

NATIVE WOMEN IN RESERVE POLITICS: STRATEGIES AND STRUGGLES¹

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Introduction: Indian Reserves and the State

The socio-legal status of Canada's Indian people is governed by *The Indian Act of Canada*, which for more than a century has assigned more limited fundamental rights to women than to men. The specification of a distinct legal status for Indians emerged in the nineteenth century in order to limit access to lands reserved by the federal government for Indian use. Initially, the definition of 'Indian' was reasonably broad and included non-Indian spouses and the children of these marriages. In 1869, however, the Indian Act was amended to deny membership to women who married non-Indians and to their children. Henceforth, legal status was determined by patrilineal affiliation. A married woman had the socio-legal status of her husband and was required to leave her natal band when she married an 'Indian' of another band or a non-Indian. Rights to residence on her natal reserve and access to its resources were denied even to divorced or widowed women who wished to return to their kin.

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Until 1951, other sex-discriminatory provisions limited women's social and political rights. Women of 'Indian' status (henceforth: 'status women') were denied the right to vote in band elections, to hold elected office, and to partake in public meetings deciding band business. Limits were placed on their right to inherit property. Widows could not inherit their husband's property unless they were judged by a federal agent to be of good moral character. Nor could a widow manage her husband's estate.

Although the remaining restrictions of the Indian Act were not lifted until 1985, social practices among Indian bands did become more flexible. In defiance of the Indian Act, some bands granted non-status women the right to residence and welcomed the children of women who resided elsewhere. Women formed voluntary associations that embraced both status and non-status members in order to preserve social unity and to provide for cultural continuity. As we shall see, because of the particular nature of community/state relations, these associations provided an alternative forum for women's political action on the reserves.

Native Indian communities differ from other Canadian communities in three important regards: first, their community government, usually an elected council, has minimal powers of administration and in all respects is subject to rulings of the federal government; second, community life is associated closely with residence on Indian reserves; and third, because the land base of the reserves is either inadequate or impoverished, the majority of native communities suffer chronic unemployment, poverty, and dependency on state-controlled welfare.

Analysis of the political processes in reserve communities suffering economic and social deprivation has led to the conclusion that internal political influence is gained by individuals acting as 'middlemen', or power-brokers, between the state and the community. Specifically, it is argued that the power of an individual or elected council rests on the ability to control scarce resources that derive from the state (Larsen 1983: 107). These resources include funds for community administration, grants for community development projects and temporary job creation schemes, and subsidized housing for band members resident on the reserve. A larger power base cannot be created by the band council because the community is bound to the state by the practices of 'welfare colonialism' or 'wardship' (Tanner 1983: 2). In consequence, competition for political office revolves around the struggle to control the same few resources. Individuals or organizations which seek direct access to these resources thereby challenge the influence of the council. If their success endures over a

long period they, like the council, become mediating agents who redistribute highly desired goods gained from outside the community. In rare cases, these individuals or organizations may become so successful that they emerge as rival structures to the council with the ability to sway the political process.

Regrettably, studies of the role of power-brokers in community politics have focussed only on the actions and strategies of elected councillors, who in many native communities are predominantly male. To my knowledge there are no comparable studies of women's struggles to gain access to the same kinds of resources and hence to influence community decision-making.

The purpose of this article is to describe a community in which women do exercise control over critical community resources and in consequence, quite apart from the band council, shape community decision-making. I present a case study of women's participation in the politics of a Carrier Indian reserve in central British Columbia and argue that in this case women obtained and sustained public influence partially because they formed voluntary associations that have access to critical political resources controlled by the state. I suggest that voluntary associations have the attributes of political 'teams' (Bailey 1969: 28, 45): they are led by a core of elite women and have members bound to the core by ties of family loyalty and by ties of patronage whereby followers are gained by the leaders' careful distribution of scarce goods.

