yale University Press, 2013).

[6] Melanie Yazzie, "Decolonizing Development in Diné Bikéyah: Resource Extraction, Anti-Capitalism, and Survivance," *Journal of Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 1–25.

[7] Farina King, *The Earth Memory Compass: Diné Landscapes and Education In The Twentieth Century* (University Press of Kansas, 2019).

understood as collective and enacted through kinship systems, language, land relationships, and ceremonial practices rather than individualized or disclosure-based models of recovery. Ethical rigor is maintained through refusal, cultural protection, and non-extractive engagement, recognizing that withholding ceremonial and relational knowledge is itself a trauma-informed methodological practice.[8,9,10,11] Autoethnographic and narrative elements in this study are employed not as confessional or self-disclosure practices, but as Indigenous storywork and analytic methods grounded in relational accountability and collective history.[12]

Within Indigenous research paradigms, lived experience is understood as a legitimate source of knowledge when situated within cultural teachings, kinship systems, and historical contexts.[13,14,15,16] This approach resists extractive research practices that demand disclosure of trauma or ceremonial knowledge as evidence and instead prioritizes ethical refusal, cultural protection, and participant safety—including the author as a relational subject. Consistent with Indigenous trauma-informed research principles, narrative is used selectively and intentionally to illustrate theory in practice while avoiding pathologization or harm.[17,18,19] In this framing, autoethnography functions as a methodological strength that honors Indigenous cultural knowledge, rather than a limitation requiring external validation.

The methodological foundation of this work draws from Indigenous research paradigms that privilege relationality, responsibility, and community accountability.[20,21,22] Knowledge production is understood as a reciprocal process rooted in lived relationships to land, culture, and community rather than a detached observation. As such, this essay situates personal experience

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[8] Ellenwood, *Contributions to Indigenous Leadership*.

[9] Joseph P. Gone, "A Community-Based Treatment for Native American Historical Trauma: Prospects for Evidence-Based Practice," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 81, no. 5 (2013): 751–762, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033720.

[10] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014).

[11] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Zed Books, 2012).

[12] Jo-ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (UBC Press, 2008).

[13] Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

[14] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As we Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[15] Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Fernwood Publishing, 2008).

[16] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

[17] Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra M. DeBruyn, "The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief," *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 8, no. 2 (1998): 56–78.

[18] Bonnie Duran and Eduardo Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (State University of New York Press, 1995).

[19] Gone, "A Community-Based Treatment for Native American Historical Trauma."

[20] King, *The Earth Memory Compass*.

[21] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

[22] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*.

within broader historical and structural contexts of settler colonialism, federal Indian policies related to residential boarding schools, and the ongoing processes of assimilation that have disrupted Indigenous cultural practices related to first foods systems, hunting and gathering subsistence practices, and generational cultural knowledge transmission through kinship systems.[23,24]

Historical trauma theory provides an interpretive framework for understanding the intergenerational impacts of colonial violence within Indigenous communities while avoiding deficit-based or pathologizing narratives.[25,26,27] This framework is paired with Indigenous scholarship that centers Indigenous women as cultural knowledge keepers, healers, and theorists whose embodied knowledge sustains families and communities across generations.[28,29,30,31,32,33]

Food sovereignty is approached not only as a political or environmental movement, but as an embodied healing practice enacted through everyday relationships to traditional foods, land stewardship, and ceremonial responsibilities that enact kinship and community. As Indigenous people, we heal in community, not isolation. By following cultural practices and ceremonies that involve getting out onto the land to gather first foods, fish, hunt, and engage with family (both immediate and extended) and community, this allows for the transfer of cultural knowledge and healing practices related to the land and ceremony.

By braiding theory with lived illustration, this methodology resists colonial separations between mind and body, theory and practice, and scholar and community. It affirms Diné philosophies, exerts Nimiipuu food sovereignty, and blends both as a site of Indigenous resistance and survivance and advances Indigenous-centered approaches to healing that remain grounded in women's medicinal and food source knowledge systems, intergenerational relationality and kinship, and cultural continuity that defines Indigenous feminist manifestation of a more holistic and inclusive praxis.

