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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7f36t49h>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 38(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2014-06-01

DOI

10.17953/aicr.38.3.fv7r4r4211046217

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Leading a Good Life: The White Earth Anishinaabeg in Transitional Times

Anna Krausová

In this paper, I offer a view on the rebuilding processes of the White Earth Nation within the larger context of national and global processes. The struggle of the White Earth Anishinaabeg to maintain a distinct political and cultural space for their existence as one of the nations within the United States is a form of resistance against the cultural, legal, and political hegemony of the nation-state. In spite of being essentially localized in the region of the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota, this resistance is, to a great extent, influenced by national and global factors.

The US position in the hegemonic cycle is a global factor that, in combination with Kondratiev economic cycles and short-term economic fluctuations, can affect the priorities of federal Indian policy and Native responses to it.¹ According to Immanuel Wallerstein, the United States found itself in the position of the world's hegemon between the end of World War II in 1945 and the end of the Cold War in 1989. Wallerstein places the transitional period of the rise of the United States to global hegemony between the 1870s and 1945, and the US decline from the dominant position to a similarly long transitional period since circa 1970.² Thomas D. Hall and James V. Fenelon suggest that transitional times of contested hegemony may pose a danger to indigenous peoples and movements.³ I agree with this assumption. Nonetheless, I believe

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no period could be considered entirely favorable to Native peoples as to their sovereignty as separate political entities within the nation-state.

In both transitional periods, significant transformations of governing structure occurred on the White Earth Reservation. The first transformation took place after the financial crash of 1929 and in the following years of the Great Depression and the New Deal. This transformation involved only marginal participation of the White Earth Anishinaabeg and ignored their specific needs and interests. The second transformation, which took place at the time of the Great Recession, stemmed from the nation-building activity which culminated in government reform, ratification of the new constitution in April 2009, and referendum approval in November 19, 2013. To understand the twenty-first century nation-building at White Earth, it might be useful to look back at the period of the Great Depression and the Indian New Deal. This approach helps to reveal patterns in decades-long Anishinaabe efforts to maintain political, legal, and cultural sovereignty of their nation.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE INDIAN NEW DEAL

The transitional period of the hegemonic rise of the United States between the 1880s and 1945 was an exceptionally hard time for the White Earth Anishinaabeg. As early as the 1860s, the advancing US territorial expansion was accelerated by economic activity of the second Kondratiev wave based on iron and steel industries, and steam engine production. The rising phase of the third K-wave used the innovative potential of the previous K-wave, mainly the Bessemer technology in steel production, which led to the development of heavy engineering, first globalization, and gradual US ascendance to global hegemony. Also, the upswing of the third K-wave was connected with rapidly progressing incorporation of the White Earth Reservation resources into the developing US industrial economy. In Minnesota, the great railway boom in the 1880s facilitated the settlement of geographically isolated regions. When Minnesota was admitted to the Union in 1858, only 15 percent of the land was settled. By the 1880s, another 34 percent was populated. With the Homestead Act of 1862, new settlers could obtain free land in remote locations and cheaply purchase the remaining unallotted land on the White Earth Reservation. The allotment policy and ensuing land frauds deprived the White Earth Anishinaabeg of both fertile agricultural land and pine lands which attracted entrepreneurial interests of lumber companies. Through logging, the White Earth reservation was incorporated into the US capitalist economy and changed from being a “region of refuge” to a “dependent periphery.”⁴

When the Cup of Life almost Became the Cup of Grief

The tremendous loss of land base was the most serious factor that endangered societal cohesion and the very existence of the community. Marginalization and the real lack of opportunities to find wage work were intensified by the impoverishment brought about by the Great Depression. The Great Depression at White Earth saw not only extreme destitution but also resilience, which allowed the Anishinaabeg to prevent complete destruction of the community and cultural assimilation. A look back at this period shows what strategies the White Earth Anishinaabeg employed to survive, not only physically, but also to maintain values on which their true survivance depended.