I further argue that the political interventions of women's voluntary associations alter the political process in two significant ways. First, they place new emphasis on political issues that women see as central to their ability to carry out their traditional responsibilities as nurturers and providers. In so doing, new networks of alliances, which are essentially between women, emerge to challenge established political practices. Second, once they gain control over sufficient political resources, the associations become rival structures to the council. This rivalry will exist even when the associations are linked directly to individuals holding political office.

Village Life and Political Organization

The Carrier Indians are located in the Nechako plateau of central British Columbia where they are settled in a number of small reserve villages. Once dependent upon a mixed economy of subsistence bush production (fishing, hunting, gathering) and wage labour, they now

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rely primarily upon unearned income and bush subsistence. The Carrier are plagued by underemployment and unemployment, and the private sector offers very few employment opportunities. On the reserve, work is limited to a handful of positions in small businesses. While small scale milling operations exist on some reserves, these cannot offer regular employment to all who seek work.² Employment in the nearby white communities is rare and insecure. In many of the reserve communities, job opportunities are restricted to positions created by the needs of state bureaucracy: a handful of administrative and clerical positions, community service roles, seasonal bush labour, and seasonal state-funded job creation schemes. The community described here suffers from all these factors. It has no employment through reserve-based businesses. In the absence of state job-creation schemes employment can exceed 85%. In short, theirs is an economy of dependency characterized by social assistance, state controlled employment schemes, and intermittent casual labour for the dominant population.

The division of domestic and subsistence labour is predominately along gender lines. Women perform the bulk of domestic duties, gardening, salmon fishing, and food processing. Men hunt, trap,³ fish occasionally, and assist women with their work. But for the most part women and men work independently of one another. Women control the organization of their work and the distribution of surplus food resources. Men commonly, but not always, hunt without women and they personally select their own male hunting companions.

The extended family of three or four generations is the critical unit of production and consumption. Whether the main source of income is state transfer payments, pensions, social assistance, etc., or a combination of wages, unearned income and subsistence production, economic resources are shared among closely related kin. At the same time, individual resources are not common property. Spouses personally handle their incomes and ownership of such items as cars,

2 The single exception to this is Tanizul Timber Ltd. of the Stewart Trembleur Band, which has a large tree-farm licence and is a secure source of employment for the surrounding communities.

3 Opportunities to trap are constrained by large-scale resource exploitation and settlement, which have destroyed animal populations in many areas, and by the need for levels of capital investment unavailable to most band members. In the band under discussion, only a handful of traplines can now be utilized. The majority of these are leased to other trappers due to the owners' lack of capital.

trucks, and boats. Pensioners and workers, for example, independently manage their incomes, which they share with kin as they choose. Women's unearned income - social assistance, family allowance and pensions - is an important family resource.

Family loyalty is at the heart of the kinship system and community politics. Families are ranked vertically. Those who have claims to traditional rank and high status are politically prominent. Although village factions are identified with prominent families, membership of any unit cannot be identified unequivocally. For each alleged faction there exists an undisputed core of two or three closely related families, but the core's following is hard to pinpoint. Small, economically weak families and individuals pragmatically forge alliances within these factions, which they legitimate by claiming kinship, affinal, or friendship ties. Since most families are related to the factional cores in one way or another, allegiances are fluid, ambiguous and negotiable.

For political and administrative purposes, the local level of government is the band chief and council. The council hires administrators and a clerical support staff. As well, it appoints a number of advisory committees, commonly composed of members of the leading families and band elders, to guide the decisions of the council and the administrative staff. Women and men occupy elected and appointed office.⁴ In keeping with the higher number of male reserve residents, it is common to find more men than women on the council. Nevertheless, at public band meetings, held by the elected council, the sex ratio is often reversed. In the absence of their husbands and adult sons, women come to represent their families and households. Wives and husbands speak out individually and no opinion takes priority over the other.

Council authority is delegated by the federal government and is limited to minor decisions and administrative by-laws. Fiscal control remains in the hands of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DINA), which has direct control over band resources, capital funds, and administration budgets. Reserve resource exploitation requires licencing by DINA and economic development occurs only with state assistance. In short, the band councils are a parapolitical

4 It is interesting to note that women first ran for elected office in 1954, the first election after amendments to the *Indian Act* granted them this right. Since then, women have routinely sought office.

