

“The Story Must Be Told As It Is”:  
Colonial Spiritual Self-Identification and Resistance

in Leslie Marmon Silko and Luci Tapahonso

by

Devennie Wauneka

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Joni Adamson, Chair  
Ronald Broglio  
Melissa Free

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine the novels and poetry of Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna) and Luci Tapahonso (Navajo), exploring how they are working to maintain, control, protect and develop their spiritual Indigenous identities. I link their literary work to Article 31.1, from the United Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which states that “Indigenous people have the right to maintain, control, and protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies, and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.” I argue that both Silko and Tapahonso create narratives and characters that illustrate how indigenous identity is self-determined and maintained through resistance to colonization and assimilation. I examine how these stories and characters incorporate new knowledge, about modern lifeways, into traditional Indigenous oral traditions and histories. Both Silko and Tapahonso connect nature and history, as they illustrate how oral traditions are passed down through the continual sharing of inter-generational stories and ethnobotanical information about plants, animals and food. This study will track how oral stories help the characters (re)connect with the land, and with foodways, by re-establishing a relationship of resistance against the exploitation, assimilation, and colonization of indigenous peoples, lands, and resources and the maintenance of spirituality through oral traditions.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family back home on the Navajo reservation, especially my mom and dad. Their stories and prayers continue to support me. I would also like to thank my partner for taking care of our home while I sat, reading and writing.

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## CHAPTER 1

### COLONIAL SPIRITUAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND RESISTANCE

#### Introduction

The Pueblo people always have connected certain stories with certain locations; it is these places that give the narratives such resonance over the centuries. The Pueblo people and the land and the stories are inseparable. In the creation of the text itself, I see no reason to separate visual images from written words that are visual images themselves. (Silko, *Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit* 14)

Growing up on the Navajo reservation, in Fort Defiance, Arizona, I was surrounded by deep blue skies, red rocks, dirt roads that were slowly turning into paved ones, white and grey patched dogs, family members, and their stories. Eating meals together has always been essential to my family – even when we were away from home camping or hauling wood, someone made sure there was a table to gather around and that was where we would tell stories. I didn't realize the importance of these stories when I was younger. I thought every one sat around the dinner table or at grandma's feet listening to stories of how couples meet, how ancient peoples moved from place to place, what the differences were between summer versus winter houses, and many other stories that marked landscapes and conveyed sophisticated reasons for why a person should not misbehave or roam too far from home at night.

A story was never too far away. My dad's side of the family were my neighbors—my aunt and cousins lived to the left and right of us, my grandmother lived across the street, my two uncles lived on opposite sides of her, and my grandfather lived a little

down the hill, past my grandma. Each of these people would tell stories. My grandparents never lived under the same roof, and of course there are stories about why it was that way. My mom's parents live a few towns over, and we saw them every Sunday, spending time in the sweat lodge and to have some of grandma's mutton dumpling stew. There are many stories from both sides of the family and those stories have been retold over and over, year after year. Out of all the countless tales, my all-time favorites were from my grandmother, Helen Wauneka. Briefly, she retold a story of how one summer while gathering some food in the hills behind Fort Defiance, she walked a little past her normal trails and came across the edge of a corn field. Grandma, at this time, was about 30 or 35 years old, making this around 1952. My dad wasn't born yet, but he grew up hearing this story like all of us did. She snuck into this corn field and proceeded to take a few ears of corn for my aunt and uncles back at home. Her loyal reservation or "rez" dogs followed her everywhere and, that day, they followed over the barb wire fence into the corn. Their barks were a first indication that something was not right, however, grandma was pretty confident she was alone. A few seconds later, she saw dark brown fur rustling about a few feet from her. A baby cub quickly walked into the path and she knew the mom was around. Sure enough, she appeared seconds later, behind her cub out of the ears of corn, following the barks. With only seconds to react, my grandma remembered what she had learned years before and that was that bears can't see very well. So, she stood there as stiff as possible, doing her absolute best to ignore the dogs licking her hands and wrapping themselves in her legs. Grandma stood in the corn field and stared down this bear for hours. She describes its fur, eyes, and teeth as if it were yesterday. She doesn't know how long she stood there but she was able to trick the bear. Eventually, the bear

went on its way with her cubs. My grandmother remembers and retells this story for only a few people and as soon as I heard it, I wrote it down.

Two of the most important Indigenous American writers, Leslie Marmon Silko and Luci Tapahonso, frequently write about their homelands and the oral traditions, very much like my grandmother's story, they are place-based and usually family-oriented. Both authors share intimate, educational and often entertaining stories from their respective communities. Their stories come in different forms, all stemming from the oral traditions passed down, and these authors transformed their stories into printed texts like poetry and nonfiction, or photographs – each depicting descriptive details heard in the many remembered stories. Written in 1981 and republished in 2012, *Storyteller* is a collection of mixed genre poetry, prose, and photography. The narratives are influenced by traditional oral stories shared through family members and community. Silko writes that the collection of traditional stories is “to acknowledge the continuity of storytelling and the storytellers” (xxv) and to give the readers “a feeling of the landscape and the context of the Pueblo villages where the stories take place” (xxv). In 1997, Silko published *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, a collection of nonfiction essays surrounding the Laguna Indigenous identity. In the “Introduction”, Silko writes that her “book of essays is structures like a spider’s web. It begins with the land; think of the land, the earth, as the center of a spider’s web. Human identity, imagination, and storytelling were inextricably linked to the land, to Mother Earth, just as the strands of the spider’s web radiate from the center of the web” (21). The other story that will be focused on is “Yellow Woman”, an interesting tale of love surrounded by mystery. Central to this story is the creation being, Yellow Woman or Kochininako. The narrator for this story is



immersed in a love affair with a mysterious man, Silva, after a chance encounter by the creek. Throughout the story, the narrator is reminded of the old stories involving Yellow Woman being kidnapped by mountain spirits, and she wonders whether she a part of this traditional story as the creature being. Silko is able to weave the narrator in between worlds, leaving a feeling that they are merged. In 1997, Luci Tapahonso published *Blue Horses Rush In*, another collection of mixed genre stories and poetry, each depicting traditional and contemporary Navajo life. Tapahonso describes the Navajo landscape and lifestyle seen in shared stories from family and community members. Tapahonso describes this book as a “collection [that] embodies in many ways the essence of the Diné love of language and stories. Some of the stories are humorous, while others are intensely sad accounts of loss and grief” (xiv). I will also focus on Tapahonso’s “Introduction” in *Blue Horses Rush In*, a short story about her traveling from the Navajo reservation back to Kansas. The road trip shows the character’s self-extraction from a homeland that takes place in Tapahonso’s life whenever she makes that journey from home to home. In this chapter, I will analyze Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller* and *Yellow Woman*, as well as Luci Tapahonso’s *Blue Horses Rush In*.

I will examine how each narrative shows that most Indigenous individuals are connected to a place or a specific area of land and are able to build relationships between themselves as well as their environmental surroundings. I would also like to review how elements of Indigenous storytelling and/or oral traditions are marshalled into activism and put into written form in legal documents such as the United Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Using Leslie Marmon’s Silko and Luci Tapahonso’s literary work, I want to track how the stories in each of these texts and their characters

connect with the land, creating a platform or a relationship to fight against exploitation of both indigenous peoples, lands, and resources.

### Indigenous Resistance through Oral Traditions

The intense relationship between Indigenous people and the land creates strong advocacy to preserve the culture and traditions. Advocacy through oral stories is little understood outside indigenous communities but is the “connective tissue” that keeps the connections between Indigenous knowledge, contemporary life, and communities strong. By being able to self-identify as Indigenous through oral traditions, individuals become deeply rooted in the landscape and often feel it is their obligation to stand up for environmental rights. In “Leslie Marmon Silko’s Reappropriation of Native American and History and Identity”, literary scholar Cynthia Carsten writes, “Native American authors who reclaim the territory of history and identity through literary texts challenge the critical reader, in the light of the ethics of resistance, to reevaluate dominant ideologies of cultural meaning and truth” (107). The resistance is against the loss of Indigenous knowledge and language through the cultural assimilation experienced at the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding schools. Silko writes, in *Storyteller*, about the shame and embarrassment experienced through the Christian boarding school by describing her Grandmother A’mooh’s aversion to sharing traditional oral stories, but instead reads a copy of *Brownie the Bear* (xxii). Silko also experiences being punished for speaking the Laguna language at the BIA Laguna Day school (xxiii). Resistance is also against the unauthorized use of Indigenous tribal lands and water for

special corporate interests. Tapahonso writes about this resistance by claiming ownership through stories surrounding territories and landmarks.

Silko and Tapahonso show that resistance and activism stem from the knowledge of storytelling and understandings of what the stories are about. Leslie Marmon Silko in *Storyteller* explains that, “these stories gave [the Indigenous community] the heart to face danger with the hope that if they did exactly what the survivor’s story, and thus stories rich in detail and description became the most pleasurable because they gave the listeners the most information. The association of knowledge with power begins here” (xx).

Tapahonso conveys this knowledge-associated power by recreating these Navajo stories realistically as possible in order to transfer the stories beauty and thereby creating a protective relationship for these stories and the lands it describes. Tapahonso writes in *Blue Horses Rush In* that:

Many of [the stories] were originally told in Diné, taking no longer than ten minutes in the telling. Yet in recreating them, it is necessary to describe the land, the sky, the light, and the other details of time and place. In this way, I attempt to create and convey the setting for the oral text. In writing, then, I revisit the place or places concerned and try to bring the reader to them, thereby enabling myself and other Navajos to sojourn mentally and emotionally to our home, Dinétah. (xiv)

These stories converge the physical and spiritual worlds together and both of these authors attempt to keep the narrators ambiguous in order to maintain the communal nature of these tales. By converging the two worlds, Indigenous knowledge is kept intact

through sharing oral traditional stories. Storytelling creates a space for traditional Indigenous knowledges to be carried on into the next generation.

Carsten writes (referencing Silko) that:

In *Storyteller*, the self is emergent from the ethos of the community; its people, its history, its landscape. Silko draws on the resources of her Laguna Pueblo community, subtly weaving her self-inscription out of the stories and history of her people. Unlike conventional Euro-American autobiographies that place the 'I' at the center, her autobiography locates the self within the web of the interconnected Pueblo universe. (108)

As both Silko and Tapahonso illustrate, storytelling is very important to Indigenous families and its community. These stories bring families and individuals together, promoting the continuance of cultural and traditional knowledge. Most of these stories center around the community, anchoring itself amongst the area's natural resources, including the landscape, its animals, its history and at the same time accepting the possibilities of supernatural or cosmological events occurring. An open mind is an important aspect to these stories, because most are unexplainable and to question its validity is not considered. If it does happen, a simple ambiguous answer of "that is the way it's always been" is given. Luci Tapahonso writes in *Blue Horses Rush In* that:

[I]nherent in Diné storytelling is the belief that, indeed, the events or the story did occur at some point in the past. There is not an insistence on facts' or 'evidence.' The understanding is that the function of stories is to entertain and that they usually involve some teaching as well as the

exploration of possibilities, besides which they all require a vivid imagination and a non-judgmental mind-set. (xiv)

Trusting these stories is essential to having them effect you spiritually, mentally, and physically.

Indigenous creation stories anchor tribes and communities to their land and its history. As Joni Adamson writes in “Cultural Critique and Local Pedagogy” from *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism* that Indigenous storytelling personal environments can also be referred to as vernacular landscapes. She explains that:

The vernacular landscape is a folk landscape in which people are attuned to the contours of home and place; it is a living breathing landscape where geological features...are alive with meaning and significance, where people, whether they live in rural or urban areas, can tell you the names of their neighbors and the names of the trees, where they have as sense of the rhythms of local culture. (90)

These oral stories initiate and create a serious close connection or bond with individuals and the spiritual or natural world in the places where Indigenous people live.

These lessons are just a part of an Indigenous oral tradition that stem from creation stories all the way to current tales. Teachings include how to care and protect the household through prayer and songs as seen in Tapahonso’s part one of “Notes for the Children” in *Blue Horses Rush In*:

Long ago the Holy Ones built the first hooghan for the First Man and First Woman with much planning and deliberation; then they started in the east

doorway, blessing the house for the protection and use of Navajo people. They moved clockwise from the east and offered prayers and songs in each direction. They taught us in hope that when we moved into a new apartment or home, we would do the same. (35)

Silko also alludes to these lessons in *Yellow Woman and the Beauty of a Spirit*, stating that these stories are not “bedtime stories” but they carry traditional information through multiple generations. She gives an example of the stories surrounding deer-hunting, claiming that the “even the most ordinary deer-hunting story is dense with information, from stalking techniques to weather forecasting and the correct rituals to be performed in honor of the dead deer. In short, the stories and reminiscences that enliven all Pueblo social gatherings are densely encoded with expressions and information” (178). These oral traditions involve the practice of storytelling – storytellers are individuals contributing to an informative collective history that brings communities together, while strengthening the bond between its members and creating a relationship with the physical landscape. Storytelling sustains the community, preserves the past, and allows communities to share knowledge.

