Seeking Life: Diné Storytelling as Power, Imagination, and Future-Making

by

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ABSTRACT

Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii's (Empowered Earth Surface People, Diné People) story begins with the origin of the cosmos as detailed in Diné emergence narratives, and continues in Diné ceremonial songs, film, and poetry. Diné people's emergence narratives describe how life moved through the four worlds and how Changing Woman brought Diné people into existence. In the present, Diné people often tell stories against violent colonial domination that aims to unsettle the hope and safety that undergirds their life and prosperity. Through their stories, Diné people bring their past and present together to make futures where Diné life can flourish. Each dissertation chapter explores the contours of storytelling as imagination, power, and future-making through selected Diné stories. Chapter 1 draws from the story of Gus Bighorse as set forth in his as-told-to autobiography (1990). The chapter describes how this Diné warrior, who survived the 1860s forced removal of Diné people, spoke from the heart to tell of a future beyond the US Cavalry's violence. Such future-focused storying illustrates how Diné people apply elements of Sa'ah' Naghai Bike' Hózhǫ (SNBH) in the present to encourage the people to live. SNBH is a philosophy, worldview, and organizing principle for the underlying power through and by which Diné people imagine, create, remake, and renew our reality to realize hózhǫ, beauty. Chapter 2 examines the critical discourse within and around the 2014 Navajo election language fluency controversy that led to Christopher L. Clark Deschene's removal from the general election ballot. Chapter 3 analyzes the hooghan and the Treaty of 1868 to show how construction in the United States always has sustained and marked the permanence of settler colonialism as white colonizers usurped Diné

people's lands and destroyed their homes. Chapter 4 employs the concept of feminist rehearsal to map the production of life and death in the border town of Gallup. This chapter interweaves the author's family's border town experience, the Nááhwíiłbįįhí Story, and Sydney Freeland's feature film *Drunktown's Finest* (2014). Chapter 5, an examination of Diné narratives of catastrophe and emergence, establishes a Diné-based approach to the threat of removal that climate change imposes.

DEDICATION

For my father Jeffery Clark, Jr. who believed I could do anything. And for my brother Miguel D. Yazzie who always greeted his family with the biggest, warmest smile. You both deserved more life.

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CHAPTER 1

COLONIALISM IS NOT OUR END

Diné people seek life to counter fear, hopelessness, and death by imagining and creating alternatives to settler colonial domination.[1] Imagining and creating are interrelated processes of envisioning and acting upon futures where the people live and thrive. I critically analyze storytelling as modes of imagining and creating. In presenting the narration and proliferation of Diné life through storytelling and enactments of power, I explore how we conceptualize and protect life in the settler colonial present and propagate life beyond the settler drive to end our existence.

Before white settler invasion and the genocidal onslaught of colonial violence, Diné people documented our history through oral traditions.[2] Diné emergence stories (sometimes called *creation narratives*) tell how the people came to live between the Four Powered Mountains.[3] These stories remind Diné people of the successes, failures, and

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[1] Undertaking the research to understand the ways Diné people seek life, I cannot help but think about the young people in my community and nation who carry the burdens of colonialism. I cannot help but think of our femme relatives subject to sexual and domestic assaults. While I do my best to avoid the defeatism of damage-centered narratives, I cannot deny that young people in some of our communities end their lives in disproportionate numbers, and women are assaulted or go missing at alarming rates. This has been true for some of my precious young cousins. For me, life and death in colonialism is not an abstract idea or peripheral experience, this is something I carry in my heart, bones, mind, and spirit. This project begins and ends with defense of Diné life, and how Diné life is discussed, treated, written about, and portrayed. Just as much as it is about how our bodies are excluded, murdered, raped, and eliminated, is it about the way we thrive, live, love, and care. My research, writing, and activism are grounded in these facts. And contrary to the perception that such an approach that points to ongoing colonialism is grounded in despair or hopelessness, these efforts are motivated by the desire to live and thrive.

[2] For more on oral traditions, see Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Remembering Our Grandmothers: Navajo Women and the Power or Oral Tradition," in *Indigenous Peoples' Wisdom and Power: Affirming Our Knowledge through Narratives*, ed. Julian E. Kunnie and Nomalungelo I. Goduka (Farnham, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 78–94; Angela Waziyatawin Wilson, *Remember This!: Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

[3] For more on Diné emergence, see Wilson Aronilth, Jr., *Navajo Oral History*, 1980; Wilson Aronilth, Jr., *Diné Bi Bee Óhoo'aah Bá Silá: An Introduction to Navajo Philosophy*, 4th Edition, 1994; Paul Geyer

lessons learned as the many beings moved through the phases of emergence. Diné emergence stories relay incidences of catastrophe and conflict that were visited upon the people, and the stories demonstrate the ways Diné people encountered seemingly insurmountable disasters and death with life and future possibilities. Through continual emergence, Diné people perpetuated their ways of knowing and being. This dissertation is both about stories and a continuation of Diné people's story.

Stories—prayers, novels, songs, poems, films, paintings, and emergence narratives—and storytelling among Indigenous peoples have many purposes. Using stories, Diné people have documented life and existence from before the origin of human beings. In ceremonial settings, stories can heal and protect. Among families, stories can serve as entertainment, as methods for relaying values, and as systems for preserving family histories. In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Cherokee Indigenous literary critic Daniel Heath Justice asserts that stories can heal or wound.[4] The stories colonizers know and tell about Indigenous peoples encompass a range of narratives that represent us as deficient, disappearing, dying, savage, and uncivilized. This dissertation, by contrast, focuses entirely on the stories we, Diné people, have told about ourselves in contexts such as government, film, construction, and border towns. These tellings constitute oppositional strategies that aim to resist and destroy settler domination. Contrary to many

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Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane': The Navajo Creation Story* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

[4] Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 1–6.

anthropological studies of Diné people, the stories I map here show that we are resilient and have persisted through horrific genocidal erasure and colonial elimination.

Our present stories and storytelling occur in the context of colonialism, simultaneously limiting and proliferating Diné stories that narrate in, against, and beyond domination. Colonialism is a complete disordering of Diné society and being. Colonizers have perpetuated violence and death on Diné people, and have sought to destroy our cultural and political systems. In the so-called United States, settlers often based their stories about Indigenous peoples on damaged-centered approaches and perspectives, which Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck describes as the representation of Indigenous peoples as "defeated and broken."[5] The work I present here counters that narrative by telling a story about beautiful and persistent people who thrive because we imagine and create—in, against, and outside of settler regimes—to realize our hope and vision of living and flourishing.

This research examines several instances of how Diné people imagine and create as a means for moving beyond settler domination. Through these examples, I map how our imagining and creating either replicates or challenges oppressive regimes. Each of my dissertation chapters analyzes how Diné people enact storytelling to imagine and create future possibilities. My dissertation proposes to answer these questions: What does it mean to imagine and create through storytelling? When is storytelling, as practiced by Diné people, oriented toward decolonization? When is storytelling enacted to reproduce

[5] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 412.

hegemonic regimes such as settler colonialism and patriarchy? How does settler colonialism influence the process of imagining, and from this, how can we change the way we imagine?[6]

My inquiry into the nature of imagination and creation in Diné society focuses on how Diné people enact storytelling traditions that document our existence and challenge colonial narratives. As such, this dissertation continues work by scholars in Critical Diné Studies such as Jennifer Nez Denetdale, Melanie K. Yazzie, Lloyd L. Lee, and Andrew Curley, who challenge and critique dominant colonial narratives about Diné people.[7] Consider Denetdale's *Reclaiming Diné History*, which interrogates non-Diné telling of Diné histories, showing how they marginalize Juanita in the stories of Chief Manuelito's life and leadership. Denetdale's reclamation project exposes the erasure of women in colonial, masculine historical projects. Denetdale's reconstruction of Juanita's life relies on family stories maintained in oral traditions to demonstrate the power of oral histories to counter colonial narration of the past. Through telling Juanita's life, Denetdale shows

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[6] My questions emerge from years of community organizing with Council Advocating an Indigenous Manifesto, a grassroots organization I co-founded with Delsey Benally, Randilynn Boucher-Giago, and Antonio Benavidez. The organization's purpose was to topple settler dominative orders and dream new possibilities for our people. Through this work, my comrades and I grappled with understanding how our quotidian actions and resistive strategies could and did replicate the very oppressive regimes we sought to end. This research emerges from this bind, and seeks to understand how dominative power can seep into our resistive actions, imagining, and creating beyond settler regimes.

[7] Denetdale, "Remembering Our Grandmothers: Navajo Women and the Power or Oral Tradition"; Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Securing Navajo National Boundaries: War, Patriotism, Tradition, and the Diné Marriage Act of 2005," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 131–48; Melanie K. Yazzie, "Unlimited Limitations: The Navajos' Winters Rights Deemed Worthless in the 2012 Navajo–Hopi Little Colorado River Settlement," *Wicazo Sa Review* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 26–37; Lloyd L. Lee, "Diné Political Leadership Development on the Path to Sustainability and Building the Navajo Nation," *Wicazo Sa Review* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 25; Lloyd L. Lee, ed., *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014); Lloyd L. Lee, ed., *Navajo Sovereignty: Understandings and Visions of the Diné People* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017); Lloyd L. Lee, *Diné Masculinities: Conceptualizations and Reflections*, 2013.

that oral traditions reliably reanimate peoples who have been disappeared or obscured from settler histories. Like Denetdale's reclaiming the past through oral narratives, I (re)construct the Diné imagination through an examination of past and present enactments of stories, oral and written.

Contrary to Navajo Studies narratives, as detailed and critiqued by Diné scholar Melanie K. Yazzie, which have represented Diné persistence through neo-classical liberalism and agency, I recast our persistence, resistance, and thriving through our Diné ways of knowing and being. As such, this project continues Yazzie's directing Critical Diné Studies "toward questions of power, materiality, violence, capitalism, and settler colonialism, and the myriad of ways in which the politics of life infuse Navajo social and political formations."[8] This dissertation recounts familiar stories about the hooghan and Nááhwíiłbįįhí, among others, but I reposition them within the imperative to question power, materiality, violence, capitalism, and settler colonialism.

Future-Focus, Storying, and the Power of Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii

In Diné cosmology, Diyin Diné'e, Power People, imagined, spoke, and fashioned all of existence as they moved through the previous four worlds before arriving in the present Glittering World.[9] In this world, Asdzą́ą Nádleehé, Changing Woman, brought

[8] Melanie K. Yazzie, "Contesting Liberalism, Refusing Death: A Biopolitical Critique of Navajo History." (PhD diss., The University of New Mexico, 2016), 15.

[9] I do not recount all the events or actions of specific deities because the emergence stories have contexts and protocols that I must respect. The act of refraining from telling too much is also a commitment to asserting responsibilities and respect for our knowledge systems that non-Navajo knowledge purveyors violated and destroyed. Many of these vulture-like purveyors descended upon Diné people to capture knowledge systems they imagined or hoped were going extinct. And when they realized that we were not going extinct, the opportunists wove narratives of why the Diné people were great adapters. "Adapters," not so bad, right? To me, the oversimplification of us as adapters reads like a people who grasped at any bit

Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii, Empowered Earth Surface People, into existence.[10] Through various trials and understandings, the Diyin Diné'e placed the powerful mountains and stars, eliminated monsters, built the hooghan, and defined kinship. Their meticulous actions made habitable conditions so that Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii could live and thrive.

Diyin Diné'e brought my people into a complex world formed through Sa'ah' Naghai Bike' Hózhǫ (SNBH), a philosophy, worldview, and organizing principle. I take SNBH to represent a power by which Diyin Diné'e and Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii imagine, create, remake, and renew our reality so that we can realize hózhǫ, beauty. This power is observable in the universal energies that orchestrate everything in the cosmos, and is represented in our kinship, our storytelling, and our active engagement with the past, present, and future. On the order of cosmic origins and movements in the universe, SNBH represents the entirety of elements and forces of existence. The intentional SNBH-informed acts of Diyin Diné'e led to critical moments that propelled Diné people into existence. Diyin Diné'e arranged it so the people could continue to imagine and create the world. In short, SNBH is the system of being and knowing by which Diyin Diné'e brought all things into existence. The Diyin Diné'e then instructed the Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii to live by this system.[11]

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of knowledge or resource to selfishly continue. Much like a mindless, lifeless Zombie bent on consuming brains. If anything, this sounds more like the violence and death colonizers brought to the Americas.

[10] In much of Diné writing, Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii, is translated as Holy Earth Surface people. Diyin Diné'e is usually translated as Holy People. I translate "Diyin" and "Diyinii" as 'empowered' instead of 'holy'. The reason for my translation is that terms such as 'sacred' and 'holy' do not accurately describe the Diné understanding of universal power that orchestrate the universe. Whereas terms like 'sacred' and 'holy' are steeped in western religious hierarchal orders, my use of 'empowered', while not perfect, aims to restore a Diné understanding of relationships and powers of the universe.

[11] For more discussions and uses of Sa'ah' Naghai Bike' Hózhǫ, see Wilson Aronilth, Jr., *Foundation of Navajo Culture*, 2nd Edition, 1992; Aronilth, Jr., *Diné Bi Bee Óhoo'aah Bá Silá*; Carmenlita Chief et al.,

In this dissertation, I am concerned with the *future-focus* and *storying* aspects of SNBH. To elaborate on the feature of SNBH that I call future-focus, I turn to Diné scholars Lloyd L. Lee and Miranda J. Haskie. Lee interprets SNBH to mean "long life and happiness," which serves as the "foundational value that embodies the way Diné people are supposed to live their lives."[12] Haskie describes SNBH as "a system from which the Navajo people gain teachings and learn how to achieve a healthy well-being throughout life."[13] As a value system, SNBH orients Diné people's thinking and action toward long life and happiness. This orientation holds true for all individual and collective endeavors.

I interpret the imperative of long life and happiness as a future-focused endeavor to produce abundant conditions that favor Diné existence. This imperative requires that we maintain a reflective state to understand how our present actions impact future possibilities and outcomes. Our concern for life necessitates that we ask how we can achieve our desired future. This *how* of pursuing long life positions us to assess and critique present barriers. Our critical engagement with the present requires us to imagine

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"Breathing Clean Air Is Są'áh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóó (SNBH): A Culturally Centered Approach to Understanding Commercial Smoke-Free Policy among the Diné (Navajo People)," *Tobacco Control* 25 (October 2016): i19–25; Ferlin Clark, "In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon: The Historical Challenges and Triumphs of Dine College" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2009); Miranda Jensen Haskie, "Preserving a Culture: Practicing the Navajo Principles of Hózhó Dóó K'é" (PhD diss., Fielding Graduate Institute, 2002); Lloyd L. Lee, "21st Century Dine Cultural Identity: Defining and Practicing Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon" (PhD diss., The University of New Mexico, 2004); Nancy Cottrell Maryboy and David H. Begay, "Living the Order: Dynamic Cosmic Process of Dine Cosmology. Nanit'a Sa'ah Naaghai Nanit'a Bik'eh Hozhoon" (PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 1999); Vangee Nez, "Diné Epistemology: Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon Teachings" (PhD diss., The University of New Mexico, 2018).

[12] Lloyd L. Lee translates SBNH to mean "long life and happiness" in Lee, "21st Century Dine Cultural Identity," 1.

[13] Haskie, "Preserving a Culture," 32.

and create beyond those hindrances. If we concentrate on Diné life and the goal of living a long life, inevitably, we have to confront the injustices and horrors of US colonialism and the accompanying forces that assault our Diné lives. We are at our most vulnerable under settler colonial rule and domination. My dissertation chapters detail the axes of dominative power that structure our lives.

The past five hundred years of colonization shaped and influenced how we tell stories. While such influences have led to changes in how we tell our stories, their purpose remains unchanged. Simon J. Ortiz, respected Acoma poet and elder, asserts that Indigenous writers acknowledge their "responsibility to advocate for their people's self-government, sovereignty, and control of land and natural resources; and to look also at racism, political and economic oppression, sexism, supremacism, and the needless and wasteful exploitation of land and people…"[14] Stories and storytelling are ways of countering the hegemonic order and are directly connected to the oppressive circumstances that structure Indigenous peoples lives.

To elaborate on the *storying* function of SNBH, I turn to Dr. Ferlin Clark, president of Bacone College, who wrote that SNBH "embodies the complimentary relationship individuals have with the natural environment, the cardinal direction, blood and clan relatives, animals, and that which is sanctioned through prayers, songs, and ceremonies."[15] Complimentary relationships are crucial to SNBH because it imposes a broader idea of long life that encompasses obligations and responsibilities beyond the

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[14] Simon J Ortiz, "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism," *MELUS* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 12.
[15] Clark, "In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon," 87.

self. But here I focus on the "sanctioned through prayers, songs, and ceremonies" to describe storying and storytelling as central to how Diné people pursue and achieve happiness and long life. Clark set the terms by which SNBH becomes a process of persistently narrating the Diné relational worldview, an approach to assess, define, and renew relationships all through the natural world.

Underlying my dissertation is the idea that storytelling acknowledges and implements SNBH in telling how we sought life and how we maintain the unique identities as Diné people before, in, and beyond colonization. The stories, thus understood, bring power as we describe events that are unfolding now, that will become our past. Stories also give us the power to narrate the future on terms that favor and protect Diné life. Diné people as creative beings exhibit the extraordinary potential to direct and form the powers by which we construct our ways of knowing and living. As Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii, we arise from and have access to this power, and it is central to how we understand and implement stories within the universe's creative force.

Our implementation of SNBH as a creative power that prioritizes long life and happiness through storying perpetuates our ways of knowing and being. Santa Clara Pueblo scholar Gregory Cajete, in *Native Science*, offers the explanation that

> Native science embraces the inherent creativity of nature as the foundation for both knowledge and action with regard to 'seeking life'…Ultimately, the universe is a creative expression at a magnitude beyond human recognition…We are a part of a greater generative order of life that is ever evolving. It is from this creative generative center of human life that central principles of Native science emanate.

> Native people relate all things in myth by virtue of being born of this creative center.[16]

Cajete's use of "seeking life" describes an "all-encompassing task" for "coming to know and understand the nature of life and our relationship therein." Cajete's idea of seeking life is not dissimilar from SNBH imbued Diné understandings. Like SNBH, native science is a process of coming to understand life, relationships, and place. Our power emerges from understanding that life extends from the universal macrocosm, and to live according to SNBH is to acknowledge and understand this power.

Diné emergence narratives tell how the people came into existence through the natural world's creative power and how the Diyin Diné'e endowed the people with the same power. I call this power potential *storying*, Diné acts of telling our stories of the past and present. This dissertation presents many instances of Diné people telling our stories and storying our present so as to produce conditions that protect and proliferate life. Creativity and human endeavors to 'seek life' are connected to the universe of creative expression or nature of creativity.

The powers that dictate all creation, time, and space are the same energy and creative center of knowing that propels how we tell stories. Stories embody that ancient power. When we tell stories, we recount where we have been, where we are, and where we want to go.[17] Enacted stories, in Diné thought, change the fabric of reality. To tell a

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[16] Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), 15.

[17] Indigenous storytelling is a vast archive. And we access the archive from various settings and by numerous means. Across the vastness and diversity of stories, storytellers access and perform stories in variety of ways. See, for example, Deborah A. Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2012); Gus Palmer, *Telling Stories the Kiowa Way* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2003); Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1981).

story about freedom and justice, then, is not only to hope for but to realize, imaginatively, freedom and justice for the future. That power potential of Diné storytelling is marked in those moments where we allow ourselves to imagine and create in and against settler orders, against the impossible. The power of imagining and speaking our hopes and dreams is why Diné people, even when the US incarcerated them at Hwéél̨dí, spoke, prayed, and told into existence the return home. When they spoke, prayed, and told of that return, they created hope and possibility in the present and they were manifesting that outcome in its repetition.

Diné power, as represented in our future-focus and storying, is an appreciation and understanding of the universe as a creative force with the potential to create and destroy. To speak of something is not only to verbalize a desire, hope, or anguish; it is to put into motion the creative forces of the universe. When Diné people continue to tell the emergence of the people, we recount the emergence and power that resulted in our existence. With each retelling, we continue to rebirth the people. Our efforts to seek life are at the center of how we understand who we are as empowered beings. Because Diné people are "born of this creative center," our actions perpetuate creativity and life. The inverse of this is also true because our actions and thoughts can cause death by stifling and suffocating life. Our lives are an ongoing engagement with the creative force of nature and understanding how our lives are manifestations of this creative force. To dream, imagine, and create life is to live according to these forces of nature.

Imagination, Life, and the Future

When the late Gus Bighorse, in *Bighorse the Warrior* (an as-told-to memoir by Tiana Bighorse, the subject's daughter), recalls the US Cavalry's early 1860s invasion of Canyon de Chelly to remove Diné people, he demonstrates how militaristic force and genocidal practices of settler domination cause fear, hopelessness, and death. Bighorse recounts the experience of protecting Diné women and children who had taken shelter in a cave as the US Cavalry fought Diné warriors directly below them on the canyon floor:

> While all this fighting is down there, some of the people up in the cave want to jump off so they don't get shot or captured. Mostly it is the kids and women that are scared that do this.…still, some families just jump down, because they don't want to be shot by the enemy. They commit suicide. They think there is no way to be safe. It is very hard for us warriors to save the people.[18]

Bighorse's recollection captures the violence that colonizers levied against Diné people, and shows the fear and hopelessness that caused families to end their lives. For them, as for others, it was better to kill themselves than to die at the hands of the invaders or to live under US settler regime.

The invasion and violence exacted on Diné people unsettled the hope and safety that had undergirded Diné life and prosperity. Those Diné people who committed suicide saw no possibility of living, no future beyond the Cavalry's force and domination. Bighorse's story is about more than death, hopelessness, fear, as it also shows the Diné response of resistance and resilience. As a precursor to realizing the settler vision of the future, colonizers must undercut Indigenous life and lifeways. In the words of Bighorse,

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[18] Tiana Bighorse and Gus Bighorse, *Bighorse the Warrior*, ed. Noël Bennett (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1990), 27.

the Cavalry's actions caused Diné people to "think there is no way to be safe."[19] The US Cavalry's invasion aimed to rid Diné people of our future and undercut our confidence and belief in our stories so that we would not oppose or, in any way, impede settler futures. For Bighorse, as for many Diné people, stories and storytelling are oppositional forces to the colonial desire to end our lives.

Diné people met the Cavalry's destruction and violence with a defense of their homes, food, and lives. Bighorse tells of the Cavalry's arrival at the canyon mouth and their week-long campout before attacking Diné families and homes. In their initial attack, a "few soldiers go into the canyon and destroy hogans, orchards, and livestock. They kill three Navajos trying to stop them."[20] As the US Cavalry pressed forward, they rained bullets upon Diné people and some jumped to their deaths. Bighorse and other warriors continued to protect their people. For Bighorse, the need to defend his people never faltered even though he cried while doing so:

> I am crying. I feel sorry for our people that are killing themselves. We warriors are supposed to be brave, and we are not supposed to cry. But it is very scary to see the families jump off the cliff. We try to talk to them, to tell them to stay back from the cliff edge. We tell them not to do that because someday it will be peace. Our Great Spirit will save us, some way or other. I save some of the lives by talking to them like that. I have to talk to them from my heart, not just my lips.[21]

Despite imminent death, Bighorse talked from his heart to tell of a peaceful future beyond the genocidal onslaught. By talking from his heart, he helped to convince some individuals and families not to jump. Bighorse's words spoke to and created the

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[19] Ibid., 28.
[20] Ibid., 27.
[21] Ibid., 28–29.

possibility of an alternate future that directly countered the fear, hopelessness, and death of the moment.

When Bighorse tells the people not to commit suicide "because someday it will be peace" and that the "Great Spirit will save us, some way or other," he is urging the people to consider what it means to be Diné, and to restore belief and confidence in Diné ways of being and knowing. Bighorse's invocation of the "Great Spirit" or Diyin Dine'é is a reminder to the people that their way of life is one of hózhǫ. Diné poet Luci Tapahonso characterizes Diyin Dine'é as exemplifying "the importance of thinking tasks through carefully and initiating responsibilities with the future in mind."[22] Bighorse invoking the Diyin Dine'é served as a reminder of the power and potential of Diné lifeways to secure a future of peace.

When Bighorse talked from his heart to foster hope and encourage life, storytelling as a project of imagination, power, and its potential for future-making emerged at this moment to counter the fear, hopelessness, and death of settler violence. This relates to what Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes about vision in *Dancing on Our Turtles Back*:

> Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. Storytelling becomes a space where we can escape the gaze and the cage of the Empire, even if it is just for a few minutes.[23]

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[22] Luci Tapahonso, *A Radiant Curve: Poems and Stories* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2008), 17.
[23] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub, 2011), 33–34.

Storytelling as a mode of imagining multiple possibilities beyond settler domination can help people continue to live.[24] The Bighorse example communicates to us that, even though the onslaught of settler violence and domination can overwhelm, we can experience moments of freedom and hope. The moments of imagining and creating enable the people to resist and persist. Diné storytelling implements our power through creating alternate realities to what the colonizer dictates.

Storytelling moments allow us to experience freedom and justice, "even if it is just for a few minutes," as Simpson writes. These moments of imagining and presenting an alternate envisioning to settler violence are the foundation that sprouts further envisioning. Imagining the seemingly impossible settler colonial end builds off of imaginative moments that build on other imaginative moments.[25] To imagine the end of settler domination and the return of Indigenous territories in the someday is not an outlandish or unattainable vision or hope. Slowly, but assuredly, we actualize the impossible.

Storytelling envisions a way out of cognitive imperialism as an active, lived, individually, and collectively driven set of alternatives to the stories of settler colonialism

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[24] The journal *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* dedicated an entire issue to storytelling, decolonization, and resurgence. I found the volume introduction essay particularly helpful while thinking about the relationship between Diné storytelling and decolonization. See Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, "Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013).

[25] Poka Laenui, a Hawai'ian Native Rights advocate, sets out a process of decolonization that includes a phase he refers to as "dreaming" which occurs when and where "the full panorama of possibilities are expressed considered through debate, consultation, and building dreams on further dreams which eventually becomes the flowing for the creation of a new social order." The act of dreaming is one of those ways that the people can continue to live free and to imagine possibilities beyond the present moments of death, violence, and consumption. For more, see Poka Laenui, "Processes of Decolonization," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 150–60.

and other hegemonic regimes. Within the vocabulary used to describe the colonized, within the telling/fabrication of these stories, the colonizer had to imagine then create these colonial realities against the Indigenous reality. All of colonization is a story. A story that is believed, first and foremost by the colonizer, then told and beaten into the colonized.

To tell stories of Indigenous reality and future is to undercut the very stories that sustain the occupation of lands and maintain our oppression. These stories are oppositional, but first they maintain the Indigenous reality that does not rely on colonizer stories. As the collective Indigenous Action Media puts it, "The anti-colonial imagination isn't a subjective reaction to colonial futurisms, it is anti-settler future. Our life cycles are not linear, our future exists without time. It is a dream, uncolonized."[26] To recover and tell our stories is to position us in the space of Indigenous existence. Our stories did not always have the purpose of opposing colonizer stories, but our stories now serve an anticolonial function because of colonization.

Bighorse's invocation of a *someday* illustrates a Diné concern for long life and happiness in some future setting as the objective of the present. He invokes a someday of hope, vision, possibility, and life against colonial death and absolute domination that makes the continuation of Diné people seem an utter impossibility. The collective can still engage in battle, but as fear and hopelessness can overpower individuals, just as it did in those canyon caves, the someday presents a moment of possibility when all else

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[26] "Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto," *Indigenous Action Media* (blog), March 19, 2020, https://www.indigenousaction.org/rethinking-the-apocalypse-an-indigenous-anti-futurist-manifesto.

seems impossible. The defense of our homelands and ways of knowing engages the someday. To seek justice and the end of domination is to seek a someday not ruled by the lifeless, dark mass that constellates and animates settler power axes.

Diné people seek and articulate the someday as a way to create meaning, hope, and possibility where it seems absent. In this dynamic of settler domination, storying, future-focus, seeking life, and the power of Diné creativity coalesce to prevent death. The someday can be conceived as a decolonial imagining that opposes settler invasion and claims to Indigenous territories. The someday is an alternate envisioning that invokes a future time when the people transcend violence and death as we once again live according to SNBH, in hózhǫ. By virtue of our very existence, Indigenous peoples struggle against settler colonialism. Diné warriors, activists, storytellers, thinkers, poets, drag performers, and philosophers actively and tirelessly imagine and seek justice and peace in even the darkest and most impossible situations.

Bighorse's decision to talk from the heart shows us how imagination can oppose settler invasion and domination. The imagination as a cultural, spiritual, and political force has the potential to counter colonial domination; restore freedom, hope, and life; and remake the world anew. For Kenyan born writer and decolonial theorist Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, "Imagination is the supreme sovereign, for it is not bound by time and space, nor by authority…In that sense, even within an oppressive system, the artist can still exercise the sovereignty of his imagination to dream of new worlds."[27] For Ngũgĩ Wa

[27] Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, "Freeing the Imagination: George Lamming's Aesthetics of Decolonization," *Transition* 100, no. 1 (2009): 169.

Thiong'o, the artist, or "cultural worker" in an oppressive system possesses the inner power to dream worlds anew. The basis of this claim is that artists, novelists, or poets are actively exercising the sovereignty of their imagination—they live in, produce in, and draw power from the imagination. As Bighorse's example shows, artists are not alone in wielding the power of imagination. This dissertation shows some of how Diné people live and thrive by drawing from and asserting the creative power of SNBH through imagination.

All Diné people know and desire a change. Our desire birthed when the first colonizing forces invaded our territories, and it has been nurtured in our consciousness and safeguarded in our marrow.[28] Caribbean-born philosopher Frantz Fanon, who asserts that decolonization is "the substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another," writes that this "change is extraordinarily important because it is desired, clamored for, and demanded. The need for this change exists in a raw, repressed, and reckless state in the lives and consciousness of colonized men and women."[29] Within the daily actions and thoughts of Diné people are the "raw, repressed, and reckless" imaginings and ideas of liberation; these imaginings point to several different concrete possibilities to transcend the colonial reality. Our imaginings point toward this claim of liberation and manifest in the creation of poetry, music, film, rugs, and paintings. It does not matter that these

[28] I borrow the language of 'marrow' from Cherie Dimaline. *The Marrow Thieves*, a dystopian novel for Young Adult readers, tells the story of Frenchie, the protagonist, and his family of misfits who found one another after losing their biological families. Together, they avoid capture by the Recruiters. The premise of the novel is that colonizers have stopped dreaming and to keep dreaming they must steal Indigenous peoples' marrow because that is where their Indigenous ancestors hid their dreams when they were incarcerated in residential schools. Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* (Toronto: DCB, 2017).
[29] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1.

alternate imaginings might exist in some raw, repressed, and reckless state. What matters is that the imagining exists and will continue to do so, to resist the colonizer's desire to own and consume everything and everyone in its path.

As Bighorse reflected upon his life in old age, he shared with his daughter, "I never thought of going this far. And I am thankful for all my clan children. I'm not going to let my grandchildren suffer what I suffered. I suffered *for* them."[30] This illustrates the long life and happiness of SNBH, as Clark writes that it "allows for one to live into old age with all the physical attributes, and mental faculties, and to see one's grandchilden and great-grandchildren toward the end of life's journey."[31] Bighorse here also intended a future, and the life he lives exceeds his expectations. His wonder at life's path relates to the ups and downs that we experience. For Bighorse, storytelling was a way to counter the suffering caused by colonialism. His detailed witness and memory of what happened during the US Cavalry's invasion of Canyon de Chelly illustrate how settler invasion, violence, and domination instill fear, circumvent hope, and proliferate death. This is how settler colonialism organizes and carries out its vision of eliminating Indigenous peoples and possessing Indigenous lands.

[30] Bighorse and Bighorse, *Bighorse the Warrior*, 1.
[31] Clark, "In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon," 87.

Coronavirus Pandemic and Mutual Aid as a Life-seeking Practice

On March 17, 2020, the Navajo Nation reported 1197 cases of COVID-19 infections and 44 deaths.[32] According to news outlets, the Navajo Nation's per capita infection rates, compared to US states, ranked third highest.[33] I became extremely disheartened by a CNN news segment covering COVID-19 among my people. The segment featured interviews with key personnel and showed video inside the COVID-19 unit at the Indian Health Service (IHS) facility in Gallup, New Mexico.[34] CNN's Gary Tuchman and Dr. Jonathan Iralu, an infectious disease expert for IHS, briefly discussed the critical condition of an unidentified Diné patient:

> "A woman who appears to be in even more dire shape about to get what's known as a fresh frozen plasma transfusion," Tuchman narrates for the camera.
>
> "It's an FFP transfusion to prevent bleeding problems at this time. It's part of a resuscitation," adds Dr. Jonathan Iralu.
>
> "How seriously ill?," Tuchman asks.
>
> "That's a very critically ill person right now," Dr. Iralu responds.