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structure directly encapsulated by the state system. That is, they are "partly independent of, and partly regulated by, larger encapsulating political structures" (Bailey 1969: 12). Their authority is limited to community administration and subject to the discretionary powers of one state bureaucracy, the DINA (Tanner 1983: 19).

The chief and council function as mediators to the federal government and its funding agencies. Jobs and community funds derive from state officials and are distributed by the chief and council and the administrators who act as patrons in an economic system that has few opportunities for expansion. In effect, office holders publicly manage resources that in other circumstances would be private property or individual concerns. For example, as on reserves elsewhere, the provision of new housing, the renovation of existing housing, or the expansion of community facilities are all tied to state-controlled job creation and community improvement schemes. Similarly, the quest for personal goods, household furnishing, children's clothing, amenities for the elderly etc., is a public not a personal matter since band members must compete for a share of the social assistance funds and services.

Given that desired goods are insufficient to meet everyone's needs, allegations of unfair distribution abound. Accordingly, chiefs, councillors and administrators are drawn into factional disputes and regularly denounced for favouritism. Individually or collectively, office holders are challenged in one of two ways: they can be removed from office or they can have their areas of influence taken from them. The latter is rare and occurs only when other institutions, voluntary associations or small family-based businesses for example, compete successfully for state funds and gain control over community developments which generate jobs. Moreover, these other institutions persist only when they can continue to compete successfully against the band council for the same political resources.

An important political resource of Indians is their ideology (Larsen 1983; Tanner 1983: 33), which in this case rests on the ideal of 'looking after the people'. Traditionally, Carrier women assumed responsibilities as family heads, usually in co-operation with a male peer. Currently, women's domestic responsibilities are undifferentiated from community obligations. Women are expected to share their surplus food, to assist young people, and to intervene in the domestic disputes of others in an effort to restore harmony. Furthermore, women are expected to provide care through the assumption of community service roles such as health workers, drug and alcohol counsellors, child care workers, and the like. Among Carrier bands,

serious political actors are known as good providers - persons able and willing to support others through sharing scarce goods and by providing job opportunities. Pragmatic politics must be justified as fulfillment of moral responsibilities. This offers women a unique ideological resource, namely accomplishment of their traditional nurturing roles within the context of political action, as the changing dynamic of the women's voluntary associations illustrates.

Women and their Voluntary Associations

1. *Domestic priorities and the struggle for community services*

Women's voluntary associations were first introduced to the Carrier as auxiliaries to the church hierarchy and as community groups dedicated to maternal health and child care. It was not until about 1944, when Indian women across the west formed provincial associations, that Carrier women's groups gained autonomy from church authority and forged inter-reserve networks. Carrier women, like other western Indian women, formed local chapters of The Native Mothers Guild⁵ to deal with domestic crises, to provide guidance to young mothers, and to improve community services essential to domestic well being. Membership at the community and provincial levels now includes status and non-status women. Local chapters are united by a provincial executive.

According to its earliest members, members of The Native Mothers Guild were initially apolitical; they restricted their activities to individual family needs confining themselves to a narrow interpretation of their motto, 'home and country'. Nevertheless, as time passed the women found they could not meet their domestic goals without political action. In order to care successfully for their families, they needed new community services: water and sewer systems, improved medical care, electricity, and the like. The quest for these services brought the women into confrontation with the reserve administration, DINA, and the provincial and federal governments. Understandably, the Guild's members voiced their concerns as women-mothers and daughters charged with the nurture of infants and the care of the elderly:⁶

5 Fictitious names are given to the women's associations in order to protect band and personal identities.

6 All quotations are taken from interviews with women actively engaged in women's voluntary associations.

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We went to the Guild's meetings wherever they happened. I spoke out for our dying babies. What could we do? Our elders were crawling through the snow to get to the outhouse. We fought for water and sewer. We had typhoid then, and TB too, it was taking our people. That's what the Native Mothers Guild was for. All over, the Indian women got together to do something for their children.