The existential basis of Anishinaabe bands rested on the rhythms of the seasonal cycle. These rhythms were an important cementing factor in the White Earth community, strengthening Anishinaabe identity and giving order to communal life. But the land shortage made farming and traditional ways of subsistence—hunting, fishing, and gathering seasonal plants—difficult. After the Anishinaabeg received their allotments, they became subject to Minnesota state laws, both civil and criminal.⁵ Traditional subsistence patterns tied to the seasons were disrupted by the application of Minnesota fish and game laws.⁶ Fortunately, as opposed to hunting and fishing, berrying was not subject to state regulations and offered not only cash income to families but “presented the opportunity to carry on the cultural meanings and social relationships associated with the seasonal round, affirming people’s identity as Ojibwe.”⁷

Another collective practice that constituted an even more important part of the seasonal round was wild rice harvesting each fall. Neither the severe economic situation nor the pressure of progressing commercialization turned wild rice harvesting into an activity of merely material importance. In the Anishinaabe perception, wild rice, *manoomin*, remained the most sacred food growing on water, and therefore the activities connected with wild rice harvesting were ceremonial in nature, with whole families participating in these annual events. The Anishinaabe relationship to sacred elements of water and *manoomin* is apparent in the account of credit agent Albert Huber, who in September 1936 observed wild rice harvesting along the shores of rice lakes in northern Minnesota. Huber depicted a joyous harvest atmosphere and women’s affectionate handling of *manoomin*. He noticed the difference between the way rice was gathered by Indians, who let enough ripe kernels fall into the water, and the white property owners, who greedily harvested everything before the rice was ripe, thus depriving themselves of the next year’s crop.⁸ Wild rice harvesting, like other traditional activities associated with the seasonal round, reflects the Anishinaabe relationship to land and its gifts, which need to be harvested with care and thanksgiving.

Values connected with traditional collective activities helped the Anishinaabeg keep their community together even in the difficult times of the Depression, due to their cooperative relationships and a deeply ingrained sense of responsibility for the weak and needy. Ignatia Broker, White Earth Anishinaabe elder and storyteller, argues that the “traditional way of sharing” did not disappear despite the changes in the Anishinaabe material life.⁹ During the Depression the Anishinaabeg at White Earth, as on other reservations in Minnesota, showed resilience by utilizing the limited possibilities of traditional subsistence economy and participating in the poverty-relief programs of the Indian New Deal. Finding relief work on the home reservation was not always possible for White Earth men because the Consolidated Chippewa Agency provided employment on a rotational basis in order to give wage opportunity to as many men as possible. White Earth men were willing to labor under any weather conditions to help their families, in heavy snow storms and temperatures as low as fifty-six below zero, as in the winter of 1933–34.¹⁰

Some Anishinaabe elders and spiritual leaders attribute the suffering during the Depression and the previous decades of deculturation and forced assimilation, together with the accompanying disorientation and confusion of values, to a fulfillment of the prophecy of the Sixth Fire recorded on a wampum belt dating from 1400. In Edward Benton-Banai’s interpretation, this prophecy foretold the allotment, assimilation, and boarding school era as one in which “the balance of many people [would] be disturbed. The cup of life [would] almost become the cup of grief.”¹¹ In these hard times the structure of the Anishinaabe community life was disrupted but not destroyed. Reciprocal relationships and the responsibility for the weak and needy continued under the conditions of the changed seasonal round. The relationships of interdependence helped maintain the “circle of life” and restore the disrupted balance in the community. The restoration of disrupted balance means achieving “what ought to be,” what is good and ethical, not only in relation to humans but also to plants and animals. This is the core of the Anishinaabe moral ideal, *mino-bimaadiziwin*: “life in the fullest sense, life in the sense of longevity, health and freedom from misfortune. This goal cannot be achieved without the effective help and cooperation of both human and other-than-human persons, as well as by one’s own personal efforts.”¹² Living a good life in the sense of *mino-bimaadiziwin* was made difficult in utmost poverty and hopelessness. Further, the ways of achieving this Anishinaabe moral ideal changed under the influence of Western thought and education in English. But thanks to the ability of Anishinaabemowin, the Anishinaabe language, to transport knowledge from one generation to the next, the meaning contained in the word *mino-bimaadiziwin* remained.

The IRA and the Loss of Former Organizational Patterns

The Anishinaabe bands in Minnesota belonged to those Native communities that managed to preserve many aspects of their traditional forms of government even under reservation conditions. The ability to adapt flexibly and creatively to changed external conditions finally allowed the Anishinaabeg to preserve the “traditional” alongside the “modern” to the present day. Unfortunately, under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) self-government did not respect traditional organizational patterns, and the White Earth Anishinaabeg were given little opportunity to incorporate time-honored components of their social organization into the new institutional arrangement.

Prior to the passage of the IRA, for more than two decades the White Earth Anishinaabeg were operating under a written constitution as part of a loose organization of the General Council of the Chippewa.¹³ This organization was established as a central body to ensure greater political cohesion of Minnesota Anishinaabe bands and help them face the allotment policy more effectively, with officials being elected to legislative and executive committees. This loose union of Anishinaabe bands was better suited to the scattered reservations than the centralized tribal organization introduced by the IRA. Moreover, the provisions establishing local councils on each of the reservations were more appropriate to the traditional understanding of governance. The General Council delegates each represented one hundred members, and band chiefs served as ex-officio delegates to council meetings.