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[23] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*.

[24] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409–427.

[25] Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native Peoples* (Teachers College Press, 2006).

[26] Gone, "A Community-Based Treatment for Native American Historical Trauma."

[27] Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart-Jordan and Lemyra M. DeBruyn, "So She May Walk in Balance: Integrating the Impact of Historical Trauma in the Treatment of Native American Indian Women," in *Racism in the Lives of Women: Testimony, Theory, and Guides to Antiracist Practice*, ed. Jeanne Adleman and Gloria M. Enguídanos (Haworth Press, 1995), 345–368.

[28] Joyce Green, ed., *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Fernwood Publishing, 2007).

[29] Denetdale, "Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses."

[30] Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "The Value of Oral History on the Path to Diné/Navajo Sovereignty," *American Indian Quarterly* 33, no.1 (2009): 79–87.

[31] Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (Press Gang Publishers, 1996).

[32] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*.

[33] Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Beacon Press, 1986).

In keeping with a trauma-informed Indigenous methodology, the following narrative is shared selectively to illuminate how matriarchal teachings emerge through relational encounter rather than disclosure or admittance. What follows is a situated narrative offered not as personal anecdote but as a lived illustration of Indigenous matriarchal knowledge in practice, marking a turning point in how patriarchal influence became visible within my own healing process.

## Healing is Generational

*"To really begin your healing, you have to unlearn looking at yourself through the eyes of your father." Kaupapa Maori Elder aka Wahine Wisdom*

It's been ten years since I visited Aotearoa and met a dear Maori elder who passed during COVID. Her knowledge, wisdom, and spirit are a memory for many of us today. The healing I experienced with her left an impression on my life as it relates to understanding how patriarchal influences can be subtle and unknowing. Since that destined encounter, I have been working intentionally to unlearn how I view myself through the settler colonial gaze and patriarchal influences in my life.

As I struggled internally with what she taught me that evening, I was unaware of how much she would influence my journey from that day forward. Not only did her words take me by surprise, but I also had no idea how much of an impact she would have on my healing. I believe that's when the story of my resilience and overcoming began.[34] What I thought I knew began to change drastically, and that's how awakening happened for me. Shortly after, I signed up for a Feminism in Education course and discovered bell hooks' *Understanding Patriarchy* (2004) and spent the next semester interrogating how the "imperialist white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" influenced my understanding of womanhood.

At the time, I vacillated between self-identifying as a feminist or a womanist and read critical works by Black feminist scholars Patricia Hill Collins,[35] Angela Davis,[36,37] and Alice Walker.[38] Coursework included readings and critical discourse on white feminists Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir,[39,40] who I thought were removed from what I knew as an Indigenous woman. Suffice to say, as an Indigenous woman, I come from two very distinct nations that have wrestled with patriarchal influence since 1492. While growing up Diné, white feminist ideologies were not always quite what I experienced. Up to that semester, I was unfamiliar with feminist theory and began researching Indigenous women scholars for my assigned "alternate" or

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[34] Green, *Making Space*.

[35] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics Of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2000).

[36] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (Random House, 1981).

[37] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Culture & Politics* (Vintage Books, 1989).

[38] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

[39] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 10th anniversary ed. (Routledge, 2000).

[40] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier (Vintage Books, [1949] 2011).

secondary course readings. I looked beyond the course syllabus to identify what seemed most appropriate to the feminism I grew up with and understood. During that time in my academic journey, I encountered the works of Indigenous women scholars such as Green,[41] Maracle,[42] and Goeman and Denetdale,[43] which marked the beginning of my own intellectual self-discovery.