Judy Iseke claims in “Indigenous Storytelling as Research” that “Storytelling is a practice in Indigenous cultures that sustains communities and validates the experiences and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples. Storytelling provides opportunities to express the experiences of indigenous peoples in Indigenous languages and nurtures relationships and the sharing of Indigenous knowledges and cultures” (559). Silko demonstrates this practice through one of the short stories written in *Storyteller* about the creator being Yellow Woman. Silko’s Aunt Alice shares a story describing a confrontation between

Yellow Woman and a giant creator monster being called Estrucuyu. While hunting, Yellow Woman encounters the ancient creator monster animal. After giving up all possessions and clothing, she hides and calls out for the help of the Twin Brothers. They arrive and are able to kill the monster, cutting out his heart, and throwing it out onto the land. Aunt Alice explains that the big rock near John Paisano's place is where the monster's heart rests. This is the reason the area is called Yash'ka or heart (79-83). The connection Aunt Alice places on the current physical rock's location coincides with the oral story's depiction of how the Twin Brothers threw the monster's heart out between Laguna and Pagate. The physical evidence of the rock validates the experience and knowledges of the Laguna people and its traditional oral stories. The name of the location and the name for heart re-affirms Indigenous knowledges surrounding this particular story. Oral tradition within an Indigenous community promotes cultural and traditional knowledge. Tapahonso demonstrates this practice by sharing oral stories also involving cultural and traditional connections to actual landmarks written in "This Is How They Were Placed for Us". This poem describes the Navajo transformation being, Changing Woman. The poem connects her spiritually to neighboring mountains like Blanca Peak, Mount Taylor, San Francisco Peak, Hesperus Peak, and Huerfano Mountain. The poem has Navajo sentences and prayers, explaining that prayers and beings created this world. Like Silko's short story, this poem validates the Navajo traditional experiences and knowledges (39-42). Iseke further writes that, "Indigenous peoples engage oral traditions, historical/ancestral knowledges, and cultural resources to examine current events and Indigenous understandings in ways consistent with traditional worldviews and cosmologies" (559). Personal stories told to me by my parents and grandparents shaped

my understanding of the Navajo culture, and these stories ran true because I could recognize the landmarks described in stories. This connection between the oral traditions and physical landmarks anchored my spirituality within being Navajo, and kept me culturally close to traditional ways.

Both Luci Tapahonso in *Blue Horses Rush In* and Leslie Marmon Silko in *Storyteller* and *Yellow Woman* write about the impact the land and its history has had on their family and people's history. The books themselves are a collection of memories, or recollections, told through poems, short stories, and photography – each of these accounts not only deliver a physical picture of the Laguna Pueblo and Navajo lands but they also convey a sense of spiritual and traditional pride in the culture. Silko writes in *Yellow Woman*:

The ancient Pueblo people depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival. The oral narrative, or story, became the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained. Whatever the event or the subject, the ancient people perceived the world and themselves within that world as part of an ancient, continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories. (30-31)

Each literary text evokes a type of nostalgia and warm feeling that only home gives you. Each book has stories that are kept alive through memories being told and retold to each generation. Silko explains that these memories turned into narratives are important and that they condone notions that Indigenous peoples are part of larger story:



The entire culture, all the knowledge, experience, and beliefs, were kept in the human memory of the Pueblo people in the form of narrative that were told and retold from generation to generation. The people perceived themselves in the world as part of an ancient continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories. (xix)

She further explains that:

[L]ocation or place plays a central role in Pueblo narratives. Stories are most frequently recalled as people are passing a specific geographical feature or the exact location where a story took place. Often the turning point in a story depended upon a peculiarity or special quality of a rock or a tree, found only at that place. Often it is impossible to determine which came first: the incident or the geographical feature that stirs the imagination. (xx)

These stories solidify the relationship because current physical landmarks that appear in the tales are indeed seen in the present. Indigenous people, because of this close connection to the land, are resistant to being exploited for its resources. Protecting the homelands and ensuring its existence helps to sustain the cultural and traditional way of life.

In Luci Tapahonso's "Introduction" to *Blue Horses Rush In*, Tapahonso is leaving the Navajo reservation to return to Lawrence, Kansas. Like all trips back home to the reservation, it is difficult to leave the people, food, and land. In the beginning of the short recollection, Tapahonso first acknowledges the weather on the reservation in comparison to weather in Kansas. "Around Shiprock everyone hoped for rain, but I had just come

from Kansas, where it had been raining for three days straight, and for me the warm dry air was refreshing” (ix). She goes on to describe how immersed her and family get in stories – allowing them to converse for hours, going over each story that may be entertaining.

To leave Shiprock is difficult. After an hour or so of saying good-bye, as we drive out of the front yard there is always a group of family members waving and watching us leave. As we drive through Shiprock, we encounter other family members, friends, or relatives at the 7-Eleven, the gas station, or at City Market. So we stop once more to catch up on the latest news and say good-bye again. They ask several times when we’ll be coming home next. (xi)

Tapahonso even mentions that although her children were not physically there, their memories will be a part of the ongoing conversation – “Although my own children were not with us in Shiprock, their names and presences were interwoven throughout the conversation as we talked of their childhoods, their college course work, or Lori’s children” (x). They are remembered collectively and by being part of the traditional stories, they are never forgotten and still connected to the land.

These types of memories and being remembered are important to the collective oral stories, as people and landmarks sustain Tapahonso’s culture and heritage. Leaving the reservation is difficult because it is a long good bye. Good-byes are shared with animal and humans, but it feels like a personal good bye should happen with the landscape. For the Navajo, it is important to pray for you and your family’s well-being whenever we travel outside the four sacred mountains. Tapahonso doesn’t literally say

good-bye to the land, but she lists the names of the towns passed when traveling east back to Kansas and those mentioned are Gallup, Rehoboth, Albuquerque, and Lawrence, Oklahoma. The more they travel east, away from the Navajo reservation, the less Navajo is spoken; in Shiprock, it was steady stream of both Navajo and English; in Albuquerque, there is only English; and in Kansas, their accents make everyday conversations difficult (xii).

Although the Tapahonso's are leaving their land and family, they decided to carry on the traditions of gathering and sharing through memories of their recent trip by retelling oral stories. She writes that

This transition in language and conversation usually continues for the first two or three days we are back in Lawrence. Soon the accent lessens, but never disappears entirely. In Lawrence, we gather in our home in the evenings or on weekends—our two daughters and their little families—and exchange stories from our visit. (xii)

The culture and tradition is carried on and practice through remembering and retelling of these stories. It strengthens the community and the family. By retelling these stories, especially away from home, Tapahonso is reinforcing her and her daughter's spiritual and cultural identity to the Navajo traditions, experiences, and knowledges.

In Leslie Marmon Silko's "Yellow Woman" from *Storyteller*, the narrative immediately places you in a mystical location. The protagonist of the story wakes up attached through skin and sweat to a stranger, Silva. Mysticism comes from the strange feeling of being close to a familiar location and to this stranger. The female in the story mentions how easily she came across Silva standing near the creek and then, suddenly

spending the night with him. Much like the monster's heart from Silko's poem mentioned earlier, the landscapes and landmarks described in "Yellow Woman" reinforce the cultural connection between Indigenous peoples and its oral traditions. Silko is showing resistance by continuously sharing these stories, allowing them to be shared through written text. Silko writes from the female character's point of view, "But I only said that you were him and that I was Yellow Woman—I'm not really her—I have my own name and I come from the pueblo on the other side of the mesa. Your name is Silva and you are stranger I met by the river yesterday afternoon" (53). The female character mentions over and over that she might literally be a part of the traditional story surrounding Yellow Woman. She wanders with Silva and secretly hopes that they run into a stranger, shattering the illusion that she might be Yellow Woman.

I will see someone, eventually I will see someone, and then I will be certain that he is only a man—some man from nearby—and I will be sure that I am not Yellow Woman, Because she is from out of time past and I live now and I've been to school and there are highways and pickup trucks that Yellow Woman never saw. (54)

Various versions of this story include Yellow Woman being kidnapped by either a mountain spirit or a Navajo wanderer. After another night together, he disappears and she walk back to Laguna Pueblo only to find him there. She doesn't go home but follows him back into the hills, arriving somewhere east of the Navajo reservation and west of the Pueblo. She recognized the landscape and is able to remember where home is located. Carsten writes that, "[b]y resisting conventional literary models and replacing them with a mythic narrative, Silko manages to reverse the history of the dominance of the Euro-

American voice” (122). Throughout this type of love affair in this story, the female /character is constantly mentioning, remembering, and worrying that she is a part of the old Yellow Woman oral traditions by actually being Yellow Woman. By retelling and remembering this story, the transformational creator being being is kept alive and mentioned casually within social narratives.

As mentioned before, the landscape surrounding the communities act as a backdrop to all the oral traditions and provide a space for stories to grow, as well as be preserved. The “vernacular” landscapes become personal and from these stories there is a sense of obligation to protect native lands that represent local cultural heritage and thus a need for resistance. Silko writes from *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* that:

[T]he places where stories occur are precisely located, and prominent geographical details recalled, even if the landscape is well known to listeners, often because the turning point in the narrative involved a peculiarity of the special quality of rock or tree or plant found only at that place. Thus, in the case of many of the Pueblo narratives, it is impossible to determine which came first, the incident or the geographical feature that begs to be brought alive in the story that features some unusual aspect of this location. (33)

Jeff Corntassel in “Re-envisioning resurgence: Indigenous pathways to decolonization and sustainable self-determination” writes that:

Being Indigenous today means struggling to reclaim and regenerate one’s relational, place-based existence by challenging the ongoing, destructive forces of colonization. Whether through ceremony or through other ways

that Indigenous peoples (re)connect to the natural world, processes of resurgence are often contentious and reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, social, and politics scope of the struggle. (88)

This struggle against colonization is seen through the stories from Leslie Marmon Silko and Luci Tapahonso' literary texts—by retelling and remembering these traditionally cultural stories, the foundation of the indigenous knowledge is already resisting the effects of colonization. Another way these stories are fighting back against colonization is by protecting the landmarks seen in these oral traditions. Without these landmarks, the validity of these stories lessens and is in jeopardy of being forgotten.

#### Indigenous Knowledges and Rights

According to the Smithsonian Institute's Department of Anthropology, Congress established the Bureau of Ethnology (BAE) in 1879 and its focus was to research on North American Indigenous traditions and cultures. There were over 200 Bulletins and 48 BAE Annual Reports published over 86 years. Recently, various Indigenous groups used these reports to argue for land right claims. Adamson and Monani write in "Cosmosvisions, Ecocriticism, and Indigenous Studies" that several Indigenous writers referred to these BAE reports to "piece together cultural and ecological knowledge that had been scattered or lost over years of systematic oppression and racism" (6), and were able to prove ownership over culturally traditional lands. These reports are packed with Indigenous knowledges similar to the stories shared in Tapahonso and Silko's shorts stories and poetry. The cultural and traditional Indigenous knowledges in these oral stories are the basis for Indigenous land rights. The passed down traditions and stories

show that the Indigenous peoples are actively self-determining their Indigenous identification by maintaining and protecting their culture, traditions, and knowledges as defined by the United Nations' Declaration directed at Indigenous peoples.

In September 2007, the General United Nations' Assembly adopted the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, or UNDRIP, by a majority of 144 states in favor, 11 countries who abstained, and 4 countries who voted against it. The Declaration's 46 articles describe the rights the Indigenous Peoples have, and recognizes them as distinct individuals, as well as being part of a community. These individuals have a right to self-identify as Indigenous people through self-determination, meaning people have the right to decide how to be governed and how to practice their own culture. The Declaration advocates for the protection of Indigenous Peoples language, lands, territories, resources, tribal jurisdictions, economic development, and culture. The UNDRIP was developed and designed to protect Tapahonso and Silko's way of life shared through their storytelling and oral traditions.

Tapahonso and Silko's stories, including landscape and the ways that people are linked to it, illustrates the importance of UNDRIP's Article 31.1. This article summarizes Indigenous People's right have to their history, indigenous knowledges pertaining to nature, and culture:

Indigenous people have the right to maintain, control, and protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies, and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions,

literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

This article claims the right to self-determine the various ways that Indigenous Peoples maintain their identity, history and knowledges pertaining to nature. The UNDRIP can set standards and guide local government in its relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

Very briefly, UNDRIP describes the rights Indigenous Peoples have in regard to self-determination, including having the right to be recognized as distinct people; having the right to free, prior, and informed consent to their traditional lands; and the right to be free of discrimination. Not only does the UNDRIP protect the Indigenous lands but it also protects Indigenous knowledge, culture, and heritage. Silko and Tapahonso gather and share traditional oral stories, preserving their Laguna and Navajo culture is a reference to the principles underlying in UNDRIP. This kind of intergenerational cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and expressions relates directly to UNDRIP's declaration to protect and maintain this type of intellectual integrity. Silko and Tapahonso are able to self-determine their Indigenous spiritual identity through maintaining traditional practices told through cultural oral stories. As mentioned before, these stories actively engage Indigenous knowledges and this knowledge is the basis for land rights, as most landmarks are connected with a creation oral story. The need to protect the traditional lands in these oral stories cross over into real activism. Indigenous people have been engaged in activism concerning land and water right for some time now. A few examples is the fight against the use of sewage water on the sacred San Francisco Peaks ski area in Flagstaff,



Arizona. The Navajo people have filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights claiming that San Francisco Peak is a traditional sacred location for several Indigenous groups in Arizona (Landry). This mountain is included in many oral stories and is often the birthplace for several transformational beings – it is deeply rooted and connected to Indigenous knowledges and experiences. Before the complaint was filed, Indigenous people have been fighting against the use of sewage water to make artificial snow for the skiing area on the peak. Another example of protecting Indigenous traditions through standing up for Indigenous land rights is the active protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The Dakota Access Pipeline will be a 1,772 mile long pipe, carrying crude oil from North Dakota down through Illinois. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe is opposed to this project because there is no guarantee that the pipe will not leak into the land and ruin the water. Not only will this project affect the water, but construction of the pipeline will disrupt sacred traditional lands. Currently, members of the Standing Rock Sioux along with a lot of Indigenous groups from all over the world are staging an ongoing protest and have set up a camp called the Sacred Stone. They call themselves Water Protectors instead of protestors and their main objective is to protect the water by disrupting the pipeline and its progress. At Sacred Stone, the Indigenous protestors are still sharing cultural traditional oral stories and this is seen by these protestors calling the Dakota Access Pipeline the “Black Snake”. The “Black Snake” is a reference to an old Lakota oral creation story that describes a black snake crossing and destroying the land. The Indigenous protestors are actively maintaining and protecting their sacred traditional lands using the slogan: “Stop the Black Snake” (Sacred Stone Camp).