Before passage of the IRA there was a widespread misapprehension and confusion among Native peoples regarding the new legislation. There was also strong apprehension that adopting formal institutions would disrupt social relations in communities and extinguish treaty rights. Native people did not have sufficient time to consider the changes proposed by the Indian Office in the “Indian Self-government” circular that was sent out to reservations in January 1934. An Anishinaabe meeting held at Cass Lake for the purpose of discussing the circular resolved that the lack of time prevented them from taking a position in this matter.¹⁴ Nonetheless, beginning in February weekly open councils were held on the White Earth Reservation to explain the purpose of the proposed legislation to the people.¹⁵ Although the White Earth council did vote in favor of the Wheeler-Howard bill on March 23, 1934, the council also asked for certain amendments and assurances.¹⁶

This conditional support for the bill was one of the reasons why the White Earth Anishinaabeg welcomed the chance to get acquainted with the proposed measures and attended the Indian Congress at Hayward, Wisconsin, on April 23 and 24, 1934.¹⁷ Fifty-six White Earth delegates again pledged their preliminary support for the bill and asked to be informed of all changes and

amendments before the bill's enactment. Reasoning that their support for the bill would not do any harm to the band, the delegates also saw their support as a chance not to miss the opportune moment when the Indian Office, for the first time in its existence, defended the interests of Native peoples and offered greater authority in the management of their affairs.

After a series of Indian congresses carried out during March and April 1934, the bill went through two revisions. The Indians, however, had no way of knowing the details. The third and final draft of the IRA was a radically shortened version of the original Collier bill enlarged by amendments produced in the discussions at Indian congresses.¹⁸ White Earth delegates at the Indian Congress at Hayward had commented on the first version of the bill, and it was this version they supported in the expectation that a change in Indian policy would give them greater decision-making power in local matters and the development of their resources. Interestingly, some of the Minnesota Anishinaabe leaders retained this overly optimistic view regarding the extent of tribal powers even four years after the IRA was enacted.¹⁹ On October 27, 1934 the White Earth Anishinaabeg voted on whether to accept or reject the provisions of the IRA. The total eligible voting population numbered 4,169 people, with 1,122 voting in favor of the IRA and 245 against it.²⁰ It is possible that the election results would have been different had all the eligible voters participated in the election. Perhaps, those who abstained from voting did so because they did not know what to expect from the new political arrangement.

As a result of accepting the IRA provisions, the White Earth Anishinaabeg became part of a centralized federation called the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. The tribal constitution was ratified on June 20, 1936 in an election held on each of the member reservations.²¹ Two years later it was clear that the constitution and bylaws, as well as the prepared charters for each of the reservations, were too constraining and did not allow the Anishinaabe bands sufficient local control over their own lands. Regional bureau officials Archie Phinney and M. L. Burns, who had greater insight into the problems of the Minnesota Anishinaabe reservations than the bureau officials in Washington, worked with Anishinaabe leaders on decentralization plans for the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe providing for increased autonomy of local bands. Unfortunately, they failed in their efforts to push through the plans.²²

In February 1939 reservation councils were created by separate charters designed by bureau officials.²³ In order to fit the needs of the local Indian Office, Indian Office officials adapted the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Constitution, the Tribal Corporate Charter, and the band sub-charters based on a unified model to give more powers to the Tribal Executive Committee. Although some recent scholarship challenges the view that the bureau imposed model constitutions on tribes, there is "incontrovertible evidence that some tribes

did, in fact, receive a copy of a 'model' constitution."²⁴ This was exactly the case of the Minnesota Anishinaabe bands. The chair of the Tribal Organization Committee of the Department of the Interior in Washington, DC, Felix S. Cohen, did not anticipate such practices when he was responsible for the development of tribal constitutions. On the contrary, he warned against sending out such canned constitutions from Washington because he was aware that no single constitution could fit the great variability among tribes.²⁵

The changes that the new legislation introduced were a disappointment to the White Earth Anishinaabeg. In the late 1930s, there was friction between the newly instituted Tribal Executive Committee of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and the more traditional councils that still operated at White Earth and the other five Anishinaabe reservations. Centralizing power in the Tribal Executive Committee at the expense of individual reservation councils resembled the relationship between the secretary of the Interior and tribes and narrowed the space for local decision-making. The self-governing operation became formalized and every important decision required the approval of the secretary of the Interior. In this way, the federal bureaucracy remained a barrier to real tribal autonomy. The opinion that was voiced at the hearings before the Committee on Indian Affairs in 1940, that the tribal organization under the IRA "is not self-government" but "dictatorship," agreed with the sentiments of White Earth leaders at that time.²⁶