Feminism, from my lived experience, oversimplifies the deeply embedded relationships I have with the women who raised me. I realize it tends to reveal more about how unsettling the settler colonial gaze can be, especially when explaining white feminism theoretically. From an Indigenous perspective, as a Diné and Nimiipuu, the word feminist lends itself to white feminism and white supremacy, which often doesn't embody what I lived and experienced in childhood, teenhood, young adulthood, marriage, or motherhood.[44,45,46,47,48] Oftentimes, white feminism erases Indigenous women's experiences due to its lack of intersectionality and its upholding of patriarchal influences, and why I believe Indigenous matriarchy is greater than feminism.

## Kinship Protocols and Relational Accountability

As a Diné, we are taught to introduce our clans before we begin our work, as my mother reminded me: "*k'é béego*," loosely translated as "it is by and through kinship." Whether it is an academic work-related presentation or being out in any Indigenous community, we first introduce ourselves using our clan system. It is a Diné cultural protocol, and understanding this practice and way of being is how we recognize and respect those who came before us and those we are in the presence of to maintain cultural understandings of who we are in relationship to the land and where our clans comes from, what our clans are known for, and how our clans came into to being. The intricate social-archaeological kinship system known as *K'é* is not only how we introduce ourselves, but also how we express our relationality to one another.[49] My first clan is Tsé naha bił nii (With the Rock or Sleeping Rock) clan, my second clan is born and raised by Tł izi łání (Many Goats) clan, my third and maternal clan is Tsí naa'jinii (Black Streaked Wood) and my fourth and paternal clan is Bįįh'bitoo'ni (Deer in Water or Deer Spring) and Nez Perce.

Grounded in the matriarchal cultural knowledge that also informs and defines Diné epistemology and methodology, as a young matriarch, I find that Indigenous Cultural Knowledge (ICK) is how I ground myself from the

[41] Green, *Making Space*.

[42] Maracle, *I Am Woman*.

[43] Mishauna R. Goeman and Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Native Feminisms: Legacies, Interventions, and Indigenous Sovereignties," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 9-13, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/wic.0.0035.

[44] Belin, *From the Belly of My Beauty*.

[45] Denetdale, "Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses."

[46] Denetdale, "The Value of Oral History on the Path to Diné/Navajo Sovereignty."

[47] King, *The Earth Memory Compass*.

[48] Yazzie, "Decolonizing Development in Diné Bikéyah."

[49] Hollie Kulago, "Theorizing Community and School Partnerships with Diné Youth," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 28, no. 2 (2012): 60-75.

center and the spirit of all my work and writings. When I taught classes, I assigned my students the previously mentioned Indigenous female authors solely to uplift and share their work. Growing up Diné, we are taught that mothers are the first teachers.

As an emergent scholar, at that time in my academic journey, I was a much younger person and had not come to my own awareness or identity as a matriarch in training. I introduced to all my classes Indigenous cultural protocols and followed in the steps of previous Indigenous scholars who created introductory statements that situated and located who they were in relation to self. I believe in that practice when teaching and find it helpful when assigning critical self-reflection essays on the first and towards the end of the semester to circle back. A significant part of my scholarship is grounded in critical self-reflection and has become a part of my practice. Personally, I believe self-reflexive exercises helped me along my healing journey, showing me how much can change in a few months and how important they can be to healing, personal growth, and professional development.

As Indigenous women, we must also acknowledge the teachings given to us before we decide to write about them. Whether it's elders or people, what we know is an extension of our family, community, and nation, and is valid ICK. In my research of Indigenous feminisms, I found dissertations with personal statements, even read books with prologues,[50] which created a space for and situated scholars, "this is who I am and where I come from" as a natural and normal part of introducing oneself within the academy. In Nimiipuu, when one states who they are in relation to clan-family, community, and nation, they are speaking from their truth.[51,52,53]

Although how one person does this may differ from one nation to the next, we understand, and even if we may not all agree, there is only one way to introduce ourselves, and it always includes our family, community, and/or nation. We also respect the universal law and cultural protocols that, when someone does indeed share something as intimate and personal as their clans, these realities are what we come to learn as truths and practice in our own research today.