The political strategies of the Native Mothers Guild matured during the 1960s. Involvement in the Guild resulted in political training for women. An entire cadre of women gained experience in a variety of strategies of lobbying, inter-community activities, and in bringing their influence to bear on the male leaders of their reserve. In the words of one Guild member:

The men weren't organized like women. We could stand up to the band council. We spoke for the families and they had to listen. The trouble-makers went against us but they couldn't go nowhere. We were all pulling together and then they had to listen.

When the band council lost sight of the struggle for community services as the key political issue in its negotiations with the federal and provincial governments, the Native Mothers Guild did not falter. It petitioned the band council for essential services and lobbied the regional and federal offices of DINA independently of the elected band council. Letters requesting community services were sent from The Native Mothers Guild to the regional and federal offices at DINA. As one woman remembered:

That's why they call me a motor mouth. I spoke out when I had to. The men weren't speaking up in public, just talking to themselves. They didn't show no interest in getting to Ottawa. We sent petitions right there and our delegates to talk for us. The Native Mothers Guild were doing the business for the council.

Disenchantment with the band council grew and led The Native Mothers Guild to support two of their members as candidates for elected council. This action was remarkable for two reasons. First, women directly challenged the competence of the male-dominated council. They argued that council apathy and male indifference were responsible for the band's failure to obtain water and sewer systems. Second, their candidates came from two prominent families (identified throughout as Alpha and Beta) commonly perceived as opposing

factions. With both women acting as representatives of the same organization and advancing the same causes as council members and as women, their election had the effect of integrating the community rather than exacerbating factional tensions as was most commonly the case.

Following this initial political success, The Native Mothers Guild became more confrontational in its tactics. The Guild used the local and national media to draw attention to local needs and became more prominent in negotiations with the state. In the 1970s the highway that slices through the village came under increasingly heavy use. When the provincial government refused to pave the highway within the village limits and denied financial compensation for the expropriated land, the band set up road blockades. Female elders were stationed at the front: the symbolic figures of maternal concerns, traditional wisdom and social leadership. Although this action was supported in principle by the band council and involved persons of all ages and both genders, it was conceived and organized by The Native Mothers Guild who informed the governments of their intentions by letter and brought the matter to the local media.

During the same period, The Native Mothers Guild extended its sphere of action to include government funding that would not be controlled by the band council. The Native Mothers Guild obtained funds from a variety of federal agencies, Canadian Health and Welfare, Canada Manpower, and the Secretary of State for community building projects. This was a double blessing for all concerned. The community acquired urgently needed facilities and temporary jobs were made available to men:

We got jobs for the men that way. They built our crafts centre and then we got the laundry mat. We could give the men jobs with our money.

The Native Mothers Guild had found a new way of providing for family needs through the provision of community facilities, which would be used primarily by women and children, and the creation of male employment, an urgent need in most families:

None of our men had jobs then. They were turning to drink
There's always trouble in families if the men don't work.

Control over state-funded projects was critical to women's political struggles. Now women could establish client-patron relations with the men they employed. Moreover, as individual women were linked to the

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successful projects of their association, they gained prestige in the community. Their ability to create jobs was seen to be a new and significant way in which women could provide for the needs of others, in particular for their families. Because their funds were not administered directly by the elected council in the sole interest of status individuals, the women were free to employ non-status kin, who often endure the most insecure economic and social conditions. While not everyone agrees on the extent to which band resources should be shared with non-status kin, there is strong support for women who create alternate economic opportunities. Two important consequences followed. Individual women gained greater credibility as community leaders and the association itself came to be openly viewed as a women's political organization.

In sum, women were motivated to political action by their need to fulfill their traditional responsibilities. Acquisition of water and sewer systems, for example, had been necessary to their efforts to care for their community. In turn, realization of their initial political goals supplied the rationale for further public interventions. Their pragmatic strategies transformed the nature of their actions from a struggle with the state for community improvement to an internal confrontation over women's political opportunities.