## CHAPTER 2

### MAINTAINING A SELF-DETERMINED IDENTITY AND RESILIENCY

Diné people far from home are always scheming and planning as to how to get some mutton and Bluebird or Red Rose flour. When we hear of someone going back to the rez, we offer them money and ask humbly that they bring flour or mutton back for us....Mutton has long been a staple of Diné life and is a literal reminder of the many meals at home, celebrations and events of all types, fairs, and ceremonies. (Tapahonso, *Blue Horses Rush In*)

I grew up and was raised traditionally on the Navajo reservation, in Fort Defiance, Arizona. Being raised traditionally, to my family, meant that the oral stories and ceremonies were passed down to me through family members, immediate and distant. I participated in ceremonies from a young age, was taught my creation story and learned how to self-identify through clan systems. I believe participation is important to being an active member in an Indigenous community because it continuously creates a space for knowledge to be passed down through the generations. This space was created by my parents, as they insured that I knew my clans and that I knew how to conduct myself as a good Navajo – they passed down knowledge they had learned from their parents/grandparents. I was surrounded by my culture and its traditions daily.

To understand the connection felt between Indigenous peoples and their homelands is to understand the Indigenous cultural creation stories describing a migration from previous other worlds leading to this current one. Each specific story is laced with different important metaphors and places the Indigenous person in a sacred relationship

to the land, animals, and transformational creator beings. Joni Adamson explains in *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism* that:

Despite five centuries of oppression, repression, and dispossession, the Diné and Pueblo peoples still feel a deep connection to lands that resonate with cultural and personal meaning and significance, lands that are alive with story. They still identify a place of emergence somewhere within their traditional homelands....They still tell the emergence and migration stories from their oral traditions, still recognize the places where the events of the stories took place, still cultivate gardens of corn and beans and squash, and still see the places where they live as a middle place in which nature and culture are not separate, but inextricably bound. (48)

These cultural stories help guide the Indigenous mind and people through these multiple worlds and present times. The oral stories Tapahonso's in *Blue Horses Rush In* are sprinkled with cultural and personal knowledges, from her Acoma mother-in-law sending the children to get rainwater instead of sink water because it wasn't good to make pottery with (31), to traditionally blessing a new home the way the Holy Ones practiced (35) and different passed down skills from various transformational creator beings like Changing Woman and Spider Woman. Luci Tapahonso uses the influence oral traditional have on the Indigenous community because it reminds the individual that there is a choice in self-determining ones Indigenous identity. Instead of letting these traditions and cultural oral stories disappear, individuals can chose to learn and protect these Indigenous knowledges. Resiliency occurs through retelling these cultural creation stories in a respectful manner—by continually sharing Indigenous knowledges through generation

and generation, the Indigenous individual is able to determine their own spiritually cultural Indigenous identity. The oral stories are resilient in themselves because they have survived years of colonization, assimilation and exploitation.

Using Tapahonso's stories, I am going to describe the different ways, through sheep and creation beings tales, the Navajo people kept their oral traditions alive and resisted total assimilation. I will also discuss how they incorporate elements of their past into their everyday modern lives, solidifying a strong cultural spiritual self-identity. I will also cover some Navajo history which is key to understanding the importance of what Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte called "resiliency" inspired by the oral stories.

### The Oral Traditions

For this chapter, when creation story is being referred to, I mean the cultural oral traditions surrounding the emergence of the Navajo people. The Navajo creation story in particular is expected to be told during the winter months when certain animal and spirits are away. The story revolves around the Navajo people's journey through multiple worlds to arrive in the present one. These worlds inhabit different transformational creator beings that guide the Navajo people safely through these different dimensions. The songs, prayers, and stories absorbed during this journey are continuously still shared among the Navajo people. By migration story or history, I am talking about the history of the Navajo Churro sheep, the forced migration during the Navajo Long Walk, and the slaughter of livestock during the Navajo Livestock Reduction.

Creation and migrant stories include the both ancient and contemporary. For instance, sheep is a relatively modern addition to the Navajo traditional lifestyle and

histories. The Navajo people say that “Sheep is Life”. The sheep represents more than an animal because it provides clothing and food for families. As long as I can remember, mutton has been served at every family gathering and ceremony. Families usually butcher an entire sheep in celebration of a birthday or in recognition of a ceremony. The entire sheep is put to use, meaning that nothing is wasted – the wool is woven to make rugs and clothing while the organs are prepared with the meat to feed the whole family. While I attended Sarah Lawrence College in New York, I found comfort in the overnight packages of frozen mutton my mother sent. Preparing mutton stew from these special packages solidified my relationship to my Navajo cultural homeland – with every bite I remembered home and its traditional stories. My longing for mutton illustrates that the Navajo can continually survive in a modern world while remembering their traditional values.

Much like Taphonso in “Notes for Children”, I look forward to eating mutton whenever I can, especially when I am far from home. Besides learning how to self-identity through clanship and oral traditions, I was taught many other things which include how to weave rugs, how to make frybread, and how to carry on traditions while at the same time being able to experience new worlds. I didn’t learn to butcher a sheep. I watched, and a few times, I would help clean the intestines. My cousins who lived closer to my mother’s parents, in Lupton, AZ were the braver ones – they butchered with the adults. They learned how to butcher sheep, herd, weave, and speak fluent Navajo. Every gathering with family members, especially around food, creates an atmosphere for sharing. I acquired Navajo knowledge through living among our traditions and stories.

Spaces are created during these visits to encourage everyone to share old and new stories. A few stories are silly but even those are laced with lessons. Tapahonso gives an example of this humor in *Blue Horses Rush In*: “Diné people are known to complain at time, ‘What kind of meal is this? There’s no mutton stew!’ So if you’re far from home, remember there might be other Diné people around who are probably craving mutton” (37). Gathering to eat mutton creates a space for stories and relationships to grow. For example, in section 4 from “Notes for the Children”, Tapahonso connects remembered taste to memories of family and history:

When we taste mutton, we are reminded of the mountains, the air, the laughter and humor surrounding a meal, but mostly we are reminded of loved ones...Some elderly people say that mutton has healing powers and brings happiness because sheep have been a part of our history since the beginning of time. (56-57)

The stories written in Luci Tapahonso’s *Blue Horse Rush In* show that the Navajo people are deeply connected to the land and its animals, always remembering the hardships derived from colonization but resisting assimilation by incorporating the new world into the culture and traditions.

My Navajo traditions and cultural values come from my family and the community. I was taught the creation stories and was introduced to songs, prayers, and ceremonies throughout my entire life. I respect these oral traditions and its cultural values. Learning from these intergenerational traditions helped my parents ensure our Indigenous knowledges and identity were carried on. Right away I realized that I had an obligation and a right to maintain, control, protect, and develop these Navajo traditions in

order to sustain my spiritual Indigenous self-identification. I practice these rights by remembering these stories, by retelling them, and I protect these traditions by respecting its origins.

The Navajo people, through continually passing down the stories, are able to, what Kyle Powys Whyte refers to in, “What Do Indigenous Knowledges Do for Indigenous Peoples?” as having a right and a responsibility to plan for the future while maintaining their self-determined spiritual identity.

Indigenous knowledges have governance-value for Indigenous peoples as an integral part of how our nations and communities plan for the future.

The responsibility and right to plan for the future is a key component of collective self-determination and enshrined by important documents such as the UNDRIP. (24)

Indigenous oral traditions are an example of how Indigenous knowledges and identity are being maintained, controlled, protected and developed within an Indigenous community (UNDRIP). Article 31.1 specifically states that, “Indigenous people have the right to maintain, control, and protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.” I maintain and develop my traditional knowledges by continually praying every morning to rising Eastern sun, even when I was living away from the reservation, I practiced the Morning Prayer and felt like I was keeping my spiritual identity close to Navajo culture and traditions. I protect my corn pollen by storing it in a deer skin beaded medicine bag. I maintain my Eagle feather that was given to me a long time ago during a ceremonial meeting to promote my education by cleaning

its delicate strands. My family sustains this Indigenous knowledge through remembering the Navajo oral tradition with me and my siblings.

This protection of cultural heritage is seen in *Blue Horses Rush In*, she demonstrates the significance placed on the land, people, transformational creator beings and sheep. By significance, I mean that she illustrates that the Navajo people have an ability to self-determine and protect their own cultural identity through, what Whyte calls resurgence and power (6). These stories convey messages to live a healthy knowledgeable safe life, while stressing the importance of being able to communicate respectfully and patiently with other multilayered beings, human and nonhuman.

Traditional oral creation stories include human and non-humans or transformational beings, meaning that these individuals can manifest mysteriously and live anywhere in time and space. Similar to deities or gods, these transformational beings offer guidance and protection through traditional prayers and cultural devotion.

Tapahonso writes in *Blue Horses Rush In* and *Sáani Dahataa! The Women Are Singing* about Changing Woman and Spider Woman – they guide the Navajo people through songs, prayers, and stories. Not only does Tapahonso include these female creator beings into her book, but she includes the Navajo relationship with sheep. Tapahonso shares a fondness for sheep by opening *Sáani Dahataa!* with a bowl of mutton stew upon returning to the reservation – it serves as a type of welcoming and departing meal. When Tapahonso leaves for Kansas, she stops by the flea market to grab a mutton sandwich.

Silko also discusses the Acoma's relationship to foods introduced through colonization, and she also makes connections to these new foods and their respected transformational beings in *Storyteller* and *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of Spirit*.



Although the Navajo are distinct from the Laguna Pueblo, there are some overlaps in cultures and traditions when it comes from food and colonization. Silko writes about the importance of goats in “Uncle Tony’s Goat”, writing that the “goats were valuable. We got milk and meat from them. My uncle was careful to see that all the goats were treated properly” (163). In short, Silko’s uncle had a rule to not bother the animals and the kids broke this rule. Another story from Grandmother A’mooh describes a resolution to the Navajo people raiding the Laguna sheep. Instead of violence, the Laguna gave the Navajo some sheep and told them to simply ask for food in the future (203). For this chapter, I will be examining the relationship between the Navajo people and their sheep, and how this relationship was able to turn colonization into a way of maintaining a self-determined spiritual identity by resisting assimilation by accepting different practices in Luci Tapahonso’s work.

Louise Lamphere writes in “Migration, assimilation, and the cultural construction of identity: Navajo Perspectives” that:

The new view of assimilation is one that does not demand ‘Anglo conformity’ but sees assimilation as compatible with the maintenance of some culturally distinct religious practices, associations, symbols and values. More attention needs to be given to both the process of maintaining such practices and the creative process of adding to altering and creating new ones. (1140)

The stories that Luci Tapahonso share in *Sáani Dahataał* and *Blue Horses Rush In* show a relationship between sheep and human but not always in direct animal human connection, meaning that the sheep is referred to through the food and clothing it

provides for the Navajo community. Lamphere offers the idea of concentrating on the ideas of intra-cultural practices instead of an erasure of culture (1149). The Navajo recognized the power this animal provided, and included its entire entity into oral traditions, meaning that it was woven in with other stories and was developed into a variety of intra-cultural practices as Lamphere suggests. She further writes that “[n]ot only can identities be multilayered or contextual, but individuals can retain or grow up to attain identities that have deep cultural and symbolic roots” (1140). The Navajo people maintain their identity by including sheep in their oral stories while still keeping their transformational beings.