The introduction of the IRA form of political organization of the White Earth Nation and Minnesota Chippewa Tribe as a whole fits within the context of the federal government's strategy of incorporating Native American communities into the capitalist economic system. The previous allotment policy used the strategy of supplanting Anishinaabe collective values with individualistic ones, which attributed significant value to private ownership of land. The strategy of the reorganization policy was aimed at transforming Anishinaabe bands into profit-making entities, federated into the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe's corporate political structure. The conception of Native nations governed as corporate bodies encouraged the process of incorporation into the capitalist economy without overt assimilation pressures. Like corporations, which begin and end, it was expected that Native nations would gradually give up their claims to political autonomy. But the social being of people constituting a nation is not coextensive with economic processes and relations. The existence of a nation is based on common way of life, which would not be possible without common recognition of values—a set of foundational principles of culture—on which people rest their lives, relationships, and common institutions. At White Earth, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Constitution did not reflect basic Anishinaabe values and thus was a source of antisystemic sentiments for several decades, which finally crystallized into the idea of constitutional reform.

WHITE EARTH IN THE GREAT RECESSION AND BEYOND

We are our past / and in the present / we make the future / As long as the past / exists in memory / —it is the present. / And the future / is what we make it.

—Viola F. Cordova, *How It Is*²⁷

Three-quarters of a century after this coercive break in naturally developing political and cultural forms, in the aftermath of adopting the IRA provisions, the White Earth Anishinaabeg find themselves in a process of nation-building, one in which they turn their attention to the unfulfilled possibilities of the past. The fulfillment of these possibilities can provide a solid ground for the continuation of Anishinaabe historical identity in the present situation of structural and moral crisis in the world-system. While it is true that self-determination policy has allowed tribal governments greater control over federal programs on reservations, it fails to unequivocally support tribal exercise of their sovereignty. Congress and the Bureau of Indian Affairs recognize that effective self-governing institutions are a necessary precondition for economic development in Indian country. But the programs of various federal agencies to strengthen tribal institutions led to excessive bureaucracy that turned tribal governments “into lopsided service delivery or program management organizations.”²⁸

The legacy of tribal reorganization under the IRA prevents the White Earth band from exercising proper self-governance and hinders economic development. Although the former Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Constitution of 1936 was revised in 1964 and amended in 1972 and 2006, it did not satisfy the needs and wishes of White Earth citizens. Moreover, ambiguity surrounded the voting on the Revised Constitution in 1963, similar to that in 1934 when the White Earth Anishinaabeg voted on the adoption of the IRA.²⁹ Apart from the notorious flaws of the IRA constitutions, such as centralization of power and lack of checks and balances, the specific problem of this joint constitution is the disproportionate authority of its governing body, the Tribal Executive Committee. The Tribal Executive Committee has the authority to “administer any funds within the control of the Tribe” and to “manage, lease, permit, or otherwise deal with tribal lands, interests in lands, or other tribal assets” of the six bands under the jurisdiction of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe—White Earth, Leech Lake, Bois Fort/Nett Lake, Grand Portage, Fond du Lac, and Mille Lacs.³⁰

The main reasons why the White Earth band initiated the process of government reform, which will lead to greater political autonomy, were the structural shortcomings of the IRA constitution, absence of a separate reservation judiciary, and central decision-making of the Tribal Executive Committee

regarding reservation resources and land claims. The White Earth band, which is the largest both in size and enrollment, sees it as unfair that it has the same number of delegates to the Tribal Executive Committee as the other much smaller bands. Moreover, the phrasing of the Revised Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Constitution lacks specificity and could be open to any interpretation. Gerald Vizenor argues that decisions of the Tribal Executive Committee regarding “individual reservation resources . . . and the actual division and distribution of land claims and other natural resource settlements could be adverse to the citizens of the White Earth Reservation.”³¹ The IRA structure of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe was preventing the band from effectively managing both internal and external political relations and made it difficult to face the forces of political and market competition.