Before the news crew leaves the IHS facility, the unidentified patient's condition worsens, and the medical team decides to transport her to Albuquerque, New Mexico for the care they could not provide.

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[32] I started this section just as the national media was beginning to cover this issue. It was long present on social media and Diné people were already aware this was a crisis situation. Diné people made every effort to curtail the spread. Some of those early community responders are mentioned in this section.

[33] On May 10, 2020, the Navajo Nation surpassed all US states as having the highest per capita COVID-19 infections. A press release from the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President indicates that the nation had reached 3,122 infections with 100 deaths.

[34] Gary Tuchman, "Navajo Nation Has Lost More to Coronavirus than 13 States," *Anderson Cooper 360* (CNN, April 17, 2020), 01:10, https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2020/04/17/navajo-native-american-coronavirus-pkg-tuchman-ac360-vpx.cnn.

The interviews and facility video capture the intensity of COVID-19 treatments and the horrendous way the disease ravages the body. For me, it relayed concern, fear, and worry for the tragedy and death visited upon my people. Before the CNN segment, I knew COVID-19 was hammering my people and nation, but the frontline video and description of the Diné person's critical condition left me with a feeling of deep, heavy sorrow. The news segment elicited anger, too, because the infection rates revealed my people's vulnerability in settler colonial society. The virus ravaging Diné bodies is not an accident since it stems from the United States' historical, political, economic, and social domination of Indigenous peoples. That is, the production of illness and death in colonialism is intentional.[35]

In describing the colonial situation, Fanon observed that the colony is a compartmentalized system in which the colonizer makes the colonized live in squalor. As he puts it, "The colonized's sector, or at least the 'native' quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything."[36] Illness or the vulnerabilities that allow for easy targeting of Indigenous peoples result from this fact.

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[35] I researched and wrote my dissertation through the COVID-19 pandemic. The news I relay here was early in the pandemic. As we learned later, the US would not get the virus under control, and because of this the pandemic spiked in numerous states and cities at different times. When I wrote this note on December 24, 2020, we were still in a spike. The Navajo Nation continued to grapple with the virus after the numbers declined significantly. Over the course of the pandemic, many friends lost family members, brothers, moms, dads, and sisters. Since the onset of the pandemic, my family lost Shizhé'é (uncle) Benjamin Yazzie, Shideezhí (cousin sister) Tanya Yazzie, Shínaaí (uncle) Francis Ambrose, Sr., Shizhé'é Johnson Gleason, Shidá'í Felix Littlesunday. Writing about life and death in colonialism during a pandemic was difficult. Yet, I firmly believe Diné people are a beautiful and persistent people. In those days that writing was impossible because my mind and spirit were elsewhere, the stories of our people overcoming tragedy and catastrophe helped me to reground myself. I know, more than ever, that I desire and yearn for life for myself, my family, and Diné people.

[36] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 4.

Colonizers produced the reservation for the savage, unworthy Indigenous bodies that, for settlers, inconveniently existed upon lands they desired. Colonizers condition the reservation for death and extermination. As long as reservation conditions are out of sight, it matters little to the colonizing society that Indigenous peoples live near death in the poverty they manufactured. When they become aware of the situation in reservations, they continually shift the blame to Indigenous peoples for not accepting the gifts of colonialism. As if to say, if only you accepted the gifts and wonders of civilization. In contrast to this, "The colonist's sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel…They are protected by solid shoes in a sector where the streets are clean and smooth, without pothole, without a stone. The colonist's sector is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly permanently full of good things."[37]

The settler state's imperative to contain and control its colonized population, over time, has become less obvious than when Indigenous peoples were forced onto reservations and prohibited from continuing vital cultural and spiritual practices. The era of frontier violence and death is no longer how colonizers do things. We sometimes like to imagine, for convenience, that Indigenous peoples' economic development initiatives indicate that we are no longer under the colonizer's thumb. Even when tribes have entered the capitalist market and have made solid attempts to fulfill their capitalist endeavors, situations such as the pandemic demonstrate the horrific injustices that persist. Colonizers intentionally placed us at the bottom of national priorities. This has been true throughout all of the colonial experience.

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[37] Ibid.

The pandemic highlights for Diné people the dynamic of the haves and the have nots. Many Diné people and non-Diné have pointed out that the lack of infrastructure, such as running water, has proliferated the number of infections and deaths. The Navajo Nation, 27,000 square miles, only has thirteen grocery stores. Those relatives living in the most remote locations are miles from health facilities. Overcrowding in homes makes it all the more likely that an entire household could become infected. The lack of appropriate resources to ensure that people are adequately informed further illustrates the well-maintained US colonial situation. While a global pandemic, the virus underscores the ongoing impact that centuries of colonization has wrought on Indigenous peoples. Decades of settler genocide and eliminatory policies left Indigenous peoples vulnerable to infection and death.

For Fanon, this situation of despair leads the colonized to desire that which the colonizer has, "it's true there is not one colonized who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist."[38] Seeking life for Diné people must not aim to share in the exploitative riches of settler society. Instead, we must endeavor to replace the colonist's oppressive orders with life-seeking processes. Ending the settler order begins with Diné imagining and creating new worlds, which implements our power potential as life seekers. Our power, as Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii, is to tap into that creative force of nature from which life and Diné people emerged. We should direct our dreams, imagination, and hope at the emergence of the new world in which we accommodate life

[38] Ibid., 5.

across all identities. This ensures we no longer mistreat our unsheltered, trans people, and anyone that does not fit in normative regimes.

Even as I allow the tragedy to occupy my mind and body, I know the narrative of our diseased, broken, problem, and savage body is not the only story. Leaning into this can only serve to sustain colonial narratives about our supposed deficiencies. We must remember that colonialism conditioned our bodies to sit at the edge of death, only a slip or fall from erasure. So that a disaster like the pandemic nudges Indigenous bodies over the edge. As in a coin pusher arcade game, the right nudge and bodies tumble over the edge. A win for the settler colonial and capitalist regime. We have been targeted for death and, it seems, we must only wait until the body succumbs to the direct assault on life. When death finally arrives for thousands, due to murder, disappearance, suicide, alcoholism, chronic illness, the only explanation need be that this is the Diné body's natural trajectory, as it was always already dead. These situations of despair force critical questions about settler colonial violence and Indigenous life and bodies in the US. When will we not be vulnerable? What will it take for us to thrive and not have to wear our bodies down in colonialism? How can we regain sovereignty over our bodies? How do we restore health and vitality to be more well when the next pandemic or tragedy strikes?

Another news segment by senior investigative reporter Cynthia McFadden aired on NBC's *Today* on April 20, 2020, featuring interviews with Navajo Nation Council Delegate Eugene Tso and President Jonathan Nez. In the interview, Council Delegate Tso, in tears, pleas for help, "I don't think there's any words I can say to how much I worry about the people on [*sic*] reservation and my community. We ask for help. There's

nothing coming in. So I am worried about them. Can't sleep, can't think right."[39] Our pleas, while sad and overwhelming, demonstrate our desire to live. Sometimes, you cannot help but shed tears for all that our people have been through and all that we will endure. But, in those moments, we see our desire to thrive and live life on our terms. I know, as do many others, that we will survive this. We will lose a lot, but from this we are reminded that colonizers intentionally placed our bodies and lives at the edge of death.

In the same *Today* segment, President Nez says, "Well we are hopeful that this week will be a better week for us. We're not gonna roll over or we're not gonna feel sorry for ourselves. It just seems alarming that the first citizens of this country are kinda pushed to the back burner."[40] After so many centuries of colonization, we still have to appeal for basic necessities to sustain our livelihood. The leaders among us, who are supposed to have a hopeful future vision, are becoming overwhelmed. Our nation's material conditions make it undeniably apparent that the history of colonialism orchestrated conditions that have made our people vulnerable to disease.

President Nez offers a counter perspective when he declares we are not going to roll over and die. If we linger in the hopelessness and despair, we only give in to the colonizer's wishes. Instead, Diné people will do as they have always done, which is to resist and continue to strive against logics of death and elimination. If Diné people know anything from our colonial experience, it is that we have to create life and possibility

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[39] Cynthia McFadden, "Coronavirus Batters Hard-Hit Navajo Nation," *Today Show* (NBC, April 20, 2020), 01:37, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbfI4HYWM40.
[40] Ibid., 02:20.

where there is none, much like Bighorse. And the drive to live is not to give in to the colonial death machine. It is to assert the politics and ethics of life. When you are for life, for Indigenous life, then you are against settler colonialism. For the more we take care of our lives and the more we persist in our lives, we labor against our colonizer's desire and goal for our deaths.

We find ourselves not at the edge of death but between a dying settler, capitalist society and the emergence of a new world with fuller and more life-filled possibilities. We are crushed between two possibilities and in a unique position of death/possibility that allows us to create and imagine. Because we will not rollover and die, much to the disappointment of colonial forces, we will do as we always have, creating possibility against all odds, forces, money, and might. Our collective will to live is a powerful force they can never extinguish.

The type of imagination that interests me arises from conditions of despair and emerges in and against settler regimes. This form of imagination seeks to end settler colonialism. This situation makes me pause and recognize the despair stirring in my belly. While my hopeful self trudges through thick, suffocating darkness, I must momentarily live in that despair to comprehend loss and death. And I must understand the despair and death that are contraposed to the problems of the settler colonial "neighborhood" whose problems are, most emphatically, not at all the same. When we take Fanon seriously, we understand that this contrasting situation makes the colonized hunger, desire, ache, and long for conditions far beyond the colonial order. We desire health, long life, and happiness in a way that turns the colonial order on its head.

Others responded to the pandemic by caring for the most vulnerable among the vulnerable, that is, the unsheltered, non-conforming, economically disenfranchised, and elderly. Individuals and collectives like the K'e Infoshop, Taala Hooghan Infoshop, and Kinłani Mutual Aid responded to the Navajo Nation pandemic with mutual aid.[41] According to Big Door Brigade, a site that the Kinłani Mutual Aid links to, mutual aid "projects are a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government, but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable."[42] Their responses are driven by a very keen awareness and critique of the nation state's desire and plan for our early deaths. They also expose the state's priority to maintain health, political, and social systems that propagate infections and death. Their work is organized around kinship principles as they arrive to defend life and tell the story that our beautiful bodies and lives are worth protection.

Brandon Benallie, Diné anticolonial activist and co-founder of K'é Infoshop, on *The Red Nation Podcast*, defines "mutual aid" as "k'e, kinship." He adds that for Diné people kinship is how we "ensure that everyone has a healthy and dignified life."[43] Benallie attributes his understanding of kinship and mutual aid to his grandfather, a

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[41] Kinłani Mutual Aid "is an all-volunteer community response to the threat of Covid-19. We have organized a hub to coordinate volunteers to collect and distribute necessary resources to those most vulnerable in our community and support unsheltered relatives. This group is created for autonomous relief organizing based on the principles of mutual aid, solidarity, and direct action." For more, see "Kinlani/Flagstaff Mutual Aid – Solidarity Not Charity!," accessed May 18, 2020, https://kinlanimutualaid.org/.

[42] "What Is Mutual Aid? – Big Door Brigade," accessed May 18, 2020, http://bigdoorbrigade.com/what-is-mutual-aid/.

[43] Nick Estes, "Navajo Nation, Mutual Aid, & Bordertowns w/ Cleo & Brandon," The Red Nation Podcast: Red Power Hour, n.d.

farmer who shared his crop yield with elders in Black Mesa, Arizona. Benallie's grandfather provided and reallocated "the gifts that were bestowed upon him through the gift of farming to those around him, those who couldn't farm for themselves."[44] Benallie distinguishes mutual aid from charity because the latter tends to add a layer of conditions for interaction. He tells a story about efforts that he and Radmilla Cody, former Miss Navajo, musician, and advocate against domestic violence, undertook in Gallup, NM to feed unsheltered relatives. Religious groups joined the effort but only after agreeing to the condition that they would not proselytize to those seeking food. Benallie and Cody were adamant about this: they felt that people should not be fed with conditions attached. The important distinction here is that they approach unsheltered people as relatives deserving dignity versus prioritizing anyone's religious agenda. As their efforts placed the people first, their work was human-centered to the highest degree possible. This approach prioritizes life as the organizing imperative, which is quite different from looking at the unsheltered relatives as deficient or needing intervention. Their approach respects the human first and does not attempt to coerce individuals into capitalist and settler colonial regimes.

Mutual aid shares much in common with Diné principles of kinship. Historically, Diné people orchestrated support through social relations that were not capitalistic. While mutual aid shares principles that resemble k'é, the difference between mutual aid and kinship is that the former attends to domination and societal problems. K'é, as Diyin Diné'e imagined and practiced by Diné people, was not oppositional to settler dominative

[44] Ibid.

order. K'é and relational systems did not emerge in response to and failures of the settler capitalist state. Of course, this is not to say that k'é does not have this potential.

Imagining through stories, kinship, and empathy is what Diné people are always doing as cultural and political workers. This is apparent when Bighorse convinces his people not to commit suicide. He responded to the immediate needs of the people rather than having to rely on some central authority. He immediately reacted because he could see what was needed to protect Diné life. He responded by resisting and opposing the immediate physical threat posed by the Cavalry and the settler violence induced suicides. Because of our colonial circumstances, it is not just about seeking long life and happiness anymore. Now we must actively protect life against colonial domination. The Diné pursuit of long life and happiness is changed because of settler colonialism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy.

Dissertation Outline

In this chapter, I establish the central principles and terms involved in understanding and feeling how to imagine and create in Diné society structured by a settler colonial and capitalist society. The value of such a discussion is that I identify how Diné people's imagining and creating have met and can continue to meet, resist, and oppose the limitations that the settler hegemonic orders have tried to impose. The remaining chapters of my dissertation can be understood as a series of suggestions based on how Diné people can orient imagining and creating as we move toward future possibilities of living and thriving. These suggestions arise from a study of political and legal rhetoric in a culturally and historically informed analysis of the 2014 Navajo Nation

presidential election controversy (Chapter 2); an analysis of the hooghan and a close reading of the Treaty of 1868 to expose and challenge the coloniality and whiteness of settler built environments and construction (Chapter 3); a feminist rehearsal of the border town, *Nááhwíilbįįhí Story*, and Sydney Freeland's *Drunktown's Finest* (Chapter 4); and an examination of Diné narratives of catastrophe and emergence that establish a Diné-based approach to the threat of removal that climate change imposes (Chapter 5).

Chapter 2, "In and Against the Image of Our Ancestors: Language, Leadership, and Sovereignty in the 2014 Navajo Nation Presidential Election Controversy," examines the critical discourse within and around the 2014 Navajo presidential election controversy that led to Christopher L. Clark Deschene's removal from the general election ballot. My analysis focuses on the October 9, 2014 Navajo Supreme Court ruling to illustrate the ways Diné people discursively and legally constitute language, identity, and leadership. This study shows how the debates about leadership, language, and identity factor into Dinéness and the shared concern with enactments of sovereignty to secure a Diné future. This chapter presents a detailed example of how tribal sovereignty has been closely tied to the colonial mandate of eliminating Indigenous peoples, especially in the Navajo Supreme Court's deployment of tradition to create and enforce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

Chapter 3, "Building a Diné Home: Blasting the Coloniality and Whiteness of Construction and Moving Toward a Diné Approach," argues that settler built environments and construction in the United States sustains settler colonialism and marks whiteness by showing how colonizers usurped Diné people's lands and destroyed their

homes. This usurpation and destruction were necessary for colonizers to imagine and build their own homes. In a close reading of the Treaty of 1868, this chapter demonstrates how the infrastructure for colonial hegemony was mandated and specified in blacksmith and carpenter shops, schools, railroads, and right-of-ways. The chapter contends that we must undercut the mandates of settler colonialism and whiteness by returning to a Diné building process as represented in the hooghan. In contrast to US settler state building, I present the hooghan, a traditional home structure, to articulate Diné visions of nation and assert Diné claims to our homeland.

Chapter 4, "Bordertown (Im)Possibilities: Rehearsing Diné Life and Death in the *Nááhwíiłbįįhí Story* and *Drunktown's Finest*," interweaves three instances of storytelling around and about the status of Gallup, New Mexico as a border town. In each of these stories, I rehearse Gallup to establish and then undo previous border town portrayals. I also rehearse the ancient story of Nááhwíiłbįįhí and of the film *Drunktown's Finest*, which enable us to better navigate the border town as a place of death and life, of possibility and impossibility. This chapter develops a theory and praxis of Diné storytelling as performance, one in which storytellers make choices about Diné people's existence in the present with desires for future life and possibility. I offer, instead, that Diné people must stay and implement the praxis of ch'íhonít'i', *a way out*, seeking through political acts and modes of cultural production to find life in border towns by overturning oppressive structures that seek to exploit and eliminate Indigenous bodies and presence.

Chapter 5, "Ushering in a New World: Bundling Past and Present Stories of Change, Catastrophes, and Climate Change," analyzes Diné origin stories about the movement through the previous worlds to develop a theory and praxis for charting world-ending-beginning events. In such stories, the people tell of all they left behind and the things they took with them. The story instructs what it means to begin anew. In this chapter, I ask: What if anthropogenic climate change forces Diné people to leave our homeland? I develop a *bundling* approach that brings together Diné past and present narratives with climate change discourse. This chapter argues that Diné people must replace life-strangling practices of dominative orders with life-giving efforts that help life flourish. Reading Diné emergence stories in this way helps us develop a placed-based, anti-colonial response to the challenge of climate change. I urge a critical engagement with emergence narratives and world shifts for understanding how Diné people moved from one world to the next.

Each chapter interweaves ancient and contemporary stories. By bringing our past and present stories together, the chapters illustrate the storying power of Diné people across time. The chapters build on the possibilities of the preceding chapter(s) by urging us to look further into our future. That is, the concern for the future crescendos but never overlooks nor overshadows our past and present narratives.

When the Diyin Diné'e came into existence, they built the world one dream after another, making mistakes and taking action based on hope without certainty, but always keeping the future in mind. Diné people now have many challenges before us, but the Diyin Diné'e endowed us with the power of imagination and the ability to create. As

Diné poet Jake Skeet puts it, "Our bodies are our future. Our landscapes are our future…Storytelling has the ability to conjure the deepest parts of ourselves and reimagine time and thus reimagine hope. Storytelling allows us to embrace what is far away, remember what was forgotten, and hope for a future existing now."[45]

Diné people imagined and built worlds before, as we know from the origin stories detailing these processes. Those stories show us how we once undertook the entire task of imagining the Diné world as we defined relationships with plants, animals, and landscapes of Dinétah. We had our own notions of time and space. We had sciences, technologies, and building processes. Diné people imagined an entire world and then built that world. The powerful envisioning of Diyin Diné'e and Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii now present and serve as a vital alternative to the destructive power systems of imperialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. We must replace life-strangling practices of dominative orders with life-giving efforts.

[45] Jake Skeets, "The Other House: Musings on the Diné Perspective of Time," *Emergence Magazine*, 2020, https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-other-house/.

CHAPTER 2

IN AND AGAINST THE IMAGE OF OUR ANCESTORS: LANGUAGE, LEADERSHIP, AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE 2014 NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

On August 26, 2014, the Navajo Nation presidential primary results secured Christopher L. Clark Deschene a place on the general election ballot.[46] Deschene came in second with 9,831 votes after Joe Shirley, Jr., who received 11,052 votes. Russell Begaye, the nearest, third place challenger, received 7,453. Ten days after that primary election, two candidates who had been eliminated in the primary filed challenges with the Navajo Office of Hearings and Appeals. Dale E. Tsosie and Hank Whitethorne, the tenth and fifteenth place finishers, claimed that Deschene did not meet the language fluency requirement outlined in the Navajo Nation Election Code.[47] On November 4, 2014, the Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation ordered a special election to take place with Deschene removed from the ballot and replaced by Begaye.[48] The delayed general election occurred on April 21, 2015 with Begaye defeating Shirley for the presidency.

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[46] When I share my research topic with fellow Diné, their initial response is usually a cautious eyebrow raise as they assess whether or not I supported Deschene in the 2014 election. I proceed to tell them that my research is not an argument for or against Deschene but, rather, examines that election as a case for understanding how factors such as language, leadership, and Dinéness that arose in the course of that election relate to contemporary Indigenous theories of sovereignty, and what these portend for Diné future.

[47] In addition to the language requirement, 11 N.N.C § 8 A outlines eleven other requirements that include residency requirements, registration as a voter, enrollment in the Navajo Nation, and prior service in an elected Navajo Nation position. See "Title 11 Elections," 11 N.N.C. § 8 A(4) Qualifications for Office (1990).

[48] The Navajo Nation's highest judicial court is officially named "The Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation," but in the chapter I use "Navajo Supreme Court" "Navajo Nation Supreme Court," and "the Court" interchangeably.

The process that led to Deschene's disqualification from the race for the presidency involved eight months of controversy.[49] This study shows how those debates about leadership, language, and identity factor into Dinéness and the shared concern with enactments of sovereignty to secure a Diné future. This study analyzes critical discourse within and around the election controversy in order to illustrate critical concepts within current Indigenous theories of sovereignty with respect to the historical and cultural contexts of colonization and decolonization. Analysis of the election controversy in light of work by theorists Jennifer Nez Denetdale, Patrick Wolfe, and Waziyatawin reveals the components of Indigenous sovereignty. This study applies those theories to show how enacting sovereignty is necessary to imagine, create, and secure a vision of the future. Drawing from this range of voices, this study argues that sovereignty, a power and authority that Indigenous peoples have maintained since time immemorial, is a future-making project.

Analysis of the controversy and especially the Court's opinion on fluency demonstrates how Diné leadership, language, and identity are constituted discursively, legally, and politically within and by settler colonialism. To explain how the Navajo

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[49] The language fluency controversy was only the most recent contentious Navajo Nation presidential election. Consider, for example, the 2006 and 2010 elections where presidential candidate Linda Lovejoy's gender was targeted as a disqualifier. At the heart of the controversy was a Diné story that many interpreted as a maxim against women serving in leadership roles. If a woman were selected as a leader, the warning went, chaos would ensue. In 2010, Lovejoy was favored to win the general election against Ben Shelly as she won the primary by a 20.11% margin. She eventually lost the election to Shelly. For an incisive critique of the intersection of the Navajo Nation and gender, see Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses: The Navajo Nation, Gender, and the Politics of Tradition," *Wicazo Sa Review* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 9–28. For a critique of the inaccurate, colonized interpretation of tradition as a standard for leadership selection, see Lloyd L. Lee, "Gender, Navajo Leadership and 'Retrospective Falsification,'" *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 8, no. 3 (September 2012): 277–89.

Nation enacts sovereign authority to constitute Dinéness, I draw out the relationship between politics, power, and language in the Diné context. I show that the Navajo Nation's use of sovereign authority and, more specifically, the Navajo Supreme Court's application of Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii in its opinion on fluency implements what the late anthropologist Patrick Wolfe termed the logic of elimination.[50] For Wolfe, settler colonialism is an invasion that *destroys* and *replaces* Indigenous peoples, their institutions, and ideas to take Indigenous land into settler possession.[51] I characterize the Court's opinion on language fluency as a mechanism for managing Diné people toward Indigenous elimination. Lorenzo Veracini's insights into population management in settler colonial contexts point out that "settler anxieties" produce the "need to biopolitically manage their respective *domestic* domains."[52] The management of Indigenous peoples in the settler colonial context involves "extermination, expulsion, incarceration containment, and assimilation."[53] Considered together, the Navajo Nation election controversy demonstrates the way settler colonial logics operate in the Diné context to manage Diné people into non-existence.

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[50] Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii, translated as The Diné Fundamental Law, was enacted on November 1, 2002 by the Navajo Nation Council. According to the law, "Diné bi beenahaz'áanii embodies Diyin bitsáádéé' beehaz'áanii (Traditional Law), Diyin Dine'é bitsáádéé' beehaz'áanii (Customary Law), Nahasdzáán dóó Yádiłhił bitsáádéé' beehaz'áanii (Natural Law), and Diyin Nohookáá Diné bi beehaz'áanii (Common Law). These laws provide sanctuary for the Diné life and culture, our relationship with the world beyond the sacred mountains, and the balance we maintain with the natural world." See *Chapter 2: The Foundation of the Diné, Diné Law and Diné Government* of "Title 1 General Provisions," 1 N.N.C. § 203 (A) Diyin Bits'áádéé' Beehaz'áanii - Diné Traditional Law (1990).
[51] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409.
[52] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 16.
[53] Ibid., 16–17.

Indigenous peoples assert sovereignty in a context of settler states' attempts to eliminate Indigenous bodies, languages, and overall presence.[54] Indigenous futurity must replace settler futures that seek to foreclose Indigenous peoples' lives, lands, and cultures. In contemporary contexts, sovereignty helps to ensure the people's survivance in and against settler domination as it offers a way for Diné people to live and imagine beyond the consequences of settler colonialism.[55] Sovereignty presents the potential to counter the coercive power that functions to engulf Indigenous existence by showing, instead, how—in seeking and obtaining freedom from oppression—the colonized imagine a future beyond colonialism.

Following from this stress on the imagination, Dakota scholar and activist Waziyatawin points to how colonization limits Indigenous peoples' ability to imagine. Her work puts forth a vision of decolonization as a complete reordering of Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies.[56] One aspect of her proposition includes returning public lands to Indigenous peoples and distributing massive reparation packages to rebuild Indigenous societies. Anticipating counter arguments on the prohibitive cost, Waziyatawin points to the international aid the US provides Israel as an example. She

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[54] For more on sovereignty, see Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*, Second Edition (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999); Wallace Coffey and Rebecca Tsosie, "Rethinking the Tribal Sovereignty Doctrine: Cultural Sovereignty and the Collective Future of Indian Nations," *Stanford Law & Policy Review* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 191–221; Joanne Barker, ed., *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*, Contemporary Indigenous Issues (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, 2nd ed (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009); Lee, *Navajo Sovereignty*.

[55] For more on survivance, see Gerald R. Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

[56] Also see Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

also asserts that the polity now known as the US must be eliminated. In her radical decolonial imagining, she acknowledges that most will find her vision impossible because "the colonization process has so thoroughly indoctrinated all of us with ideas regarding the fixed state of affairs, most of us never dare to dream about what a just society might look like."[57] True sovereignty, one that protects and encourages life rather than eliminates it, will emerge from a critique that identifies how settler colonial imposed limitations have impacted Diné society's processes of imagining beyond settler domination. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in *Dancing on our Turtle's Back*, asserts that resurgence movements must "create more life, propel life, nurture life, motion, presence and emergence."[58]

The Diné mind, the propensity to imagine, and the proliferation of life are inextricably tied to settler colonial structures. Decolonization projects have acknowledged this contradictory nature of decolonization praxis.[59] Yet, the act of imagining in and beyond settler domination is an act toward sovereignty premised on the imagination undoing and countering the bind of colonization. To undo a history in which settler power sets and seeks to enforce limits on what the colonized can imagine, the new society turns to free the imagination. My analysis of the election controversy argues that a nuanced understanding of settler domination and Diné resistance to domination is

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[57] Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2008), 129.
[58] Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 143.
[59] See, for example, Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*, First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); and Michelle M. Jacob, *Yakama Rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing* (The University of Arizona Press, 2014).

necessary to how Diné people conceptualize leadership. An examination of the Navajo Supreme Court's October 8, 2014 written opinion on the matter of fluency and the outcome of that opinion presents an opportunity to understand how power (both dominating and resistive) intersect with Dinéness.

My analysis of the Court's opinion demonstrates the drawbacks of the judiciary asserting an ancient Diné power codified in the Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii. This reimagining of a westernized judicial system that asserts a Diné form of justice might look like an act of decolonization or protection of Diné life, but I argue that it advances settler domination since the power serves to eliminate Diné people. This chapter demonstrates how tribal sovereignty is closely tied to the colonial mandate of eliminating Indigenous peoples, especially in the Court's deployment of tradition to create and enforce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

In this chapter, I describe key events that led up to the Navajo Supreme Court's October 8, 2014 written opinion on the timeliness of Tsosie's and Whitethorne's challenges, and on the legitimacy of fluency as a reasonable regulation of a candidate's political liberty. The narrative I present includes Diné peoples' perspectives as represented in the Letter to the Editor section of the *Navajo Times*. Through an analysis of public, political, and legal discourse, I draw attention to the relationships and configurations of leadership, language, and identity. Looking at key excerpts from the Court's opinion, I argue that although the codification and assertion of Diné power in the judicial system creates the potential for decolonization, in practice the application of Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii reinscribed settler colonial logics. I follow this section with an

analysis of the Court's opinion on the centrality of language in perpetuating Diné power and existence. I show that the Court's language assertion essentializes Diné identity and situates Diné language and culture in the past. This representation of language and Dinéness is constructed against narratives of progress and modernizing leadership and governance. I conclude with a discussion on the need to re-seize and re-vitalize sovereignty and life rather than eliminate it.

My inclusion of *Navajo Times* letters adds crucial Diné perspectives and reactions to the political controversy as it was unfolding. Historically, the *Navajo Times* letters section has featured diverse opinions on political matters such as the subject of this study, or the 2009 reduction of the Navajo Nation Council from eighty-eight to twenty-four members. The letters section is a lively public space where Diné people have debated their position on controversial issues, shared their frustration toward inadequate leadership, and expressed their hopes for a vibrant Nation. The Letters to the Editor section of the *Navajo Times* can never fully represent all Diné people's positions and views, but it offers a unique glimpse of the active and passionate interest in Diné future and nationhood. Although the Navajo Nation receives coverage in newspapers outside the Nation such as the *Gallup Independent* and the *Navajo-Hopi Observer*, the *Navajo Times*, established in 1959 by the Navajo Nation Council but now an independent corporation, is the Nation's only newspaper. Prior to the proliferation of social media platforms, the radio and the weekly *Navajo Times* were the primary modes of receiving and broadcasting news and opinion. The *Navajo Times*'s history positions this newspaper as a unique media outlet in the Navajo political and cultural landscapes.

Narrative of Deschene's Disqualification

The current Navajo Nation leadership selection process aligns with a westernized democratic process, in which individual citizens vote to decide the candidate they consider most qualified for the position.[60] Lumbee scholar David E. Wilkins, in his study detailing Navajo politics from precolonization to the current era, notes that before colonization the process of Diné leadership selection took place under circumstances very different from the current one, where individuals self-nominate.[61] Instead, there was a strenuous process that required the potential leaders to live out certain principles that people recognized as consistent with the people's view of the future. The people's consideration of would-be leaders' values and stature in the community was of significance. Leadership selection did not occur in a centralized process like we see today. Diné scholar Lloyd L. Lee, who writes on leadership and the qualification of leadership, observes that personal qualities weighed heavily in selection: "Leadership was earned by achieving a level of integrity. Naat'áaniis were intelligent, creative, and planned for the future….They lived by the principles of caring, humility, and generosity."[62] Such a process demanded presence among the people. In this way, Diné

[60] For more on the Navajo Nation election process, see "Title 11 Elections," 11 N.N.C. § 1-409 (1990). To understand the election process within the formation of the Navajo Nation as a domestic dependent nation, see David E. Wilkins, *The Navajo Political Experience*, 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013); and Denny Avery and Michael Lerma, "Diné Principles of Good Governance," in *Navajo Sovereignty: Understanding and Visions of the Diné People*, ed. Lloyd L. Lee (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017), 103–29.
[61] Wilkins, *The Navajo Political Experience*.
[62] Lee, "Diné Political Leadership Development on the Path to Sustainability and Building the Navajo Nation," 27.

people were constantly assessing potential leaders' integrity and ensuring adherence to collectively defined principles.