The preface of *Blue Horses Rush In* starts with a description of the land seen during a road trip back to the Navajo reservation from Kansas. Tapahonso writes about the changes in land, and especially the differences between the Kaw River and San Juan/Rio Grande River. “One fall we drove home to Shiprock, New Mexico, about 1300 miles away. Our route took us across Kansas, into Colorado, and then down into northwestern New Mexico. It was such a contrast to see the wide fierce water changes to the quiet shallow San Juan in New Mexico” (ix). Tapahonso chooses to start this book of stories, as Joni Adamson writes in “The Ancient Future: Diasporic Residency and Food-Based Knowledges in the Work of American Indigenous and Pacific Austronesian Writers”, with “each of the short pieces in the collection is to be read like the stories that Tapahonso typically tells her daughters on long drives home” (10). So we see how the ancient oral traditions are woven into contemporary life as Tapahonso drives her car back to the Navajo Nation, all the while telling her daughters shared oral traditions. This collection of stories is supposed to feel like the reader is participating in this relationship

between mother and daughter, between the Navajo people and its traditions. Through Tapahonso's words, the reader can feel like the stories are maintaining that connection to the land and the culture. These stories are full of Indigenous knowledge and are being passed down to her daughters during these road trips back home. She shows that these oral traditions are important to the Navajo self-identity and serve as a type of resistance against colonization simply by communicating with her daughters on a road trip. By sharing these stories, she is able to maintain their Indigenous knowledges. Tapahonso is teaching her daughters that, although the Navajo people were subjected to violence through colonization and assimilation by being forced to participate in the Long Walk, the Indigenous knowledges associated with being Navajo can be carried on into modern times. It shows that the Navajo people were able to prevail in times of oppression and hardships. These tales generate a lasting and surviving traditional knowledge, kept alive with the family and with the tribe simply by remembering and retelling. Not only is Tapahonso highlighting the resistive nature Indigenous peoples have against colonization, she is also sharing that the times of oppression didn't halt the practices of Navajo tradition and its cultural values. In fact, Tapahonso writes about the acceptance of the sheep, adding that these animals are like family – that is how important this animal is. Tapahonso writes in, "In 1864", before the Long Walk, Kit Carson and his army killed the sheep. "Kit Karson and his army burned all the fields, and the killed out sheep right in front of us. We couldn't believe it. I covered my face and cried. All my life, we had sheep. They were like our family. It was then I knew our lives were in great danger" (8).

## The Importance of Sheep

Sheep are not native to North Americas, but instead were brought to the southwest area through colonization from Spaniards. Instead of rejecting this new animal, the Navajos were able to recognize its capabilities while embracing the sheep and using its attributes to cloth and feed themselves, while incorporating sheep into their traditions and culture, preserving their identity. The Anishinaabe are groups of culturally related Indigenous peoples of Canada and North America related to the Algonquin tribes. There are different Anishnaabe individual tribes but they all share various cultural traditions. Whyte writes about these groups and claims that the general public should look at the world in the way these Indigenous people do:

It is common to look at the world as interrelated in ways that some people outside the Anishinaabe world do not always grasp, such as the complex interrelation of human health, storytelling, gendered, and intergenerational relationships, cultural and ceremonial life, the intimacy of human relations with plants, animals and entities, and the moral responsibilities that come with family, clan, and band membership. (2)

This interrelation of intergenerational relationship between Navajo and outside entities doesn't make the Indigenous knowledge less important, but instead it strengthening the bond that the Navajo have with their culture and traditions.

## The History of the Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation was established June 1st with the Treaty of 1868. The entire reservation is roughly 27,000 square miles. It is about the size of West Virginia, and it

covers three states: Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. The Navajo Nation's capital is in Window Rock, Arizona. According to the 2011 Census, the Navajo Nation has around over 300,000 enrolled members, half of which are fluent in the Navajo language. In order to be an enrolled member, one must be of ¼ blood quantity and show proof of Navajo ancestry to officially obtain a Certificate of Indian Blood from the Navajo Census office (Donovan). The traditional Navajo follow a clan system, and most traditional members believe in the Creation Story. The Navajo Creation Story, due to its sacred roots and believes, can only be told during the winter time and is full of stories based on how the Navajo believe they were brought into this world.

These stories hold a very special place in Navajo tradition and culture, they ground the people in its traditions, knowledges, and ideologies. Even if a particular person or family's religion is not traditional, the concept of "homeland" is still very important to the Navajo as it serves as a type of protected grounds found within the four sacred peaks in each respective direction. The Navajo are a matrilineal and matriarchal society, which means the female is the dominant figure in the family and each person takes their first clan from their mother. Navajo women are known to be strong and independent, showing time and again their intelligence and resistance through Navajo personalities such as Dr. Annie Wauneka (no relation), a highly educated Navajo women who strived to be an established advocate for Indigenous health and education, or through transformational creation story "mythical" figures or deities such as Changing Woman.

## Place Based Knowledge

Changing Woman is regarded as being the ultimate personification of Earth and the Universe – she represents beauty in the Navajo. Changing Woman embodies what it means to be a Navajo – full of beauty. Navajo’s believe that if we are in harmony and in balance with the world, we are able to embody Changing Woman and instill beauty in our hearts and minds. These creator beings contribute knowledge and guidance to the Navajo, allowing them to change the narrative, but at the same time, keeping the ethics of being Diné. They are remembered and retold through oral stories, as seen in Luci Tapahonso’s work. The Navajo creation story is an oral tradition that is passed down generationally, depicting different worlds where animal, land, and human live in the same but different place. Each being is able to communicate and find a way to live peacefully with the other. Not all stories are positive, some are littered with lessons on bad behavior and negative behavior.

Tapahonso includes this individual in stories like “This Is How They Were Place for Us”, from *Blue Horses Rush In*:

She is the brightness of spring

She is Changing Woman returned

Because of her, we think and create

Because of her, we make songs.

Because of her, the designs appear as we weave.

Because of her, we tell stories and laugh.

We believe in old values and new ideas. (39)

Changing Woman is literally credited with being the creator of seasons, creator of thought, creator of weaving, and creator of oral stories – her values/ideals are deeply connected with the Navajo traditions. Tapahonso writes about Spider Woman in “Above the Canyon Floor” introducing herself to the Navajo people by appearing before Áshiih Neez:

“Áshiih Neez,” she said, “you are a kind and tender man, but I am not an earth surface person. I am called Spider Woman. I am here to help the people. When you marry,” she said, “let your little girls herd sheep near here. I will be here, and I will reach them to weave. With this skill, your family will prosper. Because of weaving, the Navajos will never be destitute. Only the women will weave, Áshiih Neez. They will provide for their families along with the men. (47)

Spider Woman shares the responsibility to preserve this cultural tradition of weaving and chooses to share this Indigenous knowledge to Áshiih Neez, who is expected to carry on this experiences and lessons to the Navajo People.

Joni Adamson writes in “The Ancient Future: Diasporic Residency and Food-Based Knowledges in the Work of American Indigenous and Pacific Austronesian Writers” about how “traditional place-based people retain their cultural and food-based knowledges and practicing what environmental educator Mitchell Thomashow has called forms of ‘diasporic residency’ that offers contemporary peoples models for how to live a rapidly globalizing and environmentally-changing world” (6). The Navajo people have shown this ‘diasporic residency’ after being given sheep by the Spanish colonizers, taken away by the United States Government, forced to walk hundreds of miles in the Long

Walk, given back their sheep, and having them taking away in the 1930 Livestock Reduction. The threat of being extraction from an Indigenous identity through colonization and assimilation didn't stop the Navajo people from incorporating foreign objects and animals, like sheep, into their cultural lifestyle. This is how they survived. Joni Adamson's take on Thomashow's "Diasporic Residency" illustrates the resilient behavior imbedded into the Navajo traditions seen in Tapahonso's stories. They are able to use their collective memories through oral stories to survive the changing modern worlds.

In 1540, Coronado brought sheep to the North America from Spain. Convinced that there were Cities of Gold, Coronado spent a few years unsuccessfully searching for gold. These sheep remained behind once this expedition was over and their final resting place is unknown. In 1598, a Spanish colonizers brought more sheep to North America, more notably they brought the Churro and Merinos. The Navajo people embraced the Churro sheep, appreciating its wool and eating its meat. The Navajo were able to use the sheep's wool to spin yarn for clothes, and more notably, create the famous Navajo rug. They used the wool and turned the practice of weaving into a profitable economy, selling their beautiful rugs to outsiders. These animals were soon incorporated in the Navajo way of life, as well as its oral stories, not only as sheep but as mutton to nourish our bodies with and as wool that clothes our bodies. The U.S. Government didn't recognize this deep cultural connection or relationship that the Navajo people had with the sheep (Weiseger). All they saw was that the Navajo people were disrupting the westward expansion of the new world. Robin Riley Fast writes in "The Land is Full of Stories: Navajo Histories in the Work of Luci Tapahonso" that "the ostensible intent of this



uprooting and imprisonment was to end Navajo raiding, protect them from other tribes, and force them to assimilate as farmers on the Euro-American model, while making their homeland available for white settlers” (196). The government saw their resistance to assimilation – so they gathered the Navajo people and relocated them. Luci Tapahonso opens “In 1864”, from *Sáani Dahataal* with a piece of this history:

In 1864, 8,355 Navajos were forced to walk from Dinétah to Bosque Redondo in southern New Mexico, a distance of three hundred miles. They were held for four years until the U.S. government declared the assimilation attempt a failure. More than 2,500 died of smallpox and other illnesses, depression, severe weather conditions, and starvation. The survivors returned to Dinétah in June 1868. (7)

The Navajo resistance to colonization brought on by the U.S. government forced the people to live in Bosque Redondo. Although suffering through unbearable hardships and death, the Navajo people continued to tell stories, always remembering their native homeland. Not only were the creation stories preserved but the stories surrounded the forced imprisonment by Kit Carson and the government. Tapahonso carries on these memories in “In 1864”:

They began rounding up the people in the fall.  
Some were lured into surrounding by offers of food, clothes,  
And livestock. So many of us were starving and suffering  
That year because the bilagłana kept attacking us.  
Kit Carson and his army had burned all the fields,  
And they killed our sheep right in front of us.

We couldn't believe it. I covered my face and cried.

All my life, we had sheep. They were like our family.

It was then I knew our lives were in great danger. (8)

Using personal pronouns like “they”, “I”, “us”, and “our” make this story personal – Tapahonso is able to create a feeling of sadness and hopelessness. The heartache felt during 1864 is carried through time, and is re-felt through her words. The reader can feel the pain. Although this short story is filled with despair and shock, Tapahonso reminds the listener that it is important to remember this history because the Navajo people believe that they are not alone in this world:

There were many who died on the way to Hwééldi. All the way

We told each other, “We will be strong as long as we are together.”

I think that was what kept us alone. We believed in ourselves

And the old stories that the holy people had given us. (10)

As long as we have our traditional stories, the Navajo people will be together and strong. Resistance to colonization and its assimilation is to remember and retell collective memories and its history. Robin Fast writes that “[t]he poem claims this terrible piece of Navajo history in order to remember and mourn the people’s suffering, but also, by retelling the story to a new generation, it confirms Navajo continuance and thus constitutes, as well, an act of both resistance and healing” (185). Although the time spent in Bosque Redondo was considerable, and although it was clear that the government was trying to eradicate this Indigenous group through relocation and starvation, the Navajo people were able to survive.

## Food Based Knowledge

The landscape in southern New Mexico was unfamiliar, so the Navajo people had a difficult time cultivating crops. There were no sheep or livestock common to them. Instead they were given government food rations of unfamiliar goods like flour, coffee, and canned food. Their method of resistance and survival was to incorporate these new foods like coffee, flour, and canned peaches into their lifestyle, and thereby, including them in their stories. The Navajo were able to adapt to the harsh changes, and maintain their self-determined identity. This acceptance of new materials and food is written about at the end of “In 1864”:

Then I tell her that it was Bosque Redondo the people learned to use flour and now fry bread is considered to be the “traditional” Navajo bread. It was there that we acquired a deep appreciation for strong coffee. The women began to make long, tiered calico skirts and fine velvet shirts for me. They decorated their dark velvet blouses with silver dimes, nickels, and quarters. They had no use for money. (10)

Fry bread, a new style of blouses and skirts made during these times are still relevant today and seen in many families. Fry bread is cherished throughout the reservation, and coin-decorated traditional garments are still worn at the Navajo Nation Fair song and dances. The Long Walk and the horrible experiences are never forgotten – rather they are continually shared with others through stories, food, and clothing. Five years after the Navajo people left their homeland for Bosque Redondo, they were allowed to travel back. The people traveled home, carrying the new stories along with the old, back home. It

wasn't long after the return home to Dinétah, that the U.S. Government decided to control the lives of the Navajo.

During the 1930's, the government was convinced that the sheep belonging to the Navajo was creating an irreversible erosion to the landscape. They believed that the land was too small for such a large number of livestock. Appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, the Commissioner of the BIA John Collier declared that the Navajo people owned too many livestock. The Livestock Reduction program was implemented and thousands of sheep, goats, cattle and horses were slaughtered in masses. The government interfered with the way of life the Navajo people had accustomed themselves to. With the sheep, they were able to use its wool to weave and with its meat, they were able to eat. The Navajo income dropped drastically and the people became more dependent on the government (Weisiger).

Tracy Voyles writes in "Intimate Cartographies: Navajo Ecological and Citizenship, Soil Conversation, and Livestock Reduction" about the livestock reduction and the horrible experiences endured by the Navajo People, illustrating the way the Navajo people remained resilient through government-imposed regulations regarding their livestock and land. In a subtle fashion, she implies that the government took actions in a pro-active attempt to save the landscape from an overflow of livestock, but that they acted hastily, without giving any regard to the spiritual and traditional connection or relationship that the Navajo people created with sheep. She also explains that the tragedy experienced by the Navajo through the colonization, livestock reduction, and the attempt to eliminate the Indigenous populations triggers a desire to remain resilient, leading "to a

strengthening of Diné culture and shaped the course of a growing cultural, economic, and environmental self-determination” (The Ancient Future 13). Joni Adamson writes that:

[L]ike many Diné, many...are living ‘in diaspora’ because of continuing lack of economic opportunity and many leave their mountain homes for jobs and educations they find in the cities. This is the reason Tapahonso frames the poems in *Sáani Dahataat* with a long drive with her daughters back to her home in Navajo land. Tapahonso recounts stories that help them understand the experiences of their people. (13)

She is continually attaching herself to her stories and thereby, attaching herself to the land and its traditions. Tapahonso is able to carry on her self-identity as a Navajo woman. She helps keep this connection, not only by telling stories, but by remembering Navajo practices like weaving and by eating mutton.