The onset of self-determination policy was favorable for the development of White Earth activities designed to achieve a greater measure of independence from the central power of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. A more efficient functioning of the White Earth government came in 1978 with the creation of the band’s conservation court. The devastating impact of Public Law 280 on the band’s government was limited in 1997 when the White Earth Tribal Court extended its jurisdiction over civil and regulatory cases.³² Although the state of Minnesota refused to give up its jurisdiction over White Earth tribal members, in the late 2000s the band reclaimed judicial authority over its citizens and developed its own criminal code. The exercise of de-facto sovereignty in such a vitally important sphere as jurisdiction over one’s own citizens is a crucial means of maintaining stability in the community. The creation of a justice system that matches community values leads to greater confidence of people in the administration of justice and improvement of public safety. This activity manifests the never-ceasing effort of the White Earth Anishinaabeg for independence and continuation of their strategies of *mino-bimaadiziwin*.

The period of systemic transition that, according to Wallerstein, the world-system is now undergoing, brings a general sense of uncertainty, chaos, and fear of the future. The issue is whether the successor system “maintains the pattern of the existing . . . hierarchical, inegalitarian system, or [becomes] relatively democratic, relatively egalitarian.”³³ The Anishinaabe prophecy of the Seventh Fire mentions two roads between which Euro-Americans will be making a choice. One is the road to technology, of headlong rush to technological development, which modern society has been pursuing. This road will finally lead to the destruction of the Earth. The other is the road to spirituality, “the slower path that traditional Native people have traveled and are now seeking again.”³⁴

It is not possible to reject the idea of progress as a matter of principle but refuse the ideology that believes in boundless technological and industrial progress. The Western view of progress carries a technocratic approach to the

natural environment that manipulates, changes, and destroys through technology. The economy is undoubtedly important for securing the basis of human life, but once the goal is maximizing profits, both the natural environment and social stability become endangered. I believe that Native understanding of the world is not in conflict with Wallerstein's position that dividing the real world into three arenas—politics, economics, and socioculture—is an unfortunate way of approaching social reality “because it divides the unique human experience into artificial spheres,” where each claims importance over the other and ignores their interconnection.³⁵ Holistic thinking about the relationship of human to nature, which some natural scientists started to prefer in the 1980s, is an integral part of the life of Native people.³⁶

White Earth Constitutional Reform

The experience with two different ideational worlds and knowledge of two entirely different worldviews gives Native people a certain advantage in the present chaotic situation and crisis of value orientation. Finding unequivocal support in one's own cultural heritage and the endeavor to maintain the ability to live *mino-bimaadiziwin* provides Anishinaabe nation-building with a solid foundation. “Retracing one's steps” means searching for the positive aspects of the past in mores, customs, and unwritten laws. For centuries these positive aspects were guaranteed by the authority of elders and taken for granted, but nowadays they have lost their commonplace character. Rediscovering the ability to live Anishinaabe *mino-bimaadiziwin* based on the Seven Grandfather Teachings brings unconditional ethical criteria into life, criteria that are applicable under any conditions and serve as a compass in day-to-day decision-making.

The effort to achieve the moral ideal, “what ought to be” in the sense of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, involves responsibility to future generations. The awareness of this commitment, and a vision of a more effective government which would better serve reservation citizens and protect their rights, led Erma Vizenor, the White Earth chairwoman, to undertake steps toward forming an efficient government under a new constitution. Drafting the formal constitution was a fundamental decision, behind which was a desire to create an organic law that would reflect the value orientation of the community and ensure the “continuation of compassionate reciprocity, cultural sovereignty, and the Native rights of survivance in perpetuity.”³⁷

The story of the White Earth constitutional reform corresponds with Duane Champagne's observation that constitutional reform can be a slow process because its successful completion depends on community consensus, which may not be reached easily.³⁸ The White Earth Reservation community

has been seriously contemplating the possibility of developing a separate constitution since the 1980s. Because a radical government reform is a process that concerns all the citizens of the White Earth Nation, pre-constitutional societal consensus about the changes that the new constitution would bring was necessary. The first step was the creation of a working group consisting of people committed to the reform effort. Erma Vizenor decided to follow the formal path of constitutional conventions. Forty delegates from all the White Earth community councils, including the off-reservation ones, as well as White Earth citizens at large represented the plurality of views in the White Earth Nation. On one hand, the diversity of opinion made the discussions difficult, but on the other hand, it reflected the people's expectations of the reform process. The four constitutional conventions that took place between 2007 and 2009 were open to all citizens, who thus were able to take part in the public discussions and express their views and concerns about the change.

Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor was nominated as an at-large delegate by Erma Vizenor, who, at the end of the second constitutional convention, appointed him the principal writer of the Constitution of the White Earth Nation (CWEN). Undoubtedly, the main weight of responsibility for drafting the constitution was on Gerald Vizenor's shoulders, with the support of an appointed advisory committee: Jill Doerfler (assistant professor, University of Minnesota, Duluth), JoAnne Stately (vice president of development for the Indian Land Tenure Foundation), and Anita Fineday (chief tribal court judge, White Earth Nation). The CWEN was ratified by secret ballot of twenty-four delegates present at the fourth and final constitutional convention on April 4, 2009.