ICK is the heartbeat of Indigenous methodologies for my work. I remember a time when I thought Vine Deloria was the end-all and be-all of American Indian Studies (AIS), and for my master's thesis, I used to say "Vine is Fine" as a point of reference for any AIS readings and literature. I'm GenX, so from the time of the 19th century, when AIS courses were taught from Custer Died for Your Sins, and God Is Red, as an outlier, I can look back on my formal education and realize how patriarchal influences pushed Indigenous male scholars before Indigenous female scholars. For example, by the time I discovered my favorite Indigenous female scholars, such as Lee Maracle.[54] How could anyone forget *I Am Woman* when deconstructing

[50] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*.

[51] Paul, *Listening to the Birds*.

[52] Piatote, *Antíkoni*.

[53] Tuck, "Suspending Damage."

[54] Maracle, *I Am Woman*.

and critiquing the patriarchy and its ties to white supremacy?

When we say to the world that we are going forth with an Indigenous matriarchal methodology and political statement, it is what we, as Indigenous matriarchs, must do.[55,56] When universities say they're about Indigenous research, yet there is limited space for Indigenous women, it reminds me we still have work to do. Recently, I took a class on community-based research and design, and when it came to the course readings on outreach, I'm not sure why, but I was taken aback by how simple it seems for non-Indigenous researchers to understand that they are guests within any Indigenous community, yet it is something that must still be taught and included before research can begin.

When working in any community, it is imperative that guests of any Indigenous community engage in meaning-making that is reflective of an Indigenous perspective, which implies they must also work with and be led by Indigenous people, not non-Indigenous or Native academics or researchers.

The foundation that I have is based on my Diné upbringing. I was raised by Diné matriarchs who showed me firsthand what it means to become a woman. We are first born as a child, a girl child to be specific, and for me, who was raised in a settler colonial world, it's taken me all 54 years of my life to understand what little I know about being a young matriarch. I honor all the Diné women who came before me, from my great-grandmothers and grandparents, who did not speak English, to my parents, the Boomer generation, who were sent away to federal boarding schools across the Navajo reservation and into Southern Utah.

Today, when I listen to my parents talk about their experiences, neither of them laments and wish they could go back. What they remember and cherish, and recall, are memories of friendships, sports and recreational activities and introduction to ways of this glistening world. As an Indigenous woman who speaks from what the academy has named a feminist, I write as a young matriarch. As a mother, not only to three children, but my plus two who became a part of my life later.

I never understood what a mother does, or is to her family, until I had children of my own. Diné have teachings about motherhood and the respect and dignity that come with the childbearing years all begins with K'é. Although my childbearing years are done, I have begun the next part of my journey as a woman, into becoming a grandmother. I welcome these years. Reluctantly, hesitantly, and distinctively with one desire, to create a safe and healthy home environment.

It's taking me a long time to stand up on my own and look back at where I've come from, and to have a positive outlook on life. This Indigenous matriarch manifesto is about reclamation and healing.

It's about identity.

It's about livelihood.

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[55] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*.

[56] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*.

Most of all, it's about Indigenous women's liberation.

When it comes to the liberation of Indigenous people throughout the world, there seems to be a pervasive colonial thought or theory, concept, or map that gives the idea that assimilation was the best thing that happened for Indigenous people. Historically, it was the most culturally devastating, and yet somehow, Europeans and their descendants believe they brought Indigenous people civilization. Building from the Mujeres Zapatistas movement, this Indigenist matriarch manifesto is an honoring of every Indigenous woman and child who suffered and endured the needless oppression from settler colonial patriarchal influences.

As a mother in the collective Indigenous healing movement, there is a new consciousness and understanding of what it means to be a good relative or "five-fingered being" or "earth surface people" according to my Diné elders. It involves a lot of relearning ancestral practices and unlearning of the disrupting and historical influences of the western patriarchy on modern and contemporary Indigenous societies, especially as it pertains to violence against women and children.

I am Diné through my mother, and healing as a practice opened doors for my children and me to talk about the unresolved historical and contemporary grief and childhood/adult traumas that prevented our healing. Unhealed pain and unresolved traumas have led many Indigenous families and people away from their culture, and when in recovery, the return to Indigenous cultural practices helps to challenge and question western patriarchal influences that resulted in this manifesto.