Adamson and Monani add from “The Ancient Future” that, although:

Tapahonso recounts the horror of the Long Walk...she also wants her daughters to know that the Diné are strong and that they survived because of their resilience. She tells her daughters that during their time at Bosque Redondo, the Diné were forced to eat the foods of their colonizers and jailers. However they took these strange food and transformed them into means of their survival. (10)

Tapahonso sprinkles mutton and wool throughout her stories – allowing them to have a special position in the traditions. Whether it’s from the mutton stew waiting her parent’s home in Shiprock in *Sáani Dahataat* or checking in a cooler of mutton at the airport in *Blue Horses Rush In*, these stories have a permanent existence in the Navajo oral stories

and tradition. Along with the tales of Changing Woman and Spider Woman, live the recent stories of survival during colonization and the courage to resist assimilation by maintaining a self-determined spiritual Navajo identity. This chapter shows that Indigenous oral traditions and its knowledges help the Navajo people maintain and protect a connection to cultural traditions and values. The short stories and poems shared by Tapahonso highlight the importance of sheep, place and food based knowledges explained through oral traditions and migration stories.

When I was 14 years old, I decided to leave my home in Fort Defiance and the Navajo reservation to attend a preparatory boarding school near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Overcoming traumatic historical memories of colonization and assimilation shared from my older relatives, I deliberately picked Native American Preparatory School (NAPS). NAPS was an experimental preparatory school in the early 1990s whose main objective was to prepare Indigenous students for college without the experiences of cultural assimilation. After NAPS, I continued my education at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, eventually studying abroad in Florence, Italy. The point of this short biography is to point out that throughout my educational hurdles and through living in different cities/countries, I always carried my corn pollen medicine bag, my eagle feather, and the stories embedded in me. I still maintain a clean house, showing the Holy People I live a clean way of life. I wake up early and pray to the Holy People arriving with the rising sun. I pray using sage and cedar, and I abide by all traditional rules such as not cutting my hair at night, or whistling at night or having drawn shades at night. It is through these various practices that I am still able to resist the modern world and forget all my traditions but instead- I maintain, control, protect, and develop my Indigenous

knowledges passed down to me through oral traditions. By maintaining my Indigenous knowledge, I am able to self-determine my cultural spiritual self-identification as Diné.

## CHAPTER 3

### INDIGENOUS SELF-IDENTIFICATION THROUGH NATURE AND FOOD

In 1999, Leslie Marmon Silko published *Gardens in the Dunes*, a fictional novel surrounding a young Indigenous girl's travels from the Sand Lizard homeland to the unfamiliar lands of Europe. At the beginning of the novel, the young girl, Indigo is living with her grandmother, Grandma Fleet and sister, Sister Salt. They live in the garden hills somewhere near the California/Arizona border, where Grandma Fleet taught Indigo and Sister Salt traditional and cultural knowledge which includes seed knowledge. The learned how to gather, plant, harvest, and store seeds. When Grandma Fleet died, the girls were able to survive on their own for a while before being captured by government officials. Sister Salt was sent to jail, then to live in a border town making money through un-traditional ways. Indigo was sent to the Sherman Institute Boarding School, but managed to escape soon after her arrival. During her escape and in hiding, she is found by Hattie and Edward – two highly educated white settlers to the area. They don't return Indigo to the Boarding School due to Hattie's sympathy toward the assimilation of Native children but take her on a journey to New York, then to England. During the trip, Indigo continuously reconnects spiritually back to her Sand Lizard homeland by remembering, maintaining, and protecting her relationship with nature through collecting seeds, gathering new botanical information, and sharing Grandma Fleet's ethnobotanical oral traditions. According to Article 31.1 from UNDRIP, Indigo is maintaining, controlling, protecting, and developing her cultural heritage when it comes to seeds and knowledge of the fauna and flora. Indigo responds to food sovereignty by remembering cultural practices, spiritual values and Indigenous knowledges surrounding seed knowledge.



Indigenous ecology has always been imbedded in Indigenous knowledges. Kyle Whyte, writes in “Indigenous Food Sovereignty, Renewal, and U.S. Settler Colonialism” that “[i]n the face of settler colonialism, one of the primary issues Indigenous peoples face concerns how to design, plan and implement ecologies that can create physical, cultural, and social well-being in our societies. Food sovereignty represents a particular strategy for how to live in spite of this structure of oppression” (16). Indigenous people and their collected knowledges through oral tradition is an example, along with food sovereignty, of the resistance against colonization and assimilation. This chapter highlights the interactions that Indigo occurs between her and the seed/plant life. She is able to maintain a self-determined identity through remembering stories surrounding and involving plant life. Indigo, throughout, *Gardens in the Dunes* collects seeds and continues to remember her Grandmother’s words. Indigo is able to carry on the Sand Lizard culture and traditions by practicing her seed gathering, planting, and harvesting. Taught by her grandmother, Indigo accepts any opportunity to gain anymore botanical knowledge that will contribute her Indigenous knowledge. Indigo recognizes that her seed knowledge is more than its value, nutritional or taste – it is the connection the food holds to culture and traditions that is important. It is the activities and practices surrounding obtaining, and using that plant for food.

### Ideas of Food Sovereignty

Indigenous people have the right to maintain, control, and protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences,

technologies, and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

UNDRIP's Article 31.1 describes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-determine their identity by the way traditional knowledges are used in cultural ethnobotanical practices. This includes the right to be recognized as distinct peoples, sovereignty over traditional lands; and the right to be free from discrimination. These individuals have a right to self-identify as Indigenous people through self-determination, meaning people have the right to decide how to be governed and how to practice their own culture. Indigenous peoples self-identify through their relationship with culturally traditional practices learned from oral traditions.

One form of sovereignty concerns food. Food sovereignty is another way Indigenous people resist colonization through remembering and maintaining an ethnobotanical relationship. Whyte writes in "Indigenous Food Sovereignty" that:

the exact term 'food sovereignty' in English was rarely used by these groups until recently, we should consider that North American Indigenous peoples, going back several hundred years, were using English-language concepts and frames associated with concepts of inherent sovereignty, self-determination, cultural integrity, subsistence harvesting, and treat

rights as ways of justifying their own control over food that matter culturally, economically, and nutritionally. (5)

Early in the novel, Silko writes about this control over food or food sovereignty by describing Grandma Fleet's inherent responsibility to share or pass down their Indigenous seed and plant knowledge. Silko writes that:

After the rains, they tended the plants that sprouted out of the deep sand; they each had plans they care for as if the plants were babies. Grandma Fleet had taught them this too. The plants listen, she told them. Always greet each plant respectfully. Don't argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither...Grandma Fleet told them the old gardens had always been there. The old-time people found the gardens already growing, planted by Sand Lizard, a relative of Grandfather Snake, who invited his niece to settle there and cultivate her seeds. (16)

This chapter will help illustrate different ways that Indigo holds onto her spiritual identity by practicing the seed knowledges passed down to her. She not only maintains this knowledge, she adds on to it and shares it with others on her journeys. The close relationship that Indigo has developed between the natural and human world only helps sustain her Sand Lizard identity through colonial times when the future is unknown. All Indigo has is her seed knowledge. Silko does an excellent job at highlighting the important and different ways Indigo interacts with her sovereignty. Through her cultural and traditional knowledge, Indigo is able to experience her own sense of freedom through knowledges passed down from Grandma Fleet.

## Indigo's Journey

The rain smelled heavenly. All over the sand dunes, datura blossoms round and white as moons breathed their fragrance of magic. Indigo came up from the pit house into the heat; the ground under her bare feet was still warm, but the rain in the breeze felt cool—so cool—and refreshing on her face. (15)

In the beginning of *Gardens in the Dunes*, Indigo already shows that she has a strong sense of place and shares a close relationship with the land and creatures who inhabit it.

Indigo is introduced in the novel as:

tilt[ing] back her head and open[ing] her mouth wide the way Sister Salt did. The rain she swallowed tasted like the wind. She ran, leaped in the air, and rolled on the warm sand over and over, it was so wonderful. She took handfuls of sand and poured them over her legs and over her stomach and shoulders—the raindrops were cold now and the warmth of the sand felt delicious. (15)

Early descriptions show her love for the earth. As the novel progresses, her relationship with nature is solidified when she is able to maintain her sense of connection to the gardens, trees, and seeds she finds and collects in her travels.

After Indigo escapes the government boarding school, she finds temporary shelter in a garden and almost immediately connects with the plants by identifying each flower species. She sheds her government clothes, dances naked amongst the flowers, and eats the rose hips until she falls asleep (85). Indigo notes that if she weren't "on the run" from government officials she would collect these floral seeds as instructed by Grandma Fleet.

Silko describes this regret and follows it with a reason as to why seed collection is important to the Sand Lizard people:

Grandma Fleet always advised the girls to collect as many new seeds as they could carry home. The more strange and unknown the plant, the more interested Grandma Fleet was: she loved to collect and trade seeds. Others did not grow a plant unless it was food or medicine, but Sand Lizards planted seeds to see what would come; Sand Lizard ate nearly everything anyway, and Grandma said they never found a plant they couldn't use for some purpose. (85-86)

It is clear that Indigo is comfortable among the plants and flowers; it is also clear that this relationship to nature is deeply embedded in Indigo's memory. She continues to demonstrate this connects by re-assuring her Sand Lizard identification through plants when Hattie and Edward find her, care for her, and take her on a cross country trip to New York, then to Europe. On the train to New York, she occupies some of her time in "the observation car with the garden books open in their laps as they gazed out the train windows for glimpses of gardens and parks that resembled those illustrated in the books" (129). Indigo finds comfort in being surrounded by plants because it reminds her of Grandma Fleet and Sister Salt. She shows happiness and relief when they arrive in New York after a long train ride:

There were still houses as far as Indigo could see, but now there were farms, planted with corn and beans—Indigo got very excited when she saw this and told Hattie to look out the window. Yes, the farmers in New York grew corn and beans and squash. They left sight of the ocean for a

distance as the coach passed through big apple orchards—Indigo became very excited when she saw the small green fruit on the trees. The road curved again and emerged from the trees just above the rocky beach, where dark blue waves splashed the big rocks with foam. (157)

It could be said that this connection helps Indigo make the mental and spiritual journey back to her homeland as she remembers the gardens. Seeing corn solidifies that connection back to her homeland. Grandma Fleet shows a true knowledge of the surrounding nature by teaching Sister Salt and Indigo how to collect certain seeds for growing, planting, harvesting, and storing foods. She even relays information on times to harvest, how to tend to the gardens and look out for rodents. Both girls absorb her cultural traditional heritage and retain it for future use; each lesson providing a sense of security for the girls to survive. They wouldn't starve if they worked hard for their food. Before their grandmother dies, she teaches and passes this cultural knowledge down to the sisters. Stephanie Li, from "Domestic Resistance", writes:

Many of Grandma Fleet's stories are intimately connected to the land, describing the cycles of nature and the return of deceased Sand Lizard people. These tales present the world as an integrated universe where the presence of humans is inextricable from the processes of nature. As a result, Indigo learns to recognize rain as a manifestation of her ancestors, and she understands the old gardens to be a place of sanctuary (26)

Indigo internalizes and uses this knowledge to help her survive unfamiliar worlds – she is able to maintain her close relationship even when traveling to foreign lands.

Silko uses Indigo, specifically, to demonstrate intergenerational knowledge by showing that she possesses unique ideas that enable her to control, maintain, and protect her cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions, and intellectual property. Indigo is able to draw on these memories or personal history to help soothe her body mentally, physically, and spiritually. Indigo demonstrates great degrees of resiliency when it comes to preserving her cultural heritage by using her traditional knowledge to self-identify as Sand Lizard, keeping her connection to the old gardens through her relationship to seeds, plants, and animals. Indigo also uses her cultural knowledge of the Ghost Dance, Boarding School, and Grandma Fleet's traditional knowledge to survive a colonial world. Indigo, according to the UNDRIP, is able to be recognized as a distinct individual, is able to set an example for why having the right to prior consent is important to Indigenous Peoples, and, is able to fight against discrimination she faces on her travels.

Indigo demonstrates this Indigenous knowledge by communicating daily with the spiritual side of nature by gathering seeds, learning about new plants, establishing a relationship with the parrot and monkey, as well as using the teaching from her Sand Lizard people to survive her travels in a foreign world. She often reflects on Sister Salt, Grandma Fleet, and the gardens to help soothe her sadness and anxiety while traveling eastward towards England. Her dreams and memories of her cultural heritage and traditional knowledge give her strength to survive her ordeal away from her people and land.

## Resurgence and Resistance

Indigo demonstrates resurgence and resistance by sharing cultural and traditional knowledges learned from her family members throughout her travels, sometimes helping others understand her as a human being. She adapts to situations and creates spaces for her to maintain and protect her Indigenous identity. In “Indigenous Knowledges”, Whyte writes that “Indigenous knowledges have governance-value for Indigenous peoples as an integral part of how our nations and communities plan for the future. The responsibility and the right to plan for the future is a key component of collective self-determination and enshrined by important documents such as UNDRIP” (24). Instead of assimilating, she is allowing herself to live in two worlds – this is how she survives and protects her knowledge. This type of education can only be learned from growing through and from the land – Indigo and Silko are showing the reader that life did exist before western science was formulated. Indigo exhibits her innate knowledge that she shares a special relationship or bond with nature by continually writing in a seed journal. Silko writes Indigo’s character as being with nature and vice versa. Life exists through Indigo’s curiosity and determination, and it’s a feature that isn’t learned through scientific thought, but by experience. Through the novel, she carries this cultural knowledge across countries and seas, sharing her teachings with anyone that listens.