Diné people, despite the changing political landscape, continue to express their thoughts on the state of leadership and their desire for a new type of leader. Consider, for example, Robyn Jackson, a Diné citizen from Wheatfields, Arizona, whose letter appeared in the *Navajo Times* on September 11, before the fluency issue had become a topic of opinion letters. Jackson expressed her unhappiness with the primary elections and having to vote for a leader among the seventeen presidential hopefuls. Jackson lamented the fact that none of the candidates embodied the characteristics for her vision of an ideal leader. In her letter, which the *Navajo Times* titled, "Voter feels angry, restricted, cheated," she expressed that would-be leaders lacked an "understanding [of] colonization, capitalism, racism, environmental racism, misogyny, patriarchy, domestic and sexual violence." Jackson asserted that "many Diné, especially [her] generation, don't feel confident in these 'leaders.' The truth is this whole system and way of governing is foreign. It was not created by us, but was imposed on us."[63] Jackson thought that none of the candidates embodied all that was needed to take on oppressive forces. Jackson's letter shows that some Diné citizens understand the oppressive logic of settler colonialism, and that leadership selection processes are, at least in contemporary contexts, based in electoral politics and processes that redefine how people interact with and assess potential leaders.

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[63] Robyn Jackson, "Voter Feels Angry, Restricted, Cheated," *Navajo Times*, September 11, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6.

Since 1990, individuals interested in serving the Navajo Nation as a President must file an application and pay the applicable fees. The application must include a "notarized, sworn statement by the candidate" that he or she "is legally qualified to hold the office," "meets the qualifications set forth in" Section 8 of the election code; a candidate must have submitted an application "in the form and manner prescribed by law," and "may be removed as a candidate in the event his or her application contains a false statement."[64] When the deadline to apply has passed, the Election Administration moves to certify the application. Per the Election Code, the Election Administration holds "the candidate applications of all candidates it has certified as eligible for a period of 10 days during which sworn challenges may be filed with the Office of Hearings and Appeals by other applicants for the same position, whether or not such applicants are certified."[65] In the run-up to the primary elections of 2014, Deschene and sixteen other individuals submitted their individual notarized, sworn statements affirming that they met the qualifications for president, which included the Section 8 requirement to "fluently speak and understand Navajo and read and write English."[66]

On April 25, 2014, the office of Navajo Election Administration certified the seventeen candidates thus beginning the ten days allowing for a challenge to any candidate's certification. No candidates issued challenges within those ten days. Instead, after the August 26, 2014 primary elections, Tsosie and Whitethorne, candidates who had lost in the primary, with votes locating them in tenth and fifteenth place, respectively,

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[64] "Title 11 Elections," 11 N.N.C. § 21 B(2) Filing for Election (1990).
[65] "Title 11 Elections," 11 N.N.C. § 24 Challenges; appeals (1990).
[66] Title 11 Elections, 1990, 11 N.C.C. § 8 A(4) Qualifications for Office.

each submitted separate complaints on September 5. The Office of Hearings and Appeals, on September 10, dismissed "the challenge based on timeliness, concluding that Tsosie and Whitethorne should have challenged Deschene's fluency within 10 days of NEA's certification."[67] Bill Donovan, reporting for the *Navajo Times*, wrote that "all of the grievances filed against Deschene for not being able to speak Navajo fluently have been dismissed for not being filed in a timely matter."[68] Donovan added that Deschene "has been open about his lack of ability to speak Navajo but has said in forums and in public speeches that he is now in the process of learning the language."[69] Donovan's report also quoted Deschene as saying, in response to the belated primary challenge, that the "Nation demonstrated its confidence in our campaign with its vote in August, and it's disgraceful that a few people are trying to ignore and subvert the will of the voters. The truth is that thousands of our children are struggling to preserve our language, and many see my success as an inspiration."[70]

As Tsosie and Whitethorne were dissatisfied with the Office of Hearings and Appeal's dismissal of their post-primary challenges, they appealed to the three judges on the Navajo Supreme Court. After those judges held oral arguments on September 26, 2014, the Court then remanded the case back to the Office of Hearings and Appeals to determine Deschene's fluency. The Court also ordered the Office of Hearings and

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[67] Paul Spruhan, "The Complete Timeline of the Navajo Presidential Dispute," *Social Science Research Network*, April 24, 2015, https://ssrn.com/abstract=2598541.
[68] Bill Donovan, "Complaint against Deschene's Candidacy Not Filed in Time," *Navajo Times*, September 11, 2014, A1.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., A3.

Appeals to hold a hearing within five business days. Following that hearing, the Navajo Supreme Court released its full *written* opinion on October 8 in response to the September 26 oral arguments and decisions. In the opinion, the justices identified the following issues for consideration:

> The issues are 1) whether the OHA erred in applying the 10-day limitation contained in 11 N.N.C. § 24(A) to dismiss complaints against a presidential candidate that alleged he filed a false statement that he "fluently" speaks and understands Navajo, and 2) whether the requirement that a presidential candidate "must fluently speak and understand Navajo" is a reasonable regulation of a candidate's right to political liberty.

On the matter of timeliness, the Navajo Supreme Court reasoned that 11 N.N.C § 341(A)(1) instead of 11 N.N.C § 24(A) was applicable. Section 341 states that "within 10 days of the incident complained of or the election, the complaining person must file with the Office of Hearings and Appeals, a written complaint setting forth the reasons why he or she believes the Election has not been complied with."[71] In effect, the Court declared that *the primary election* rather than the Election Administration's certification was the triggering event for determining the timeliness of Tsosie's and Whitethorne's challenges. This decision declared the legitimacy of appellants' challenges as ones that should be heard by the Office of Hearings and Appeals.

On the matter of fluency, the Court decided that it was a reasonable regulation of the candidate's right to political liberty. At the Navajo Supreme Court's direction, the Office of Hearings and Appeals held a deposition and hearing to determine Deschene's fluency, so that on October 9, 2014, following the failed attempts to determine fluency,

[71] "Title 11 Elections," 11 N.N.C. § 341 (A)(1) Office of Hearings and Appeals (1990).

the Office of Hearings and Appeals entered a default judgment against Deschene after he refused to cooperate with the fluency test that the Department of Diné Education created and Tsosie's and Whitethorne's attorneys administered. Donovan Quintero, who was present at the hearing as a writer for the *Navajo Times*, describes Deschene as defying "repeated questions, despite facing a chance that he wasn't going to convince the one person – Office of Hearing and Appeals' Richie Nez – that he was fluent in the Navajo language."[72] Justin Jones, Tsosie's attorney, asked Deschene in Navajo where he is from and what are his clans. Jones, in English, also asked Deschene to describe in Navajo how a resolution becomes law. To each question, Deschene responded in Navajo with "You are testing me. This is not right."[73] The appellants' attorneys kept pushing for Deschene to respond until Nez entered a default judgment to disqualify Deschene. That default judgment also ordered the Election Administration to remove Deschene from the ballot and to replace his name with that of Russell Begaye, the third-highest vote-getter among the primary candidates on the ballot.[74] After the hearing, Deschene questioned, "What are we saying to our young and to those who are coming back qualified? Are we saying that they're not welcomed? It goes back to the language. The language should never be a

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[72] Donovan Quintero, "Deschene Defies OHA, Supreme Court Standards, Says Jones and Jordan," *Navajo Times*, October 16, 2014, A3.
[73] Ibid.
[74] The Office of Hearings and Appeals ordered that Deschene should be removed from the election ballot on October 9, 2014. The Election Board did not comply with this order. Citing the election code, the Election Board reasoned that it had an autonomous authority and a responsibility to protect the voters' rights to a fair election. The OHA ruling also triggered a ten-day period for Deschene to file an appeal. Deschene appealed the decision on the final day, but it was dismissed due to a filing technicality. A series of appeals and court decisions on the Election Board's lack of compliance culminated, on October 31, in the Court's decision to hold the Board in contempt, to remove them from their position, and to restrict them from running for office in the future.

measure to divide and separate our people."[75] For Deschene, his exclusion at the Court's decision, while firmly rooted in language fluency, was also a failure of the Court and the electoral system.

After the default judgement against Deschene, Tobah Chee, a Diné citizen from Tsaile, Arizona, wrote an impassioned plea for adherence to the rule of law in his letter to the *Navajo Times* editor, which the newspaper provocatively titled, "Real Issues have gotten hijacked." Chee pointed out that "This is about the Navajo Nation a government not following its own rules. To be a legitimate government you have to follow the rules and regulations that make one a government. The real issue is that the election office did not follow its law."[76] Chee added that "most young Navajos don't speak the language and that it is hard to define fluency, that does not change the law, and Navajo Nation requirements for people running for president clearly states that the president should be fluent in Navajo."[77] For Chee, the issue is not about language or Diné identity, but it is about the Nation's legitimacy, which is undermined if the Nation cannot follow its laws. The enforcement of the law, of course, is directly connected to the Nation's sovereign authority. Chee reasons that if the Nation does not follow the laws, and this is not corrected, then the Navajo Nation government ceases to be legitimate.

One week after Chee's letter, Danielle Benally, a Diné citizen from Black Mesa, Arizona, in her letter titled "Are we cast aside for not speaking fluently?" articulates the

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[75] Quintero, "Deschene Defies OHA," A3.
[76] Tobah Chee, "Real Issues Have Gotten Hijacked," *Navajo Times*, October 16, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6.
[77] Ibid., A7.

limitations of essentializing Diné identities because it imposes a boundary that excludes Diné people who deviate from that ascription. Furthermore, for Benally, the problem of leadership is not only about the Deschene exclusion but, rather, it extends to a broader governmental and leadership problem of relying on the federal government rather than developing sovereignty toward the future.

> The grievances filed against Chris show hatred, envy, and jealousy. A Navajo man is being told he can't represent our people because he isn't Navajo enough. If that's the case, maybe I am not Navajo either.…
>
> As it is, our current leaders throw the word sovereignty around not even knowing the meaning. The current state of the Navajo Nation shows we are not sovereign at all. We will never be with the current leaders because they all still rely heavily on the federal government. We have the resources and the knowledge to change that.[78]

These citizens' responses highlight the convoluted nature of both the initial challenge to Deschene's fluency and the subsequent decision to remove him from the ballot. For Diné citizens such as Benally, the issue was about more than leadership disqualification. Rather, the actions betray the very legitimacy of the Navajo Nation's sovereign authority. For Chee, the legitimacy of the Nation was based on the *rule of law* and the Nation's capacity to set, follow, and enforce laws. Benally's letter calls citizens to question ideas of Dinéness and to analyze the government's motives and role in ascribing and enforcing such boundaries.

The immediate aftermath of the hearing signaled the first half of several months of extended political upheaval. Further appeals, court decisions, orders, and legislation

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[78] Danielle Benally, "Are We Cast aside for Not Speaking Fluently?," *Navajo Times*, October 23, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A7.

included calls to remove the Election Administration's executive director, the Court's order to remove the entire election board, and legislative efforts to remove the Chief Justice of the Court.[79] On July 21, 2015, Diné people voted in favor of a referendum to change the language fluency requirement wording so that Diné people would decide, with their vote, whether a candidate was fluent—the change would only apply to future elections. These events weigh in during the language fluency requirement saga, but as this chapter focuses on the Navajo Supreme Court's October 8, 2014 written opinion on the matter of fluency, that is where we now turn, a matter of central importance for everyone who cares about the ways power, leadership, and Dinéness are constructed in and against settler colonial domination.

Tradition, Authority, and Continuity

The Navajo Nation Council legislated the modern courts in 1958; the courts formed in the following year. In *Navajo Courts and Navajo Common Law*, Raymond D. Austin, a former Justice of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court and scholar of American Indian Studies, describes the Navajo Nation Council as adopting "many provisions of the then existing Bureau of Indian Affairs Law and Order Code as Navajo Nation statutory

[79] This chapter offers an abridged version of events; those who are interested in further reading on the election controversy can consult: Spruhan, "The Complete Timeline of the Navajo Presidential Dispute"; Meredith G. Moss, "English with a Navajo Accent: Language and Ideology in Heritage Language Advocacy" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2015), 57; Larry Roland Stucki, "The Bitter Navajo Language Fluency 2014 Presidential Election Conflict," *Sociology and Anthropology* 5, no. 10 (October 2017): 841–61; Lloyd L. Lee, "'Must Fluently Speak and Understand Navajo and Read and Write English': Navajo Leadership in a Language Shift World," *Indigenous Policy Journal* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2017), http://www.indigenouspolicy.org/index.php/ipj/article/view/305; Avery and Lerma, "Diné Principles of Good Governance," 106; and Farina King, *The Earth Memory Compass: Diné Landscapes and Education in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2018), 175, 182.

law" but notes that Navajo courts used customary precepts since its formation.[80] After the Supreme Judicial Council of Navajo Tribal Council was created in 1978, the creation of this council was politically controversial because it fell under the authority of then Chairman Peter MacDonald. In 1985, the Navajo Nation Supreme Court was created through the Judicial Reform Act to "streamline court operations" and to "abolish both the Navajo Nation Court of Appeals and the Supreme Judicial Council."[81]

For decades, the use of customary precepts in Navajo courts has served as an example to Indigenous peoples worldwide of Indigenous justice in modern courts. Diné law, beehaz´áanii, in the modern courts is an ongoing effort to maintain and assert Diné sovereignty in colonialism. This is evident in Chief Justice Emeritus of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court Robert Yazzie's assertion that Navajo justice differs from American justice because it is vertical as opposed to the horizontal justice that characterizes western courts. A distinguishing feature of vertical justice is the concern with healing and restoration of balance, as opposed to punishment and the seeking of truth. Healing and restoration are necessary to Diné Bi Beehaz´áanii, which Yazzie describes as "something fundamental, and something that is absolute and exists from the beginning."[82] Yazzie adds that Diné people say that life comes from the beehaz'áanii because it is the "source of a healthy, meaningful life."[83] For Austin, beehaz´áanii is oriented toward goodness

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[80] Raymond Austin, *Navajo Courts and Navajo Common Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 37–38.
[81] "Courts & Peacemaking in the Navajo Nation: A Public Guide," accessed February 25, 2019, http://www.navajocourts.org/publicguide.htm.
[82] Robert Yazzie, "'Life Comes from It': Navajo Justice Concepts," *New Mexico Law Review* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 175.
[83] Ibid.

and balance, and is understood as the "values, norms, customs, and traditions that are transmitted orally across generations and which produce and maintain right relations, right relationships, and desirable outcomes in Navajo society."[84]

Austin and Yazzie are vital to understanding the evolution of Diné values, norms, customs, and traditions in the courts. They each make compelling arguments for why Diné precepts in the courts is an assertion of our sovereignty. For example, Austin describes the use of Navajo common law as "the Navajo people defining Navajo Nation sovereignty the Navajo way."[85] The implementation of customary precepts in the courts prioritizes Diné life, beauty, and nourishment. Because a Diné understanding of the law is to bring balance and stability to the people, it works to foster good relations among families and communities.

In asserting its obligation to uphold statutory law and ancient law, the Navajo Supreme Court, in the October 8 opinion, agreed that the Court's finding came from the ancient laws, one of which holds that the "value system – the law of the Navajo people – is embedded in the language," as received in the form of direct speech from Haashch'éélti'í, Talking God:

> In this society, this Court has an obligation to interpret Navajo law and enforce Navajo law. When we carry out that responsibility, that responsibility is not limited to an interpretation of statutory laws - those laws made by human beings to regulate other human beings in society. We consider ancient laws also. The ancient laws of the Holy People take precedence because these are sacred laws that we were placed here with.…In the Navajo language that system is expressed as Naakits'áadahgo ójí. Core to that system is the language. The value system - the law of the Navajo people - is embedded in the language. When Haashch'éélti'í said that to the people, that in itself became the establishment of a law - bee

[84] Austin, *Navajo Courts and Navajo Common Law*, 40.
[85] Ibid., 18.

> haz'áanii. Now you take that law and apply it. It is how our people survived as a society since time immemorial.[86]

As the highest judicial authority of the Navajo Nation, the Supreme Court clearly delineated its power and responsibility to interpret and enforce statutory and ancient laws pertaining to Diné peoples' existence. The Court's authority, according to the opinion, extended from sovereignty, understood as "sacred laws that we were placed here with."

Sovereignty in this case, then, is not only the power of people but also the divine power that created the Diné people as a "we" tied to the present land and to a prehistory, to the dawn of law itself. These powers are not considered on equal footing because ancient laws take precedence as is shown by the Court's language and focus in the illustration of ancient law as derived from a value system that was communicated directly by Diyin Diné'e, Power People. The Court, then, represents itself in its written opinion as the entity that interprets and enforces the ancient laws. It claims said authority from the Diyin Diné'e.

We could argue that the Court's decision to reinforce a traditional Diné idea of what it means to be a Diné person was an act of decolonization, one that privileges Indigenous knowledge, protects indigeneity, and applies sovereign power. Basing decolonization in tradition is not without complications, as Diné historian Jennifer Nez Denetdale observes.[87] So-called tradition can be conflated with US settler state's values

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[86] Dale Tsosie v. Christopher Deschene, No. SC-CV-57-14 (Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation 2014); Hank Whitethorne v. Christopher Deschene, No. SC-CV-58-14 (Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation 2014).
[87] Denetdale, "Securing Navajo National Boundaries: War, Patriotism, Tradition, and the Diné Marriage Act of 2005."

as Denetdale convincingly shows: for example, Navajo patriotism and gender norms, while appearing to be rooted in Diné principles and values, support settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy. In the case of the Navajo Nation's policy against same-sex marriage, for example, Denetdale shows how the heteronormative order is conflated with Diné values. Her work is valuable for demonstrating how the Navajo Nation within a settler state entangles both political entities at an ontological and epistemological level.

The Court's reliance on Diné tradition is open to critical analysis in the context of decolonization and colonization. Where decolonization allows for tradition as resistive strategy, in colonization it can also reinscribe existing power structures. Tradition is never simply an act of decolonization, as is clear from how Denetdale directs our attention to the ways tradition is used to support hegemonic orders. Expanding on this point, a critical analysis of Diné uses of tradition as a hegemonic formation would unmask settler colonialism as a continuously changing process, one that is always reforming and shifting to meet the drive to acquire Indigenous lands, to foreclose Indigenous peoples' existence, and using various masks, including "tradition," to control the Indigenous imaginings of decolonization and freedom's potentiality.

The Court, in the opinion, cites "tradition" without recognizing the discontinuities (e.g., colonization) from ancient to modern systems. Rather, the development of the modern judiciary is presented as a continuous system that passed unmarred from the divine to human and into the westernized judicial context. There's no recognition that it is a human system, not a divine one, and a western system at that. The Court traces the modern judiciary system to an "ancient history" where "the People journeyed through

four worlds and, in the course of their journey, came upon many problems both natural and caused by the People, which had to be resolved before the journey continued."[88] The encounters with the natural and people-caused problems introduced an imbalance that necessitated the people's attention so as to restore balance. The system that Diné people devised did not resemble the modern system, yet it served to restore balance in moments of spiritual, social, political crises. Because the Court's function is to restore balance to the imbalanced, the Court does not distinguish its restorative functions as having changed from ancient times to the present since its purpose is still to restore. And, in this, does not account for the discontinuities wrought by colonialism.

Yet, the Court's October 8, 2014 decision centralizes power within an institution whose existence belongs to secular time as opposed to the time of Diné creation. By deploying stories from the time of Diné creation, the Court seeks to inscribe its interpretation of statutory law with the authority of ancient, unwritten, customary law. The problem is that in centralizing the interpretation and enforcement of ancient laws to itself, as a select class of people, the Court effectively removes custom from its ancient, timeless context among the people. Chief among the several problems raised is that ancient, unwritten, customary law becomes subject to singular, self-serving, and rigid interpretation, rather than one based in the collective whole. The codification and rigid interpretation of Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii operates opposite of a fluid and life-producing system that accommodates the variations among Diné people across time and space.

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[88] "Courts & Peacemaking in the Navajo Nation: A Public Guide."

Language and culture, as shared by Diyin Diné'e, was never intended to serve as the singular and monolithic image against which Diné life would be stifled.

We must ask, does excluding Deschene (and other non-speakers of the Navajo language) move against beehaz´áanii? Is the court's ruling a failure of Navajo precepts in modern courts? The issue is not the application of Diné customary precepts in modern Navajo Courts. The problem is that the Court's decision goes against the idea that life comes from beehaz'áanii because the ruling did not protect life nor restore cohesion, return balance, and protect kinship. Instead, the Court's decisions caused rifts between branches of government, voters, generations, so-called educated/non-educated, traditional/non-traditional. The Court's claim and assertion of sovereignty fostered division, isolation, and exclusivity. The move against life positions Diné beehaz´áanii and the court in service to colonialism.

The codification of Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii becomes a part of the larger mechanism by which the Navajo Nation uses its governing bodies and political/legal statutes, which are written down and carry administrative weight, to manage the people on behalf of the hegemonic state. It is not enough to acknowledge that sovereignty is coercive and controlling. If we do not analyze how sovereignty functions in the everyday interactions and politics of tribal communities, we will continue doing the work of settler colonialism. By eliminating Diné people and foreclosing Diné futures, the work of settler colonialism in the elections controversy appears in the following subareas: 1) the law declaring itself to be timeless, yet the requirement for 'Navajo fluency' dates from 1990 (content of the decision ignores historical context of the requirement); 2) Diné origin

stories are cited to drive people apart, not bring them together (impact of decision); and 3) the Court refuses to examine its temporal authority or to ask questions about who benefits from its decision.

The subareas indicate the ways settler states develop technologies of power to endow themselves with the ability "to bring the future history of the species under its control." As political theorist Anthony Bogues writes, domination of the future involves "[h]ow to trap, shape, control, and make human life in its own image—that is the objective of power. In this drive, it has to trap both the imagination and desire."[89] While Bogues was not writing about settler colonialism, his work helps to recognize sovereignty as the tool that Diné people should use for realizing the peoples' imagination, dreams, and desires. In the Diné context, sovereignty is a concept for defining and carrying out self-governance and self-determination. The problem is that because both the people and sovereignty exist in settler colonialism, sovereignty, as in the October 8 written ruling, is inverted, and becomes a dominating force for maintaining current power configurations.

The imagination, in decolonization, is generally conceived as a process by which people assert their existence, or as a process through which people can create a new social order. The outcome does not necessarily mean a transcendence of oppressive or undesirable circumstances, however. If settler colonial behaviors, ideologies, and institutions are the context in which Diné people are imagining and creating, then we Diné people cannot uncritically imagine who we were, are, and want to be. Counter to the

[89] Anthony Bogues, "Imagination, Politics, and Utopia: Confronting the Present," *Boundary 2* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 146.

drive to eliminate, trap, control, and shape Indigenous peoples, Waziyatawin's example of radical imagining and Simpson's ideas on producing and propelling life are relevant to critiquing the Supreme Court's decision, and as a path forward for challenging the settler state. Challenging empire and oppressive powers is why Bogues emphasizes constructing life as a product of imagination when he argues "that the desire and the imagination become central to constructing ways of life.…This implies and requires a different way to think about the political."[90] Furthermore, he suggests "that in our moment, one aspect of the present configuration and drive of power is to capture desire and imagination."[91] We have seen that sovereignty through the judicial courts can carry the very dangerous potential of reinforcing and reproducing settler colonialism.

(Future) Leadership and (Past) Ancestral Image

According to Veracini, the population economy in settler colonialism is composed of a triangular relationship between the settler collective, Indigenous Others, and exogenous Others. In this context, the Indigenous Others are represented as either "degrading and/or vanishing" or assimilating. The task of degrading/vanishing or assimilating the Indigenous population, while they appear contradictory, "both operate in the context of a progressive erasure of the indigenous presence.…they also refer to circumstances in which the settler colonial situation operates towards its ultimate supersession."[92] The Court's opinion, operating on notions of degradation and

[90] Ibid., 153.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 25.

disappearance, asserts its authority by defining fluency against a historically based Diné identity, one that extends back to Diyin Diné'e's original instructions. The invocation of the ancestral Diné image is in contradistinction to contemporary expectations of leadership qualities that support development and modernizing, of which, Deschene exemplifies.

On September 25, Deschene submitted a brief to the Navajo Supreme Court a day prior to the hearing on the issues of timeliness and fluency. In the brief, Deschene argued that Tsosie's and Whitethorne's challenges were not because he did not meet the fluency requirement, but because he did "not speak Navajo fluently or smoothly enough for their subjective tastes and standards."[93] Deschene argued that upholding the OHA's decision would be appropriate "because 11 N.N.C § 8(A)(4) is void for vagueness and…would conflict with [his] fundamental right to participate in his government and the fundamental rights of the Navajo People to choose their leaders."[94] Deschene's argument identifies the problems of fluency as a qualification: 1) the Navajo Nation did not maintain a standard or definition of fluency and 2) any efforts to determine fluency, in the absence of a definition or standard, could not occur without bias. For Deschene, the fluency requirement also conflicted with his right to participate in government and voters' right to select leadership. On this claim, Deschene added that the "Navajo people are the ultimate arbiters of whether, among other qualifications he possesses and requirements his [*sic*] satisfies, [he] speaks Navajo well enough for each of them to be qualified to serve as

[93] Christopher C. Deschene and Samuel Pete, Brief of Deschene, No. SC-CV-57-14 and SC-CV-58-14 (Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation 2014).
[94] Ibid., at 9.

President of the Navajo Nation."[95] The fluency requirement—even if it was vague and subjective—could only be assessed and determined sufficiently by the collective affirmation of Diné voters, according to Deschene. The invocation of his right and the right of the voters aims to set the authority firmly with the Nation's citizenry.

Under the Diyin Bits'áádéé' Beehaz'áanii (Diné Traditional Law) section of the Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii, leadership selection is a power that sits with the people. According to this section, "It is the right and freedom of the Diné people to choose leaders of their choice…leaders who will ensure the rights and freedom of the generations yet to come."[96] The language here is consistent with Wilkins's and Lee's description of historical Diné leadership selection as belonging to the people. The people decide their leadership against those values and attributes important to them. The Diné political terrain is a dialectical relationship between a Diné value system and a westernized one, however. Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred, in *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, argues that the "core of the crises facing our nations is the fact that we are being led away from our traditional ideals by the people with the authority to control our lives."[97] The leading away from traditional ideals has resulted in Indigenous peoples existing in a circumstance of opposing Indigenous and western value systems. In such a circumstance, values change over time; new attributes are prioritized, and others might become secondary. Leadership assessment and selection occurs in this dynamic of diametrically opposed value systems.

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[95] Ibid., at 14.
[96] Title 1 General Provisions, 203 (A) Diyin Bits'áádéé' Beehaz'áanii-Diné Traditional Law.
[97] Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 12.

Deschene's qualifications and experiences were heavily discussed in newspaper outlets, and they were prominently displayed as superseding the language fluency requirement. The representation of Deschene as the ideal leader for the Navajo Nation was a point not lost on Deschene and his attorney. In the brief submitted to the Supreme Court, Deschene and his attorney recited his qualifications: a veteran of the US Marine Corps, graduate of United States Naval Academy, a master's in mechanical engineering and a law degree, both from Arizona State University, and elected to the Arizona House of Representatives for District 2. Deschene's qualifications led his attorney to remind the Court that it "has been said that [he] is the most accomplished person to compete to become the President of the Navajo Nation."[98] Deschene's supporters reasoned that his education and prior elected leadership experience made him the ideal leader for Diné people and the Nation's future.

Deschene's disqualification from the presidential race led some citizens to question the oft-cited Chief Manuelito, a Diné leader who rose to prominence during the Long Walk era, who advised taking the ladder of education. Jay Ross Slivers, a Diné citizen from Lukachukai, Arizona, in his letter to the *Navajo Times* expressed his disenchantment with the advice to get an education and to return home to help the people and Nation, which the newspaper titled, "Climb Manuelito's ladder…is a big lie."

> As a young individual living here on the Navajo Nation, I, for one, have always been told, "Get an education, leave the reservation, make something of yourself, but come home and help your people."
>
> Lately, that has become a big lie. I am referring to the whole Deschene situation. As a young person I can see that these individuals who are arguing this complaint

[98] Deschene and Pete, Brief of Deschene at 6.

> are simply fearing that we, the younger generation, are finally starting to realize what's going on around us and that we are ready to take charge and clean house, so to speak.
>
> …
>
> Mr. Deschene deserves to lead his people, he is a veteran, which we as a nation, honor and respect with pride, and he is a lawyer who has the ability to find the wrongs done to our nation, without having to go to an outside party to assist with problem.[99]

For Slivers, and other supporters, Deschene was the ideal embodiment of the educated (and experienced) returning home.[100] Deschene's presidential bid, for some, marked a pivotal moment in which a highly educated and experienced leader would usher in an era of development and prosperity and would simultaneous right historical wrongs. This was the perception of Deschene's potential leadership.

Instead of siding with Deschene, the Navajo Supreme Court responded as follows: "[he] argues for the requirement for fluency in Navajo should be disregarded in favor of the 9,831 voters…who voted for him because the qualification is vague, ambiguous, subjective and discriminating against young and educated Navajos. *We strongly disagree*."[101] The Court's resounding objection to Deschene's argument proceeded to argue for the necessity and legitimacy of the language fluency requirement. The Court added that the language fluency requirement was clear, unambiguous, and a reasonable

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[99] Jay R. Slivers, "Climb Manuelito's Ladder...Is a Big Lie," *Navajo Times*, November 6, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6.
[100] See, for other examples, Pauletta White, "The People Have Voted for Deschene," *Navajo Times*, October 2, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6; Kamiko Martin, "Student, Young Diné Supports Deschene," *Navajo Times*, October 2, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6–7; and Milton Shirleson, "Desperately Need New Leadership," *Navajo Times*, October 30, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6.
[101] Dale Tsosie v. Christopher Deschene at 8; and Hank Whitethorne v. Christopher Deschene at 8; Emphasis added. .

regulation of Deschene's political liberty. And, the "law was enacted to preserve, protect, and promote self-determination, for which language is essential." Writing in Navajo, the Justices countered that when one is among Diné people as a leader, said individual must speak and understand the language, and, by becoming a leader, one becomes a teacher of Diné people, a person who stands in proxy of Diné people, and a person who stands in defense of Diné people.[102]

Richard Brown, a Diné citizen who resides in Tucson, Arizona, in his letter to the *Navajo Times* titled, "Language is not the primary issue," argued that the focus on language was not as important as the need to address issues such as access to capital, bettering education, and supporting entrepreneurs.

> Attention Navajo people: Language should not be a core factor in our tribal government. Fluency does not equivocate to good leadership regarding places of office on the Navajo Reservation. The Navajo people need to understand that we need a president who has a strong economic plan that will bring jobs, curtail the "brain drain" and provide resources that will aid the Navajo Nation.
>
> …Chris Deschene gives us the opportunity that we have been looking for to pull the Navajo people out of the Stone Age and make our nation a modern one.[103]

Noteworthy here is the positioning of Deschene's leadership and experiences as an opportunity to address what many felt were the nation's real issues. But in making such an argument, leaders—particularly those undergirded by values of militarism, adherence to rule of law via lawyering, and prior experience in elected position—are narrated as the

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[102] The statement on leadership was originally written in Navajo, and above I offer a translation. The original text, "Diné binanita'í jílįįgo nábináhaazláago Diné bizaad bee yájiłti' dóó bik'izhdiitįįhdoo háálá Diné bina'nitiní jílį dóó Diné bájizį dóó bich'ąąh jizį," can also be found in Dale Tsosie v. Christopher Deschene; Hank Whitethorne v. Christopher Deschene at 10.
[103] Richard Brown, "Language Is Not the Primary Issue," *Navajo Times*, November 6, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A7.

savior of the struggling and endangered nation. The turn away from the disappearing/degrading Indian, in favor of affiliating more closely with the US settler state, is a program of further assimilation.

Diné people are not the only ones who envision the future as one of further adoption of and integration into the US nation state. Among the few scholars to have written on the election controversy is the anthropologist Larry Roland Stucki, whose essay "The Bitter Navajo Language Fluency 2014 Presidential Election Conflict" over simplifies the "conflict" by portraying Deschene's disqualification as a fight between a younger generation and older generation occurring against the backdrop of "frantic attempts to reduce fluency declines in the rising generation on the Navajo reservation."[104] Stucki claims that these frantic attempts

> are in part motivated by the memories that older Navajos have of their boarding school experience and by the strong desire of tribal leaders to continue to gain further recognition from the federal government that though once defeated, they are still a 'sovereign nation.' However, an even stronger motivation appears to be the fear that key elements of Navajo culture will be forever lost if the language dies, a controversial hypothesis…widely endorsed by many Native American leaders and educators.[105]

Stucki's choice to characterize the event as frantic and defeated sustains narratives of the disappearing and dying Indian. His description portrays Diné people as a fearful and defeated people responding without an awareness of our situation. In fact, many Diné people are aware of the settler colonial circumstance and the death drive to eliminate Indigenous peoples.

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[104] Stucki, "The Bitter Navajo Language," 841.
[105] Ibid., 842.