This is written for all the women and little girls (and boys) of the world who understand their mothers' love, fear, and suffering in silence at the hands of the settler colonial patriarchy. Current Indigenous research findings include scholarship from Indigenous matriarchs who not only lead their families through their critical works, but also through their kinship and family responsibilities, by virtue of their cultural education and protection of children.

In the early formative years, education and kinship practices safeguarded children's lives and taught them where to find food, shelter, and water. In early education, the practice of kinship included knowing our clans and where or who to seek help and shelter with; as well as survival, including the protection of the elderly, who were the teachers of land-based practices, language, kinship, and ceremonial practices. The survival and future of any Indigenous nation thus began with the women and children of the family clan to sustain the future of the People.

In contemporary matriarchy, there is a direct line of ancestry in which every female born child is also named and recognized as a descendant of a clan mother. While it is known that male children are also born into matriarchy, however, in matriarchy, it is understood that a male child would not remain in the clan, unlike a female child. A female child will bring children into the world and grow the family, and a male child will marry and move to live with his female partner to

help her create her family, and her children will then belong to her mother's clan.

In a matrilineal descent system, an individual is considered to belong to the same descent group as their mother. This ancient matrilineal descent pattern contrasts with the currently more popular pattern of patrilineal descent, from which a family name is usually derived. For Diné, it begins at birth and with the *Kinaalda* when we are taught to be reverent and mindful of our state of mind and to grind corn that will be used to make a corn cake to feed the people at the end of the ceremony. This is also when we are taught to let go of our childhoods and are gifted "new" clothes as we reemerge into the world as a newly blessed young woman. I didn't understand the significance and meaning of matriarchy until I learned the patriarchy doesn't raise daughters to be matriarchs. It raises daughters to exist behind the head of the household, which is contrary to Indigenous matriarchy, where the woman is the head of the household. In Nimiipuu it is common knowledge women provide well over 50% of the staple diet with first foods. She is the head of her domain, and everything she works for is for the betterment and protection of the home, which is for the children. It's taken me a long time to understand this about being born and raised in a matriarchy.

Growing up I learned matriarchy represents the female expression of childhood, adulthood, motherhood, sisterhood, and elderly grandmotherly wisdom. The vastly different and cultural clashes I grew up with changed when I met the patriarchal influences which created in me traumatic memories that cut a deep and cavernous soul wound. I learned later as a young adult, that unhealed patriarchal influences can continue when not addressed and harm the lives of children and leave scars that don't belong to the children.[57,58,59,60] What I learned taught me, healing also involves rematriation, which is a sacred return and honoring of Indigenous matriarchy. Rematriation is a critical and key element to healing throughout the global Indigenous community.

Indigenous matriarchal cultural knowledge is ancestral and rooted in kinship systems that predate the colonial forms of governance. As a result, the following Indigenist matriarchal manifesto represents a universal reckoning of what Indigenous women around the world can rediscover when centering on motherhood, children, family, community, and nation. Together, these commitments articulate an Indigenous matriarchal framework that is trauma-informed, grounded in relational accountability, cultural continuity, and the protection of women, children, LGBTQ+, Elders, and future generations through kinship-based practices.

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[57] Brave Heart and DeBruyn, "The American Indian Holocaust."

[58] Duran and Eduardo Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology.*

[59] Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound.*

[60] Gone, "A Community-Based Treatment for Native American Historical Trauma."