In the novel there is an obvious bond between human and nature – it’s a bond that feels supernatural and reciprocal. Stephanie Li claims that:

The stories about gardening and mothering presented in Silko’s novel explore how narrative encodes cultural identity and empowers individuals to embrace the earth as a nurturing force rather than as a resource to be



exploited and abused for capitalistic profit and personal gain. Indigo draws upon the natural world as a signifier of cultural narratives such that the earth mothers her through its preservation of familial stories. By then implanting her own stories in the world around her, Indigo also succeeds in gardening the earth with new narratives that nurture her Sand Lizard heritage. In this way, the interrelated activities of gardening, mothering, and storytelling combine to achieve a powerful means of resistance against oppression and cultural erasure (20).

Indigo has no formal education or knowledge of biology but she is able to sustain a special relationship with the non-human world, and embrace the earth as a “nurturing force” as Li suggests. Indigo pays special attention to all plants and seeds found along her journeys. With each seed or plant picked up, Indigo is able to connect back to her Sand Lizard homeland through dreams and memories. Her insistence on treating plants and animals like family reflects on the natural closeness or kinship Indigo feels for nature. Stephanie Li continues to say “as displayed throughout *Gardens in the Dunes*, gardening reflects social values and complex ways that humans relate to and conceive of the natural world. This can have a profound for repercussions for oppressed people” (18-19).

Indigo’s intent on gathering seeds and preserving her Sand Lizard culture is an adequate reference to the principles underlying the UNDRIP. Indigo and UNDRIP definitely advocate for the protection of Indigenous rights. Silko is able to create a strong character in Indigo. She is successfully recognized as a distinct individual; she fights back against discrimination; and she becomes an example for why it’s important to have the right to prior consent.

The reason for Indigo's close and loving relationship to animals and plants can be traced back to Grandma Fleet's education. Early on in the novel, their grandma conveys the extreme importance of living on and off the surrounding land. She reiterates time after time how important it is for the girls to sustain a healthy relationship with the animals and plants cohabiting with them. In this case, Indigo learns her ancestral manifestation of her people's science, technologies, and cultures through resources for survival, seed knowledge, and plants used for medicinal purposes.

Grandma Fleet told them the old gardens had always been there. The old-time people found the gardens already growing, planted by the Sand Lizard, a relative of Grandfather Snake, who invited his niece to settle there and cultivate her seeds. Sand Lizard warned her children to share: Don't be greedy. The first ripe fruit of each harvest belongs to the spirits of our beloved ancestors, who come to us as rain; the second ripe fruit should go to the birds and wild animals, in gratitude for their restraint in sparing the seeds and sprouts earlier in the season. Give the third ripe fruit to the bees, ants, mantises, and others who cared for the plants. A few choice pumpkins, squash, and bean plants were simply left on the sand beneath the mother plants to shrivel dry and return to the earth. Next season, after the arrival of the rain, beans, squash, and pumpkins sprouted up between the dry stalks and leaves of the previous year (16).

Grandma Fleet is wise and strongly encourages a communal, reciprocal, and respectful relationship with the physical and spiritual beings of nature. She passes on her cultural

and traditional knowledge to the sisters – she is adamant that they learn how to properly live off the land by planting and harvesting.

### Plant and Seed Knowledge

Grandma Fleet successfully passed down her Indigenous knowledge to Indigo, invoking the essence of UNDRIP’s Article 31.1. The seed and plant knowledge that connects the Sand Lizard people spiritual to nature is continuously seen in Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes* and demonstrates how this knowledge is maintained, controlled, and protected in order to sustain a self-determined Sand Lizard identity. Early in the novel, Silko writes that:

[A]fter the rains, they tended the plants that sprouted out of the deep sand; they each had plants they cared for as if the plants were babies. Grandma Fleet had taught them this too. The plants listen, she told them. Always greet each plant respectfully. Don’t argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither. (16)

Even when the women could no longer sustain a viable life in the gardens due to refugees eating all the animals and plants, Grandma Fleet continued to collect seeds for later use as seen in the following text:

Each day while Mama and Sister Salt were at their work in town, Grandma Fleet took Indigo with her. Some days they prowled the arroyos to gather willows for basket making; other days they walked in the sand and sagebrush hills outside town to gather grass seeds to grind into flour. Most days Grandma Fleet and Indigo ended with a walk through the town

dump, where they surveyed the refuse and Indigo scrambled down the sides of the garbage pits to retrieve valuables the townspeople carelessly threw away. String, paper, scraps of cloth, glass jars and bottles, tin cans, and bits of wire—they washed their discoveries in the shallows of the river and reused them. Grandma Fleet saved seeds discarded from vegetables and fruits to plant at the old gardens when they returned; she poked her stick through the debris in garbage piles behind the café and hotel. Grandma kept her seeds in the little glass jars with lids they found at the dump; she kept the jars of seeds in her bedding for safekeeping. The apricot pits were her special favorites because she remembered the apricot trees of her childhood at the old gardens. Grandma Fleet held the jar up close to her face and spoke to the seeds; “Mmmm! You will be my little sweethearts, my little apricot trees!” (24)

Always searching and collecting seeds for future use is an important sustainable quality to have. Grandma Fleet obviously knows, understands, and practices this delicate relationship with nature, but similar to how she is teaching Indigo and Sister Salt, she learned from an older generation.

This kind of intergenerational cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and expressions relates directly to UNDRIP’s declaration to protect and maintain this type of intellectual properties. Grandma Fleet is doing exactly what Indigenous People desire – an opportunity to protect and develop their cultural way of living. According to Terre Ryan in “The 9th century garden”, he writes that:

[T]he Sand Lizard engage in subsistence agriculture, an ancient practice that Grandma Fleet painstakingly teaches the sisters. Because their crops are indigenous to the local environment, they thrive despite the harsh landscape. Save the grandmother and the two girls, all of the remaining Sand Lizards have relocated to reservations; Grandma Fleet hopes that the remote location of the old place will keep the girls safe from kidnappers and marauding outsiders. As long as they can remain in the dunes and plant their crops, Grandma Fleet reasons, her granddaughters will survive.

(118)

After Grandma Fleet's death, the girls are able to survive by working hard to plant, harvest seeds and store its plants as taught. She knows that the lessons will not be in vain, and that her oral traditions will live on through Sister Salt and Indigo. Each instance, Grandma Fleet, is able to outline her teaching with maintaining a cultural relationship with the animals and plants. When the girls learn that their mother might not return sooner rather than later, grandma makes sure they knew how to survive without her. Silko describes this new responsibility:

They would just have to learn to get along without her, Grandma Fleet told them as she began to show them the things they would need to know.

They walked through the dry stalks and old debris of the dune gardens, and she told them where to plant the beans, corn, and squash seed and how deep. Plant in late July or early August after the rain came. (47)

Both girls are able to internalize this knowledge and keep their crops going, even after Fleet's death. The encouragement to create sustainable life from planting seeds is not the only survival resource they were taught.

Grandma Fleet also teaches them, that in case their crops fail, they have other options for feeding themselves. Silko explores various techniques for gathering food for their family in desperate times, and writes that Grandma Fleet teaches them about awareness.

Tonight she was going to show them an old trick: how to get fresh meat. After dark they filled their gourd canteens at the spring and sat outside with Grandma; they watched the stars and the half-moon as they listened and waited for the coyotes. On three previous nights, the coyotes hunted in the dunes not far from the spring. They listened as the coyotes began their hunt, using yips and barks to signal one another and to drive any small game, rabbits or roosting birds, into their ambush. She taught the girls to distinguish the coyotes' language of barks and howls so they would know when the coyotes got lucky. That was the signal for the girls to take off running as fast as they could, Sister Salt with the old flint knife in one hand and a gunnysack in the other, and Indigo with a long stick. Grandma said to be careful to leave the coyotes plenty of bones; otherwise next time they might not call out an invitation to share their feast. (47)

Being aware of their circumstances, they can gauge what they need to take from nature without creating an imbalance between human and nature. These lessons for gathering food through hunting and scavenging involves sharing a coyote's feast, or gathering moss

and watercress from around the spring waters and breaking into a pack rat's stash (respectfully). Again, all lessons stemmed from manifestations regarding science and cultures that helped ensure the survival of the Sand Lizard people, especially with the girl's sense of pride and resiliency.

Indigo's ideas and visions for her Sand Lizard culture is evident when she returns to the Needles, California area at the end of the novel. After being gone for so long, and to return as an older individual, Indigo demonstrates that she still practices her cultural and traditional expressions by continuing to plant and gather seeds. Indigo ensures her survival during colonial times. Not only does she survive, but she shows signs of being stronger within the manifestations of her own ideals regarding human/generic resources, seeds, and medicine. Stephanie Li summarizes this realization by writing that:

Indigo thrives in the old gardens, accompanied by Sister Salt and the little grandfather. She successfully grows Laura's gladiolus plants and discovers that they are edible as well as beautiful. Thus she not only transplants the flowers into her native ground but also finds a new, beneficial value for them. Most importantly, however, Indigo continues the tradition of storytelling by relating tales of her travels through Europe to Sister Salt. These stories demonstrate Indigo's comfort with new narratives and experiences that enhance and expand Sand Lizard culture, much like the transplanted gladiolas. Her flourishing life in the old gardens demonstrates the critical necessity of forms of resistance based in domestic activities. (35)

The girls, especially, Indigo demonstrate why it is important for Indigenous Peoples to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage and traditional knowledges in order to sustain their interaction with seeds and general resources. Most of all, these lessons, help soothe Indigo's anxieties and fears. The stories served as a type of medicine for Indigo – whenever she needed help, she spoke to nature surrounding her to assist her mentally and physically.

Article 31.1 states that Indigenous Peoples have the right to their "...knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions." Indigo demonstrates certain ways she preserves certain types of information and knowledge from Sister Salt and Grandma Fleet, as well as gaining new knowledge learned on her travels with Hattie and Edward. Indigo, as stated several times, becomes a very courageous and adaptive character with an eager mind to learn about new plants and its seeds. Indigo relates to the last part of this article because she is concerned with carrying on cultural traditions regarding flora or fauna, oral tradition, and arts. "The more strange and unknown the plant, the more interested Grandma Fleet was; she loved to collect and trade seeds. Other did not grow a plant unless it was food or medicine, but Sand Lizards planted seeds to see what would come; Sand Lizards ate nearly everything anyway and Grandma said they never found a plant they couldn't use for some purpose" (85-86). Using this type of thinking, Indigo continues her Sand Lizard culture and continuously gathers seeds, plants, and animals along her travels. Silko gives Indigo an opportunity to show Hattie her



knowledge regarding these elements, and thereby making her character unique for the sustainability to Indigenous Peoples.

Indigo's knowledge of plants and their gardens takes her far into a Western world, where she collects exotic information regarding seeds adamantly. Stephanie Li writes that "gardening reveals basic beliefs about the relationship between humans and earth. For example, Grandma Fleet honors Indigenous values by recognizing the old gardens as a source of good, shelter, identity, and she passes the respect for the earth in to her grandchildren" (19). This respect learned from her ancestors is shown when Indigo passes this knowledge on to her companions throughout her travels. She communicates, not only with Hattie, but with her lost family members through whispered prayers. She is confident that nature will relay the message back home.

Indigo uses this Indigenous education to her advantage—she survives the events surrounding the time era involving assimilation and colonization. Near the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Grandma Fleet recognizes that there must be a reciprocal relationship with nature and she learned this from her personal history.

Grandma Fleet explained the differences in the moisture of the sand between the dunes as they slowly made their way up the sandy path between the dunes. Grandma steadied herself with a hand on each girl's shoulder; they made their way slowly past the bare terraces where the sweet black corn, muskmelons, and speckled beans used to grow.

Grandma explained each of the dunes and the little valleys between them had different flows of runoff; some of the smaller dunes were too dry

along their edges and it was difficult to grow anything there; in marginal areas like these it was better to let the wild plants grow. (49)

Grandma Fleet explained which floodplain terraces were well drained enough to grow sweet black corn and speckled beans. She taught them that the squashes and melons were water lovers, so they had to be planted in the bowl-shaped area below the big dune where the runoff soaked deep into the sand. She explained and emphasized the importance of the plants, such as the wild gourds, sunflowers, and Datura, and how they seeded themselves wherever they found moisture. She is demonstrating why these traditional cultural practices are important to self-identifying as Indigenous. As Article 31.1 states, Grandma Fleet is demonstrating their “right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.” Indigo is connected to her cultural traditions through Grandma Fleet’s teaching and stories – a bond is created between her and nature. On the nature of the relationship, Silko writes, “After the rains, they tended the plants that sprouted out of the deep sand; they each had plants they cared for as if the plants were babies. Grandma Fleet had taught them this too. The plants listen, she told them. Always greet each plant respectfully. Don’t argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither” (17). She taught them to be resourceful with nature and it is seen when the narrator states, “When there was nothing else to eat, there was amaranth; every morning and every night Sister Salt boiled up amaranth greens just like Grandma Fleet taught her” (16). Not only does Grandma Fleet teach plant knowledge, but also knows certain tricks to help gather more food. As mentioned previously, she “taught the girls to

distinguish the coyotes' language of barks and howls they would know when the coyotes got lucky. That was the signal for the girls to take off running as fast as they could" (47).