For Stucki, the root cause of the impending language extinction that the Diné people fear is the Nation's lack of *institutional completeness*. Stucki adopts the idea of institutional completeness from Raymond Breton. Linda H. Gerber attributes Breton with introducing "the concept of institutional completeness in order to account for the viability of ethnic communities."[106] According to Gerber, whom Stucki cites, Breton argues that

> boundary maintenance is most successful when an ethnic group ... has the organizational complexity to meet all or most of the needs of its members within its own boundaries. Communities that are sufficiently large and well organized enough to have their own places of worship, credit unions, specialized retail outlets, restaurants, social services, real estate agencies, and employment opportunities will be able to retain their members more effectively – even over generations.[107]

Using the idea of institutional completeness, Stucki concludes that "the poor employment and living conditions on the reservation do much to force people to increase their interaction with the surrounding outside English-speaking world. Thus it can be argued that any remaining hope that Navajo will survive as a living daily language will require solving the myriad of problems facing reservation residents."[108] Stucki's proposal for working toward institutional completeness gets at the heart of the nation states' desire to interpellate Indigenous Nations into the US—as when he suggests, for example, that

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[106] Here, to clarify Stucki's use of institutional completeness, consider his essay, "The Bitter Navajo Language Fluency 2014 President Election Conflict," in which Stucki cites Linda H. Gerber's review of Stucki's self-published book, *Copper Mines, Company Towns, Indians, Mexicans, Mormons, Masons, Jews, Muslims, Gays, Wombs, McDonalds, and the March of Dimes*, in which Gerber offers a summary of Raymond Breton's work on institutional completeness. Gerber writes that "institutional completeness, which refers to the kinds of mechanisms of environmental control identified by Stucki, is a powerful determinant of long-term viability or survival." Gerber's review identifies Stucki's book as adding to the scholarship on institutional completeness.

[107] Linda M. Gerber, "Review of the Book Copper Mines, Company Towns, Indians, Mexicans, Mormons, Masons, Jews, Muslims, Gays, Wombs, McDonalds, and the March of Dimes, by Larry R. Stucki," *American Indian Culture & Research* 34, no. 3 (2010): 111.

[108] Stucki, "The Bitter Navajo Language," 852.

the Navajo Nation should become the fifty-first state—rather than grappling with a justice- and peace-oriented decolonial transformation that moves away from the settler nation state. It is clear that Stucki's commitment to maintaining boundaries in the Navajo Nation align with further integration into the settler state—one that does not question the very basics of oppressive power that Diné people are contending against.

The characteristics of Deschene's leadership profile set up various expectations. Among them, many felt that because he had the experiences and qualifications of the military, state legislative leadership, and a western education, that he was equipped to move the Nation beyond the status quo. This is evident from the comments in the *Navajo Times*, where people evoked language of Diné people living in the past or needing to modernize, and for them Deschene was the person to accomplish the task.[109] What is meant by this is that the continuing development of the Navajo Nation is somehow stunted, and for it to continue to move on this developmentalist trajectory the Nation would need to elect the right leadership to make this possibility a reality. In declaring this expectation, we see that some Diné people's ideas of leadership values and qualities are no different from what one might expect of US politicians. This is in direct contrast to, but not independent of, historically measured values and qualities that Diné people previously expected of leadership, such as care, humility, and generosity.

In this way, the perceived future-oriented potential that Deschene represented was positioned against the Court's opinion upholding the language fluency requirement and

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[109] See, for example, Lonnie Thomas, "Nation Needs a Paradigm Shift," *Navajo Times*, October 23, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6; Brown, "Language Is Not the Primary Issue," A7; Marian K. Bitsui, "Our Words Are Powerful," *Navajo Times*, November 13, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A7.

the centrality of language to Diné identity. In the opinion, the Court asserted that as "Diné, we are the image of our ancestors and we are created in connection with all creation."[110] The Court, in making this declaration, sets the Diné people of the present against the image of their ancestors from a time of the Diyin Diné'e. Appealing to the authority of 1 N.N.C. § 201, the Court added that

> upon our creation, we [were] identified by:
>
> > Our Diné name,
> > Our clan,
> > *Our language,*
> > Our life way,
> > Our shadow,
> > Our footprints.
> > Therefore, we were called the Holy Earth-Surface-People *[Diyin Nohookáá Diné]*.
> > …
>
> Different thinking, planning, life ways, *languages,* beliefs, and laws appear among us, But [*sic*] the fundamental laws *[Diné bi beehaz'áanii bitsé siléí*] placed by the Holy People remain unchanged.[111]

The Court's claim of an unchanging image among a *difference* ignores the fact that much has changed. One can only presume that the *difference* the Court gestures toward is other Indigenous peoples, settlers, and/or exogenous Others—again, the Court does not appropriately account for the change caused by colonialism. The Court unflinchingly asserts in its recitation of Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii that Diné people are identifiable by, among other things, the language.

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[110] Dale Tsosie v. Christopher Deschene; and Hank Whitethorne v. Christopher Deschene.
[111] Dale Tsosie v. Christopher Deschene at 9; Hank Whitethorne v. Christopher Deschene at 9; Italics in original document.

Settler society's construction of Indigenous identities as static is just one example of how, after centuries of colonization, Indigenous peoples routinely encounter ideas of indigeneity that are rooted in false and/or outmoded notions of an Indian. Hopi sociologist Angela A. Gonzales writes that "ethnic boundaries can be external, differentiating between groups, or internal, marking differences within an ethnic population and differentiating among members of the same ethnic group. Internal boundaries can mirror criteria imposed from outside or can be concepts that members hold of what constitutes legitimate identity."[112] One such boundary for marking difference is language fluency, as is the case in the Court's use of language as an identifier of Diné people. While Indigenous cultures and peoples have changed, sometimes by our own volition, but often by force, the settler state and Indigenous peoples maintain these ideas through hegemonic institutions (law, schools, churches) that enforce ideologies and impress behaviors.

What counts as being a Diné leader was structured around a list of qualifications as defined by the Court's reference of *Bennett v. Navajo Board of Election Supervisors*: "While the right or privilege of placing one's name in nomination for public elective office is a part of political liberty, thus making it a due process right, that liberty may be restricted by statute. Any such restriction must be reasonable and forward some important governmental interest."[113] By restricting both leadership and the broader concept of

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[112] Angela A. Gonzales, "Urban (Trans)Formations: Changes in the Meaning and Use of American Indian Identity," in *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, ed. Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2001), 173.
[113]Bennett v. Navajo Board of Election Supervisors, No. A-CV-26-90 (Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation 1990).

"liberty" to certain qualities that follow from and are oriented around "some [Navajo Nation] governmental interest," the Court declares itself to be the primary institution that can conceptualize and imagine what Dinéness, leadership, and sovereignty can be as defined against language boundaries. Furthermore, to support the idea that the Court had the right to "forward some important government interest," the decision invokes and reinforces that traditional concept of tribal identity. In effect, the Court asserts that it will maintain a Diné identity based in the image of Diné ancestors, an image which the Court projects by claiming to have a greater understanding of Diné creation and Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii, which are encoded in a timeless language.

Fundamental to this case is that a statute originally designed and created to ensure that Diné people were living in accordance with the image of their ancestors had the unanticipated, detrimental effect of creating a boundary that worked toward elimination by means of degradation and disappearance. The Court's October 8 ruling sends the message that only certain individuals can claim a Diné identity or are sufficiently Diné to hold elective office. Marian K. Bitsui, Diné citizen of Flagstaff, Arizona, in her letter titled, "Our Words Are Powerful," expressed her thoughts on the message the Court was sending with its decision on language fluency: "When considering the value [*sic*] our words, consider what you are saying when you say, 'If you don't speak Navajo to the ability that I think you should, you cannot lead our people.'"[114] Danielle Lynch, Diné citizen of Church Rock, New Mexico, was similarly critical of the Supreme Court's decision when she wrote that it "has sent a negative message to the youth that they mostly

[114] Bitsui, "Our Words Are Powerful," 7.

[*sic*] likely will not be good enough to be president.…We're supposed to be moving toward harmony but how is denying one of our own moving toward harmony?"[115] Taylor and Lynch articulate that a language requirement originally intended to keep Diné ways of knowing as the central aspect of Diné government was implemented in a fashion that "eliminated" Deschene and the thousands of other Diné people who do not speak the language. The Court's actions are contrary to its proclaimed purpose of restoring balance, and, instead, introduce chaos by creating and enforcing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

In this circumstance, the Court regards itself as the guardian of the Nation's ability to define who and what Diné is. The Court intervened in the process of the Navajo Nation imagining what it means to be Diné in a contemporary setting; the Court's decision imagined, defined, and asserted this idea within the framework of settler-rooted ideas and image of the Indian. It closed off debate by invoking the language fluency requirement as a boundary; it stripped Deschene of his primary election win and relegated him outside a boundary enforced by sovereign authority. This decision reinforces an unexamined myth of state sovereignty, as the Court defines Diné identities (be they within or outside of leadership) to accommodate the continuation of westernized, settler-state dependent government entities imposed on Diné people.

The complexity of the concept of sovereignty concerns Austin who asserts that: "The Navajo Nation should be cautious of the federal government's brand of tribal

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[115] Danielle Lynch, "I'm Not Good Enough or Qualified to Work," *Navajo Times*, November 26, 2014, sec. Letters to the Editor, A6.

sovereignty because it is a means of controlling Indian nations (and Indian peoples)."[116] This need for caution is not news to Diné people since the coercive and controlling nature of sovereignty is no secret. What makes the uncritical application of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court's decision even more convoluted or obscure is the decision's default to unexamined notions of sovereignty. Instead of opening up the concept of "who is Navajo" or "who is fit to serve" with regard to leadership, it limits the candidate pool and restricts Dinéness. Instead of an exploration of language and identity as plural and subject to continual change it reaffirms ideas of degrading and/or vanishing Diné.

The question remains, does Deschene speak fluent Navajo? The responses vary depending on where one falls on the spectrum of opposition/support for Deschene's candidacy. Some will point to Deschene's background of being raised outside the reservation as evidence for his inability to speak the language. Some will say Deschene admitted to not speaking Navajo when he was on the campaign trail, as Whitethorne and Tsosie argued. Others maintain that he was committed to learning the language. And many others assert that language fluency is inconsequential to his ability to fulfill the duties of the president. I did not start to answer whether Deschene was fluent, nor did I intend to ascertain his fit for the presidency. Instead, my analysis shows how Diné leadership, language, and identity are constituted in settler colonialism, I explain how the Court enacts sovereign authority to define and restrict Dinéness, and I explicate the

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[116] Raymond D. Austin, "Diné Sovereignty, a Legal and Traditional Analysis," in *Navajo Sovereignty: Understandings and Visions of the Diné People*, ed. Lloyd L. Lee (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017), 30.

intricate ways that the ancestral image is positioned against narratives of development and progress.

Re-Seizing and Re-Vitalizing Sovereignty and Life

This study demonstrates the need for Indigenous peoples and nations to critique and scrutinize the adoption and application of Indigenous knowledges in decolonization, as there is potential to reinscribe dominative logics. My analysis should not be construed as an argument against the vitality and necessity of Indigenous knowledges. Rather, I stress the complex entanglements of our knowledges with dominant systems. The case example shows that so-called tradition was levied as an exclusionary metric in the measure to protect indigeneity and sovereignty. When it comes to Indigenous liberation and sovereignty, we must stay attuned to the co-optive qualities of dominative power.

Diné scholar Melanie K. Yazzie offers a critical perspective on sovereignty's relation to the Navajo-Hopi Little Colorado River Settlement, proposed in 2012.[117] Yazzie's analysis cuts through the misleading language that the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President and Assistant Attorney General Stanley Pollack used when they advocated the settlement. Yazzie argues that despite the two parties advancing the unquantified and unlimited benefits of the settlement, the settlement had the opposite effect: it limited Diné access to water. She rejects Pollack's assertion that the water rights settlement is the ultimate act of sovereignty. Rather, Yazzie contends that the handling of the water rights settlement begged "for a radical re-seizure and re-vitalization of tribal

[117] Yazzie, "Unlimited Limitations."

sovereignty for the twenty-first century."[118] Here, Alfred's understanding of the hegemonic mythology of the state is useful, as "the struggle for justice would be better served by undermining the myth of state sovereignty than by carving out a small and dependent space for indigenous peoples within it."[119] Similarly, it is in the interest of Diné people to undermine the myth of state sovereignty and the small space within it that Diné people are currently occupying; the radical re-seizure and re-vitalization of sovereignty that Yazzie advocated is a good way to begin.

Sovereignty is the site in and from which Diné people (elected officials, judges, voters, and non-voters) interact and negotiate matters of what it means to be Diné in the present and in the future, all while buttressed against the past. Sovereignty's condition as a future-making project does not always support the vitality of Indigenous peoples. Given the potential for sustaining either colonization or decolonization, implementing sovereignty is far from certain in Indigenous contexts. As settler colonialism seeps into the minds of Indigenous peoples, it subtly limits them as it reproduces already existing oppressive relationships. The pervasive image of the Indian serves to situate Indigenous peoples in the remote past so that when we are measured against this ideal, frozen, static image we will always fall short. And, as we progress through time, Indigenous peoples become less and less like that static image frozen in the past, unconnected to the present. The modernization and development of the Navajo Nation, as can be realized by electing the right leadership, promises, we are told, persistence into the

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[118] Ibid., 33.
[119] Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 82.

future. But, the projection of developmentalist goals into the future is further identification with settler values and ideals that works to eliminate Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

Contrary to this, there are vibrant futures imagined by Diné people who live life on their terms and who work toward futures that are not constricted and quantified in ways that arise directly from and serve settler domination. To move toward living on our terms as opposed to ones dictated, we must attend to: the honesty and intelligence of Denetdale in critiquing the oppressive invocation of tradition; the brave and radical imaginings of Waziyatawin's realistic proposition to retake Indigenous lands and remake it on Indigenous peoples' terms; and Simpson's inspiring and moving call to propel and produce more life. It might seem that Diné people are far from living on our terms. Counter to this idea, I included Diné perspectives to demonstrate that although we take issue with our government and leadership, we have diverse perspectives that fuel our lively debates. Diné people's opinions, as expressed in letters to the *Navajo Times*, show our collective interest and awareness of the issues our Nation faces. We are vested in the persistence and vitality of our Nation even when our perspectives and experiences do not always align. There is also genuine love among our people and the desire to ensure our future as culturally and politically distinct people.

CHAPTER 3

BUILDING A DINÉ HOME: BLASTING THE COLONIALITY AND WHITENESS OF CONSTRUCTION AND MOVING TOWARD A DINÉ APPROACH

Construction is colonization and vice versa. Construction as an enterprise of settler colonialism eliminates and replaces Indigenous peoples and their infrastructure. In the United States, construction—its ideology, curricula methods, processes, and practices—furthers the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Construction leads to the thingification and classification of the environment, and, with every new project, marks white presence and permanence. When settlers build over Indigenous peoples, erecting homes, digging pipelines, building roads, constructing telescopes and other structures, they seek to obliterate Indigenous peoples' presence and underscore the supremacy of settler construction.[120]

Construction has largely escaped critical inquiry into its function in settler colonialism.[121] That omission is no casual accident. After mapping out the colonial

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[120] Settler construction's destruction of Indigenous people is best represented in recent struggles to protect the land, people, culture, and nation. For more, see Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2019); Anne K. Kelly, "Settler-Colonial Laws Ignore Sacred Ground & so the Fight Begins," Maven, accessed April 11, 2020, https://indiancountrytoday.com/opinion/settler-colonial-laws-ignore-sacred-ground-so-the-fight-begins-gVSLMKF6RUy6e6ijEahMag; Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019); and "Gila River Against Loop 202," Gila River Against Loop 202, accessed April 11, 2020, https://gilariveragainstloop202.wordpress.com/.

[121] The fields of architecture and planning have great critical works, numerous examples of what a deconstructed or critical approach looks like. For critical works in architecture, see Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2012). For critical works in planning see, for example, David C. Natcher, Ryan Christopher Walker, and Theodore S. Jojola, eds., *Reclaiming Indigenous Planning* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013). Diné scholar and construction manager Rosanna Jumbo-Fitch critiques the Eurocentrism of construction management curriculums. She approaches her critique by positioning against Diné stories, tradition, and sovereignty. Her dissertation is the only Indigenous critique of construction I found. For more, see Rosanna Jumbo-

origins of construction beginning with the Navajo Treaty of 1868, I show, in this chapter, how those origins relate to specific problems the colonialist enterprise of construction presents for Diné people. Considering this, I urge a new nation *building* path, one that contemplates the following questions: How can we construct and nation *build* in a way that supports and sustains Indigenous nations rather than replicate colonial mandates of whiteness and elimination inherent in contemporary construction? What will it take for us to imagine and realize a Diné home and homeland so that it strengthens and empowers our nation? What does it mean for us to build our homes and nations within the unexamined adoption of modern, westernized construction methods? How do we approach construction so that it supports nationhood and asserts our beliefs and values of place?

I ask these questions to expose construction's role in Indigenous dispossession and continued subjugation. Diné people must identify how construction has been implicated in an array of specific colonialist practices laid out in treaties to transcend the problems of settler state building. We cannot continue to uncritically adopt western construction. Nor can we reproduce the values and beliefs of hegemonic settler orders that aim to erase and replace our peoples and nations.

The hooghan, a structure that represents Diné people's planning, architecture, and construction, is an expression of homeland, belonging, futurity, and nationhood. I present the story of the first hooghan to conceptualize a Diné approach to building a home and

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Fitch, "Integrating Diné Culture and Language to Transform Construction Management Curriculum," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (EdD Diss., Northern Arizona University, 2018), (2054024460).

nation. The purpose is not to find meaning within dominant, colonial construction ideas and beliefs but to build and imagine our societies anew from our ways of knowing and being. Wanda Dalla Costa, Saddle Lake First Nation and Professor of Architecture, puts forth that architecture "is one of the most salient expressions of a culture. It draws from the past, defines the present, and envisions a future, all the while adapting to reflect the current values and aspirations of a society."[122] The hooghan is brimming with the values, knowledge, and aspirations of the Diné people. It holds the information of our past and offers the implements for charting futures beyond settler domination.

I put construction discourse and institutional formation *on blast* for carrying out the mandates of colonialism. I chose the terminology of "put on blast," defined in Urban Dictionary as putting someone's "secret and personal business in the spotlight without them being willing," because I intend to reveal construction's complicity in colonialism since the field and industry have not willingly done so itself.[123] The time is now for us to put long-held destructive implements of construction in the spotlight. *Blasting* is apt terminology because settlers have blasted—with genocidal firearms and explosives—their way through Indigenous lands. I bring that violent history and ongoing destruction to bear by returning the problem to US construction scholars and practitioners.

I analyze the Navajo Treaty of 1868 to reveal the foundational beliefs and resulting views of construction formed on the frontier that have persisted in modern

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[122] Wanda Dalla Cost, "An Emerging Narrative: Aboriginal Contributions to Canadian Architecture," in *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture, Volume II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 356.
[123] "Urban Dictionary: Put on Blast," Urban Dictionary, accessed June 25, 2020, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=put%20on%20blast.

construction. The Navajo Treaty of 1868, signed on June 1, 1868, brought an end to the federal government's forced removal of Diné people from their homeland. The forced death marches to and incarceration at Fort Sumner were genocidal practices, measures that settlers undertook to engineer ideal circumstances for their home. Although settlers employed numerous forms of invasive action before the Long Walk and 1868 Treaty, this particular moment is of primary interest as it illustrates the planning involved in US desires to acquire lands, remake the land in their vision, and continuously mark their presence.[124]

The 1868 Treaty was not the first treaty for Diné people. Earlier treaties also aimed to quell warfare. While they could have served as key moments to analyze the tenets of settler construction, I focus on the 1868 Treaty for three reasons: this is the final treaty that allowed Diné people to return to Dinétah, that redefined territorial boundaries, and that marshaled the terms of building. Like other treaties that the US negotiated with tribes, this treaty represents settlers' desires to demolish and obliterate Diné connection to home and to place so that they could realize their own home. By securing the return to Dinétah under restrictive reservation boundaries and prescribing how Diné people would rebuild their hooghan and nation, the treaty articulates ideologies of home, nation, and territory. The US federal government dictated treaty terms to police Diné people's return to Dinétah and ensure that our nation's rebuilding would be subject to state imperatives.

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[124] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Laying this theoretical groundwork for proposing an anticolonial Diné theory and approach for building our home and nation is necessary because all settler construction projects occur on Indigenous peoples' homes, sacred sites, canal systems, and burial grounds. Without this critical analysis, it is impossible to understand how construction facilitates Indigenous peoples' elimination as a precursor for replacing Indigenous existence. Patrick Wolfe, the late theorist of settler colonialism, maintained that recognizing invasion as a "structure rather than an event…involves charting the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society."[125] This chapter charts the toxic logic that underlay the building and development of the US settler state and shows how this transmuted into settler-built environments, to the detriment of Indigenous building and nations.

A return to our practices outlined in the building of the first hooghan will prioritize our nation in building. Instead of reinforcing colonizer nation-building and claims to a home, Diné and Indigenous principles of connection to place counter the current dominative and exploitative relationships that sustain colonial and whiteness logics. Diné home construction and nation building that restores the connection to place and centers nation will put Diné people on a path to realizing our vision of the future.

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[125] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 402.

Diné Home and Nation

The Diné people's hózhǫjí, Beauty Way, ceremony begins with a set of songs that tell how the first hooghan was built, long before it was transported to the present world. I draw from my cultural knowledge and experiences to describe and interpret the home's quotidian, cultural, and ceremonial significance. My family comes from a line of medicine people learned in Beauty Way ceremonies, and I had the privilege of being raised in such an environment to learn firsthand.[126]

According to the ancient songs, hooghan building was a process of thinking, talking, planning, acting, and rejoicing in accomplishment. After the people placed the structural frames, they rejoiced and celebrated the successful implementation of their thoughts and planning. The songs describe materials used in the hooghan and how the initial structural logs came together. I do not recount the specifics of the ceremonial songs here because of my responsibility to family, ancestors, and nation. The songs have been retold and translated in a few locations, but the conditions and field specific practices that facilitated the acquisition of those knowledges occurred under the auspices of colonial invasion and destruction.

The songs continue by describing the placement of items such as the grinding stone, bedding material, and hairbrush in the finished hooghan. The placement of these utilitarian items offers a vision of daily life and activities, and it details the needed tools

[126] For those seeking written material, consider Charlotte Johnson Frisbie, *Kinaaldá: A Study of the Navaho Girl's Puberty Ceremony* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993). Frisbie offers a broad introduction to understanding hózhǫ ceremonies through the Kinaaldá, although the colonial gaze distorts the representation of the Diné ceremonies. This text also subscribes to gender binaries that dangerously represent the feminine in restrictive and sexist terms.

to ensure balanced and healthy living. Those items (some no longer in daily use) convey how the family could sustain wellness far into the future. The meticulous forethought given to the home's interior aspects exemplifies the planning Diné ancestors and Diyin Dine'é, Power People, put into the future. The careful planning of everyday tools and adornments shows that nothing about the home should be haphazard but should reflect the people's carefully considered expectations of daily life and their vision and hope for the future. The Diyin Dine'é and Diné people's careful and thoughtful planning readied the hooghan for the family to grow and strengthen from within it.

The act of building and adorning the home shows that for Diné people, thinking and planning occur before taking any action. That thinking required the people to imagine the home and to ponder its purpose within Diné thought and existence. Every hózhǫ starts with these songs to acknowledge and ready the hooghan so the patient and their family can receive blessings.[127] The hózhǫjí songs are Diné history and serve to remind the people of their place and purpose. The songs detail the people's desire for hózhǫjí, the state of goodness, balance, hope, and beauty, that Diyin Dine'é and Diné people structured the world by as they emerged through the worlds.

Diné emergence stories tell of the being's movement through multiple worlds with the eventual arrival in our present world. According to these stories, the Diyin Dine'é built the first hooghan in a previous world, and then they brought the structure to the current world. In its earliest designation, there were the male and female hooghan;

[127] This envisioning of the Diné home tells of Diné personhood and nationhood at a particular moment. The recounting of it here is not intended to essentialize the Diné hooghan, nor do I intend to represent it as only being in hózhǫ.

each with its purpose. The male hooghan, according to Diné philosopher Wilson Aronilth, Jr., was designated for "praying, and singing [sic] to make plans and for ceremonial purposes…They never lived in it only patients and sick people who are having ceremony can stay in there for an amount of time…"[128] Aronilth describes the function of the female hooghan as "a place for resting, to eat, a place to talk or laugh, a place where children can be born and can grow."[129] Aronilth notes that Diyin Dine'é set specific purposes for the two hooghan variations, but presently Diné people use the female hooghan for ceremonies and planning activities initially designated for the male hooghan. To which he adds, "This is okay for today's generation."[130]

Aronilth's description of the male and female hooghan serving different purposes demonstrates that Diyin Dine'é gave significant forethought to who Diné people would be in our daily lives and how we would interact with other-than-human beings and the environment. The description speaks to the distinctions made between everyday family life represented in the female hooghan and ceremonial and nation-oriented planning activities reserved for the male hooghan. The female and male hooghan spaces had different knowledges and practices that existed in each space. The care and love between family members demonstrate the principles of hózhǫ in the family home. Whereas the male hooghan ceremonial and planning activities dealt with external threats from enemies and healing of deadly illnesses. Separating the male hooghan activities from daily life in the female hooghan helped protect the family's well-being from any potential threats or

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[128] Aronilth, Jr., *Diné Bi Bee Óhoo'aah Bá Silá*, 106.
[129] Ibid., 107.
[130] Ibid.

harms. While Diné people treat these spaces with care, Aronilth's note about the changing nature of Diné ceremonial and living spaces demonstrates an attention to the forced and willing changes Diné people made.

Diyin Dine'é formed the hooghan within an understanding of the human's place in the cosmos, so it became a place to learn and apply kinship: shimá, shizhé'é, shádí, shitsilí, shimá sáni, shinálí hastiin, shimá ni'asdzáán, and yádiłhił shitaa'. These terms translate to mother, father, older sister, younger brother, maternal grandmother, paternal grandfather, Earth, and Universe. Diné relational systems prioritize connection to people, non-human people, and place. The philosophies and practices of kinship are represented all through the hooghan.[131] Diyin Dine'é imagined the hooghan for growth, love, hope, and kinship, and they envisioned it as the central space in which the Diné person and family came into being and lived a long, fulfilled life in hózhǫ. They designated the fireplace, the sleeping areas, and the cooking space with an intention for future vitality and consideration of daily familial life, responsibilities, and interactions. Designed with consideration to how the body was cared for, nourished, taught, and known by the immediate family, the Diyin Dine'é designed the hooghan, beyond Diné quotidian life, as the location from which the Diné person and family could pray and dream all they were and wanted to be. It is a project of futurity.

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[131] Those seeking to understand these Diné concepts in a broader theoretical and philosophical context can consult the following: Clark, "In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon"; Lee, *Diné Perspectives*; Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie and Margaret Speas, *Diné Bizaad Bináhoo'aah (Rediscovering the Navajo Language): An Introduction to the Navajo Language* (Flagstaff: Salina Bookshelf, 2007); and Aronilth, Jr., *Diné Bi Bee Óhoo'aah Bá Silá*.

For Diné people, the *we* that constitutes our nation was defined in relation to the mountains and the hooghan, and the making of the people's livelihood within and between these locations. Diné kinship concepts set the foundation for interacting with other beings and the environment. This relates to Diné understandings of place between the powerful mountains marking Dinétah. Through the hooghan, Diné people have been, are, and will remain connected to the mountains and the cosmos' entirety. Louie Gonnie, a Diné musician who incorporates Diné knowledge and tradition, elaborates the connection between the sacred mountains and the hooghan when he says, in a prelude to his song *Hooghan:*

> Dził dadiyingo Nihá ndaas'ya'
> Nihighan 'át'é dooleeł nihi'doo'niid
> Yá 'ałnįį'gi kǫ' diiltlii
> Ch'é'étiin hólǫ
> Honishgish sitą
> Hwiink'eh haz'ą kwe'é
> Nitsáhákees hólǫ dooleeł
> Nahat'á hólǫ dooleeł
> 'Iiná hólǫ dooleeł
> Sih Hasin 'éí doo' hólǫ dooleeł[132]

Gonnie reminds us that the Diyin Dine'é placed the *sacred* mountains and told the people that this would be their hooghan. Diné people, even when we are outside our dwelling, are still at home within the mountains. As such, the Diné world radiates both outward and inward from the residence. Diné people are always living in relation to other beings and the entirety of Diné Bikéyah because we are connected to our land, the Earth, and the universe through the hooghan. The persistence of the people is affirmed in the presence

[132] Louie Gonnie, "Hooghan," track 7 on *Sacred Mountains*, Canyon Records, 2017, Spotify.

and strength of the mountains. In this home, Gonnie adds, there would be fire, a fire poker, and a fireplace.

Fire, like the hooghan, was discovered in the previous world and brought to the present world by the Diyin Dine'é. In Diné ontological and epistemological understandings, the coyote named the fire kǫ'. Diyin Dine'é brought fire to the first hooghan. When the fire reached Diné people, Diyin Dine'é instructed them to care for and respect it. Diyin Dine'é also instructed them to "address the fire as a sacred divine relative" because in the beginning "the fire over powered [*sic*] all kinds of hardships, sickness, poverty, starvation…"[133] Fire and fireplace are the beginnings of our education as Diné people, as fire, according to Aronilth, "…represents (iina) for the Diné…It makes us grow into a better person. We all have fire inside our home…We live by it and cook our food with it and eat it, it feeds us with tenderness, love and care."[134] The fire carries the dual purpose of offering care and protection, and it is the source of life and power. Its life-giving force is the basis of the respect it garners. Its power potential is in its defensive and destructive capabilities. Kǫ', as the central element of the home, not only represents the numerous iterations of the fire coming together, but it offers insight into Diné conceptions of power.

Diyin Dine'é imagined the fire as representing each family's autonomy because it allows the people to provide for themselves. Without kǫ', the people cannot keep their homes warm in the winter and they cannot cook their food, nor can they pay homage to

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[133] Aronilth, Jr., *Navajo Oral History*, 104.
[134] Ibid., 105.

the history of their existence. Kǫ', more than its practical uses, represents and serves as an example to Diné people on how to be a person of warmth, light, and strength. The fire is the people's autonomy, and it is how the people live in hózhǫ.

Extending from the hooghan is the dá'ák'eh, the juniper ramada, the outdoor cooking area, and other features of Diné people's livelihood.[135] Daily maintenance, che'hojiisiin, of the homestead is required so that when the Diyin Dine'é cross the dark early morning sky they could bless the family. Che'hojiisiin is based on principles of organization and readiness for maintaining goodness in one's life. Just outside the homestead are extended clan families living in proximity and striving to maintain life's beauty and sanctity. Beyond the extended clan family are other clan neighbors. In this way, Diné people build their homes and nation—each family working in concert to ensure hózhǫ.

The home's inseparability from land in the nation-building project shows what it means to build in a Diné context. If we take seriously the knowledge passed through songs, we must approach the building of our homes and nation as a way of claiming and maintaining our territory. The brief explanation of the Diné approach to building contrasts with the building and development that occurs following the onset of colonialism. The nature of construction for Indigenous nations is about land and nationhood in anticolonial struggle as is clear when considering the roots of the ongoing

[135] For more on the cornfield, see Parsons-Yazzie and Speas, *Diné Bizaad Bináhoo'aah*, 277. Parsons-Yazzie and Speas briefly describe the cornfield as representing unity, family, and planning.

contention between Diné realization of home and homeland versus US colonial and whiteness logics to possess Indigenous lands.

Invasion of Structure and Marking White Possession in the Treaty of 1868

The arrival of European American settlers to Dinétah ushered in an alternate and destructive envisioning of home and nation, one that supported the occupation of Diné territory and management of Diné people. That destructive project at once facilitated the exploitation and consumption of raw materials and permitted the proliferation of white settlers across the continent. Unlike Diné people's process of building home and nation, settlers did not imagine their place in balanced relation to the land. Nor did those settlers engage principles of balance, care, and respect in nation-building. Rather, settler society's expansion occurred under notions of continual advancement and expansion to sustain their occupation of Indigenous territories and always mark their presence against Indigenous peoples.