2. Female unity and sexual politics

In the 1970s, The Native Mothers Guild became a central agent in dealing with the discrepancy between a traditional idealized respect for women and the reality of gender tensions generated by the election of women to the band council. When a woman, a Guild president, was elected chief, she found herself facing opposition from men who felt she had usurped a male role. The most dramatic instance occurred when a number of men, hired by the council, vented their resentment at having to take orders from a woman. In her words, the men hired to build the new dance-hall went "on strike". What started as a dispute over favouritism in the hiring process was transformed into a complaint about a woman 'taking over men's business'. Supported by The Native Mothers Guild, the chief rose to the challenge by organizing the women to work on the dance-hall roof. She recalls:

Then them guys quit on us, halfway. And the roofing was supposed to start. That morning they say, "We're on strike," they told me. Boy I ran around. I pick up all the women and we threw the shingles up on the roof. And we all had hammers

and we start to work. We must have had about six strips. Halfway we were. And over they come. The women are busy hammering. About 3:30 somebody comes up. "Gee, we'll go back to work. We just get mad." Part of that roofing the women did just to show we are able-bodied too.

The council election of 1974 provides a further illustration of the political tensions between women and men. According to both the written records on file at the regional DINA office and accounts of the women involved, the nomination and election process in that year were characterized by visible hostility between a handful of men and a larger number of women, who in the end had their social and political rights protected by the Guild.

The issue was in the first instance straightforward. A dispute arose over the exclusion of a woman's name from the ballot. The female candidate complained that her name failed to appear on the ballot despite her having been nominated at the public meeting according to correct procedures. A review by a DINA agent failed to resolve the dispute as no record of her nomination could be verified. From that point, the dispute escalated into one of gender politics. The elder electoral clerk signed an affidavit swearing his records were full and correct and stating that women "had no place" in the council. He obtained support for this position from two other men, his social peers. In response the angered candidate, supported by the Guild executive, pursued her position with the requisite affidavits.

The attack on women's political rights united the women. Personal differences between members were quickly, if temporarily, bridged. Within The Native Mothers Guild, executive members of opposing factions rallied to support the candidate. They defined the behaviour of the men as the acts of 'trouble makers' who did not understand election procedures and community support. They successfully petitioned DINA to call for new nominations. In the end, the united Native Mothers were not only able to have the election results overturned, but in the subsequent electoral process, elected a number of female candidates.

In short, the Native Mothers Guild had established itself as a competitor in the political process. Building on their successful lobbying for community improvements and the demonstrated ability of their leaders, the association was able to draw women together in order to confront tensions and structural limitations perceived to be imposed upon them by men. In consequence, male attacks on women's right to political office were deftly averted.

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3. *Family loyalty and factional politics*

At the time, the Native Mothers Guild was the only voluntary organization on the reserve and therefore the only social institution to provide a focus of solidarity for women. Nevertheless, in the absence of outside challenges, its leaders divided and entered into political competition with one another. Having achieved personal prominence and greater prestige for their families, the leaders, who were core members of the two opposing factions, were able to secure elected and appointed positions for their sons and daughters. The political rivalry of the leaders led to internal disputes over use of the Guild's funds and resources. These disputes led to further tensions linked to the factional competition for seats on the band council.

Although the two factions were well-matched teams, feelings often ran high when one or the other was perceived to be 'in power'. Tensions mounted as one faction (Alpha) gained a majority of council seats and appointed its members to the key administrative positions. Allegations of favouritism brought against Alpha included their distribution of the Guild's resources as well as those of the council. In 1978, tensions between the two major factions came to a dramatic head. Women's social relationships were torn asunder as the two prominent leaders confronted one another in bitter recriminations following the tragic death of a son in each of their families. The schism between the two families rippled through the entire village as the bereaved families found themselves struggling for loyal supporters.