All these lessons were in preparation for how to get along without Grandma. She inadvertently informs Indigo and her Sister Salt that one day they would be without her – so Grandma Fleet feels the responsibility to teach the girls survival skills. Grandma Fleet, essentially, teaches and passes down her people's intergenerational knowledge to the girls, and in this case, Indigo. Grandma Fleet is well aware of the benefits surrounding gathering and harvesting, especially with seeds. This is clearly seen through Grandma Fleet's desire to find and store seeds. Silko writes, "Grandma Fleet saved seeds discarded from vegetables and fruits to plant at the old gardens when they returned...Grandma kept her seeds in the little glass jars with lids they found at the dump; she kept jars of seeds in her bedding for safekeeping. (24). Indigo picks up this trait – she gathers seeds just like Grandma Fleet.

Now she dreamed Grandma Fleet hugged her close and told her to be strong, and she would get back home just fine. When Indigo woke, the scent of crushed coriander leaves in the cloth of Grandma Fleet's dress was still vivid and so was the sensation of Grandma's embrace. Grandma Fleet came to her and she loved Indigo as much as ever; death didn't change love. The dream reminded Indigo she must gather as many new seeds of flowers and trees as she could find on this journey so she did not disappoint Sister Salt and Mama, or Grandma Fleet. (178)

At the end of her journey, she accumulates a nice collection. Through the indigenous people's personal natural history surrounding the gardens, Indigo is able to continually self-identity as Sand Lizard, enabling her to remain resilient and survive.

### Self-Determined Indigenous Identification

This self-identified Sand Lizard little girl is thrust into an entirely different world by several events. One of the events is the death of Grandma Fleet. The death causes the girls to carry on the traditions of collecting, planting and harvesting. Indigo uses her relationship with the Sand Lizard people's history to cultivate a relationship with nature itself. Along her journey, she surrounds herself with nature, more specifically seeds and their gardens. Silko, throughout her novel, emphasizes how important physically seeing nature for Indigo is a positive event. Each sighting for Indigo helps her re-attached herself to Grandma Fleet and to her own people. To further illustrate the human and nature connection, Chen writes that, "For the Sand Lizard women, gardening, which requires intense bodily responsibility to and aesthetic sensibility of the land and plants, is an important management measure for environmental recovery. The works in the indigenous old gardens are proceeded with mutual respect and responsibility between human-beings and non-human beings." This mutual respect stays with Indigo as she travels away from her homeland. Chen goes on to state that: "Gardening is also a valuable resource for psychological healing. Sustainable gardening incurs spiritual influences on the inhabitants in that the gardeners share a land-based spirituality in which they feel identified with and responsible to the plants, animals, clouds, and their

ancestors.” Based on Chen’s writing – Indigo is uses her spiritual or cultural connection to the land as a healing or coping mechanism.

Indigo utilizes her seed and nature knowledge to control, maintain, and protect her cultural heritage as Grandma Fleet’s granddaughter and as a descendent of the Sand Lizard people. She is able to grow traditionally by maintaining a deep and close relationship to nature through Grandma’s memory, her people’s history, and seeds. Using these ideas and items, Indigo maintains her self-determined identity and survives. Indigo successfully maintains, controls, protects, and develops her cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, and intellectual property.]

## CHAPTER 4

### SELF-AWARE INDIGENOUS PRAGMATISM IN SILKO'S *CEREMONY*

A few of my family members served in the United States military. My maternal grandmother's older brother, Johnny Goodluck, enlisted in World War II while still in his teens. He never came home, and was declared Missing in Action—my grandma still has his flag folded neatly in a box in the back of her closet. Another story claims that my dad's father enlisted and was on his way when the war suddenly ended, so he turned around and came home. He didn't even leave Arizona. Other uncles, cousins, and aunts serve in other fields of combat, proudly protecting the country which included their traditional homelands. Each came back a little different and seemed eager to either return to a traditional way of life or forget the world through drugs, violence, and alcohol.

According to the *Army History: The Professional Bulletin of Army History*, Native Americans voluntarily enlist for military service more than any minority group in the United States. Reasons for this include that Indigenous people feel the need to protect their families and traditional homelands. The bulletin claims that:

The annual enlistment for Native Americans jumped from 7,500 in the summer of 1942 to 22,000 at the beginning of 1945. According to the Selective Service in 1942, at least 99 percent of all eligible Indians, healthy males aged 21 to 44, had registered for the draft... On Pearl Harbor Day, there were 5,000 Indians in the military. By the end of the war, 24,521 reservation Indians, exclusive of officers, and another 20,000 off-reservation Indians had served. The combined figure of 44,500 was more than ten percent of the Native American population during the war

years. This represented one-third of all able-bodied Indian men from 18 to 50 years of age. In some tribes, the percentage of men in the military reached as high as 70 percent. Also, several hundred Indian women served in the WACS, WAVES, and Army Nurse Corps (23).

The Indigenous population was not segregated like African American soldiers, but were allowed to serve along with the general population. Their presence in the war established ensured they would be heroes when they returned to the reservation. These facts are reflected in some of the best known Native American novels. For example, Leslie Marmon Silko is most known for her novel, *Ceremony*. Through her character, Tayo, she illustrates how some indigenous veterans struggled with their own Indigenous identity when they returned home, after serving in the war. Their connection to the traditional homeland and cultural practices is deeply affected by having traveled to foreign lands and seeing the horrors of war. They often feel distant from their traditional spiritual identification. In Tayo's case, his Indigenous identity is put into jeopardy by the traumatic events surrounding war.

In the beginning of the novel, he continuously re-experiences the traumatic jungles of the Pacific he saw during World War II. His constant flashbacks deeply impacts his mental, spiritual, and physical health. His pain is so bad that he feels like his identity could be non-existent by insisting that he was white smoke while at the white hospital in Los Angeles (14). When Tayo arrives home to the Laguna reservation, he stays at home in bed or is coerced to the local bar by his friends. He becomes mentally ill and becomes a burden to his family and friends. Betonie, a Navajo medicine man is able

to guide him into understanding that he must reconnect with his colonial spiritual, traditional, and cultural self-determined identity.

Tayo's experiences can be metaphorically instructive for understanding what is happening to the Earth with climate change. In "Indigenous Experience in the U.S. with Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship in the Anthropocene," Karletta Chief, John Daigle, Kathy Lynn, and Kyle Whyte write that, "The cultural and subsistence relationships that indigenous peoples maintain with the Earth's resources and systems are defined by the traditions and beliefs practiced by Indigenous peoples" (162). Tayo no longer practices these traditions and beliefs, causing his Indigenous identity to gradually disappear. He lacks the traditional knowledge to affirm his connection to the homeland and Laguna culture. Chief continues to claim that:

Many cultures who see responsibilities that bind all living and spiritual beings also recognize a tremendous imperative to learn as much as possible about how one can exercise responsibilities toward these beings. Indigenous ethics of reciprocity entail systems of creating and maintaining useful knowledge of how humans can be good stewards of the Earth. (163)

In this chapter, I will argue that Tayo is able to re-establish his self-determined Indigenous identity by resisting the negative effects of war and becoming reconnected to his Laguna roots through remembering his oral traditions. Through his re-identification, Silko highlights Tayo's mental and spiritual shift from empathy towards self-aware pragmatic practices that establish and strengthen his ties to his homeland. Article 31.1 is demonstrated in *Ceremony* because it leads Tayo on a journey to realize his responsibility towards maintaining, controlling, and protecting his Indigenous knowledges through



remembering oral traditions and beliefs. Healing takes place by reconnecting to cultural values and traditions that include respecting earth's nature. Tayo is a metaphor for contemporary Indigenous activism – he is using older traditional stories combined with recent personal experiences or knowledges to realize a responsibility towards nature and Indigenous traditions. Tayo resurrects from this sickness by actively participating in a ceremony. He participates in this ceremony to get well, to reconnects with his cultural traditional ways through songs and prayers.

Silko references the atom bomb in *Ceremony* – this historically violent act paired with memories of Tayo's World War II flashbacks could mean that the planet earth is ill and is taken over by an evil force. With these actions, Tayo's mental and spiritual realities are overwhelmed with negative elements, causing him and his world to be extremely unwell and off-balance. Indigenous peoples realize this responsibility towards nature, especially during a time where climate changes is doubtful and corporations are intent on exploiting Native lands for resources. The Standing Rock people are standing up for their land and water rights by opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline – a pipeline that will cut through Native lands and could threatened local water if the pipes break. Hundreds of Indigenous peoples are gathering and, like Tayo, are bringing their personal experiences to fight the negative effects of colonization through remembering and retelling songs and prayers. The gathering at Standing Rock is demonstrating what Article 31.1 states as their right to protect, maintain, and control over cultural traditions, expressions, and knowledges by standing up to Dakota Access Pipeline. Like Tayo, they are trying to heal and protect the Indigenous knowledges by protecting the land from the “Black Snake”.

## Tayo's Journey

In the novel, Tayo recognizes his responsibilities toward creator beings by initiating songs and prayers in an effort to generate a spiritual relationship. It is not until he remembers his Uncle Josiah's stories and practices different prayers/songs that he is able to slowly re-establish his spiritual connection to the land and culture. The deep connection that Tayo finds through intergenerational story telling saves his relationship to Indigenous knowledge, traditions and culture. Tayo becomes self-aware of his pragmatism, meaning that he starts to remember his traditional oral stories in a practical sense. He starts to pray to the morning sun and sprinkles corn pollen animal footprints.

He stood up. He knew the people had a song for the sunrise...He repeated the words as remembered them, not sure if they were the right ones, but feeling they were right, feeling the instant of the dawn was an event which in a single moments gathered all things together—the last stars, the mountaintops, the clouds, and the winds—celebration this coming. (182)

He realizes the potentials of praying to the spirits, as well as accepting the journey he must endure to reach this clarity. Tayo links the practice of Laguna culture to the theory behind the creation stories shared within in the community. These lessons encourage the individual to grow as better person, and Tayo reinvents himself by accepting these stories and learning from them. He understands that in order to live a mentally and spiritually health existence, he needs to grow once he re-establishes his relationship to his culture and seeks out a medicine man to assist in this ceremony.

Silko describes this disconnection from reality, the natural world, or Indigenous knowledge in the beginning of *Ceremony* as a sickness. The disconnection that makes

Tayo ill can be seen as soon as he steps off the train in New Laguna—he is literally shaking, unable to keep his legs from shaking. He arrives home sick. Silko writes:

When he got off the at New Laguna, his legs were shaky and the sleeves of his coat smelled like puke, although he had tried to rinse out the coat in the washroom sink on the train. He didn't want them to know how sick he had been, how all night he had leaned against the metal wall in the men's room, feeling the layers of muscle in his belly growing thinner, until the heaving was finally a ripple and then a quiver. (29)

Tayo is aware of his weakness, commenting that he community may judge him on this. He worries that his family will resent him for not being able to resist to violence and alcoholism that plagues returning war veterans. His sickness is so great, that he is unable to walk and feels like he is an embarrassment to his family.

The Army doctor diagnoses Tayo with “battle fatigue”, insisting that the way he felt was normal for war victims (31). A lack of respect towards the natural world is almost seen when Tayo insists that lights and colors makes him feel even sicker, claiming the darkness gives him comfort:

He felt better in the dark because he could not see the beds, where the blankets followed smooth concave outlines; he could not see the photographs in the frames on the bureau. In the dark he could cry for all the dreams that Rocky had as he stared out of his graduation picture; he could cry for Josiah and the spotted cattle, all scattered now, all lost, all sucked away in the dissolution that had taken everything from him. (31)

Silko describes Tayo's inability to re-establish himself as a strong Laguna man after returning from World War II. He is unable to get out of bed, he is unable to keep his stomach from the pain of nausea, or to see clearly. Preferring to be in the darkness, he excludes himself from the community and allows his identity to become jeopardize because there is no longer self-identification practices achieved to keep his connection intact during this dark time. His mind and body seems to be rejecting nature. His grandmother declares that Tayo needs to see a medicine man before he is taken away to a hospital. Ku'oosh, the medicine man, realizes the disconnection seen in Tayo, commenting that the world is fragile and stories much be shared to guarantee the continuance of Indigenous knowledge and culture. Ku'oosh explains that world is fragile (35), explaining the responsibility belongs to the humans to carry on traditional practices through oral traditions:

It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku'oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said, and this demanded great patience and love. (35-36)

Tayo lacks this patience and love by demonstrating a desire to be taken back to the Army hospital where his identity will turn into white smoke. He wants to be invisible to reality, rejecting Ku'oosh assessments that he may need endure a ceremony that reunites his identity with traditional practices.

Tayo is aware of his disconnection: “The old man only made him certain of something he had feared all along, something in the old stories. It took only one person to tear away the delicate strands of the web, spilling the rays of sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured” (39). He fears his mind is distancing itself from the real world, confusing his identity with the witchery seen in the novel.