The Navajo Treaty of 1868 weaponizes settler desire to control, occupy, and redefine land, and protect its citizens and interests.[136] Relevant to the 1868 Treaty to contemporary US settler state construction is that the Treaty procured the conditions that sustain development and nation-building. The treaty also highlights the inter-relationship of claiming Indigenous land, continuous building, and the elimination and control of Indigenous populations. Without these conditions, the settler state would not have

[136] For more on Navajo treaties and its function in administering colonialism, see Jennifer Nez Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007).

proliferated the way it has, and it is because of this verity that construction's foundational function in colonialism must be exposed.

Colonial invasion, beginning with the mid-1500 Spanish incursions into the now American Southwest, clashed against and disrupted Diné peoples' imaginings of home. The colonizer imaginary desired and sought to claim land and redefine relationships to place that undercut Diné presence.

Across the so-called New World, settlers relied on *terra nullius* as an organizing principle for realizing a settler home. The lie that the Americas were empty opened the frontier for settlers to imagine and create the perceived empty wilderness for their purposes. The necessity of approaching the land as empty and open for the taking allowed for a complete reimagining of place, home, and nation that went against the Indigenous realities in the not-so-empty lands. The thinking went as follows: if the land was empty, then the settlers were free to remake the wilderness into a place habitable for them, for their dreams, for their future. With the foolish claim of a clean slate declared, the settlers could establish an infrastructural presence that started with the earliest outposts in the varying colonies throughout the world.

Terra nullius is a racist concept and practice that positions Indigenous societies as less-than.[137] It is within the context of *terra nullius* and the relative positioning of Indigenous societies as less-than that construction assumes an aura of goodness. Its primary function is to advance the US nation state's development and nation-building initiatives, buttressed against imaginaries of the Indigenous savage. In order to maintain

[137] Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

its self-illusion as the apex of civilization, the settler state must advance and develop notions of savagery and without concern for the land.

Through the mid-20th century, settler societies long characterized Indigenous nations as third world (undeveloped, dirty, poor, and backward) so that it contrasted with the first world (developed, clean, rich, and advanced). Colonizers would then invoke this characterization of so-called third-world Indigenous nations as a point of comparison in order to highlight the luxuries and supposed benefits brought by settler expansion and development. In addition to representing them as inferior and uncivilized, colonizers view Indigenous peoples, cultures, and nations as frozen in the past. They view the supposed inability of Indigenous peoples to *develop* and *progress* as a result of the failure to adopt modern economies and the building practices that sustain them. Advancement is a colonial trope connected to the idea that colonized peoples live in savagery; the trope of "advancement" declares that the colonizer's kindness and assistance will pull Indigenous peoples into modernity, kicking and screaming if need be.

The settler goal to forcefully assimilate Diné people into the supposed advanced society led them to redraw our home boundaries. The result included only a small portion of our original territories. Article II of the Treaty of 1868 defines who can access the newly constricted territories when it states that territories "…set apart for the use and occupation of the Navajo tribe of Indians." The passage continues to describe who, on behalf of the US, is authorized to enter the reservation, in the line "and the United States agrees that no persons except those herein so authorized to do…shall ever be permitted to

pass over, settle upon, or reside in, the territory described in this article."[138] This usurpation of land and limited access was a mechanism to surveil and control who and why any person was allowed on the reservation.

Moving the boundaries is one of the treaty's more serious impositions, an act that undercut Diné people's relationship to place and interfered with ceremonial access to vital medicines, sites, and objects located on each mountain. Before colonial imposition, Diné people could travel freely on their lands. Now they were subject to the US desire to undertake and control their territories. The hegemonic order geo-politically distanced the mountains to obstruct access to sacred mountains that would have supported sovereignty and Diné vitality.

The Treaty of 1868 at once outlined the territorial boundaries of the reservation and prescribed behaviors the US expected of Diné people. Article I declares that from "this day forward all war between the parties to this agreement shall for ever [*sic*] cease." The next lines seemingly affirm a system of measures to maintain peace between the signatories, as any "bad men among the Indians" committing "wrong or depredation" would "be tried and punished according" to US laws.[139] The broader context of US colonial expansion activity reveals the management logics of surveillance and control hidden behind the gesture of peacemaking. The treaty language makes the management of Diné people a prerequisite to preventing any wrong against the colonialist interests of the US as expressed in the nation-building initiatives of its white citizens. The US

[138] "Navajo Treaty of 1868" (1868), sec. Article II, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6173067.Article II
[139] Ibid., sec. Article I.

government committed to managing the Diné people and other tribes into subordination in order to build the projects and infrastructure to move settlers across territories that Indigenous nations formerly controlled.

Settler subjugation, assimilation, and regulation of Diné people could only occur with appropriate buildings and skilled state agents dedicated to supervising the infrastructure imposed by the treaty. The 1864 to 1868 genocidal endeavor to relocate Diné people to concentration camps in Bosque Redondo was the settler state's attempt to clear the land of its people so it could be claimed and apportioned to white settlers who would people and build upon that land, served by the new infrastructure. The settler state responded to the failed removal and incarceration efforts by allowing the Diné people to return to their homelands. The treaty establishes the state's mechanisms of indoctrination, surveillance, and control over the Diné people, requiring them to adopt settler educational and religious priorities.

The Treaty of 1868 vividly illustrates the interlocking complexities of elimination, settlement, building, and assimilation. That the whole project to build upon the land and mark settler presence depended on controlling the Diné people is evident in Article III of the Navajo Treaty of 1868:

> The United States agrees to cause to be built at some point within said reservation, where timber and water may be convenient, the following buildings: a warehouse…an agency building for the residence of the agent…a carpenter shop and blacksmith shop… and a school-house and chapel, so soon as a sufficient number of children can be induced to attend school...[140]

[140] Ibid., sec. Article III.

For the US federal government to properly manage Diné people, the state needed convenient access to materials for building and sustaining life. The settler state required at least a minimal infrastructural presence to surveil and manage the Diné population. This array of biopolitical management projects needed access to convenient resources, including the skilled labor implied by a carpenter and blacksmith shop. Developing these colonial outposts required skilled labor to oversee the construction of the buildings that would eventually carry out the priority of disciplining and assimilating Diné children. The treaty clearly states that these facilities' purpose is for the children and was not intended for settlers living on the frontier. For the US settler state, the present and future biopolitical management of Diné people are welded to the project of building and inducing children to attend school.

The presence of a reservation agent and building infrastructure are essential to the surveillance and management of Diné people, which is designed to thwart their interference with the colonial progression that the agent represents. I move away from the reservation agent and focus instead on the role of the carpenter and blacksmith, set forth in the same Article III, which states the need for convenient access to "timber and water" and for "a carpenter shop and blacksmith shop." These lines emphasize the relationship between various colonial actors and the environments they overtook. Construction owes its understandings to all of these practices developed in the colonial outposts and frontiers. Present-day construction has unquestionably carried out and continues to carry out these practices, views, and beliefs. The reservation agent's role is to control the

management of goods and favors, which secures the colonial infrastructure and its continuing operation.

The skilled labor of tradesmen, such as carpenters, blacksmiths, and engineers, is vital to colonization because they help to make the environment habitable; their skill ensures the administration of settler colonial functions on the frontier. The role of tradesmen is to tame the environment and to commodify and channel local resources so that settler building progresses. This has been true throughout the colonial experience the world over.

Settler construction practices are rooted in the colonial invasion of Indigenous territories. Sustaining European presence required settlers to establish an infrastructure that supported their livelihood and occupation of Indigenous lands. According to John Weiler, "British military engineers were often stationed abroad in hot and wet climates where the adaptation of building forms and details became a practical necessity for health and even survival…Architectural responses combined native traditions with advanced technology imported from Britain."[141] Settler invaders faced unfamiliar climates and limited resources for building. It was the responsibility of the early skilled colonists to make use of local resources and knowledge.

Early colonial building methods incorporated Indigenous knowledges, practices, and traditions. Settlers' incorporation of Indigenous construction and architecture might seem like a beneficial, mutual exchange that helps sustain the livelihood and building of

[141] John Weiler, "Colonial Connections: Royal Engineers and Building Technology Transfer in the Nineteenth Century," *Construction History* 12 (1996): 13.

Indigenous peoples, but this was not so. The fact that colonizers represent Indigenous building practices as less advanced shows they did not consider the two sets of practices to be technologically equal. In the colonial invasion, European settlers exploited local knowledges by bringing in new technologies which required relatively scarce materials. Even as settlers denigrated Indigenous building practices, describing them as less advanced, they also included Indigenous architecture when convenient for the settler state. Before incorporation into the "advanced technology" could occur, Indigenous architecture had to be removed from its relational and placed-based contexts, excised from the worldview, history, and culture of Indigenous people.[142]

Weiler elaborates on the "significant historical phenomenon" of the Royal Engineers' role in "the global diffusion of advanced building technology"[143] as they "shared with the private sector the problems of working on the frontiers of European overseas expansion – remoteness from an established scientific community, lack of testing and experimental facilities, absence of manufacturers, and a chronic shortage of skill labour."[144] Weiler details early practices in testing materials, bridges, prefabrication, and dwelling in tropical territories. Western development in the colonies was not simply a matter of transporting buildings and building materials to the colonies. Instead, it was a

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[142] Gregory Cajete notes that the "use Native peoples of the Americas made of their land is seldom documented. These people did more than simply survive, they developed methods for agriculture, mining, water channeling, road building, and land management…" For more on applied Indigenous technologies, see Cajete, *Native Science*; and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Golden, Colo: Fulcrum, 2009).
[143] Weiler, "Colonial Connections: Royal Engineers and Building Technology Transfer in the Nineteenth Century," 3.
[144] Ibid., 4.

matter of instituting practices, testing, and manufacturing to create and support the colonial desire to occupy and possess Indigenous lands because of its remoteness.

The carpenter responsible for carrying out the 1868 Treaty terms and the royal engineer fulfill similar colonial imperatives. Their job was to make the environment suitable for the expansion of colonialism, which required a degree of knowing the environment and using materials to support infrastructure building. But the settler agent or carpenter does not just happen upon a convenient location that supports domination and elimination. Instead, the identification of convenience would have required and was premised on previous surveys of the land and resources to undertake colonial erasure. The colonial agents must survey the land for the best strategic implementation of the building and peopling of the colonial frontier.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith presents an incisive critique of how some disciplines are directly implicated in colonialism: "they either have derived their methods and understandings from the colonized world or they have tested their ideas in the colonies…Classification systems were developed specifically to cope with the mass of new knowledge generated by the discoveries of the 'new world'." [145] In the New World environment, testing and classifying implicate construction's direct role in colonialism. Material testing in colonial outposts set the early foundations for how construction and development would use the environment in building. In contrast to Diné philosophical approaches to understanding the environment in relational terms, that

[145] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 65.

testing defined relationship to the land in terms of use, an approach inspired by and reinforcing of materialist and capitalist attitudes and actions regarding the environment. The stark difference between these approaches is noteworthy: in both instances, the underpinning motives and ideological positioning of building center on what it means to build home and nation. The earliest interventions in construction in colonial outposts defined how and what settlers and the settler state would build and for what purpose, in direct contradistinction to Diné people's imaginings and implementation of their home and nation.

Aimé Césaire notes that colonization is a project of *thingification*.[146] Expounding on what thingification entails, Césaire writes, "*I* am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out."[147] His characterization of colonization highlights how colonialism proceeds to destroy Indigenous peoples and their infrastructural presence by testing and classifying all that it encounters. Césaire describes thingification as the relationship between the elimination of Indigenous peoples and their societies and colonization's eventual attempts at dressing up that destruction. He adds that they "throw facts at my head, statistics, mileages of roads, canals, and railroad tracks."[148] This "throwing of facts" endeavors to re-narrate, cover-up, and build over the destruction rather than acknowledging how settler colonization destroys Indigenous societies. Instead of framing the problem as stemming

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[146] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).
[147] Ibid., 43.
[148] Ibid.

from past and ongoing destruction of Indigenous societies, the "throwing of facts" presents the story of settler state development and progress as the benchmark against which Indigenous nations are presented by way of comparison. In the instance of Diné people, we might think of this within the broader discourse of how and why Indigenous nations lack roads, homes, appropriate schooling facilities. This argument reframes these deficiencies within the contexts of US national development so that when Indigenous nations finally build much-needed roads, homes, and other infrastructure, colonizers frame that construction as tribal nations finally catching up with the settler state's national development.

Settler infrastructure and nation developed out of their early, intense, and systematically exploitative use of nature in construction, actions that define settler relationship to the land. When colonizers test and produce construction materials—acts of thingification—they exploit the land. For example, William Thomas Denison, an engineer officer, tested the "strength and durability" of wood in a Canadian outpost between 1830 and 1831. Such tests represent trial runs for using resources to construct posts, barracks, and bridges. In the context of construction and engineering, trial runs could be seen as the mere testing of available resources. In colonialism, however, such testing is crucial to introducing the technology to facilitate the occupation of Indigenous territories, manage infrastructural takeover, and efficiently exploit resources. In turn, the engineers report test results to the imperial center, and, from there, they export technological advances to other colonial outposts. This is how construction was

implemented and dispersed throughout the colonial world. The better the testing and technology, the better suited colonialists were to implement their goal of settlement.

In the US context, construction typically does not question how development or building projects realize or advance US nationhood. This is because the construction apparatus is always already advancing and maintaining the coloniality and whiteness of settler occupation. White possession is hypervisible when colonizers build a railroad, highway, building, telescope, dam, or high rise. As Geonpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson indicates in *The White Possessive*: "For Indigenous people, white possession is not unmarked, unnamed, or invisible; it is hypervisible. In our quotidian encounters…we experience ontologically the effects of white possession…signs of white possession are embedded everywhere in the landscape."[149] It is not enough that white settlers possess the land, but it is necessary to mark that possession against the Indigenous presence. The emphasis on construction activities (railroads, mail stations) in the treaty offers critical insight into the interlocking relationship of dominating the people, building, and forward progress.

When Article IX of the Treaty of 1868 established and required the allowance of railroads, military posts, wagon roads, and mail stations, it further required that Diné people would not engage in "opposition to the construction of railroads" and that they would not "interfere with the peaceful construction of any railroad passing over their reservation."[150] The Treaty required that Diné people agree that in exchange for a return

[149] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, xiii.
[150] Navajo Treaty of 1868, sec. Article IX.

to their homelands, they would not oppose the US settler state's building through and across Diné land in initiatives that would always take priority over the interests of the people. The US securing right of ways in the treaty is a dominative flex on Diné nationhood, futures, and imaginaries. The flex alerts Diné people to the supremacy of US development and propagation. Right of ways represent the settler state's willingness to foreclose inherent sovereignty and relationship to the land.

The US securing right of ways is not merely permission to annex or cordon off the land for imperialist development. Right of way demonstrates the settler state's power, determination to mark permanence, and intent to remove Indigenous peoples and claim land at will. Railroads were key construction projects that represented the marking of whiteness and coloniality. Manu Karuka, in *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*, argues that "Railroads reordered modes of relationship across the colonized world, seeking to confine myriad possible futures into the death threat of imperialism: there is no alternative."[151] Settler colonial imposition into Diné life brought unfettered access for railroads along with their agents and their supporting institutions. The advent of the railroad initiates a complete disordering and displacement of Diné understandings of home and nation. Railroads reveal an additional layer of why it was vital for the US to acquire Diné people's compliance to traverse the continent. In settler nation building, the feat of railroad construction represents the ways construction is fused with the potential, hope, and vision

[151] Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*, Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 57.

of the US settler state. Indigenous peoples' opposition to building efforts such as railroads counters settler state expansion and development and aims to stop the spread of colonialism and whiteness.

In nation-building, the US's concern is to secure their future as builder and protect development and expansion that advance the settler state. The protection of people and progress mentioned in the same article is not a coincidence. The US's development is clearly in contention with an Indigenous presence and defense of their territories. The exercise of tribes' sovereign authority threatens US development and progress. For the US to secure its future, it was vital for the state to quell opposition to push the people into compliance.

The Treaty's requirements stipulate that Diné people not "molest" any settlers that might traverse the Diné land. The peopling of the continent was set to usher in more buildings and housing designed to facilitate the entry of still more people. The projects of peopling the continent and building infrastructure mutually constitute one another. Each relies on the other to proliferate and eliminate Indigenous presence while streamlining people's movement into and across the frontier.

Construction Moving Forward

To connect Diné construction to our principles of persistence and living, I present Diné ceremonial songs in order to vocalize how our return to Diné building approaches will align with our values and beliefs. This is because every construction project, be it a home, hospital, school, or government building, should reinforce the people's hopes and visions of the future. When Diné people assert their building processes, their inherent

claims to home, and the primacy of their nation, we do so in opposition to settler tenets of construction and occupation. If Diné people were to return to building practices that prioritize their beliefs and values, it would contend with settler claims to territory and home, and it would undermine the legitimacy of the settler state. A future that leads to a stronger nation challenges settler colonialism and white possession, and recovers territories and revitalizes connection to stolen land in the four sacred mountains. The impetus behind this type of construction is to speak and bear witness to building that does not reinforce whiteness and settler colonialism.

Demolishing white possessive and eliminatory logics that persist in construction can begin with Diné people asking: How do we construct so that Diné people and nation can flourish? What do home and homeland look like beyond settler colonialism and whiteness? As these questions are in contradistinction to construction as presently conceived, the following paragraphs develop two starting points for Diné people: to recoup building so that it reclaims our home and homeland and to assert our nation through and beyond hegemonic orders and physical structures. The purpose here is to reconsider nation-building and rearticulate construction to benefit Diné people and develop and advance an anticolonial ethic that opposes settler colonialism and whiteness.

Nature-Culture Nexus & Grounded Normativity

Diné people need to transform the relationship between building and place to move away from dominating and exploitative regimes. In the initial building of the hooghan, Diné people thought, spoke, and acted on a plan rooted in k'é, a relational system. Evangeline Parsons Yazzie and Margaret Speas, in their well-received and

widely-adopted Navajo language instruction text, offer that k'é "refers to the establishment of familial and clan relationship" and that "is essential to a person's inner peace and is what a person is to strive toward on a daily basis."[152] In these ideas of k'é, Diné people formed an understanding for relating to other people, other-than-human people, and the material world. The relational system was vital for how we constructed the hooghan and attained peace.

Among the writers who describe the relationship that Indigenous peoples maintain with place is the Yuchi and Muscogee scholar Daniel R. Wildcat, who refers to how the *nature-culture nexus* involves "a symbiotic relationship that recognizes the fundamental connectedness and relatedness of human communities and societies to the natural environment and the other-than-human relatives they interact with daily." For Wildcat, "hopefulness resides with those who are willing to imaginatively reconstitute lifeways emergent from the nature-culture nexus."[153] For Diné people, the building of the hooghan implemented the k'é relational system and permitted the people to find and maintain hope. The hope Diné people found in the hooghan construction was based on the vision of a strong and powerful people. The building of every hooghan was a reminder of the hope that Diné ancestors and Diyin Diné'e put forth. It was a place where the people could maintain strength and balance and find respite, healing, and connection.

Glen S. Coulthard, Yellowknives Dene and political theorist, takes *grounded normativity* to mean "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and

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[152] Parsons-Yazzie and Speas, *Diné Bizaad Bináhoo'aah*, 69.
[153] Wildcat, *Red Alert!*, 20.

longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationship with human and nonhuman others over time."[154] Coulthard's emphasis on experiential knowledge is important to Diné hooghan construction and nation-building practices because the place-based connection creates unique conditions that sprout knowledge for building and living. This act of coming to know the land, because it is experiential, differs from how colonizing engineers and carpenters learned about the land. Colonizers did not base their interactions on relational principles of connection, peace, hope, and ethical engagements. As I show above, their purpose was to expand, exploit, and eliminate by marking their presence on lands they violently seized from Indigenous peoples.

Key to Coulthard's thinking about grounded normativity is the potential for land-connected practices and experiential knowledge to inform anticolonial and anticapitalist thought and action. He asserts that land can inform a "*system of reciprocal relations and obligations"* that *"*can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms…" [155] Such an approach intervenes in the earliest colonial efforts to study, categorize, and label Indigenous peoples and environments in construction experiments and building. Rethinking the relationship to place and the function of space in building challenges the aesthetics of western architecture and construction and confronts the exploitation and thingification of the environment.

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[154] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 13.
[155] Ibid.

An anticolonial and anticapitalist approach to k'é and to building the hooghan will have us return to those reciprocal relationships and obligations so as to begin imagining the entirety of our infrastructural development in nondominating and nonexploitative terms. Our return to a Diné building method would have profound implications for how we relate to the world and how we build physical structures. If we can implement an anticolonial and anticapitalist ethic, we can rethink our relationship and building practices. Such an approach will create a future of hope and peace.

Nation-Centered Building

The hooghan illustrates the nation's centrality in the building phases of thinking, talking, acting, and rejoicing. As we built the first hooghan, we undertook building so that it was an extension of place, reaffirmed relationships, and supported the people's present and future vitality. To return to this, we need to situate our nation at the center of our building, much as when Diné people first considered what the home meant for their daily lives and their nation's continuance. As stated earlier, the hooghan was never only a structure to protect the people from the elements. It was about the people coming together to imagine and create a shared vision of who they would be as people residing between the Four Powered Mountains.

Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt identify five characteristics of the nation-building approach that includes Native nations asserting "decision-making power" and backing up that "power with effective governing institutions." Cornell and Kalt add that the nation-building approach "sees the challenge of development as one of creating an *environment* in which development can take hold rather than an endless chase after

funding and projects."[156] Nation-building puts forth an approach that emphasizes leaders, strategic decision making, and governing institutions.

I propose a *nation-centered building* approach focused on building physical infrastructure. Such an approach would emphasize the present and future collective aspirations of Diné people. The focus on Indigenous nations in building centers our desire and hopes for our nation while also challenging the coloniality and the white possessive of construction. Since settlers envisioned the US to reduce and then eliminate Indigenous peoples and nations, an approach that prioritizes Indigenous nations will position nation-centered building against those logics seeking our erasure.

A nation-centered hooghan building approach restores imaginings and hopefulness by building up the people and carrying them into the distant future. Participating in the building of the home is to envision and create our nation. If each Diné person and family returned to principles of respect, care, and love to establish their home, it would move us back to planning and building that prioritize local participation rather than centralized governing structures. Instead of prioritizing governing systems and elected leaders in nation-building, the thinking, planning, acting, and rejoicing needs to return to the people if nation-building is ever to counter the settler state. Without this approach, nation-building efforts within formal governing structures will only uphold the settler nation state, perpetuating building initiatives premised on dominative and exploitative relations seeking to hammer Diné people out of existence.

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[156] Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt, "Two Approaches to the Development of Native Nations: One Works, the Other Doesn't," in *Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development*, ed. Miriam Jorgensen (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007), 18.

Conclusion

I am not arguing for a complete separation from western construction technologies and practices. Rather, I assert the need to uproot the colonial and oppressive aspects of construction. Settler colonial progression through construction needs to be put on blast for: its role in the violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples; marking land and exploiting resources through the categorization, testing, and use of materials; and subjugating and disciplining Diné people. Brianne Arviso, a Diné scholar of Construction Management, researches ways for Diné people to reclaim building, and she offers a vision for how we can do so using both Diné and settler approaches. Arviso's research agenda is crucial for both the future of Diné nation-centered building and for challenging the construction field and industry.[157] Her work establishes and defines metrics for assessing construction throughout the building cycle. Until now, construction on tribal lands was only documented in congressional records and legal cases. Arviso's scholarship creates a new area of inquiry, and we begin to understand what construction looks like from a Diné perspective. As her research develops, we will gain the tools and language to better define and approach construction from our perspective, as is essential for realizing our desires as a nation.

The direction presented here asks the Diné people to come together once again, to contemplate, discuss, deliberate, and act upon a renewed vision of our hooghan and nation that reclaims and protects Dinétah. When Diné people and Diyin Diné'e built the

[157] Wanda Dalla Costa, Kristen Parrish, and Brianne Arviso, "Unique Features of Conducting Construction Activities within Tribal Communities," in *Construction Research Congress*, 2018, 233–42.

first hooghan, they undertook a process of thinking, talking, and acting to make their home within the Four Powered Mountains and to understand their relational position in the cosmos. Key to that thinking was *autonomy* as represented in the defensive and power potential of fire; *collaboration* represented by the communal cohesion between each homestead and the extended clan; and *responsibility* to one another through k'é concepts and the adornments inside the hooghan. Because they persistently sought balanced relation to other beings and places, the people were always in a state of reflection.

The hooghan songs tell us the people rejoiced in their accomplishments because they witnessed the fulfillment of their thoughts and words, and they understood that their daily efforts to live and thrive ensured their continuance. Returning to a building process that helps us live, thrive, and persist will require a building practice that is anticolonial and rooted in our unique ways of knowing and being. In this renewed approach, we must allow time for our people and nation to rejoice in our persistence so that we account for the hard-fought wins and so that we are continually engaged in reflection—leading to more thinking, talking, and planning. The hooghan building process offers a vision for us to rebuild our nation and reclaim territories that colonizers illegally seized. Moving beyond settler domination and exploitation is a difficult path, but our people's efforts, as documented in stories and songs, gift us with processes, knowledges, concepts, and theories to achieve this vision. The stories and songs offer an example of how to proceed and, importantly, it demonstrates that it is possible.

Instead of allowing the select few working in Diné governance to decide how we build homes and nation, the people need to participate in and direct daily conversations and actions to imagine and create our nation.

CHAPTER 4

BORDER TOWN (IM)POSSIBILITIES: REHEARSING DINÉ LIFE AND DEATH IN THE *NÁÁHWÍIŁBJ̨IHÍ STORY* AND *DRUNKTOWN'S FINEST*

"They say this land isn't a place to live, it's a place to leave. Then why do people stay?"

A woman's voice-over narration, *Drunktown's Finest*, (00:10)

In this chapter I interweave three instances of storytelling around and about the status of Gallup, New Mexico as a border town. In each of these stories, I rehearse Gallup to establish and then undo previous portrayals of the border town. This chapter's first anecdote meditates on my own and my extended family's experience of being subject to relocation, moved from lands where we had long lived and into Gallup by the US government under the authority of the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974 and the subsequent Navajo and Hopi Relocation Amendments Act of 1980. Rehearsing my family's experiences of relocation, I establish the border town context and represent the many ways that Diné people arrive in border towns.

The intersectional critiques of Diné historians and theorists Melanie K. Yazzie and Jennifer Nez Denetdale along with Diné and Comanche scholar Cheryl R. Bennett spell out the need to confront and understand the gendered violence of Gallup as a border town. To do so, I deploy Caribbean Studies scholar Tanya L. Shields's concepts of *feminist rehearsal* and *attentiveness to the flesh* to relate and analyze versions of the Nááhwíiłbj̨ihí story. I develop a theory and praxis of Diné storytelling as performance, one in which storytellers make choices about Diné people's existence in the present with

desires for future life and possibility. I then rehearse the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story to highlight entrapment as an aspect of the story that previous rehearsals overlooked.

In the third and last story, Gallup is the setting for *Drunktown's Finest*, a 2014 feature film written and directed by Sydney Freeland. In order to understand how Diné people seek belonging, create kinship, and forge community in border towns, I analyze *Drunktown's Finest*, which feature characters that I show as displaced and in constant motion. I focus on Felixia, a Diné transgender woman, to understand how Diné people disown and force our most vulnerable into movement. I analyze the one minute and fifty-six second opening shots of the film to deconstruct how colonial and capitalist machinations incapacitate and restrict Diné bodies in the border town. And despite the orchestrated plans for our death bound bodies, our supposedly reckless and wasted lives in the border town is considered our fault. This powerful opening sequence establishes the context to pose crucial questions about the complex power systems that structure border towns and direct how Diné people move and die. A focus on marginalized Diné people such as the unsheltered, LGBTQIA, and the economically disenfranchised help us better understand how Diné people negotiate the intersection of gender, class, and sexuality in the reservation border town. A focus on the most vulnerable also helps us know what it means for Diné understandings and implementation of kinship, gender, and community in our present and future homelands.

Here, with the concept of "feminist rehearsal," the analysis focuses on difference "because with each act (i.e., each reading of a perspective that is not our own), we get a broader understanding of, and a greater context for, our own realities, our own

complexities, and our own inconsistencies."[158] Such inconsistencies include regarding the border town as a site of possibility and change. Attention to the flesh, past and present, renders visible the racialized and gendered histories that dictate our bodies' mortality. As racialized and gendered sites produced within capitalism and colonialism, border towns are where we form and perform masculinity and femininity, serving to alternately suppress or produce life.

The border town simultaneously allows and disallows possibilities in a whirlwind of death, life, despair, and hope. That whirlwind of possibility represents disorganization and unpredictability and, at the same time, allows for birth, renewal, unity, and consensus. Caribbean born philosopher Frantz Fanon described the colonial situation as a "compartmentalized world" that is "inhabited by different species" which paints a situation with easily discernible Native and colonial segments.[159] The border town, on the other hand, is more complex than the Manichean world Fanon describes, instead characterized by complex movement in, through, and out of border towns. Fanon wrote that the colonial subject, because the compartmentalized colonial order constricts them, have "muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing."[160] The very conditions of colonialism and capitalism in reservation border towns produce the colonized's dreams of action, strength, and living. Like the dreams the compartmentalized world produces, the border

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[158] Tanya L. Shields, *Bodies and Bones: Feminist Rehearsal and Imagining Caribbean Belonging* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 25.
[159] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 5.
[160] Ibid., 15.

town kills and produces dreams. As such, the border town is a place where our desires grow and die and regrow again, where dreams are continually eradicated and new ones are born to replace them.

As an alternative to comprehending border towns as places to leave by dying or otherwise moving on, I offer, instead, that Diné people must stay and implement the praxis of ch'íhonít'i', *a way out*, seeking through political acts and modes of cultural production to find life in border towns by overturning oppressive structures that seek to exploit and eliminate Indigenous bodies and presence. Border towns, especially Gallup, can and must be places for Indigenous peoples to live and thrive.

My Life in the Border Town

I often recall how, in the early 1980s, my family ended up residing in the notorious border town of Gallup, relocated by federal acts that allocated moving expenses and dictated land division between the Navajo and Hopi in the Joint Use Area. My mother's family was subject to relocation because they lived on Hopi Partitioned Lands after the US government drew and enforced new territorial boundaries. That is how my mom, dad, siblings, and I moved to Gallup.

The US federal government's forced relocation program signaled both an end and a beginning for my family. Our relocation ended daily life among loving family, and upon the land we called home for generations. For most of my mom's extended family, it was the end of planting in our fields and tending to sheep.[161] We were no longer nestled

[161] My great-grandma Lady Wilson Nez, my grandma Irene Wilson Nez, and aunt Glenna Yazzie resisted forced relocation and continued to reside on lands controlled by the Hopi Nation. After my Grandma Lady

in the warm presence of our extended family where we could speak our language, practice culture, and hear stories. The end of life among family and upon our ancestral lands meant we had to start over in a new home and place.

In Gallup, we moved to Mentmore, a neighborhood with paved streets lined with single-story homes, where we were crammed next to unknown neighbors. Our views of juniper-topped mesas and wide-open spaces were gone. The border town required different work and school schedules and introduced new ideas and new daily interactions with multiple races. Also new was the acute racism we encountered in our neighborhood and town. At the playground or in fights, Whites and Hispanics launched racial epithets at us. Over time, we established kinship with other relocated Diné families who, like us, were thrown into the same neighborhood and border town, and whose extended family the government scattered to other border towns and to nearby cities like Phoenix. This was our hazing into American nuclear family life.

Although we eventually sold our home and moved away, we kept returning to Gallup, as this was where my paternal grandparents *went to town* on the first of every month to grocery shop, cash checks, eat a good meal at Earl's Family Restaurant, pay their pawn, restock their animal feed, and, for my grandfather, to get a drink. For my grandparents, the requisite monthly visit to Gallup was their only reprieve from the back breaking work of rural reservation life. I have vivid memories of visits to trading stores

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passed, Grandma Irene relocated to New Lands, Arizona, federally acquired lands to rehome displaced Diné families. After my grandma moved, my aunt Glenna was the last holdout from our family. My aunt Glenna was an admirable person because she continued to maintain life for her and her family up until she passed. It was a time of sadness and longing for my entire family as her passing marked the end of our family's remaining ties to our ancestral lands.

like Richardson Trading Company. Upon entering the store, I would stare behind the counters at the mounted game heads, rugs, and saddles. On other visits, I perused the antique turquoise and silver jewelry hoarded in glass display counters. I fantasized that I was there to purchase the oldest looking squash blossom or concho belt; a rescue because they looked jailed and lonely.