A year later, this factional conflict was further exacerbated. A small logging company, owned and operated by Beta, had been licenced by the DINA to harvest timber from the reserve. The operation had proceeded successfully until international timber rates fell and the company was forced to re-negotiate stumpage fees with the band council. The council rejected requests for lower stumpage fees when disgruntled band members, urged by the Alpha faction, petitioned DINA to enforce the original agreement. Without explanation, DINA seized this chance to terminate the timber licence and to foreclose on the company's loans. The company folded and lost all its assets. Its employees turned to social assistance.

When DINA terminated the logging licence the resulting tensions were turned inward on a fragile community. The local elite was unable to keep control of community affairs. Tensions mounted to a crisis-point and ended any semblance of social cohesion within the Native Mothers Guild. The feuding families escalated their bitter

dispute. The Beta faction gained control of the elected council and fired the band manager, a core member of the Alpha faction and a long-standing member of the Guild, and replaced her with a woman of their own family. Alpha women then withdrew all support from their local chapter of the Guild and established a new voluntary association, The Elders Sacred Circle.

With the appearance of a second association, the voluntary associations became clearly aligned with family politics. In many respects they took on the attributes of opposing political teams locked in a struggle for political resources and loyal followings. Whereas the Native Mothers Guild had defined its presence as an association of women devoted to family and community, the new association presented itself in the traditional role of elderly women, wise advisors to the young. While its stated policy was to represent all elders (its membership list includes elderly men), executive positions were held by Beta women, specifically those women who had been active leaders in the Guild, had been band councillors, or had been on advisory committees to the council. Significantly the band manager (whose mother was instrumental in founding the new organization) and her husband became key figures in the decision-making process of the Elders Sacred Circle. They attended all executive meetings and met with the elders to advise them on strategies and programs and to undertake the paper work and negotiations necessary to secure state funds.

With a key family member holding the position of band manager, the new association had a distinct advantage. Funding applications and development proposals, for example, were required to pass through the administration offices for council approval before arriving at the funding agency. At the same time, the Elders Sacred Circle remained independent from the elected council. Hence the women who ran it were free to act as they thought best with respect to proposed services, economic activities, and hiring practices.

By 1984, the Elders Sacred Circle was the second largest employer on the reserve. It had secured funds for children's cultural activities, Carrier language classes, cultural workshops, for travel to cultural events throughout the province, and for constructing a new cultural centre. By then it had eclipsed the Native Mothers Guild. It became the more active of the two voluntary associations experiencing greater success in obtaining government funds and therefore enjoying greater visibility in the community. The success of this association was reflected in changes in the band council and administrative staff. Beta dominated both. In fact the majority of permanent personnel

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hired by the band council were from this kin group as were those who benefitted from summer employment programs.

Of course, the Native Mothers Guild did not disappear as a political force. Rather, it reverted to its original goals, to provide care for needy families and to promote community interests. It took the lead in raising funds for a new church and continued to raise money and gather goods for families facing unexpected emergencies such as household fires. It withdrew from such overt political issues as competing for community development grants and seeking job creation funds. No doubt recognizing their immediate disadvantages in this competition, the Guild leaders rejuvenated their ideological political resources, their responsibility to nurture and to promote domestic well-being in the context of a harmonious community. The two factions continued their rivalry; one drawing upon its ability to attract a following through its patronage relations, the other rebuilding its reputation for community involvement and commitment to traditional, domestic responsibilities.

Now that the women's voluntary associations were clearly aligned with factional interests, neither could promote the specific interests of women. Clearly, they had become associations of women for family advancement. Yet women had created a special sphere of influence for themselves in the community political arena. Apart from their baseball team, which did not have the political influence of women's associations, men had no voluntary associations. Thus, following the bitter factional disputes of 1978 men did not have the same opportunities to influence public opinion or to represent village interests in negotiations with state agents. Only women were able to do this effectively. Moreover, their local political disputes destroyed neither their commitment to the community as a whole nor their determination to struggle with the state on issues critical to native women. Women of both associations continued their struggle for community improvements. At the same time elite women of the two factions continued to meet outside the community as members of the same provincial association. Beyond the conflicts of the local political arena, women remained united in their common struggles against the state.