#### Oral Traditions: Tayo and Rocky

Silko confronts the issue of believing in the older Indigenous creation stories and its knowledges. In *Ceremony*, she creates a world where Indigenous people begin to doubt Indigenous knowledges and traditional practices. This doubt in Indigenous identity is caused by the onset of colonization and the assimilation seen through the birth of boarding schools and a western way of thinking. Silko describes Rocky as a progressive thinker, unwilling to identify himself through an Indigenous lens. Rocky insists that science and western history prevail over older Indigenous storytelling, tradition, and culture. Silko writes that, “Rocky understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world. After their first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Tayo say how Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time ways. Old grandma shook her head at him, but he called it superstition, and he opened his textbooks to show her” (50). His resistance to a spiritual Indigenous identity, Rocky causes Tayo to doubt the oral traditions too.

Rocky continues to question Josiah and Robert’s traditional prayers and practices that occur after a successful hunt – the deer is ordained with silver and turquoise, and is placed on a Navajo rug at home, and is given corn pollen. Silko writes that this relationship with the deer is based in respect: “They knelt down and took pinches of

cornmeal from Josiah's leather pouch. They sprinkled the cornmeal on the nose and fed the deer's spirit. They had to show their love and respect, their appreciation; otherwise, the deer would be offended, and they would not come to die for them the following year (51). These traditional practices links Josiah, Grandma, Auntie, Robert, and Tayo to the land and culture through these oral stories – they are giving thanks to the holy people for the deer received. But Rocky disagrees and Silko continues to write about this doubt: “Rocky tried to tell them that keeping the carcass on the floor in a warm room was bad for the meat. He wanted to hand the deer in the woodshed, where the meat would stay cold and cure properly. But he they how they were” (52). Rocky is aware that he is distancing himself from the traditional community, and wants to change his Indigenous identity in order to be accepted in the outer world. Due to the boarding school experience, Rocky adopts the views of the colonizer and rejects his Indigenous knowledge, including his identity.

Adrienne Akins writes in “‘Next Time, Just Remember the Story’: Unlearning Empire in Silko's *Ceremony*” that “Throughout *Ceremony*, the words of such policymakers about American Indian ‘superstition’ and ‘ignorance’ are echoed in the rhetoric of the schoolteachers Tayo and Rocky encounter in their BIA school” (4). Silko describes this disconnection by explaining that the shame was instilled into young Indigenous children by sharing a story about root of some individual embarrassment:

It might have been possible if the girl had not been ashamed of herself. Shamed by what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people; holy missionary white people who wanted only good

for the Indians, white people who dedicated their lives to helping the Indians, these people urged her to break away from her home. (69)

Unlike Rocky and despite being half Laguna, Tayo remembers the oral traditions passed down through Josiah.

Initially, when Tayo returns from the war, he chooses to ignore Josiah's lessons because the modern world pressured Indigenous peoples to doubt their oral traditions and cultural heritage. Josiah demonstrates this doubt by sharing a story with Tayo.

He pointed his chin at the springs and around at the narrow canyon. "This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going." He took off his hat and wiped his forehead on his shirt. "These dry years you hear some people complaining, you know, about the dust, they are part of life too, like the sun and the sky. You don't swear at them. It's people see. They're the ones. The old people used to say that droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave." (45-46)

The story emphasizes the need to never forget. Another important element to Josiah's story is that human beings are to blame for the forgetfulness regarding the ethnobotanical relationship between Indigenous people and their surrounding homelands. Early in the novel, Silko shows that Tayo might be caught in a drought of his own, dehydrated from the constant vomiting, and unwilling to return to his Laguna landscape, forgetting the oral traditions passed down to him.

Betonie

Ku'oosh recognizes that he doesn't have the ability to heal Tayo, so he sends him to Gallup to see Betonie, an older Navajo medicine man. Betonie will be used as a means to reconnect Tayo with his cultural spiritual self-identity. Adrienne Akins writes that, "Much like Aunt Susie, Betonie is able to synthesize the lessons of his boarding school education with the stories and ceremonies that he preserves. Betonie's knowledge of English and identification of the positive potential of some Western innovations help him to keep the community's stories alive in a rapidly changing world" (8). Tayo is encouraged to meet his fears and to remember the stories that grounded him to the Laguna heritage. Betonie explains to Tayo how to resist the onslaught of colonization imposed on him and the Indigenous communities by recognizing it evil and defeating it by remember the old oral stories from Josiah.

Atkins explains that, "Unlike the BIA teachers who mock and harshly punish students to promote conformity to Euro-American practices and values, Josiah is gentle with Tayo. Josiah's dedication to the preservation of Laguna cultural memory through stories told with compassion and flexibility makes him an ideal educator" (11). With these oral traditions, Tayo is able to begin to re-establish his Indigenous identity. "Though Betonie plays a critical role in the novel's depiction of alternative forms of education, one could argue that Tayo's most important teacher is Josiah. The lessons Josiah teaches Tayo about the old stories, hard work, innovation, integrity, and kindness surface repeatedly in the novel" (11). Betonie recognizes the need to incorporate the new world into older traditional stories. Akins continues to write that



Silko work emphasizes the importance of preserving the wisdom of the past while meeting the changes of the contemporary world. Silko's characterizations of Josiah, Betonie, and Aunt Susie all offer profound lessons in the valuable role that cultural memory can play in unlearning empire. By including the lessons of American Indians in the reconsideration of American educational history and identity, *Ceremony* challenges Western hegemonic claims to knowledge and allows for the possibility of a new future in education. (12)

Including this contemporary American identity is evident through Betonie's collection of telephone books, calendars, notebooks, and boxes. He informs Tayo that he needs the mounds of papers to keep up with the changing world.

Tayo sat down, but he didn't take his eyes off the cardboard boxes that filled the big room; the sides of some boxes were broken down, sagging over with old clothing and rags spilling out; others were jammed with the antennas of dry roots and reddish willow twigs ties neat bundles with old cotton strings. The boxes were stacked crookedly, some stacks leaning into others, with only their opposing angles holding them steady. Inside the boxes without lids, the erect brown string handles of shopping bags poked out; piled to the tops of the Woolworth bags were bouquets of dried sage and the brown leaves of mountain tobacco wrapped in swaths of silvery unspun wool...He could see bundles of newspapers, their edges curled stiff and brown, barricading piles of telephone books with the years scattered among cities—St. Louis, Seattle, New York, Oakland—and he

began to feel another dimension to the old man's room. His heart beat faster, and he felt the blood draining from his legs. (119-120)

Betonie notices Tayo's observing the collection of random pieces of papers. As mentioned in previous chapters, Indigenous knowledge continues to carry on its traditions by incorporating elements of colonization and assimilation. Through this resistance, the individual is able to keep their self-determined identity as Indigenous.

In this case, Betonie is only adding new information to his existing knowledge. Betonie explains Tayo that, "We've been gathering these things for a long time—hundreds of years. She was doing it before I was born, and he was working before she came. And on and on back down in time." He goes on saying, "In the old days it was simple. A medicine person could get by without all these things. But nowadays...' He let his voice trail off and nodded to let Tayo complete the thought got him" (121), adding that, 'All these things have stories alive in them.' He pointed at the Santa Fe calendars." (121) Betonie is able to maintain and protect his Indigenous identity as a medicine man. Choosing to help Tayo overcome his illness, Betonie insists that Tayo re-establish himself as an Indigenous individual. He teaches Tayo to reject the evil and to trust the traditional land and its creator beings will protect him.

### Reestablishing Self-Identity

Joanne Lipson Freed calls this a communal healing because Tayo is relying on the Indigenous community and its knowledge to protect him. Freed writes in "The ethics of identification: the global circulation of traumatic narrative in Silko's *Ceremony* and Roy's *The God of Small Things*" that, "reflecting Native American understanding of

healing as a communal rather than individual process, the conclusion of Silko's narrative artfully draws readers into the community that is being healed by her story" (229). Tayo receives support from his family and from the creator beings he encounters during his trip to healing.

Freed suggests that:

By inviting us to identify with its protagonist and embrace the healing narrative that he adopts, *Ceremony* opens the past for revision in the present. Rather than being the victims of European colonization, displacement, and racism, the traumatic effects of which are well documented in the novel, Native Americans like Tayo and Betonie become agents in their own history, and Native epistemology becomes the basis for bringing Native and non-Native readers together in the novel's healing ceremony. (244)

Betonie implies that Tayo needs to remember his traditional stories as they will guide him to end the end of the ceremony. The need for Tayo to incorporate the new ways of living was to add on to already existing stories.

At one time, the ceremonies as they had performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong.

She taught me this above all else: things which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are things the witchery people want. Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth. But it has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is. Otherwise we won't make it. We won't survive. That's what witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more. (126)

Betonie tells Tayo that he needs to overcome the witchery within himself by re-establishing his Indigenous identity through locating Josiah's lost cattle, encountering a female guiding creator being, and by actively not participating in evil activities. Betonie stresses that Tayo needs to fix the broken relationship between nature and history, saying that, "There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain" (130). Through this healing journey, Tayo is able to reconnect his identity with its Indigenous knowledges.

Tayo's self determination to control, maintain, and protect his Indigenous identity by re-establishing his relationship to his traditional and culture practices through remember lessons taught by oral traditions. Tayo remembers, and retells these stories – helping him gather strength to over the evil he encounters. Tayo is able to, as Kyle Whyte writes in, "What Do Indigenous Knowledges Do for Indigenous Peoples?, maintain a "[c]ollective self-determination [that] refers to a group's ability to provide the cultural, social, and economical and political relations needed for its members to pursue good lives" (12). Tayo is able to successfully reconnect, saving his colonial self-identified spiritual identity. His relationship to his culturally identity is strong, as the novel leaves

him studied to be a medicine man. Tayo is able to articulate what is written in UNDRIP's Article 31.1, by being able to control, maintain and protect his Laguna identity by establishing and protecting the Indigenous connections to knowledges stemming from oral traditions. Tayo demonstrates the importance to protect and stand up for Indigenous land and water rights. Like the Sacred Stone Camp in Standing Rock, Tayo is defeating the Destroyers before they destroy the earth.

## Conclusion

Introducing myself in the Navajo language is important to my Indigenous self-identity and it is one of the first things that was taught to me by my parents. This introduction identifies my clans and that spiritually as well as culturally connects me to Navajo creation stories. It helps other Navajos identify where I come from. I learned this appropriate method of introducing myself through oral traditions. Oral traditions are very special to me because as mentioned in my thesis and echoed in Silko/Tapahonso introductions, I grew up listening to stories told by various family members. Example of stories are the Navajo emergence, creation stories, coyote's tales of tricks, and simple grandma staring down a bear were common and often told.

The intense relationship between Indigenous people and the land creates strong advocacy to preserve the culture and traditions. Advocacy through oral stories is little understood outside indigenous communities but is the "connective tissue" that keeps the relations between Indigenous knowledge and contemporary life and communities strong. By being able to self-identify as Indigenous through oral traditions, individuals become deeply rooted in the landscape and often feel it is their obligation to stand up for

environmental rights. Silko and Tapahonso show that resistance and activism stem from the knowledge of storytelling and understandings of what the stories are about. Both authors convey this knowledge by recreating these Navajo stories realistically as possible in order to transfer the stories beauty and thereby creating a protective relationship for these stories and the lands it describes. These stories, or oral traditions involve the practice of storytelling – individuals contributing to an informative collective history that brings communities together, strengthening the bond between its members and creates a relationship with the physical landscape. Storytelling sustains the community, preserves the past, and allows communities to share knowledge.

Tapahonso and Silko's stories, including landscape and the ways that people are linked to it, illustrates the importance of UNDRIP's Article 31.1 that summarizes Indigenous People's right have to their history, indigenous knowledges pertaining to nature, and culture: Not only does the UNDRIP protect the Indigenous lands but it also protects Indigenous knowledge, culture, and heritage. Both authors gather and share traditional oral stories, preserving their Laguna and Navajo culture in a reference to the principles underlying the UNDRIP. This kind of intergenerational cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and expressions relates directly to UNDRIP's declaration to protect and maintain this type of intellectual integrity. Silko and Tapahonso are able to self-determine their Indigenous spiritual identity through maintaining traditional practices told through cultural oral stories. As mentioned before, these stories actively engage Indigenous knowledges and this knowledge is the basis for land rights, as most landmarks are connected with a creation oral story. The need to protect the traditional lands in these oral stories cross over into real activism.

These stories convey messages to live a healthy knowledgeable safe life, while stressing the importance of being able to communicate respectfully and patiently with other multilayered beings, human and nonhuman. Silko and Tapahonso are continually attaching themselves to traditional stories and thereby, attaching herself to the land and its culture. These chapters show that Indigenous oral traditions and its knowledges help the Navajo and Laguna people maintain and protect a connection to cultural traditions and values. Oral traditions is an essential building block to building an identity, especially an Indigenous identity. Silko and Tapahonso have shown that that through their oral traditions, they are able to resist concepts of colonization and maintain their spiritual connection to traditional values, lands, and identity by sharing and community stories/knowledges. Following UNDRIP's Article 31.1, each character and situation from their novels and poems are able to establish their Indigenous identity from cultural traditional practices and knowledges while maintaining, protecting, and controlling Indigenous identity. From Silko's *Storyteller* to Tapahonso's *Blue Horses Rush In*, each character's situation involves a deeper look into personal connections to Indigenous traditions, culture, and identity. My family's stories or oral traditions and prayers protect, teach, and guide me through life, but they also re-affirm my Indigenous identity, allowing me to retain a deep traditional and spiritual connection to my homelands. As Navajo people, my family resisted concepts of colonization and assimilation held on to their traditions, knowledges and oral stories. Much like Silko and Tapahonso, these stories anchor my identity to being Navajo.

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