As I got older, I was not so enamored with the trading posts' haul. Instead, I would accompany my grandparents to the counter where they would splay their pawn tickets like a winning hand in a poker game. Rather than revealing a royal flush though, we told the trading post cashier, the dealer, that we wanted to pay the pawn interest.

Something was not right. Each visit to the trading post left me with a discomfort in my belly. The more we visited the bigger the discomfort and the longer it lingered. The discomfort gnawed at me, and it chewed its way out and I asked my mother, "what does interest mean?" She told me that each month a pawned item accrues interest, and, to keep it from going dead, minimally, you had to pay the interest.

I followed up with, "how do you get your stuff back?" She explained that paying for the interest did not reduce the amount of the original balance the item was pawned for. And to pay off the debt and regain your possessions, you needed to pay more than the interest to reduce the owed balance. I did not say anything else but I understood that my grandparents' pawned items were locked away for the foreseeable future because they only paid the interest. After the most urgent, nearly dead pawn were saved from the glass displays, like a stay of execution, we would leave the trading post and drive across the railroad tracks, under the overpass to the local market.

At the market, where local Indigenous artisans sell beaded works, medicinal plants, woodwork, and baked goods, we often ran into family and acquaintances. In those brief conversational encounters, we heard stories about people struck by cars, killed by trains, and dying from exposure. This is always how I understood Gallup, a place bustling with Diné life and creativity, against the backdrop of death and violence.

Despite its many problems, Gallup is where my family regrouped and began again after the federal government's genocidal policies and actions uprooted us. Decades after our removal, we still feel and know the ramifications of living through the direct, genocidal assault on our lives. Because of this, I recognize Gallup as a site with mixed and contending histories and experiences for a confluence of Indigenous peoples, where Diné life begins and ends, of settler domination and liberation from it. We left Gallup, but many families stayed. And every so often, we heard another of our relocated Diné relatives dying, much too young.

I often consider the possibilities and impossibilities that border towns produce for us Diné and other Indigenous peoples who come here for day visits, looking for refuge, to work, or for residence. It is no accident that when my family and many others were removed from our lands, we found ourselves in border towns, be it through forced relocation or seeking economic and educational opportunities. In colonialism, removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands is crucial and can be facilitated by ushering them into border towns and cities, where we are drained of life and labor. We must attend to how the body is uprooted, watched, made invisible, ruled, and murdered. By highlighting Indigenous experiences, we emphasize the resistive strategies beginning with the earliest

formations of the border town and continuing into present day. Doing so at once frames border town issues and documents the Indigenous will to live and thrive.

In 2014, Diné scholar and theorist Melanie K. Yazzie facilitated a workshop on settler colonialism in Big Mountain, the epicenter of disputed territories where Diné resistors, including my grandmothers and aunt, continued living on lands designated Hopi. After Yazzie shared how she helped participants diagram the relationship between Diné death and settler colonial life, she concluded: "Life for settler colonialism means death for Diné people. And what we think of as life is killed, stamped out, or banned in order to make way for settler colonialism to live and thrive. This is a Diné definition of settler colonialism: death."[162] These parameters of life and death track our movements in and out of border towns. Colonizers imagined and built border town systems of control and surveillance to continually oversee the Diné body from the moment of entry until its physical exit or death.

The dynamic, shifting relationship between settler colonial life and Diné death structures and organizes daily life for Diné people. As when 400+ families were forcefully relocated off their ancestral homelands. Or, in everyday interactions such as my grandparents becoming ensnared in an exploitative system that siphoned their meager, fixed income in a seemingly unending cycle of interest payments. For my grandparents, the life-death dynamic settled them in poverty's lap and just at the edge of non-existence. The settler capitalist system in the border town was designed to prevent

[162] Yazzie, "Contesting Liberalism, Refusing Death," 113.

them from thriving but left with enough life to drain them for profits. The narrow existence between death and profit can only be maintained through violence.

Diné historian Jennifer Nez Denetdale offers a critical perspective on border town violence such as assaults, racism, and discrimination at the hands of non-Indigenous settlers. Writing in "'No Explanation, No Resolution, No Answers': Border Town Violence and Navajo Resistance to Settler Colonialism," she asserts that border towns were established "to take advantage of non-Indian settlers who have appropriated aboriginal Indigenous lands through various means…and setting up trading posts and other businesses to profit off the Indian trade."[163] Denetdale's detailed history of border towns seen through Indigenous peoples' experiences unmasks the nature of violence in these towns and its function in settler colonialism. Denetdale shifts the "problem" and responsibility for border town violence onto those who colonized our territories and continue to terrorize our lands and peoples in an ongoing history of colonial violence that renders Indigenous bodies as problematic, that is, as drunks, homeless vagrants, and resource leeches. Denetdale counters the false casting of Indigenous bodies as the root problem by bringing Indigenous perspectives and experiences to the forefront and directing attention to ongoing colonization and violence.

Capitalist and patriarchal regimes that occupy and exploit border towns produce what Diné and Comanche scholar Cheryl R. Bennett describes as "a historical pattern of violence toward American Indians in the United States, particularly women, and

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[163] Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "'No Explanation, No Resolution, and No Answers': Border Town Violence and Navajo Resistance to Settler Colonialism," *Wicazo Sa Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 114.

especially in reservation border towns."[164] Bennett describes Officer Austin Shipley's murder of Loreal Tsinigine on March 2016 in Winslow, Arizona in "Another type of Hate Crime: Violence Against American Indian Women in Reservation Border Towns." Bennett asserts that violence against Indigenous women should be defined as a hate crime to demonstrate that "violence against women" is a "direct product of colonization and racism."[165] Bennett's analysis offers insight into the violence of patriarchy and settler colonialism, which works to maintain capitalist enterprises that underlie the machinations that the border town exacts and leverages against women and non-normative genders.

To develop a critical examination of gender and the body in border towns within settler colonialism and capitalism and to show how Diné people give shape to belonging, community, and resistance, I turn to Shields who explores resistance, rebellion, and challenge. Writing in *Bodies and Bones: Feminist Rehearsal and Imagining Caribbean Belonging*, Shields proposes to examine "formative moments for the purpose of undoing previous portrayals of gender—both masculinity and femininity—examining memory, and exploring history."[166] Even as we struggle to create meaning and life in places like the Caribbean or border towns, we can always retell and reexamine, that is rehearse, our stories, paintings, and monuments. Doing so reveals contested histories, identities, and experiences. It is incumbent upon us to rehearse our past and present, for it is through the rehearsive act of telling and listening to stories that we can construct new meanings and

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[164] Cheryl R. Bennett, "Another Type of Hate Crime: Violence Against American Indian Women in Reservation Border Towns," in *Crime and Social Justice in Indian Country*, ed. Marianne O. Nielsen and Karen Jarratt-Snider (The University of Arizona Press, 2018), 22.
[165] Ibid., 23.
[166] Shields, *Bodies and Bones*, 25.

new possibilities that involve, as Shields writes, "attentiveness to the flesh" which "reveals ways of living and dying, ways that are complicated and multifaceted, and that ask difficult questions about national belonging and citizenship."[167] Attentiveness to the flesh reveals ways of living and dying, illustrating how colonizers force Indigenous bodies into and out of the border town. Attention to the body within the hegemonic order of the border town reveals a Diné struggle for life, within a nuanced understanding of how many of our Diné relatives arrive there, whether by choice or force.

Where Shields framed her analysis of gender around national belonging and citizenship, I structure my analysis around k'é, the Diné relational system I discuss in chapter three. Kinship is the mode through which I make sense of belonging and unbelonging in Diné society. As I discuss in my analysis of *Drunktown's Finest*, kinship can and has been co-opted to serve the colonial order. And for us to restore the power of the k'é system, we must critique the ways kinship has failed our most vulnerable Diné relatives.

In the following pages, I rehearse the ancient story of *Nááhwíiłbįįhí*, which enables us to better navigate the border town as a place of death and life, of possibility and impossibility. To critically analyze the confluence of gender, violence, tradition, and geography in the border town and in Diné people's historical and contemporary understanding of power and coercion, I present two other tellings of the *Nááhwíiłbįįhí Story* to demonstrate Diné applications of the story to understand domination. I use these variants or rehearsals, a feature of oral traditional stories, to illustrate and elaborate on

[167] Ibid., 5.

storytelling and story performance as a Diné theory and praxis of rehearsal. I then extend the *Nááhwíiłbįįhí Story* to highlight the apparatus Nááhwíiłbįįhí arranges to maintain control and domination over life, an aspect of the story other tellings have not sufficiently developed.

Nááhwíiłbįįhí and Diné Rehearsal

Nááhwíiłbįįhí, *the One Who Wins You*, enslaved all life in Chaco Canyon.[168] He was light complected with blue eyes and white hair. He was bad-tempered, and he was frail. He wanted recognition from the Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii, but he was persistently rejected. These circumstances pushed Nááhwíiłbįįhí to devise fixed games. He then enticed plants, animals, and peoples to play his games so he could bring material possessions, land, and all life under his control. His fixed games allowed him to live in abundance maintained through despotic rule.

Nááhwíiłbįįhí's games created favorable circumstances so he could acquire power, control life and territory, and quell opposition. After a period of living under Nááhwíiłbįįhí's domination, a young boy wandered into the enslaved community. The Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii raised and taught the young boy to defeat their enslaving dominator, even Nááhwíiłbįįhí's wife was complicit in his takedown as she revealed his habits and how he cheated. When he was ready, the young boy challenged Nááhwíiłbįįhí.

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[168] I translate Nááhwíiłbįįhí as *the One Who Wins You* both as a rehearsive act to emphasize his actions and intentions to establish a system of domination. Nááhwíiłbįįhí is not the one who is gambling but is instead the individual that provides the gambling situation, a more apt analogy would be that the enslaved animals, peoples, and plants were the *gamblers* and Nááhwíiłbįįhí was the *house*. I prefer this translation because it emphasizes Nááhwíiłbįįhí's use of power and intention to dominate Diné people and life, bringing into focus his understanding of life as worthy of control, surveillance, and exploitation. Of course, this is not to erase previous translations or tellings of *the Gambler* but to add to and diversify the story.

Game after game, the boy slowly freed the people, other beings, and material possessions from Nááhwíiłbįįhí's rule and domination.

When Nááhwíiłbįįhí lost everything, the people forced him to leave. In some versions, the people put him into an arrow and shot him into the sky and he landed on the moon. Other versions say that he ascended into the clouds and resides in the universe. Still another version says that he returned to his father, the sun. In most versions, he shouted that he would return to exact revenge by fulfilling his original intent: to enslave and control life.[169]

Every iteration of a story is a rehearsal, one of many moments when we retell our history with great attention to detail or variations from the previous telling. Such is the case with the multiple story endings that I present in the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story. While the stories vary as to where Nááhwíiłbįįhí was banished, the variants agree on his discontent with losing power and his vow to return. Although I do not tell all versions and their details, each variant carries different meanings. For example, one version says that the oppressor was not killed because his father pleaded to preserve his son's life. In this version, we gain insight into Diné notions of justice and relationships within the broader Diné cosmological order.

The presence of these variants points to how the function of stories in Diné society is not to maintain supposed purity or adherence to an original. The story variation

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[169] For more on The Gambler, see Hastiin Bééshłigai, "The Gambler," *Leading the Way*, September 2014; Cheryl R. Bennett, "The Great Gambler: Indian Gaming, Crime, and Misconception," in *Crime and Social Justice in Indian Country*, ed. Marianne O. Nielsen and Karen Jarratt-Snider, Indigenous Justice (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2018), 54–69; Clark, "In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon"; and Albert Yazzie, "The Gambler and Hunting Practices," *Leading the Way*, September 2014.

is how stories keep their relevance and power. If the stories maintained a rigid, pure, and unchanging character, we could not use them to deconstruct present oppression and to imagine liberation. Instead, stories carry the traits of adaptability to help make sense of past and present situations, such as settler colonialism. The Nááhwíiłbįįhí story that I tell above is not the original story from which other versions emerge. To think about the stories as diverging or modified from an original is the incorrect way to view the story.

Even if we told stories word for word from one telling to the next, the condition and audience do not remain static.[170] To tell a story in the privacy of a hooghan among family can relay practices and tellings that account for the family's experiences and perspective. A grandparent, aunt, and uncle might retell a story they heard from their elders, recalling how they came to know the story and relaying to the listeners their responsibility to hear and retell the story when appropriate. This intimate storytelling varies from when a medicine person tells a story on their social media account or on KTNN 660, a Navajo Nation radio station.[171] In each of these tellings, the story might be the same but we call upon them through diverse relationships, a variety of contexts, and for distinct purposes. Stories, across these moments, relay certain beliefs and values that

[170] Here I find it useful to think about the performative aspect of storytelling, where each performance changes based on how the "stage" is arranged, and the effects a different actor has on how the story is told, making choices in intonation and establishing mood. For more on Indigenous performance, see Jaye T Darby, Courtney Elkin Mohler, and Christy Stanlake, *Critical Companion to Native American and First Nations Theatre and Performance: Indigenous Spaces*, 2020.

[171] KTNN 660, broadcasting since 1986, airs a regular Sunday segment featuring Diné storytellers. The regular series features individuals such as Wilson Aronilth Jr., who I cite throughout this dissertation. Since the proliferation of social media and YouTube, Diné medicine people and storytellers often use these platforms to share traditional stories and lessons. Individuals such as Rita Gilmore and Avery Denny regularly share their knowledge with a broad Diné audience.

can either proliferate or constrict life.[172] The stories we tell shape how we envision belonging, home, resistance, liberation, gender, sexuality, and Dinéness. In storytelling moments, we make decisions that structure how we narrate our present and future lives and that determine the contours of how we include and exclude.

Storytelling, through the various performances and venues, is a co-constructive process where speakers and listeners participate to re-enact our shared past and unfolding present, remembering and reminding ourselves of who we are, where we come from, and where we desire to go. Storytelling moments, because we co-construct them, allow for *all* participants to *make* the shared present and future, representing an inclusive process that seeks to embrace *all* Diné people. The co-constructing act of storytelling moves us toward the ideal of long, balanced, happy, and healthy life of SNBH I outline in chapter one. Stories, then, allow us to enact principles of life flourishment, an ethic that goes against the very practices of exclusion I describe in chapter two where the court leveraged stories to fit settler colonialist aims.

Telling stories, just as I have above, grounds us in our past by reminding us of where our people came from, calling upon our knowledge and experiences. Arguing against the separation of story and history, Denetdale asserts that they "cannot be separate" in the Diné context "because storytelling is a valid form of historical

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[172] This dissertation nuances the ways that Diné people imagine their present and future through storytelling. As I illustrate in chapter two of this dissertation, stories are always political because they sustain or counter oppressive logics. The Navajo Supreme Court's interpretation of an origin story, for example, sustained settler logic of elimination when it established a boundary and put Christopher Deschene outside the fluency-based definition of Dinéness.

production."[173] To this, I add that stories serve a vital function in how we make sense of the future. Such is the case with how Diné people tell and apply the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story to present circumstances.

I offer an example from Ferlin Clark's *In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*, which shares his conversation with Senator Jack Jackson, Sr. about the establishment of Navajo Community College, now named Diné College. In detailing the establishment and purpose of Diné College, Senator Jackson invokes the *Nááhwíiłbįįhí* story, which the Senator uses to characterize the relationship between the US Federal Government and Diné people. In the story, the government occupies the oppressive role of Nááhwíiłbįįhí, while education and educational institutions represent a route toward attaining self-determination.[174] This application of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story makes explicit the paternalistic and controlling role of the federal government in Diné life. By positioning education as the means of overcoming that paternalism, Senator Jackson constructs a future that moves beyond the government's invasive presence in daily Diné life.

Another perspective comes from "The Great Gambler: Indian Gaming, Crime, and Misconception." Here, Bennett uses the story to describe Diné historical perspectives on gaming and its potential entrapments. According to Bennett, before the eventual approval of gaming by the Navajo citizenship, "the story of the Great Gambler has been a main factor behind the decision of the Navajo people to continuously vote against

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[173] Denetdale, "Remembering Our Grandmothers: Navajo Women and the Power or Oral Tradition," 25.
[174] Clark, "In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon," 193–95.

gaming."[175] Bennett's analysis invokes the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story to make sense of a new feature in Diné life, to read the story as a literal warning of gambling. The risk of a losing situation warns Diné people that their approval of casinos could invite loss, addiction, and, more importantly, the possibility of losing themselves. She positions the story as forewarning the arrival of casinos among Diné people.

Both Senator Jackson's and Bennett's use of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story maintain the narrative arc while applying the story to different circumstances. Neither application is wrong or less authentic. Each uses the story as an analytic framework to make sense of the contemporary political, education, and economic aspects of Diné life. This is exemplary of Diné story rehearsal, for the story is broad enough to apply to many instances of abusive power but specific enough to serve as a critical framework for deconstructing oppressive power. Both story applications aid in the deconstruction of Diné political life, as Senator Jackson's telling critiques colonial relationships and Bennett's use helps us understand casinos, which I view as a critique of economic development discourses that capitalism imposes. In these story variations, the act of gambling is always a losing game, it can and will take everything.

The story's adaptability to numerous oppressive situations and liberatory potentials indicates the power in Diné stories. The story's diverse application shows how Diné people consider and counter domination in the past and present to defend life. The application of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story to different scenarios shows how Diné storytelling as represented in oral tradition practices set forth a theory of Diné rehearsal.

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[175] Bennett, "The Great Gambler: Indian Gaming, Crime, and Misconception," 65.

Contemporary rehearsal of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story shows its analytic function for deconstructing present domination and the threats to land, sovereignty, material possession, language, and the body.

Nááhwíiłbįįhí's return occurs in the context of domination, whether by colonialism, capitalism, or similarly oppressive conditions that hegemonic regimes establish. In border town contexts, rehearsing, retelling the story of Nááhwíiłbįįhí's return provides a way of naming, recognizing, challenging, and, ultimately, defeating our oppressors. To restore our Diné people, our flourishing life, I offer an analysis that highlights and nuances what previous rehearsals did not fully develop. By extending the meaning of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story, I show the political nature of Diné stories, and, in so doing, demonstrate stories as cultural acts with political aims, with distinct themes of domination and liberation.

Nááhwíiłbįįhí's desire to bring all life under his control required him to act in ways antithetical to foundational Diné ideas of life. To maintain ownership and rule, he had to think of himself, prioritize only his needs and desires, doing anything and everything to accomplish this end above and beyond all others. To meet his ends, he had to construct a system, the games, to facilitate the enslavement and control of people and their material possessions.

If we maintain focus on Nááhwíiłbįįhí's actions and intent to win lives, then we must grapple with the apparatus he constructs to facilitate the enslavement of Diné people. He did not force the people into these gambling acts, nor did the people willingly place themselves in these situations. Instead, Nááhwíiłbįįhí arranged the gambling

circumstances with the exact purpose that looked as if they had a chance, and as if the people did so by their own choice. His systemic approach speaks to the people's participation in a relationship in which he controlled the terms and outcomes for them to lose everything about their life. The people did not merely give away themselves, their ways of life, and most valuable possessions, it was orchestrated within a structure designed for control and domination. Once caught up in this relationship, they found it difficult to remove themselves from the cycle of exploitation and death because Nááhwíiłbįįhí arranged the gambling apparatus for this purpose. Noteworthy is how he leveraged kinship in this system as an entry point for those relatives gambling to free their family, only to find themselves also enslaved.

In the gamble of capitalism, Diné people enter the border town in a relationship, under specific rules that usually favor the "house." The reservation border town represents a capitalist society that takes from us and aims to consume life and lifeways. It aims to take our language, livelihood, and lives from us. In this case, Nááhwíiłbįįhí intentionally fixed games in his favor. In capitalism, we hear about the benefits capitalism bestows on humankind, and that without capitalism, we would supposedly be an unevolved, undeveloped, and backward people, diseased and marked for early death. Because of capitalism's gifts, we are told that we too can win, that we too are destined for success and glory.[176] Capitalism sells the possibility, a dream, of living with plenty

[176] I often recall the 2015 Chrysler 300 commercial titled "The Kings & Queens of America" narrated by actor Peter Dinklage. In the voiceover, Dinklage says "There is no royal blood in this country. Nothing is reserved for anyone. It's all just out there, waiting for someone to reach out and take it. And the ones who do, these are the kings and queens of America." Colonization has relied heavily on the false idea that America was an empty paradise free for the taking. When Indigenous peoples are included in this story, the

without want.[177] Colonizers arrange capitalism so that belief in the chance of winning is the only requirement to participate. It does not matter that many people lose in capitalism and that only a very select few representing the "house" benefit from such a system.

The apparatus of control and domination evident in the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story has been overlooked, but it is vital for mapping and countering dominating power such as settler colonialism. Understanding the systemic forces at play requires us to illuminate and confront the politics of our domination, and it urges us to grapple with our stories and traditions as both political and cultural. Not engaging with the politics structuring our lives is an utter failure of Diné life seeking theories and practices. Ignoring the political is why a simple return to tradition or deployment of stories as only cultural can never move us beyond the settler colonial death drive. As in Senator Jackson's use of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story, education without a direct challenge to settler colonial orders is not sufficient to overcome the colonizer's paternalism. To emphasize the need to elaborate

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American imagination relegates Indigenous peoples to positions of savagery, heathenism, or cannibalism. In this narrative, not only is America free for the taking, those who partake in the plundering are rewarded. Needless to say, America was never empty nor is it free for the taking.

[177] James Belich, in "Settler Utopianism? English Ideologies of Emigration, 1815-1850," writes about emigration to settler colonies and identifies the ideologies that fueled mass movement of people to settler colonies. Belich makes a distinction between formal settlerism and informal settlerism ideologies that undergirded different classes of people's visions of life in settler colonies. He writes that "formal and informal settler literature, or settlerism for short, agreed that emigration would enhance the lives of common folk through better wages, and provide them with opportunities for social promotion." The vision that formal and informal settlerism put forth differed in their expectations, where informal settlerism relied on "the idea of abundance without work" while formal settlerism "always stressed the need for hard work; informal settlerism emphasized that fertility and abundance diminished it." These distinction and differing ideas about how settler utopianism manifested among these differing perspectives is useful to understand the dominant formation and implementation of utopianism in the US settler state, especially as it pertains to capitalism. The distinction between formal and informal settlerism matters little in settler state formation because both forms of settlerisms rely on visions and expectations the depend on settler theft and occupation of Indigenous lands. That is, the land to be worked and the abundance to be gained belonged to Indigenous peoples. See James Belich, "Settler Utopianism? English Ideologies of Emigration, 1815-1850," *Liberty, Authority, Formality: Political Ideas and Culture, 1600-1900*, 2008.

the systemic features that orchestrate how colonizers herd our Indigenous (racialized and gendered) bodies through and around the border town, I briefly return to Officer Shipley's murder of Loreal Tsinigine in March 2016.

Officer Shipley, responding to a report of shoplifting, tracked then gunned down 27-year-old Tsinigine on the street of Winslow, Arizona.[178] In the ensuing uproar, many were upset that, once again, police violence and brutality in the border town led to a relative's murder.[179] Her family, community organizers, and Navajo Nation leadership fought for justice but Shipley was never charged or held accountable for the murder. As events unfolded, I noticed that many Diné and non-Diné people moved to blame Tsinigine for the shooting with comments like: "you shouldn't steal if you don't want to deal with the cops," "she should have been home with her kids instead of out drinking," or "she shouldn't have attacked the police officer."

Responding to such remarks, I wrote an opinion letter to the *Navajo Times* editor in August 2016 to express my frustration with the blame shifting. I argued that the proffered reasons were a matter of convenience as the police and settler state hardly need an excuse to execute Black and Indigenous peoples. As I wrote back then:

> We, as brown people, know that even compliant, crimeless, weaponless, and sober brown people are shot and killed by the police (a recent high profile example is Philando Castile's shooting and death which was streamed live on

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[178] For more on women of color experiences with policing, see Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police Violence against Black Women and Women of Color* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017). This source also includes a brief discussion of Loreal Tsinigine's murder (98-99).

[179] Ersula J. Ore, noting her use of *murder* instead of *killing* and *slaying*, says she "sought to use *murder* not in the legal sense, but rather to denote the killing of black people by the state…I was not speaking of individual intent only, but also naming a system that devalues and destroys black citizens through homicide" (xiv). Likewise, I use murder to emphasize the power systems that facilitate and allow the murder of Indigenous citizens in the present and past. For more, see Ersula J. Ore, *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019).

> Facebook by his wife). In Loreal's case, the presence of alcohol and an accusation of shoplifting is a convenient circumstance.
>
> Another example of Indigenous people being killed based on an accusation is when Col. Chivington and his soldiers massacred Black Kettle and his people at Sand Creek based on the accusation that warriors from Black Kettle's encampment were raiding and attacking white settlers.[180]

What I intended to highlight then, as I do now, is that settler violence, historical and present, is meant to produce Diné death; however gruesome or unjust. Because such bodies are hypervisible and surveilled, they only need to kneel or contest a pipeline for the patriotic vitriol and settler violence to break the floodgates. The controlled body is punished and often killed for moving suddenly, getting angry, raising a fist, yelling, contesting, or breathing. Under such restrictions, the body will fall out of line, even if by accident or for simply being human. The state is structured to police, regulate, and dictate life before birth until death. Then after death, colonizers fetishized our bodies in museums and private collections, or they display us in the streets after our murder.[181]

Andrew Curley, a Diné geography scholar, explains the violent history and systemic assault on quality of life that Indigenous peoples must struggle to live and to create meaning and possibility:

> We inherited these conditions of structural violence as descendants of people who were wrongfully forced from our lands and left with little resources to sustain ourselves. Our ways of life were attacked, destroyed, and displaced. We were compelled to sell our labor for wages to our colonizers in order to survive. And we did this with great resentment and anger. It is frustration with this

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[180] Jerome Clark, "Stop Blaming Loreal for Her Murder," *Navajo Times*, August 4, 2016, sec. Opinion, https://navajotimes.com/opinion/letters/letters-hb-2023-make-harder-navajos-vote/.
[181] Both Loreal Tsinigine's and Michael Brown's dead bodies were left in the street for hours after their murder.

> displacement that leads us to break petty laws such as shoplifting or to resist the authority of the police.[182]

In the settler colonial and capitalist border town contexts, people can lose their lives due to gendered violence, lack of shelter, or various hate crimes. Capitalism has taken our land and enslaved the people in an economic system that continually takes and deteriorates our bodies. Colonizers design their systems of power and the built environment, as in the border town, to reflect its domination, desire, and hope. Just as Nááhwíiłbįįhí designed a system of control through his games, the people are beholden to the border town ideological and physical apparatus.

Oppressive power restricts and confines possibilities, but in so doing, it forces creativity and modes of production that work in opposition to those same hegemonic orders. People must physically remain, which is to survive harsh conditions so that they can live someday. Tsinigine had to survive under a power regime that surveilled her body and experiences along racialized and gendered power axes. Curley's analysis explains what it means to survive as a non-normative person in domination, whether it is heteronormativity or settler colonialism. In both instances, it is convenient and lazy to lay the blame of theft on the individuals undertaking those actions, as if our bodies flung into a violent death is produced outside the history of settler violence and domination.

The dominated and controlled body must then learn to navigate these confinements and learn to find life in liminal, in-between spaces. For as omnipresent as

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[182] Andrew Curley, "Speaking out against Border Town Violence: The Killing of Loreal Tsingine and Our Community's Growing Response," *The Red Nation* (blog), accessed November 12, 2020, https://therednation.org/speaking-out-against-border-town-violence-the-killing-of-loreal-tsingine-and-our-communitys-growing-response/.

domination might seem, there remain locations beyond its reach. As we navigate these spaces, we establish areas and room for movement. In the process, we come to know our bodies and learn to move outside the colonizers' critical eyes and deadly hands. The Nááhwíiłbįįhí story is not only about the desire to control, win, and enslave an entire people and their way of knowing. The story and events detail *how* Nááhwíiłbįįhí dominated the people, preventing them from living as they desired and hoped. Under the rule of Nááhwíiłbįįhí, life was suppressed: living under the watchful, despotic eye of their enslaver, the many beings under his control were not meant to *live* on their terms.

***Drunktown's Finest*: Movement In and Out of the Border Town**

In Sydney Freeland's 2014 *Drunktown's Finest*, the camera follows three young Diné relatives in Dry Lake, fictionalized Gallup. Felixia John (Carmen Moore), a transgender woman, seeks a modeling opportunity with Women of the Navajo, based on the real-life calendar.[183] She seeks a way out of Dry Lake after a fellow contestant outs her, sabotaging her modeling opportunity. Another of the primary characters is Luther "Sick Boy" Maryboy (Jeremiah Bitsui), a soon-to-be father, days from joining the military with hopes of attaining the means to care for his family. The police arrest Sick Boy on two separate occasions, first for punching a police officer and a second time for

[183] I note that in 2016 Sharnell Paul auditioned for the Women of the Navajo calendar, passing the first round of auditions. After the calendar advertised on social media that Paul had advanced to the second round, Paul was outed as transgender, leading the owners to revoke the opportunity. See Terry Bowman, "Transgendered Woman Denied Spot in Calendar," *Navajo Times*, April 7, 2016; Terese Marie Mailhot, "Women of the Navajo Calendar Reject Trans Woman," IndianCountryToday.com, April 14, 2016, https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/women-of-the-navajo-calendar-reject-trans-woman-UEpf5wptvUS8pWa7pyO-qw; Pamela J. Peters, "Navajo Transgender Women's Journey of Acceptance in Society," Medium, October 11, 2018, https://medium.com/@pamelajpeters/navajo-transgender-womens-journey-of-acceptance-in-society-53095de73b0a.

aggravated assault after he beats his mother's boyfriend. His actions foreclose his military enlistment. Third is Nizhoni Smiles (Morningstar Angeline). Adopted by a non-Diné couple, she has come home for the summer from Michigan where she attends private school. She looks for her birth parents while volunteering at a local shelter.

The film's lead characters endure uncertainty that puts them in unstable, perpetual motion. Sick Boy, the only primary character to reside in Dry Lake, struggles with family responsibilities, drinking, and criminal activity. Sick Boy's pregnant partner pressures him to prioritize his family and demands reliability and commitment. He struggles with more than the drinking and reneging on responsibilities, as he grapples to define his masculinity within the boundaries of gang involvement, the military, and Diné tradition. Felixia lives on the reservation with her grandparents but regularly visits town, sneaking in and out her bedroom window. Felixia, a sex worker, connects with customers through social media. At a party, she makes out with Sick Boy and when he discovers that she is transgender, she apologizes as she flees. Felixia, after her modeling opportunity is revoked, decides to accept a week-long invitation from a man in New York. Nizhoni, who does not know her biological family, has nightmares that make it tough for her to sleep. Her adopted mother, a physician, prescribes medication for her insomnia upon Nizhoni's insistence. Although Nizhoni is determined to find her family, she fears the supposed reservation dangers that her adopted parents instilled in her. Her parents believe that looking for her family will only lead to hurt. The compilation of their experiences represents the instability of border town life. Their experiences underscore the diverse

ways that domination responds to different bodies, deciding how and where they can move or not move.

The film opens with a night-to-morning time-lapse of Dry Lake that captures the blare of a train horn, street light flickers, vehicle headlights darting through streets, and dark clouds moving toward the horizon. A woman's voice narrates over the establishing shot: "They say this land isn't a place to live, it's a place to leave. Then why do people stay?"[184] The question of *why people stay*, asks us to consider why Diné people and other Indigenous peoples continue to reside, shop, and work in border towns despite the daily assault on our bodies. Extending from this question, we must ask, how do people get locked in "life losing" relationships with the border town apparatus? The story of Nááhwíiłbįįhí offers a way to understand why people and relatives "stay" or continue to move in and out of the border town despite the violence and death. Just as with the apparatus that Nááhwíiłbįįhí arranged, the settler colonial and capitalist machinations lock the people into complex relationships that move our people through and out of the border town. We stay in and leave border towns for numerous reasons, per the example of my family. While not everyone stays, the question of why people remain asks us to look at the Diné body.