### Indigenous Matriarchy Manifesto Commitments:

- **Centers and protects** the safety and well-being of women, children, LGBTQ+ relatives, and Elders as a foundational responsibility of matriarchal care.
- **Supports and uplifts** children as carriers of hope, knowledge, and future possibilities.
- **Works for generations yet to come**, recognizing responsibility to unborn descendants whom we may never meet.
- **Honors kinship systems** as generational obligations, recognizing kinfolk as family bound by responsibility rather than proximity.
- **Reclaims and transmits ancestral language(s)** as a practice of cultural continuity and intergenerational healing.
- **Learns from the land**, acknowledging Mother Earth as the first mother and original matriarch.
- **Remembers and upholds** songs, ceremonies, and gathering practices that sustain ancestral relationships and collective resilience.
- **Values first foods** and ancestral subsistence teachings as sources of healing, nourishment, sustainability, and cultural knowledge.
- **Practices healing collectively**, affirming that healing is relational and enacted within families, communities, and nations rather than in isolation.

In reviewing this short list, matriarchs work daily to maintain their relationships with children and elders who also teach the children, immediate and extended kinfolk, and clans that help them to protect and sustain the lands of their ancestors. Together, these commitments articulate a matriarchal framework grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and lived experience, positioning trauma-informed care, cultural responsibility, and relational accountability via kinship as central to Indigenous healing and governance.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that Indigenous matriarchy is neither symbolic nor historical, but a living framework of culture, governance, and social organization, healing, and relational responsibility enacted through kinship and Indigenous women's lives. Drawing from Indigenous scholarship alongside lived experience as a Diné–Nimiipuu woman and young matriarch, I have situated healing as a collective, intergenerational practice rooted in kinship, land, language, and ceremony rather than an individualized or solely clinical process.

By centering Indigenous women's knowledge as epistemological rather than supplemental, this work challenges colonial academic conventions that separate theory from lived experience and extracts Indigenous knowledge through

disclosure. Instead, it advances an Indigenous relational methodology that honors refusal, protects culture, and recognizes care, memory, and accountability as forms of intellectual labor. In this framing, matriarchal healing functions as governance—sustaining families, communities, and nations through cultural responsibility rather than hierarchy. It asserts that Indigenous matriarchal knowledge endures not because it has been preserved or unscathed by settler colonial patriarchal influences, but because it has adapted, resisted erasure, and continues to persist through Indigenous matriarchal practices where women who govern, heal, and carry responsibility forward—often do so without recognition, however, are also never without a purpose or meaning.

*What follows is offered as a closing declaration situating this work within Indigenous matriarchal epistemologies.*

*A Closing Refusal of Erasure:*

- **I locate myself** as a Diné–Nimiipuu woman whose scholarship emerges from lived responsibility as a daughter, mother, and young matriarch, accountable to ancestors, community, and future generations rather than extractive academic norms.
- **I refuse** colonial frameworks that separate theory from lived Indigenous womanhood or treat Indigenous healing, governance, and matriarchy as symbolic, historical, or supplementary to Western knowledge systems.
- **I affirm** Indigenous matriarchy as an ongoing generational practice of relational governance enacted through care, kinship, land stewardship, memory, and cultural responsibility, rather than through domination or institutional hierarchy and recognition.
- **I protect** ceremony, relational ancestral knowledge, and Indigenous data from disclosure, commodification, and extractive academic consumption, recognizing refusal and withholding as ethical and methodologically rigorous practices.
- **I practice** healing as a matriarchal responsibility—one that is collective rather than individual, embodied rather than abstract, and sustained through Indigenous women's everyday labor of being trauma-informed, survival, and remembrance.
- **I carry forward** this work not as recovery of a lost past, but as continuity: asserting that Indigenous matriarchal knowledge lives in the present and will persist through Indigenous women who govern without permission.

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Dr. Renee Tsinigine Holt (Navajo/Nez Perce) is a Post Doctoral Researcher for the Indigenous Resilience Center (IRes) at the University of Arizona (UA). She is from the Tsé naha bił nii (With the Rock or Sleeping Rock) clan, born and raised by Tł izi łání (Many Goats) clan, her maternal clan is Tsí naa'jinii (Black Streaked Wood) and her paternal clan is Bįįh'bitoo'ni (Deer in Water or Deer Spring) and Nez Perce. She received her Ph.D. in Cultural Studies and Social Thought in Education at Washington State University-Pullman.

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