In sum, women's voluntary associations constitute a parapolitical structure advantageous to women generally and to individual, elite women particularly. Elite women further their political aspirations, and those of male kin, by dispensing patronage to male and female followers and by advancing the very real needs of family and community. Women's political ambitions, however, are constrained by

a political contest fought out between kin-based factional interests. In this situation, women's position vis-a-vis men has less relevance than the bonds of kinship.

Conclusion: Analyzing Women's Community Politics and Power

This account of Carrier women's political strategies has emphasized the intervention of the state into native community politics. Three salient features of state/community relations need to be highlighted. First, the native community is bound to state authority by the practices of welfare colonialism, which subjects all of the community management to the extraordinary, discretionary authority of DINA. Personal and community economic dependency necessitates high degrees of state involvement but at the same time they limit the scope of the parapolitical system of voluntary associations. The state-sponsored political structure and its rivals ultimately rely upon a single source of political power: economic resources derived from the state. Although women's voluntary associations may gain public support through their manipulation of ideological resources, they cannot limit themselves to this strategy. As we have seen, the Native Mothers Guild entered the political arena when it provided a moral critique of the all-male elected council. The women expressed their criticism in terms of their traditional responsibilities as providers and caregivers. In turn, this enabled women to defeat men's efforts to prevent them from holding elected office.

The base of the Guild's power, however, lay in its access to state-controlled resources. Like the band council, the Guild assumed the role of power-broker, distributing resources from the state to the community. Yet the strong position of the Native Mothers Guild eventually was challenged by a second voluntary association which also was able effectively to manipulate access to scarce resources. Without these community assets, the women's position would have been considerably weaker. If the federal government ceased its programs for community/economic development, the women's associations would have lost one of their key power bases and the role of broker would have reverted solely to the council, which has always had access to resources through its dependency upon DINA.

Second, the political limitations women face are exacerbated by the processes of local-level politics. Local political action is never wholly independent. Individuals and groups outside the range of local relationships are vital to the political process and are directly

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involved in their outcome (Swartz 1969: 1). More importantly, local relationships are 'multiplex' (Swartz 1969). Individuals are bound together by an interweaving of multiple kin relations and common interests that create contradictory obligations and personal affiliations. Complicating the already intricate relationships are the personal rifts and conflicts generated by the legal distinctions between status and non-status Indians.

Women in reserve politics cannot avoid factional in-fighting. Disputes are created and maintained by the state administrative structure and it in effect sponsors the local fight for scarce resources. Access to state-controlled resources permits women to fulfill their primary responsibilities to their families through provision of desperately needed jobs. Women who seek political office require the support of partisans of their faction. They must deliver favours unequally and this more narrow partisanship undercuts the mediating role of women's voluntary associations. Consequently, factional interests take precedence and women's voluntary associations lose their broader, collective, female responsibility for community well-being. Internal divisions, ruptures and fissures follow. Co-operation declines and without agreement and leadership of elite women, the membership drifts and splits as individuals withdraw or align themselves with one faction or the other.

Third, while Indian politics is a parapolitical sub-system encapsulated by state authority, voluntary associations are themselves further encapsulated by the apparatus of the band council and its administration. Women's parapolitical sub-systems are doubly subordinate. They are secondary to a community administration that is directly dependent on the state. Herein lies the irony: voluntary associations can only attain autonomy from the elected band council by successfully competing with it for state resources, while at the same time, their leaders manipulate access to resources in order to gain entry to the council.

The survival of the associations depends upon successful mediation of this contradiction. They may muster ideological resources to counter unsatisfactory administration of their community and thus overcome the effects of their dependence on state resources or they may initiate action against the state and thus gain the moral support of their community. Neither course is free from political pitfalls. Success in either direction threatens to divide women against women.

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