The time-lapsed establishing shot is followed by a series of b-roll footage of the border town, with Hank Snow's "Beggar to a King," as performed by the popular 1960s Navajo band Wingate Valley Boys, sadly droning overhead. The series of shots capture border town life for Indigenous peoples, showing them in various states of movement and

[184] Sydney Freeland, *Drunktown's Finest*, 2014, (00:10).

immobility. One shot shows a man dressed in Wranglers and a long sleeve, western shirt; he lies unconscious and curled in a fetal position under the shade of a tree. In another shot, an Indigenous woman in a plaid shirt with sleeves rolled up, beads while joking and laughing with a person off camera. In yet another shot, Freeland shows three men in a drunk tank. One is in a supine position on a metal frame bed is shirtless and in tattered jeans, another is propped against the wall in a blue hooded sweater with head hanging to his left, and the last lies on his stomach in the direction of the man on the bed; his legs extend toward the camera but off screen.

The opening shots represent Indigenous peoples as more than stationary and inebriated as it includes shots of youth riding bikes and on skateboards. And Freeland films others walking, posing, and talking. The juxtaposition of immobile and mobile Indigenous people reveals the complex movements and restrictions the border town enacts on Indigenous bodies. The youth simultaneously represent possibilities, vitality, and freedom, but as it is interlaced with the immobile and restricted, it gestures toward the damaging and deadly future the border town often produces. The beading woman, one of many artisans who sell their work in Gallup, represents the informal economy that Indigenous peoples arranged and maintain through their creativity and labor. All the people represented in the opening footage are entangled in border town life and death.

The opening b-roll compilation in *Drunktown's Finest* includes scenes of Gallup that offer a brief but vital glimpse into the complex economic, social, and political dynamics of border town life. Freeland includes shots of pawn shop lined streets, including the Richardson Pawn Shop I mention above, and a train running on tracks that

cut through Gallup. The railroad depicted in the film runs alongside I-40 and through Flagstaff, Winslow, Holbrook, Gallup, and Albuquerque, stringing the border towns like beads on a necklace fit for a colonizer. The footage also presents the border town's layers of social class by way of shots that move from large, upscale homes to dilapidated mobile homes. Through these shots, Freeland tells us that Dry Lake is a town structured by colonialism and capitalism, producing a situation of haves and have nots, exploited and exploiter, mobile and immobile, living and dead.

Hopi-Tewa artist Aaron Yava, in his book *Border Towns of the Navajo Nation*, depicts Indigenous peoples in Farmington, Gallup, and Holbrook in a series of pencil drawings.[185] Just as with the opening shots of *Drunktown's Finest*, Yava captures inebriated, inert, and seemingly lifeless bodies of Indigenous men and women throughout the three border towns. Yava includes two renderings that show his experience of getting assaulted and arrested by the police in Farmington, New Mexico. In the foreword to Yava' book, Laguna writer Leslie Marmon Silko writes that "…these scenes are true, and they must not be hidden. To hide them, is in a sense, denying that these Indian peoples exist, denying that our cousins and uncles exist because they could be my cousins and uncles. Denial of ourselves and our own origins is one of the most devastating psychological weapons the Whites have ever found to use against us."[186]

Freeland and Yava represent the Indigenous bodies in various states of inebriation with some appearing dead. They present the immobile body as if this were their natural

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[185] Aaron Yava, *Border Towns of the Navajo Nation* (Alamo, CA: Holmgangers Press, 1975).
[186] Leslie Marmon Silko, foreword to *Border Towns of the Navajo Nation*, by Aaron Yava (Alamo, CA: Holmgangers Press, 1975).

state, incapacitated so as not to threaten non-Indigenous residents. Yava depicts women passed out and in vulnerable positions, some with exposed breasts. The border town as a gendered site sustains economies of sexual assault and sex work for femme relatives. In one rendering, a woman sits next to her passed-out partner as two men pass in the background, captioned "let's get his old lady?!" In another drawing, a woman is passed out in the bushes, trash and footprints surround her and her entire upper body is exposed. Her vulnerable position and surrounding footprints suggest her unconscious body was sexually assaulted. The rendering features the caption, "Eve waking up by the Little Colorado River."

Among the opening b-roll shots is Felixia, in heels and a jean skirt with embroidered pockets, hitchhiking back to the reservation. Felixia, arm extended and thumb raised, walks along a stretch of road. The camera pans out to a medium-wide shot just as a white dodge with a turquoise and gold New Mexico license plate pulls over. And in the final extra wide shot, the truck pulls away and in the foreground in the upper right-hand frame is a road sign that reads:

NOW LEAVING DRY LAKE

ENTERING

NAVAJO RESERVATION

In these shots, Felixia is already in movement, literally traversing the border as she moves between the reservation and the border town. From the film's outset, Felixia is displaced and forced into movement—not belonging, looking, fleeing. Yet, the film never provides an explanation for why Felixia is in exile. The ambiguity of her exile is more

confounding when we learn that her grandfather and grandmother continually reassure her of their love and acceptance. Why, then, is Felixia on the move? Why and what is she fleeing?

Jennifer Nez Denetdale notes that little is "understood or acknowledged" about "the amount of violence that Navajo lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people experience, both off and on the Navajo Nation."[187] What we do know, based on the limited documentation, is that trans Diné relatives experience ridicule and violence in and outside the reservation, and our social and political conditions often force non-conforming Diné people out of our families and nation. We know that individuals are ostracized and forced away from their families because of their non-conforming genders and sexualities. Many are left to find their way in the world after having suddenly found themselves homeless and without family.[188]

In 2016, the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission released "The Status of Navajo Women and Gender Violence" report after holding two work sessions with traditional practitioners and three public hearings where women and LGBTQ people gave testimonies.[189] The commission's report documents the violence thrust upon women and

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[187] Denetdale, "'No Explanation, No Resolution, and No Answers': Border Town Violence and Navajo Resistance to Settler Colonialism," 120.

[188] In this chapter, I scrutinize Diné people's application of kinship, whether by mis-application or lack of implementation, to see how and why we do not know adequately embrace all relatives. Bailey, writing on Black family ideology, offers fantastic insight into how family norms and expectations expel non-conforming peoples from their homes and families. For more, see Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[189] "The Status of Navajo Women and Gender Violence: Conversations with Diné Traditional Medicine People and a Dialogue with the People" (Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, July 26, 2016), https://www.nnhrc.navajo-nsn.gov/NewsReptsResolutions.html.

LGBTQ people and frames the violence as a human rights issue that Diné people cannot ignore. The report makes the hidden, ignored, and dismissed violence unavoidable so that we are required to grapple with the violent actions perpetuated by Diné and non-Diné people. The report, one of the few sources documenting these atrocities, offers a glimpse at the abhorrent conditions women and LGBTQ relatives deal with. Not all hostilities and violence toward LGBTQ people are unknown. The Navajo Diné Marriage Act of 2005, which prohibited same sex marriage, is key legislative action that sustains and amplifies a hostile environment for LGBTQ people.[190] The legislation, which the sponsor represented as promoting "strong families" and preserving and strengthening "family values," attacked non-conforming genders and sexualities.

I consider the formal and informal acts of violence, as captured in the human rights report and the marriage act, a failure of Diné kinship because they operate to exclude and eliminate. And it indicates the complex ways that Diné kinship norms and practices serve the settler colonial and capitalist regimes through rigid and unchangeable family ideologies that buttress heteronormativity. We must attend to kinship's entanglement with oppressive logics, thereby limiting our practice of kinship, leading to a fossilized relational system unresponsive to new experiences and understandings. Rather than changing our views on identity and finding ways to make room for our transgender relatives, we dig into rigid ideas that are counter to kinship principles. And we push our

[190] For the act language, see CAP-29-05 or Navajo Nation Code Title 9: Domestic Relations. For critical discussions of the act, see Denetdale, "Securing Navajo National Boundaries: War, Patriotism, Tradition, and the Diné Marriage Act of 2005"; Lloyd L. Lee, "Indigenous Knowledge in Transition: The Fundamental Laws of Diné in an Era of Change and Modernity," *Counterpoints* 379 (2011): 212–24.

relatives into the streets and cities away from our homes and families, we must ask: how has kinship become entangled with the border town apparatus? How do we unravel these complex relationships so that our kinship practices do not reaffirm settler colonial and capitalist aims to win our lives?

In the instance of Gallup, we must scrutinize the types of abandonment that occur because of gender, sexuality, lack of shelter, or economic disenfranchisement. And in *Drunktown's Finest*, we need to focus on Felixia's abandonment and exclusion that force her to flee. Once our Diné relatives are thrust into the border town, the systems that organize and maintain our instability ensure that, much like the film's characters, we never settle and instead we get caught in unstable, perpetual movement until we drop. To refuse exile and forced movement away from our homes and families counters the desire for our bodies to die or pass out from inebriation. As it stands, formal and informal violence launches Diné people into exile as they must keep moving to avoid death and vulnerability to assault, the elements, and policing.

Conveniently enough, by the film's end, Felixia, Sick Boy, and Nizhoni all find their way home and into the warm embrace of an unchanged but somehow more tolerant tradition and kinship that only need be practiced by the right, loving relatives. I challenge the proffered resolution because kinship and the illegibility of trans relatives that ousted Felixia and put her in exile cannot then somehow lovingly welcome her home. Denetdale's criticism of *Drunktown's Finest* contends that it "ignores the realities of Navajo people's experiences in border towns like Gallup, thereby making invisible and

sustaining injustices, hatred, and discrimination."[191] She explains that "when Native people are traumatized, they need only channel tradition and healing will begin. However, separating 'tradition' from the 'politics' of challenging structures of domination and exploitation individualizes responses to self-healing and keeps the undercurrents of a town like Gallup intact."[192] We must centralize settler colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy in our thoughts and actions to rectify and challenge the historical and contemporary violence that persist in our lives, in border towns and beyond. In this view, we need to be careful about how we frame tradition and kinship so that we do not overlook the systemic issues that cause violence and death.

At present, our understanding and practice of kinship in the Navajo Nation limits and suppresses life because it pushes illegible relatives out and into urban spaces and border towns, forcing them to undertake the labor of creating kinship and community outside their families and home. The act of pushing relatives outside the bounds of kinship represents one of the ways that oppressive power functions to eliminate Diné people and accomplishes the US settler state's desire to annihilate Diné futurity, nationhood, and ways of knowing and being.

Here I briefly discuss Diné drag performers and performances to elaborate how their storytelling acts work on and against the oppressive logics that sustain the exclusion and elimination of non-conforming Diné relatives. I consider their performances as rehearsing Diné belonging and identity, creating inclusive ideas around gender and

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[191] Denetdale, "'No Explanation, No Resolution, and No Answers': Border Town Violence and Navajo Resistance to Settler Colonialism," 120.
[192] Ibid.

sexuality that prioritize kinship and life. Diné drag and drag shows employ Diné storytelling practices that bring community together to co-construct stories of the Diné past and unfolding present. José Esteban Muñoz, the late Cuban American queer theorist, describes disidentification as a "mode of dealing with dominant ideology…one that neither opts to assimilate with such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology." For Muñoz, the strategy of working on and against "tries to transform a cultural logic from within."[193] Counter to settler state annihilation, Diné drag performers tell a different narrative that sustains life, futurity, and offers new ways of being relatives through efforts that transform from within.

On October 11, 2019, the Western Navajo Agency Fair presented the *Excuse my Beauty Drag Show* at the Tuba City Amphitheater. Mattee Jim, supervisor of the HIV Prevention Program for First Nations Community Healthsource and longtime advocate for transgender equality, served as the event emcee. Among the show performers were Anya Mann, Khloe Layla Malone, and Lady Shug. Jim's event narration, filled with humor, education, and Diné identity assertions, sets the terms by which the Diné audience receive vital information about LGBTQ people and issues. One such moment was when Jim asked the attendees about the significance of October 11. After several wrong guesses shouted from the audience, Jim shares that

> Today is National Coming Out Day, so happy coming out. Yaas, for those of you who are already out, fabulous! For those of you who have not come out and do want to come out, it's a little safer. There is support. There are people out there

[193] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.

> who do love you, if you decide to come out. Everybody has their own coming out process. So we are here to empower. We are here to give a good show. We are here also to give good recognition to the work that we do in our Native LGBTQ community.[194]

Jim, dressed in a silver and white sparkling panda suit, stands against the amphitheater stage as she informs the audience that the present environment needs to improve support for LGBTQ people. She uncompromisingly asserts the need for love and empowerment, telling the audience that this is one of the drag show's purposes.

These Diné drag shows become important settings for performers to tell stories with their bodies, movement, clothes, and musical choices. The performances show us how storytelling is rehearsive, where storytellers simultaneously narrate and make choices about who is included and excluded. Between performances, Jim notes that the drag show is on the mainstage with all its unavoidable grandeur. These performances, like the oral storytelling practices I elaborate above, bring our history and memory to bear and tell us of a past and future in which all Diné people have a place in our society. The drag shows sustain an ethic of care and inclusion that exceeds everyday dominative and exclusionary kinship. The concern with the people's overall wellbeing and persistence demonstrates an envisioning and praxis of being Diné that defeats and moves beyond the oppressive gender and sexuality norms of settler colonialism.

Lady Shug, the evening's second performer, in a silver sequin robe glides on stage with an occasional sway as Tina Turner's *Private Dancer* plays overhead.[195] She

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[194] Sumayyah Dawud, *Excuse My Beauty Drag Show at Western Navajo Fair*, 2019, (09:31), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFOCkOg8Ll4.

[195] Lady Shug is one of the more well-known Navajo drag performers. Stories about her can be found here: James Kleinmann, "Exclusive Interview: Navajo Drag Queen Featured on HBO's We're Here," accessed

mouths the lyrics as she gracefully moves across the stage, gesturing with her hands. Lady Shug occasionally extends her arms and she lifts and drops her shoulders in a shrugging motion, obviously mimicking Turner's familiar arm and head movements. The music transitions to *What's Love Got to Do with It?* and Lady Shug exits stage right. She re-emerges to the right of the stage de-robed, now in a red sequin button-up tunic over a red form fitting thigh length dress and silver bootie sandals with crisscrossed webbing.[196]

Lady Shug continues moving about the graveled half circle between the stage and audience, continuing her Tina-esque arm movements, foot work, and head nods. The music transitions to an audio conversation from the film *What's Love Got to Do with It*, where Tina Turner and Ike Turner argue over show profits, expenses, and Tina's performance quality. The argument quickly turns violent as Ike is heard striking Tina. As Lady Shug reenacts the scene, she throws herself against the stage in sync with the strike. And, just as the assault escalates, Lady Shug thrusts into a fast-paced performance of "Proud Mary" as she rips off yet another layer of clothes. She spins quickly as the sparkling red fringes reach outward. Lady Shug moves through the audience interacting

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March 16, 2021, https://thequeerreview.com/2020/06/05/exclusive-interview-navajo-drag-queen-featured-on-hbos-were-here/; Jeremy Meek, "Photos of Queer Life on a Sprawling Native American Reservation," November 14, 2017, https://www.vice.com/en/article/43np4q/photos-queer-native-american-life-navajo-nation. You can also view her participation in Peter LoGreco, "Farmington, New Mexico," *We're Here* (HBO, May 14, 2020).

[196] I originally described Lady Shug's attire as 'red sequin skirt with silver heels' but this was not adequate. Upon recognizing this, I sheepishly asked my fashion knowledgeable friend/sister Carmenlita Chief to help me describe her outfit, which she did willing. I tell this here because it was important to me to pay homage to the performer's choices, as I am sure Lady Shug gave great consideration to the entirety of her performance, including her outfit. This is also to say that clothes are never neutral and they serve to challenge and affirm identities. The clothing choices themselves tell a story. My analysis of the performance as "working in and against" depends as much on the clothing choices as it does on gender and sexuality norms. Given this, it is necessary to pay attention to and appropriately describe the entirety of artistic choices, including clothes.

with the crowd and collecting tips, and she remains among the audience as her performance closes.

Lady Shug's performance begins on stage, presenting herself as an elegant spectacle who is distanced and elevated from the audience. The performance progresses, she transforms before the audiences' eyes as she moves closer. Those familiar with the *What's Love Got to Do with It* film know of the impending violence about to erupt. Those who are unfamiliar are likely surprised by the serious and sudden turn from elegance and entertainment. Still from afar, the audience must witness the violence she endures. With fear in her face, she is thrashed backward by an invisible but familiar violent perpetrator. And when she finally moves beyond the violence, she energetically, as if with renewed life, circulates among the people.

The violence in Lady Shug's performance is central to our ability to comprehend and confront the exclusions that our non-conforming relatives endure. In this performance, we learn that her exclusion is maintained through violence. Lady Shug intentionally performs an extremely violent, yet known, relationship. The settler state maintains and controls the cis-heteronormative and capitalist orders by enacting violence on bodies and identities like Lady Shug's. She must move through and beyond the violence before she can break free and move among the people. Lady Shug brings the violence center stage, making visible those informal and formal violence that pervade border towns and our homes.

Jim, "I know we as Diné, the word 'Diné' is of the people, so all of us in here are of the people. Bila' 'ashdla'íí danidlį. We're all five-fingered ones. We have a lot of

tradition in our culture where we don't push anybody away."[197] This is the vision that Jim and Lady Shug offer our Diné people. A future in which we can move forward as bila' 'ashdla'íí, where all people are part of the community and are embraced with love and support. Their vision is a direct response to the displacement and violence that current systems maintain. Rather than moving toward displacement, they urge us to move toward an ethic of kinship that protects all our relatives, rather than feeding our people into oppressive and deadly border towns. The drag shows imagine alternate possibilities as they challenge cis-heteropatriarchal orders, beliefs, and values. The performances create moments that challenge Diné views and beliefs of gender and sexuality. Our relatives perform and rehearse themselves back into our Diné stories, from whence they were erased.

I return to the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story once more to illustrate how our stories become entangled with colonization and constrict life. One version of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story that I heard excluded his wife, leaving out her vital role to end Nááhwíiłbįįhí's domination and enslavement of Diné people. In Senator Jackson's version, he describes how Nááhwíiłbįįhí's wife instructed the little boy "to learn everything" he could "about how the great gambler lived and survived." She taught him "the language, emotions and everything about the Great Gambler."[198] In this version, the people's liberation is imagined and realized only because of the experience and knowledge gained by her unique position in the oppressive order. Her subjection to the axes of domination and

[197] Sumayyah Dawud, *Excuse My Beauty Drag Show at Western Navajo Fair*, (15:56).
[198] Clark, "In Becoming Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon," 94.

coercion simultaneously allowed her to gain the needed knowledge and experience to end his domination. I do not intend to represent her experiences as a necessary circumstance; rather I highlight the need to understand how power dominates and controls specific bodies. An attention to how power functions in this case urges a need for power analyses at different locations, revealing how power functions as interlocked and multiplicative.

The inconsistencies between the versions reveal stories as gendered sites, where the storyteller's exclusion of women erases them from Diné stories, families, and communities.[199] The elision of women, in stories such as this, is a choice that reaffirms gender oppression and erases women from the past, present, and future. The decision to remove women from this story renders resistance and liberation as a masculine enterprise, and marginalizes women's significance in overcoming our oppression. We must question the masculine character-driven telling of the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story and the ways it advances patriarchal notions and practices of domination and resistance that narrate and limit the present and future. Instead of perpetuating dominative orders such as patriarchy, we must pay attention to gender, following Shields's feminist rehearsal, to encourage "unity and consensus building through confrontation with overlapping histories of knowledge, power, and freedom."[200] An attention to women and LGBTQ struggles and erasures, as in the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story and *Drunktown's Finest*, maps and

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[199] The other aspect to consider in the dynamics of how story narration and choices determine and form Diné people is Paul G. Zolbrod's criticism of Washington Matthews, author of Navajo Legends (1897), who "arbitrarily deleted passages dealing overtly with sex" (10). While Matthews characterizes these deletions as arbitrary, I understand them as intentional deletions that narrate particular ideas of sex and sexuality among Diné people to fit another's norms and beliefs. It is in acts such as these that our stories become moments in which people make choices about who and what we are that register these acts as political sites. For more, see Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane'*.

[200] Shields, *Bodies and Bones*, 1.

counters the multifaceted ways oppression is maintained in settler colonialism and patriarchy.

In the instance of Gallup, we should ask ourselves about the types of abandonment that have occurred because of gender, sexuality, lacking shelter, or economic disenfranchisement. And in the film *Drunktown's Finest*, we must consider the types of abandonment occurring for Felixia, Sick Boy, and Nizhoni. As Diné people, we have an expansive idea of kinship, but it has become entangled with oppressive logics so that it limits our application and it becomes fossilized because we do not incorporate new experiences and understandings. Rather than changing our views on identity and finding ways to make room for our transgender relatives, we dig into rigid ideas counter to kinship principles that force our relatives into the streets and cities away from our homes, families, and nation. This is unacceptable and we must challenge ourselves and develop new pathways to bring our people home. The start of bringing our people home is to confront the formal and informal violence that we, Diné people, cause. Returning to the opening epigraph, the border town, currently thought of "as a place to leave," is the incorrect way to approach our position. We must approach Gallup as a place to live and thrive by confronting the violence forced upon our bodies.[201]

[201] Jake Skeets gives a moving and beautiful portrait of the border town in his award winning book of poems. I consider his complex look into border towns another rehearsal of the border town that helps to nuance how we arrive and move throughout the border towns. Jake Skeets, *Eyes Bottle Dark with a Mouthful of Flowers: Poems* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2019).

Ch'íhoníť'i'

I learned the concept of ch'íhoníť'i', *a way out*, from my mother Marlene Clark. She learned it from her mom, Mary Wilson Nez. As a child watching my mom weave, I noticed she wove a single line that cut across the rug's border, leaving a path out of the rug. To visualize this, imagine a framed painting with a single line that matches the background color extending across the frame. I asked her about its significance, she said it was so her thoughts and imaginative capacities were not trapped in the rug. Years later, I began to understand Diné people's concern with protecting our imagination and creative productions from becoming entangled in singular possibilities. As with weaving, we bring our hopes, inspirations, and ambitions to the imaginative and creative process as Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii, Empowered Earth Surface People. The attention to possibilities and impossibilities through our imaginative and creative productions is a recognition and appreciation for the power potential of Diné people in cultural and political contexts.

In *Navajo Courts and Navajo Common Law*, Raymond Austin, Diné scholar and former Justice of the Navajo Supreme Court, writes about ch'íhoníť'i' as it pertains to conflict and discord resolution in modern Navajo Nation courts. Austin writes that Diné traditionalists "believe that a person's thoughts, creativity, personality, words, songs, or prayers could stagnate inside anything the person creates or undertakes if 'a way out' is not provided."[202] Austin uses this precept in the court to illustrate that in any scenario there must be a path out for the people involved. This also tells us how acts of creating

[202] Austin, *Navajo Courts and Navajo Common Law*, 132.

can bind possibility. I take this to mean that by becoming overly consumed with a single possibility or outcome, our creativity becomes engulfed by its own possibility.

The practice and philosophy of *a way out* are foundational to imagining and creating processes. Impermanence and the lack of finality allow us to create with degrees of freedom not otherwise possible. For imaginative and creative acts to maintain their power potential, the political and cultural creators and imaginers must know their work is not permanent but arranged in a field of possibility and abundance. For Diné people to imagine and create or undertake radical imagination, we must maintain a way out so we allow for multiple futures all having liberatory potentials.[203] If we commit to one idea or possibility, we risk pursuing that envisioned possibility to our detriment and destruction, even long after it is no longer viable. Whereas ch'íhonít'i' allows us to adjust and modify our envisionings while accounting for changed circumstances, and, in settler colonialism, always seeking the end of our domination.

I consider ch'íhonít'i' a Diné feminist praxis because it poses a challenge to and can move beyond the gendered and colonial practices of storytelling and border towns. Ch'íhonít'i' resembles Shields' explanation of feminist rehearsal as a "process of moving *toward* an ideal rather than *reaching* a utopic performance."[204] Ch'íhonít'i' fits into the broader understandings of SNBH that encourages persistent attention to and striving for long life and happiness. Rather than ever reaching this goal of a good, balanced, healthy, long life, the praxis of SNBH is to always move toward this ideal. Ch'íhonít'i' is one of

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[203] For more on radical imagination, see Taiaiake Alfred, "What Is Radical Imagination? Indigenous Struggles in Canada," *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, 2010.
[204] Shields, *Bodies and Bones*, 13.

those ways that Diné people ensure that we fulfill the maxim of seeking life, never becoming stagnant or uncreative about the possibilities and potential of life or overcoming the settler colonial death drive. In Gallup and other border towns, we must unyieldingly strive to find ways out, possibilities, as we move toward life. This Diné feminist practice helps us to challenge the stagnation of heteropatriarchy, capitalist consumption, and colonial entrapments.

I do not intend to represent Gallup as unremittingly bad. Diné people have put their cultural and political imprint on this place, which is uniquely Diné in many ways. The colonizing capitalist may hold power in Gallup, but we Diné people can reclaim this place as ours. Gallup's deconstruction as a settler colonial and capitalist enterprise will happen as we assert our belonging and sovereignty. It is inevitable that Diné people will replace the fat cats in the border town. This place was cohabitated by Diné people and other Indigenous peoples long before the first colonizers arrived. We gave human meaning to this place based on our interactions with the environment beyond and outside this border town jurisdiction and monolithic presence.

Even with its orientation toward Indigenous death, Gallup and other border towns cannot erase or expel us. Gallup is built against and around us. Gallup takes our flesh, blood, sweat, and tears as payment and cements our hopes in the foundations. Traders lock our imaginative and creative capacities in display cases. Gallup's façade is colonial but our Indigenous life force, held at its core, animates it with the only life that town knows. Our sitting, laying, standing, hunched bodies, whether living or hovering near death, occupy the streets, malls, restaurants, and marketplace. Our physical presence

disrupts; disallowing Gallup and other border towns from settling into its eliminatory imperative.

As Gallup continues to kill and exploit our bodies, entrap our minds, and drain our labor for profit, it might seem that this town and other border towns across the US will remain. There is another possibility for Diné people and for what the border town means for us. In the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story, even after he established ownership and domination over people, plants, animals, and land, the potential existed for the people to free themselves. Maintaining a vision that is different, beautiful, vibrant is possible even against absolute domination and death. The story instructs that however bleak a situation, there is always a way out. It is in this way that Diné people can maintain the potential of our liberation from colonialism and capitalism, even in the most unfavorable odds.

In the Nááhwíiłbįįhí story, we see people coerced into a situation of absolute loss. And rather than remain enslaved, they devise a plan to take their lives back. When they accomplish this feat, it is not a simple return to a previous way of life. Instead, the people labor to move on from this because their experience with Nááhwíiłbįįhí changes them. They know this, and they cannot return to the old because of their experience.

Our people's prior actions and responses to domination serve as the examples we need for our present struggles and future world beyond oppression and death. For Diné people, emergence narratives and stories of our colonial experience provide the road map for understanding resistance, persistence, and thriving. Colonization, someday, will become a story of the past, another example of how the people overcame, and we will rejoice just as when Diné people built the first hooghan. Our new world, our ways of

being people, and our hope will rise from destroying colonialism. Our stories of struggle will instruct the people that, even at the edge of death and erasure, when you push against the greatest political forces that ever were, you rise and thrive.

CHAPTER 5

USHERING IN A NEW DINÉ WORLD: BUNDLING PAST AND PRESENT STORIES OF CHANGE, CATASTROPHES, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Diné history tells how life moved through the Black World, Blue World, Yellow World, and White World before arrival in the present Glittering World.[205] *It is in this fifth world that Asdzą́ą Nádleehé, Changing Woman, brought Nohokáá Dine'é Diyinii, the Empowered Earth Surface People, into existence.*[206]

What if anthropogenic climate change forces Diné people to leave our homeland? What does this mean for our everyday lives? What does this imply for how we plan our future? On the surface, my questions reek of disloyalty as they appear to undercut Diné struggles to remain on our land. My seemingly impossible and repulsive questions appear to disregard our forced removal during the 1860s Navajo Long Walk and ignore the over 400 families uprooted from land beginning with the 1974 Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act. Generations and decades later, these assaults on our livelihood continue to pervade Diné people's experiences.

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[205] This chapter, from the start, was difficult to write because I grappled with Diné storytelling protocols (e.g., who can tell stories, when stories should be told, and how stories should be documented). As this chapter relies on Diné emergence stories, I considered whether I could and should tell these stories in this context. I decided that I would not write anything beyond what Diné storytellers and authors had already written. I also decided to tell abridged versions that only included relevant details regarding transition between worlds.

[206] For more on Diné emergence, see Aronilth, Jr., *Foundation of Navajo Culture*; John R. Farella, *The Main Stalk: A Synthesis of Navajo Philosophy* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007); Lloyd L. Lee, *Diné Identity in a 21st-Century World* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2020); Washington Matthews, *Navaho Legends* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994); Ethelou Yazzie, ed., *Navajo History* (Rough Rock: Navajo Curriculum Center, 1971); and Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane'*. My telling of the emergence narratives is a combination of sources that begins with stories I heard among my family, stories I heard in communal settings, and, eventually, the various sources listed here. I reluctantly list the non-Diné storytellers because of the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, usually characterized by domination.

Attending to the threat of removal, we must consider Diné people's response to this foreboding but necessary consideration. Many Diné people will refuse the possibility that we must move because our lands are uninhabitable. Even as I posit the questions, the possibility frightens and paralyzes me. Diné lessons abound with instructions and cautions that ask us to remain mindful of our words, thoughts, and conversations. If we speak of illness, death, and tragedy, our elders and parents remind us that the power of our words could invite the outcomes we speak. Considering these concerns, I maintain that climate change is a present threat, so we must speak, think, and plan accordingly. For me, this is not a focus on death or the negative, but a protection and proliferation of life against a real threat.

Colonialism and forced removal are the backdrop to the understanding of anthropogenic caused climate change in this chapter, which situates the present climate change threat in Diné history and practices of movement, observation, and relationships. Diné people have always observed short-term and long-term environmental shifts, forced and voluntary movements that are not only characterized by experiences in colonialism. Diné movement through such world shifts provides a context for responding to climate change and its dangers. Diné people have always been in motion, as when we moved between winter and spring home locales or moved from one world to the next. Movement, motion, and action are critical features of Diné thought.[207] As revealed in our

[207] Diné emergence narratives reveal constant motion of people, lands, animals, waters, and deities. For more on motion and movement see Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and Gerald R. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*, The Abraham Lincoln Lecture Series (Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1998).

emergence narratives, when the world became unlivable, we planned and responded to protect life and futurity.

I look to emergence narratives to examine Diné responses to catastrophic change. As I analyze these various moments to delineate a Diné theory and praxis of movement, change, and time, I develop a Diné *world-ending-beginning* theory and praxis in an anti-colonial future-making response to the threat of climate change. A response so that we can remain in the present world as long as it is safe while planning for emergence into a new world. This is not a step-by-step process for how to undertake either course of action. Rather, I return to emergence narratives and world shifts to understand how Diné people moved from world to world; to understand how the end of a world does not mean our people's end.

I *bundle* Diné emergence narratives, personal observations and experiences, and climate change discourse. Bundling is observable across Diné life, as when Diné weavers store and protect their weaving tools in a bundle or when medicine people pack and keep their ceremonial implements bound and readied for transport. Throughout my childhood, I observed the care that my grandmother Helen B. Yazzie took when she packed and unpacked her sewing machine, scissors, stacks of cut and uncut material, and threads of varying colors and diameters. I also witnessed my paternal grandmother Rose Clark meticulously pack and store her most prized jewelry, paintings, and pictures.

Ceremonial and personal bundling practices call for a regular opening of the bundle so we can examine the items and allow them to breathe, a process to remember, acknowledge, and assess the contents. Such is the process of renewing connection to the

items and the bundle. When we open our bundles, we bring good intention, heart, and mind to the unpacking and unrolling, and we give each item special attention and consideration as we spread out the contents. In assessing the contents of a bundle, sometimes items are removed to be gifted or used for some other purpose. We might add items to replenish the bundle or to accommodate changed or new circumstances.

As a practice with rituals intended to store, protect, and carry important implements, elements, prayers, and tools, bundling is both powerful and intensely personal. While each item maintains their individual narrative integrity, the bundled whole is presented as a comprehensive and unified entity, animated with the life and experiences of individual components. By binding the various items, bundling coheres experiences, knowledge, and hopes of families. Because the bundling act is a living engagement with our histories, the curator's purpose is to protect the past, shape the present, and prepare for the future. The curator's task is to collect physical items and connected stories that they then transmit to others.

Like Potawatomi environmental philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte, who characterizes Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a negotiation site, the bundle method I propose and apply can be understood as a practice of bringing knowledges and peoples together. A practice through which Diné people can bring our history and present scientific knowledge into conversations about climate change.[208] A method that allows Diné people to consider our past and present as we evaluate, replace, and add to the

[208] See Kyle Powys Whyte, "On the Role of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a Collaborative Concept: A Philosophical Study," *Ecological Processes* 2, no. 1 (2013): 7.

bundle that is Diné existence. The curatorial approach to climate change seeks ways we can persist in the present and the future. That is, bundling, as observable across every day and ceremonial life, is an approach that allows us to voice, debate, and settle complex issues.