The new constitution categorically rejects the distorted view of the White Earth band as merely one of the six profit-making business corporations of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Instead, the CWEN declares community relationships and a sovereign right to establish law and order on the basis of shared values. The preamble expresses the foundational role of the constitution by formulating the main goals and shared values that imbue the phrase "we the Anishinaabeg" with meaning. The values the CWEN has entrenched for future generations do not make the constitution static and rigid, but provide a broad framework for interpretation in changing conditions and circumstances.

The CWEN is a democratic constitution in the true sense of the word because it has features of both the national and the liberal constitutional models.³⁹ This constitution reflects Anishinaabe pre-constitutional identity and fits within the nation-state constitutional paradigm in this sense. The CWEN also bears features of the liberal-democratic political culture in that it includes democratic electoral rules and the ideas of human rights inspired by the Magna Carta, the US Bill of Rights, and the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968. Chapter 3 contains a detailed enumeration of basic rights of White

Earth citizens, and thus is in conformity with the fundamental principle of constitutionalism that constrains the government's powers over citizens. Liberal principles are in accord with the strong Anishinaabe sense of individual liberty and the endeavor to retain traditional values, which have always firmly buttressed community cohesion and guaranteed the continuing existence of the Anishinaabeg. The emphasis on universal human rights and democratic citizenship will strengthen the White Earth Nation's democratic character.

According to Wallerstein, "the concept of citizen has been in general a quite stabilizing element in the modern world-system."⁴⁰ The new constitution replaces the term "membership" of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Constitution with the term "citizenship." Chapter 2, Article 1 of the CWEN defines citizenship criteria on the basis of family descent, not on the basis of the federally imposed blood quantum requirement. Article 2 of this chapter is a compromise that arose from the debates of the second constitutional convention. This article provides protection to those White Earth citizens who fear that the rejection of the federal blood quantum membership criteria will deprive them of federal services provided to federally recognized tribes. Those who, for various reasons, give up self-identity and submit to external definitions of citizenship, risk a transformation of their nation into an ethnic minority and ultimately extinction. Establishing their own regulations for determining White Earth citizenship by lineal descent is an act of sovereignty and responsibility to future generations.

The question of Anishinaabe identity is an existential problem for which the term *survivance* by Gerald Vizenor offers an answer. As a creative writer, Vizenor sees Anishinaabe life from the perspective of its originality and uniqueness. In this sense of survivance, Anishinaabe existence is not mere physical survival, but a free choice to actively form the present and take responsibility for the future, which is built "through present actions."⁴¹ As "spiritual existentialism" and a "source of identity," survivance suggests a close connection with the philosophy of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, the main idea of which is to live a good life in the full sense of the word.⁴² According to Michael D. McNally, achieving an Anishinaabe moral ideal allows Anishinaabeg to become "more and more human, more and more Anishinaabe."⁴³ The process of Anishinaabe identity-making should be understood in light of cultural practices and moral meanings, not through the lens of racial criteria. It is wise and responsible that the new White Earth constitution favors this approach.

To ensure the proper operation of government, the CWEN establishes an institutional system that distributes powers between three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. In this way, the constitution protects the balance of powers and allows the branches to control one another so that the rule of law is not broken. To minimize official misconduct for the

benefit of personal or factional interests at the expense of public well-being, the CWEN introduces oversight mechanisms by incorporating traditional forms of government into the institutional system. These are the community councils, the council of elders, and the youth council, which are part of the executive branch of government and function as advisory bodies to the legislative council and the president. The CWEN specifies activities of each council and gives formal recognition and authority to them, which is in conformity with the citizens' wishes to engage as many people as possible in the decision-making process.⁴⁴

The community councils are given a task of exceptional importance: to "promote, advance and strengthen the philosophy of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, to live a good life, and in good health, through the creation and formation of associations, events and activities that demonstrate, teach and encourage respect, love, bravery, humility, wisdom, honesty and truth for citizens."⁴⁵ The reintroduction of traditional advisory bodies and reciprocal cooperation between these councils and elected officials will facilitate reaching consensus in decision-making regarding public matters and strengthen the ability of the tribal government to provide for communal well-being, protection of the community's interests, and promotion of common goals and values.

Other mechanisms by which the CWEN allows the citizens to exercise oversight of the government are impeachment, petitions, and referenda. The impeachment provisions against an elected official of the government for misconduct, nonfeasance, or mismanagement stem from the requirement for high ethical standards traditionally expected of tribal leaders. Referendum, a crucial element of direct democracy, is especially important in decision-making about constitutional amendments. A constitution is an open-ended document that allows for flexible adaptation to people's changing needs and desires. The engagement of the White Earth public in matters of constitutional amendments gives citizens a sense of active coauthorship of the constitution and common responsibility for proper functioning of the government.

The time period from the ratification of the proposed constitution to its adoption in the referendum of November 19, 2013 was an interval in which deliberative and educational processes played a decisive role, resulting in the overwhelming adoption of the White Earth constitution by nearly 80 percent of White Earth voters. The new constitution opened a path to well-functioning government, sovereignty, and continuation of the White Earth Anishinaabeg as a nation. It only remains to hope that the White Earth Anishinaabeg may base all their decision-making on wisdom, which they received as one of the Seven Grandfather Gifts. It is a gift that does not yield to changes of time and the globalized world.

CONCLUSION

My aim was to integrate local processes in the White Earth Nation within the larger historical and global context. This wide framework allows us to understand this whole period, roughly dating from the 1930s, as an ongoing antisystemic movement and a continuing rebuilding process based on Anishinaabe cultural identity, which is a necessary condition for the continuation of their nation. Even under difficult conditions in two periods of economic downturn occurring during the US hegemonic transition—the Great Depression and the Great Recession—the Anishinaabeg did not give up unconditional ethical criteria that they applied in everyday life, and, as the most valuable heritage, passed on to their descendants. Today, this intergenerational transfer of knowledge, experience, and core Anishinaabe values enabled the White Earth people to take a responsible approach to problems associated with life in the competitive environment of market capitalism and its value system. In the present time of tumultuous changes when speed seems to be an advantage on the path to success, the story of the White Earth constitutional reform shows that a slow, deliberative procedure, one that promises continuity and stability, has merit.

Acknowledgments

Many people generously provided their published research, which was unavailable to me or hard to obtain. I am especially grateful to Stephen Cornell, Gerald Vizenor, Jill Doerfler, and Thomas Hall. I also wish to thank Duane Champagne, Pamela Grieman, and Judith DeTar as well as the anonymous reviewers of the *AICRJ* for providing helpful comments and suggestions.

NOTES

1. The world-system experiences periodic waves of economic prosperity, recession, depression, and recovery lasting forty to sixty years. Each wave, called a Kondratiev wave (K-wave) is based on technological changes that, once put into production, stimulate a new wave of growth. See e.g. Research Working Group on Cyclical Rhythms and Secular Trends, "Cyclical Rhythms and Secular Trends of the Capitalist World-Economy: Some Premises, Hypotheses, and Questions," *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 2, no. 4 (1979): 483–500.

2. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World* (New York: New Press, 2003), and *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

3. Thomas D. Hall and James V. Fenelon, "Indigenous Peoples and Hegemonic Change: Threats to Sovereignty or Opportunities for Resistance?" in *Hegemonic Declines: Present and Past*, ed. Jonathan Friedman and Christopher Chase-Dunn (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 205.

4. Melissa L. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 227.
5. 24 Stat. 388, Sec. 6.
6. See Ch. 32, “Preservation of Game and Fish,” 1938 *Supplement to Mason’s Minnesota Statutes, 1927: 1927 to 1938, Superseding Mason’s 1931, 1934, and 1936 Supplements* (St. Paul: Mason Publishing Company, 1938).
7. Chantal Norrgard, “From Berries to Orchards: Tracing the History of Berrying and Economic Transformation among Lake Superior Ojibwe,” *The American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2009): 54.
8. *Indians at Work: A News Sheet for Indians and the Indian Service* 4, no. 4 (Washington, DC: Office of Indian Affairs, October 1, 1936): 17.
9. Ignatia Broker, *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative* (St. Paul: Borealis Book, 2008), 97.
10. *Indians at Work* 1, no. 13 (February 15, 1934): 19–22.
11. Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (St. Paul: Red School House, 1988), 90. See also Steven McFadden, *Profiles in Wisdom: Native Elders Speak About the Earth* (Lincoln, NB: Readers Choice Press, 2001), 35–47.
12. A. Irving Hallowell, “Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View” in *Readings in Indigenous Religions*, ed. Graham Harvey (London: Continuum, 2002), 44.
13. The Constitution of the General Council of all the Chippewas in Minnesota was adopted by several Anishinaabe bands at Cass Lake, MN, on May 8, 1913. The constitution was amended by the General Council at its fourth annual session held at Bemidji, July 11, 1916. The Constitution is on file with the author.
14. Elmer R. Rusco, *A Fateful Time: The Background and Legislative History of the Indian Reorganization Act* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 214.
15. “Testimony Taken at Hayward, Wisconsin, April 23 & 24, 1934, Where Indians of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Gathered for a Two-Day Conference to Discuss the Wheeler-Howard Bill of Indian Rights,” in *The Indian Reorganization Act: Congresses and Bills*, ed. Vine Deloria, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 392.
16. *Readjustment of Indian Affairs: Hearings on H. R. 7902 Before the House Committee on Indian Affairs*, 73d Cong., 2d Sess., Part 9 (1934): 422–23.
17. “Testimony Taken at Hayward, Wisconsin,” 368–402.
18. Rusco, *A Fateful Time*, 254.
19. William Schaaf and Charles Robertson, *Minnesota Chippewa Tribal Government: Student Handbook* (Cass Lake, MN: Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, 1978), 87.
20. Theodore Haas, *Ten Years of Tribal Government under IRA* (Washington, DC: United States Indian Service, 1947), 16.
21. Constitution and Bylaws of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Minnesota. Native American Constitution and Law Digitization Project, <http://thorpe.ou.edu/IRA/mnchipcons.html>.
22. Graham D. Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 87–88.
23. Schaaf and Robertson, *Minnesota Chippewa Tribal Government*, 86.
24. Felix S. Cohen, David E. Wilkins, and Lindsay G. Robertson, *On the Drafting of Tribal Constitutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), xxiii.
25. *Ibid.*, 3.
26. *Wheeler-Howard Act—Exempt Certain Indians: Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs*, H.R., 76th Cong., 3d Sess., on S. 2103, an Act to Exempt Certain Indians and Indian Tribes from the Provisions of the Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984), as amended June 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, and 20, 1940. (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1940), 222.

27. Viola F. Cordova and Kathleen D. Moore, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 142.
28. Duane Champagne, *Notes from the Center of Turtle Island* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2010), 160.
29. Considering that the whole Minnesota Chippewa Tribe was supposed to vote on the Revised Constitution, it seems odd that only 3,056 tribal members from the six bands went to the ballot.
30. Revised Constitution and Bylaws of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Minnesota. Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and United States Office of Indian Affairs (1964; amended 1972 and 2006).
31. Gerald Vizenor and Jill Doerfler, *The White Earth Nation: Ratification of a Native Democratic Constitution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 45.
32. Dan Browning, "White Earth Teaming up With Federal Prosecutors," *Star Tribune*, September 3, 2012, <http://m.startribune.com/local/?id=168409406>.
33. Immanuel Wallerstein, "Intellectuals in an Age of Transition," in *Emerging Issues in the 21st Century World-System, Vol. 2: New Theoretical Directions for the 21st Century World-System*, ed. Wilma A. Dunaway (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 25.
34. Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 93.
35. Peer Schouten, "Theory Talk #13: Immanuel Wallerstein on World-Systems, the Imminent End of Capitalism and Unifying Social Science," *Theory Talks*, August 4, 2008, <http://www.theory-talks.org/2008/08/theory-talk-13.html>.
36. For example, Fritjof Capra, Austrian-born American physicist, demands a holistic view of the world because the world is more than the sum of its parts. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1987). Instead of subjugating nature, Ilya Prigogine, a Russian-born Belgian physical chemist, advocates a new bond between the human and natural worlds. Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1984).
37. Vizenor and Doerfler, *The White Earth Nation*, 61.
38. Duane Champagne, "Remaking Tribal Constitutions: Meeting the Challenges of Tradition, Colonialism, and Globalization," in *American Indian Constitutional Reform and the Rebuilding of Native Nations*, ed. Eric D. Lemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).
39. See Hanna Lerner, *Making Constitutions in Deeply Divided Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). While this book does not deal with Native American constitutions, it contains valuable information on constitution-making process. Lerner argues that the most democratic constitutions contain both the nation-state and the liberal elements. These features can also be found in the Constitution of the White Earth Nation.
40. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The End of the World as We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 108.
41. Cordova, *How It Is*, 119.
42. Larry McCaffery and Tom Marshall, "Head Water: An Interview with Gerald Vizenor," *Chicago Review* 39, no. 3/4 (1993): 54.
43. Michael D. McNally, *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority, and Ojibwe Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 48.
44. Vizenor and Doerfler, *The White Earth Nation*, 88–89.
45. Constitution of the White Earth Nation, White Earth Reservation Tribal Council (ratified 2009; adopted 2013).