The times I was present when family members disassembled and reassembled their bundle, they told stories about the various items in their collection. Those stories often revealed their history and significance in moments relating to history, memory, and experience. Such acts of assembling and disassembling are relevant to my current discussion on climate change. We must return to stories, experiences, and tools that remind ourselves of our history. Then we can assess our present circumstance, adding new tools, implements, and experiences as needed to meet the challenges that climate change poses. Considering that, you can view my vignettes, discussions, and arguments as individual, standalone pieces, or a collection.[209] Pieces that you can read with and against each other, offering new and dynamic insights.

My paternal great-grandfather Be'ak'id was named for his occupation of making earthen dams across the Navajo Nation. These earthen dams, be'ak'id, caught water and were lifelines for livestock, wildlife, and wild horses. The water holes were always full in my youth, and the slightest spring wind rippled the surface, catching and wrinkling the sunlight. In hot summers, we sometimes splashed around the water holes, and when it froze in winter, we slid on ice. In 2018, news outlets reported that 200 dead horses were

[209] The personal and emergence stories I narrate in this chapter are offset in italic text. The academic prose is in roman text.

discovered at a dried-out watering hole. The gruesome images show horses half immersed and caked in dry mud. Recently dead horses propped up their heads, a final parched, desperate neigh that evaporated into the desert air.

Indigenous theorist writing about climate change recognize it as removal in colonialism. In *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*, Yuchi scholar Daniel R. Wildcat positions climate change on the arc of past Indigenous removal, alongside genocidal forced geographic relocation, violent removal of children from their homes and families to attend boarding school, and Indigenous children scrubbed of their cultural identities in boarding school.[210] Positioning climate change in this history of *forced removal* offers the necessary analytic perspective for understanding the *threat* to life, home, and lifeways. Whyte, in "Is it colonial déjà vu?," writes that the "cyclical history locates colonialism at the heart of the problem of both vulnerability and climate change mitigation."[211] Furthermore, colonialism has erased Indigenous peoples' "adaptive capacity and self-determination," putting them at even greater risk for the effects of climate change.[212]

Framing climate change as removal in colonialism underscores the potential impact on Indigenous peoples by comparing it to past removal atrocities, highlighting the world-ending nature of this problem. This perspective urges Diné people to act on the threat to our lives and connection to place. Like the genocidal removal of Diné people

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[210] Wildcat, *Red Alert!*, 2–5.
[211] Kyle Powys Whyte, "Is It Colonial Déjà vu?: Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice," in *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledge, Forging New Constellations of Practice*, ed. Joni Adamson and Michael Davis (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 102.
[212] Ibid., 92.

during the 1860s Long Walk, climate change signals death, severs land ties, splits families, causes hunger, and forecloses futures. This is our history of forced removals. We must approach the issue of climate change with awareness of what we have learned from the past, and how to bring Diné knowledge and experience into the similarly profound and lasting impacts of the future.

Diné people know a lot about forced removal, a weapon that takes many forms under colonialism. In *Bitter Water*, Roberta Blackgoat, a Diné matriarch who resisted federal relocation until she passed in 2002, captures the significance of land and the impossibility of removal:

> When the people were placed we became the Navajo Nation. The Creator placed our roots here. "Take care of the land. If this is the way you *live*, the land will nourish you," is a teaching that begins the moment you're born here on the land.
>
> …
>
> The natural kinship brings comfort to me here. I know the names on the land where I live. I sit here. Then I walk there. This is where my ancestors become the Earth again. My deepest roots are here. My grandmothers, my grandfathers, and my uncles; where their bodies are at rest: they are my roots growing; they are how I walk here.[213]

Blackgoat describes a relationship of care between people and land that begins at birth. Home, her place in the universe, is where her ancestors returned to and became the land once again. Her care for the land is care for herself, ancestors, children, and grandchildren. In Diné, Blackgoat referring to the land/home says "Kǫǫ shíni' hazlį́į́'," which I translate to mean "this is where my consciousness came to be." For many

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[213] Roberta Blackgoat, "Roberta Blackgoat, Thin Rock Mesa, Arizona," in *Bitter Water: Diné Oral Histories of the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute*, ed. Malcolm D. Benally (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2011), 30–33.

traditional Diné, who we are and how we are—from the bottom of our feet to the top of our heads—is because of the land.

Deep ties to the land and our previous removal experiences make it difficult to consider moving away from our lands. Forced and voluntary removal disorients, terrifies the affected peoples, and threatens the connection and permanence that Blackgoat describes. She defines her land connection within her experience to resist removal; thus, she asserts an unbreakable physical bond to her ancestral lands. That is, her land ethic is political and rooted in Diné ontology. To move gives into genocidal logics and severs the roots and mutually defined relationship to place. Identity and defense of home, for Blackgoat, are constructed against eliminatory aims to remove her and many other Diné families from their homes. For Blackgoat, physical connection and living upon the land are crucial to resisting settler colonialism.

We are Diné because of the intimate, active, reciprocal relationship with place. This is part of what concerns Diné scholar Lloyd L. Lee when he writes about identity markers that "represent past, present, and future elements of Diné way of life."[214] For Lee, writing in *Diné Identity in a 21st-Century World*, one of these identity markers is our land, Níhi Kéyah. Responding to Diné people's reflections on land and home, Lee surmises that "the overall theme is that the land is beautiful, significant to the people, and will always be home for each person, community, and the entire nation."[215] Home and land are crucial to how we define and orient ourselves in the cosmos and between the

[214] Lee, *Diné Identity in a 21st-Century World*, 4.
[215] Ibid., 88.

Four Powered Mountains. Like Blackgoat, Lee emphasizes land as an identity marker across time. He writes that land will *always* be home, meaning that land is a permanent feature of Diné identity.

The question of land removal poses a challenge to land-rooted Diné identity, constructed in and away from our land. Blackgoat and Lee offer interrelated perspectives on the connections between land and identity. Removal and movement require us to focus on the relationship between identity formation and home connection at a distance while attending to the complex power networks that Diné people respond to. I highlight their views to emphasize how land, identity, and politics complicate Diné identity formation in the US settler colonial context and in our response to climate change. We must remain flexible in constructing Diné identity, being sure not to exclude because of physical location. At the same time, we must maintain firm land connections as we identify and work against settler colonial logics that hunger for our lands.

Residing in the Black World were insects such as ants, wasps, beetles, and locusts. In this world were also bats and the Nilch'idine'é, Air People. The Nilch'idine'é conflicted with each other because of adulterous relations. The other beings of the world did not like their behavior, and, in turn, the beings overseeing the cardinal directions told them they were no longer welcome in their domains. They kept engaging in these behaviors, and each time they were scolded and told they were unwanted in the various regions. As they squabbled among themselves as to what they should do next, a wall of water began closing in on them from all directions. And it chased them upward and upward until they reached the top of the world. There they found an opening leading into the Blue World.

In December 2018, the Climate Change Program, a subdivision of the Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife, released the "Climate Adoption Plan for the Navajo Nation." The authors boldly declare that climate change "is real" and that the "effects from climate change are happening right now and the Navajo people are witness to its continuing outcome."[216] The Climate Change Program consulted with key professionals and elected officials over a series of workshops across the Navajo Nation. These workshops helped the program develop a survey they administered to Navajo citizens. The data they collected in the workshops and survey led to the climate adoption plan. The Climate Change Program subsequently identified six priority areas: water; feral horses; communication; enforcement and compliance; pollution, air quality, and illegal dumping; and grazing management. The stated aim was to "prepare the Navajo Nation to adapt to our changing climate, and implement strategies that will preserve and enhance natural resources and provide a resilient future for the Navajo communities…"[217] The Naabik'íyáti' Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, the authorizing governing body, voted to adopt the plan on September 5, 2019.

The exemplary approach of the Climate Change Program is to focus on Diné observations and concerns. This approach is a model of processes to implement that will counter colonial imperatives that denigrate our adaptive capacity and self-determination. External universities and research centers have, in the past, compiled reports for the Navajo Nation but none focus exclusively on daily Diné experiences and observations.

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[216] Gloria Tom, Carolynn Begay, and Raylene Yazzie, "Climate Adaptation Plan for the Navajo Nation" (Window Rock: Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife, December 2018), 13.
[217] Ibid., 3.

The Navajo plan is the first to identify vulnerabilities and to set priorities based on the experiences and knowledge of Diné people living in and working on the land. This is consistent with emergence narratives, where we see the "monitoring" of worldly political, social, and environmental conditions upon the first arrival through their departure to the next world. Monitoring our relationship with place is fundamental to understanding the impacts of climate change as it makes us vigilant to the risks posed to our lives and existence.

A similar method is used in "Accounts from Tribal Elders," a study by Redsteer et al.: they present findings from interviews conducted with forty-two individual elders and three groups of Diné elders. In those interviews, the study concluded, elders observed a "long-term decrease in the amount of snowfall in the latter half of the twentieth century" and "changes in water availability."[218] The authors admit they could not "attribute all ecosystem impact to changes in snowpack and increasing temperatures," yet they maintain that "dire conditions of increasing population pressures, poor socioeconomic conditions, and a limited resource base have acted in combination with climatic change to push the viability of living on Navajo land to its limit."[219]

Interviewing elders to document climate change is vital to understanding how climatic shifts impact Diné life and security. Elders' intimate knowledge of the land emphasizes attention to land relationships that Diné people continuously maintain, in

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[218] Margaret H. Redsteer et al., "Accounts from Tribal Elders: Increasing Vulnerability of the Navajo People to Drought and Climate Change in the Southwestern United States," in *Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation*, ed. Douglas Nakashima, Igor Krupnik, and Jennifer T. Rubis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 177.
[219] Ibid., 182.

ways of knowing and being that are based on ethical and balanced relation to the environment.[220] This knowledge, attention, and relationships differ from the exploitative relations inherent in settler colonialism and capitalism. Further support for a collaborative approach appears in Brugnach et al., whose discussion of the challenges of scale, knowledge, and power asserts the ethics of involving Indigenous peoples in climate change mitigation. For the authors, these ethics require "involving indigenous communities in decision making" as a matter "of self determination and cultural integrity of local communities that are vulnerable for climate change."[221]

Consideration of Indigenous peoples' role in climate change discourse and adaptation includes awareness of how our nations' local actions connect to state, county, federal, and international adaptation initiatives. For Diné people, this becomes more complex, as our territory lies in three states spanning multiple counties. I am not advocating for Diné people to fit themselves into other peoples' agendas, or lack thereof. Instead, I urge a Diné-based climate change adaptation and transitional response that accounts for our complex local, national, and international social and public standing.

The possibility of forced and voluntary movement does not appear in the adaptation and risk plans that I studied.[222] It seems that Diné people and the various

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[220] These data collection efforts attain information from relationships maintained since time immemorial. To gain a broader understanding of Indigenous peoples and their relationships to place, see Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, *A Yupiaq Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit*, 2nd ed (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2006); and Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, 1st ed (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013).
[221] M. Brugnach, M. Craps, and A. Dewulf, "Including Indigenous Peoples in Climate Change Mitigation: Addressing Issues of Scale, Knowledge and Power," *Climatic Change* 140, no. 1 (January 2017): 20.
[222] Christopher H. Guiterman and Ellis Q. Margolis, "Vulnerabilities of Navajo Nation Forests to Climate Change" (Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Resilience Program, 2019); Jonathan Mawdsley and Rachel Lamb, "Climate-Change Vulnerability Assessment for Priority Wildlife Species" (The H. John Heinz III

research collectives have not considered this possibility. On the other hand, if we begin with our emergence narratives, which show movement and motion as vital features of Diné people's thinking, planning, and reflection, then the possibility of movement should be at the forefront of our planning for impacts of climate change. Diné emergence narratives, with specific attention to world shifts, instruct us to rely on our relationships and observations of the human-made world and the natural world. In doing so we are attuned to changes that might lead to a world shift. Positioning our knowledge systems, experiences, and stories at the core of our adaptation and mitigation efforts to help us form a comprehensive response that includes the possibility of removal and relocation. This brings to the table a few things not covered in the nation's climate change adaptation plan, such as questions of habitability, identity, land, and movement.

In 2014, while driving through Gray Mountain, Arizona, on a visit home to Tuba City, I looked to the northern horizon after reaching the hilltop and noticed dunes engulfing the mesas' base. I was shocked and could only utter, "are those sand dunes?" Later that weekend, I told my mom it was disconcerting to see the landscape undergo drastic changes. My mother, who worked for the Navajo Nation Area Agency on Aging at the time, mentioned that she delivers home meals in north Tuba City, and, on these deliveries, she noticed a dune encroaching upon and sitting higher than a house. I had to see it, so we

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Center for Science, Economics and the Environment, October 2013), https://conbio.org/images/content_publications/Final_Navajo_Vulnerability_Assessment_Report_2.pdf; Julie Nania et al., "Considerations for Climate Change and Variability Adaptation on the Navajo Nation" (University of Colorado Boulder, March 2014), https://www.colorado.edu/law/sites/default/files/Considerations%20For%20Climate%20Change%20and%20Variability%20Adaptation%20on%20the%20Navajo%20Nation.vf_.pdf; Tom, Begay, and Yazzie, "Climate Adaptation Plan for the Navajo Nation."

drove there. It was just as she described. The sand dune sat a couple of feet from the house like a frozen wave with an open jaw ready to consume the house. Six years later, the dunes I saw from Gray Mountain have broached the mesa tops.

In emergence narratives, the beings mark their arrival in a new world by sending out surveyors in each of the four directions so that the newly arrived could examine and understand where they were, who lives there, and how they might fit into this new world. Emergence narratives tell of conversations, negotiations, and understandings between the newly arrived beings and the beings of the new world. They formed kinship with each other and addressed one another as relatives. These occasions show an intricate understanding of territory and kinship that requires them to define the terms of their relationship. The newly-arrived beings' response emphasizes their relational system as mutually dependent and defined. Instead of imposing their ways of life on the beings of each successive world, the newly-arrived approach these encounters as moments to sustain life for both parties.

Of course, these relationships are not idyllic. Diné medicine person Mitchell Yazzie told me once about how the Locust was responsible for finding a path into the Fifth World. Upon emerging, Locust encountered a black bird who tested him to determine their worthiness to enter the new world. After passing the tests that birds from each direction put before him, Locust returned for his companions, and they all joined the Fifth World. After concluding the story, Yazzie added, "t'áá' ałk'idáą' kéyah baa saad hólǫ." A word-for-word translation is "words/language exist about the land since time immemorial." In everyday use, "saad hólǫ" describes conflict. In this context, Yazzie's

commentary means that conflict and disagreement over land have existed since a forgone past.[223]

When it comes to transition between worlds and arrival on new lands, *words/language* about land and *conflict* over land are significant because they indicate different but significantly related ideas. The first describes the *words* and *language* of land that Diné people accumulated over the history of their existence. These words and language involve an interaction of knowledge and experience, which details a philosophy and ethics of place and land. As Santa Clara Pueblo scholar Gregory Cajete put it, "the paradigm of thinking, acting, and working evolved because of and through [Indigenous peoples'] established relationship to nature."[224] I consider Diné emergence narratives a formation of that paradigm of thinking, acting, and working. The language and words of land in emergence narratives represent and document Diné people's history of thinking of, acting with, and working in the land, forming Diné land knowledge base. For Diné people, the relationship between land, language, and knowledge is mutually constituted; they do not exist without the other. To say that language and words about land have

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[223] Diné historian Jennifer Nez Denetdale, in the forward to *Bitter Water*, dispels the "sparse" accounts that have "entrenched" Diné people "as blank slates who arrived in the Southwest just in time to greet the Spaniards and who then proceeded to acquire, adapt, and accommodate the material culture and knowledge of surrounding cultures, tribal and foreigners alike, in their cultural repertoire. This narrative of the Diné as late arrivals and cultural borrowers has been so powerful in the American and tribal imaginaries that it has been reified in federal Indian policies." I do not intend my discussion of land conflict and movement through the five worlds to reify the scant American and Spanish claims that undermine Diné people's knowledge of their home between the Four Powered Mountains. See "Forward," in *Bitter Water: Diné Oral Histories of the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute*, by Malcolm D. Benally (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2011), xi.

[224] Gregory Cajete, ed., *A People's Ecology: Explorations in Sustainable Living* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1999), 6.

always existed is to bind language, land, and people as a co-constructed and unified whole—people are land, language is land, land is people, land is language is people.

The challenges Locust encountered, which I view as an exchange, a meeting, a merging, a bundling, describe how land, language, and beings of different places (and times) form meaning, history, and relationship. Through these contending, simultaneous histories and land relationships, the saad hólǫ between Locust and birds formed understandings of their position in the world. To engage in dispute over land is to contest and negotiate the knowledge, words, and language that emerge from and define the place. That is, words and knowledge of the land are formed through complex negotiations (saad hólǫ) to arrive at a shared or bundled understanding of people/land relationships.

The history of Diné people's movement as told through emergence narratives is instructive as we consider the possibility of Diné relocation outside of our home within the Four Powered Mountains. If climate change were to force Diné people to move, where would we then make a new home? If Diné people had to move, what would it mean to be Diné in that new home, outside of our lands? How should we facilitate exchanges with other Indigenous peoples in those new territories? What conflicts and exchanges might we anticipate in the event of removal? These are the sorts of questions that Diné people must consider in imagining the *where* of migration and the people and beings we might encounter in these new locales. Diné people on the move would carry their Dinéness (indigeneity) with them into these new locations, which we must consider in the context of settler colonialism.

In "Indigeneity in the Diaspora," Hokulani K. Aikau investigates how the members of a Polynesian Mormon community in Utah "maintain [their] indigeneity not only in relationship to home but also to the native peoples upon whose land [they] dwell."[225] Aikau highlights the challenge of asserting indigeneity in the diaspora by drawing out the potential to displace existing Indigenous peoples and erasing their histories while settling and claiming their lands. We need to attend to Aikau's concerns. Any efforts to maintain Diné life and persistence must not contribute to Indigenous peoples' erasure, claim lands as ours, or eliminate their cultural presence in the event that climate change leads to removal and if Diné people then migrate to other Indigenous peoples' lands.

Diné people must understand what it means to be a person in prior worlds and the emerging, new world. The beings, through these various movements, were not essentialists, nor did they abandon their previous ways of knowing. Instead, the people in every event carefully considered where they had come from and where they were going. They made these assessments based on ideas of protecting and proliferating life, to ensure that all other beings could pursue beauty, balance, and long life.

Thinking about the process of leaving and entering worlds aids us to ponder our responsibilities and obligations to other Indigenous peoples as we maintain connection to our homelands and move into others' lands. An extension of these questions asks us to consider the practical aspects of such a move. Where would we relocate? How can we

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[225] Hokulani K. Aikau, "Indigeneity in the Diaspora: The Case of Native Hawaiians at Iosepa, Utah," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (September 2010): 478.

facilitate respectful encounters and exchanges? Who would decide when it is time? Who among us would make this move? And who would choose to remain on the land? I pose these questions to urge all Diné people to consider climate change threats to our people and possible migration to other territories. And even if we must relocate from Dinétah, it will always remain our home and the source of life and power.

Residing in the Blue World were birds such as blue hawks, blue jays, and blue herons. The newly arrived beings established kinship with Blue World beings.[226] *In this world, beings—mountain lions, foxes, and wolves—resided in each cardinal direction. As in the first world, the people sent explorers to survey the new world. When they returned from their expeditions, they told of hunger and suffering throughout the world. Because of the hunger and suffering they witnessed, the travelers decided they should leave the Blue World. One of the flying relatives flew to the top of the world. They found an opening into the Yellow World.*

I use *world-ending-beginning event* to name Diné people's response to climate change and other world shifts. The Oxford English Dictionary defines hyphen as a short dash "used to connect two words together as a compound; also, to join the separated syllables of a word, as at the end of a line; or to divide a word into parts for etymological or other purposes."[227] I prefer *world-ending-beginning event* because, for Diné people, the beginning and end are bound by emergence narratives and every day Diné life, just as

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[226] Zolbrod, in his account, refers to the beings that transition from the first to the second world as exiles. I prefer 'newly arrived' over 'exile' because it maintains focus on the present relationship between the arrived being and the beings of the new world. See Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane'*, 43.
[227] Oxford English Dictionary, "'hyphen, n.'.," n.d., https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90403?rskey=0k6U0A&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

the hyphen binds, compounds the adjectives. And like the bundle curators that I discuss in the introduction, Diné people's emergence narratives, through curation, bundle the entirety of history, memory, and experience into a comprehensive whole, serving to store, protect, and carry all our knowledge. All the worlds, even after their end, brought about by moving from, are held together.

Just as in a sentence, where the hyphen connects separated syllables in a word, indicating a continuation into the next line, the separation, break, or emergence from the old world, while it begins in a new place, is still connected to the previous location, and carries on what the people started. Unlike the sentence's left to right, forward, linear movement, the Diné view of movement is an upward, compounded movement, where time and space are understood through the practice of building worlds and proliferating life, both of human and other-than-human. That is, life for Diné people does not merely end in one world upon emergence but continues in the new location. Life and world-making practices bind the past and present, where attention to balance and imbalance is crucial.

Maintaining balance requires constant attention to the intricacies and machinations of our place, our relationship with other human and non-human beings, changes within ourselves, and planetary and star movements. Working from this position requires a heightened awareness of place and of the implications of their present and future actions. Seemingly unrelated events are connected because Diné people understood that each movement, thought, and action was essential to the entire relational system. This is why research and data collection processes, as I describe in the section

above, must be employed as we continue to document, adapt to, and mitigate climate change.

Whyte makes the point that "Potawatomi cultural and political systems are structured rather 'explicitly' on the concept that society must be organised to constantly adapt to environmental change."[228] Likewise, as indicated by their emergence stories, Diné society is organized to adapt to environmental change constantly. Every time the beings arrived in a new world, they sent out representatives to determine the land's status. In these assessments, the beings surveyed the land for habitability, and it was a process of becoming familiar with the land and the beings inhabiting those lands. For me, this is a Diné process of adapting to environmental changes: assessing the land and determining our place within the relation network. They completed these assessments so the people always had the land's livability at the forefront of their thinking.

Observation and experiential knowledge matter to the ways we understand ourselves as creators and shapers of our world. Diné people, as creators and shapers of the world, can negatively or positively affect the entire relational system that is the universe. Imbalanced relationships are represented in oppressive systems such as colonialism and capitalism. And the imbalance can have profound implications such as human-caused climate change. Inattention to the imbalance only leads to further imbalance. Approaching matters of imbalance from a kinship perspective allows us to develop a critical perspective about human-caused problems. As shapers and creators, humans can restore balance and good relationships. The potential for restoring balance is

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[228] Whyte, "Is It Colonial Déjà vu?: Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice," 90.

always a possibility and, for Diné people, operating within a kinship framework is an exercise of this awesome power potential.

When the land becomes uninhabitable due to hunger, upheaval, or environmental changes, the people knew it was time for a world shift. The Diné emergence narratives I present throughout this chapter show how the beings respond to political, social, and environmental imbalance. I add to this perspective of environmental shift that Diné people have structured their society and lifeways around world shift. Diné people, since time immemorial, understand that the world as we know it can shift or unresolvable discord could arise. Without this attention to their world, the people would not have the information they need to decide their future.

Apocalypse always turns my mind to Revelation in the New Testament, conjuring images of an earthquake, blackened sun, hunger, and death. This imagery lodged in my imaginary since placed there by Christian visitors to our dormitory at (then named) Greasewood Boarding School, where I was a pupil for a year. I remember sitting in a half-circle to hear about our damned souls before our guest saved us. I endlessly worried that wherever I was now going, my unsaved family was not invited. I wondered if this was reversible. Later that school year, the dorm matron blasted the Gulf War news from some news station after she put us to bed. The fear in the anchor's voice and sounds of war reverberated throughout the cold, sterile dorm halls. Nine-year-old me, tucked under the faded turquoise bedding with military-style folded corners, laid in bed thinking, "this is the end they warned of, and here I'm stuck in this lousy dorm."

For Diné people, the *apocalypse* is not apt for describing our processes of change, movement, and transitional ends and beginnings. Our narratives document and present different parameters and ideas about movement and transition in and between worlds. With emergence narratives in mind, the apocalypse, imagined as a destructive conclusion, is deleterious for how Diné people document history, struggle in the present, and imagine the future. To imagine an apocalyptic Diné end is to align with settler colonial domination; it is to reject Diné life-giving practices and turn away from our world shift knowledge and experience.

I find white settler society's obsession with their apocalyptic end, as represented in film, literature, and religion, both believable and entertaining because, as Diné poet Jake Skeet puts it, "Apocalypse is actually a project of colonialism."[229] That is, settler obsession with their demise is both a recognition of the trajectory of their imagined colonial world and of their inability to address the apocalyptic. Climate change as an apocalyptic conclusion to settler state imaginaries has always been the desired and envisioned conclusion that settlers seek, functioning and operating toward its end. A world-ending-beginning approach is more productive for Diné people to analyze and respond to anthropogenic climate change because it prioritizes Diné continuities and life flourishing practices.

When Diné people discuss climate change and plan for the threats it poses, we must not confuse a settler end with an Indigenous end by referring to this threat as an apocalypse. A zine produced by Indigenous Media Action conveys the dangers and warns

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[229] Skeets, "The Other House."

of ascribing to a settler apocalypse. We must not confuse the settlers' apocalypse with our own end:

> Its [*sic*] an apocalyptic that colonizes our imaginations and destroys our past and future simultaneously. It is a struggle to dominate human meaning and all existence.
>
> This is the futurism of the colonizer, the capitalist. It is at once every future ever stolen by the plunderer, the warmonger and the rapist.[230]

The settler drive to consume its own life, future, and imagination simultaneously fulfills its settler colonial mandate to devour and to annihilate Indigenous life and possibilities. The apocalypse supplants our Diné histories, experiences, and knowledge systems, as when Christians regularly descended upon my dormitory to displace Diné futures.

Skeets adds that for him, "apocalypse has always been represented in two ways: as an end to human life or a replacement of human life."[231] As I have shown in this chapter, neither of these things is true for Diné people. That is because for Diné people, shifts between worlds are about the continuation of human and other-than-human life. Diné people of the present are not the central aspect of these stories and transitions. Rather, world shifts and persistence depend on the protection and continuation of all life and all beings. On the other hand, a *world-ending-beginning event* in a Diné context does not carry the same baggage as Christianity influenced ideas of an apocalypse. And Diné world shifts do not imply finality or complete destruction. As world-makers, we persistently assess our world and circumstances in order to chart new courses of action.

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[230] Indigenous Media Action, "Rethinking the Apocalypse."
[231] Skeets, "The Other House."

The people and life never come to an apocalyptic ending when Diné people transition from one world to the next. Instead, the world-ending-beginning events are transitional. In such events, the people can shed what has caused harm and carry on with what is beneficial to their people and society. Regarding Diné perspectives on world-ending-beginning events, Skeet writes that "I have attended many presentations by Diné medicine people, and they each talk about another apocalyptic event, never with grief but with hope."[232] Skeets's characterization of the Diné approach to world shifts sets an entirely different ethos from the imagery of earthquakes and blackened suns. For Diné people, transitions and world shifts are necessary for the people to continue, representing a moment for the people to reflect, imagine, and create a different world. These Diné life and transition focused perspectives of world-ending-beginning events are why we view these world shifts with hope instead of grief.

Thinking about transitions in this way prioritizes Diné life as the primary mode of orienting actions and thoughts. Even if life as we know it is challenged and undercut, Diné people can continue to imagine life beyond catastrophe and controversy. In climate change, we might view this as a moment where we are destined for an apocalypse, the end of the Diné world. Or we could well view this as an opportunity to imagine another Diné beginning through a world shift.

Residing in the Yellow World were animals such as mice, squirrels, deer, antelope, turkey, and snakes. Again, the arrived beings sent explorers in each direction to learn about the new world. It is said that in this world coyote abducted the babies of

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[232] Ibid.

Tééhoołtsódii (Water Monster). He did this without the knowledge of any of the other world's inhabitants. Once Tééhoołtsódii discovered the children were missing, caused the water to rise. The traveling people, unaware that the coyote's actions were the flooding source, fled to the mountains. The water kept rising, and the people knew it would only be a matter of time before the waters reached them. To continue evading the flood, the people planted reeds that grew and lifted them into the sky. There the people found an opening into the White World.

I told friends and family I was meditating on climate change caused removal. Then I would ask them, what do you think about Diné people moving because the lands are uninhabitable?[233] Not surprisingly, the reactions ranged from quizzical looks, as if it were a trick question, to outright responses like "no, I would never leave the Four Sacred Mountains!" The answers varied, but no one was comfortable with the idea of climate change caused relocation. In these conversations, I admitted that I also disliked the idea of forced relocation. I would follow up with, "But this is easier to say when we can still access water, and our environments are habitable. It is scary, but we have to consider and plan for this possibility." In reading Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway*, a book about a group of Mexican men crossing the border, I found myself attuned to how quickly the desert, without proper hydration, could hurl the body into hyperthermia and

[233] I considered climate change caused removal after reading projections that the Southwest could become unhabitable. Desert environments are fragile and temperamental even without the threat of climate change. Lucas Waldron Lustgarten Abrahm, "Climate Change Will Make Parts of the U.S. Uninhabitable. Americans Are Still Moving There.," ProPublica, accessed December 17, 2020, https://www.propublica.org/article/climate-change-will-make-parts-of-the-u-s-uninhabitable-americans-are-still-moving-there?token=nD-X136_tDm0nh1l4Xtv0LbpjY_BSO3u; Al Shaw, Abrahm Lustgarten, and Jeremy W. Goldsmith, "New Climate Maps Show a Transformed United States," ProPublica, accessed December 17, 2020, https://projects.propublica.org/climate-migration.

death.[234] The story about these men's struggles helped me appreciate the delicate relationship between Indigenous peoples of the Southwest and the desert landscapes. And the lives and deaths of these men helped me to consider the ways colonialism and capitalism have altered the environment and expanded beyond the desert's carrying capacity.[235] My knowledge of our already harsh climate and overextended resources compels me to decide how I respond to the looming threat.

As unfavorable as removal may seem, considering this possibility is crucial to how we respond, and it is the difference between forced and voluntary relocation. Here, it is helpful to consider what Scott R. Lyons calls x-mark, "a sign of consent in a context of coercion; it is the agreement one makes when there seems to be little choice in the matter. To the extent that little choice isn't the [*sic*] quite the same thing as no choice, it signifies agency."[236] Lyons adopts this from the treaty-making era where Indigenous peoples placed x-marks on treaties. In treaty situations, Lyons asserts that Indigenous peoples may have had little choice, but assent was a choice the people made.

I adopt Lyons' analysis to urge Diné people toward a choice on climate change caused removal and to make this choice within Diné knowledge and experience in the concept of world shifts, to which I have alluded throughout this essay. Our emergence narratives tell us that a decision to move to the next world was often a forced choice. The

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[234] Luis Alberto Urrea, *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2014), 122–29.
[235] For a broad history on water and development beyond the carrying capacity of the region, see David Owen, *Where the Water Goes: Life and Death along the Colorado River* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017); Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).
[236] Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1.

threat of climate change and relocation/removal is a situation of little choice. Diné people can either actively make decisions within the coercive context, such as planning for relocation or we could face removal unwillingly.

Rather than thinking of these events as the end, we should consider them as the start of something different. We can make an active decision to proceed in a new way, rather than remain on uninhabitable lands. In this process of recognizing the benefits of our prior ways of life and considering them in terms of the new future we are charting, we neither forget the old nor embrace only the new world. We see how, in each movement from one world to the next, Diné people are engaged in this process.

Indeed, there will be those among us who will want to remain on the land even if it means death. And there are those of us who will consider the idea and prepare for the potential of relocation. I fall on the side of not wanting to move for any reason, but I acknowledge the mortal threat we face due to climate change. The easy choice is to say we are unwilling to move because this is our home. This is easier said than done, however, when so many of us are blind to our conditions and limited options. The worst that we can do is not to respond or failing to prepare for the challenges on the horizon. It is not my intention to present relocation, voluntary or forced, as a foregone conclusion. I suggest the scenario to urge action and choices regarding climate change.

Based on our emergence stories, Diné people know that the world as we know it could be immanent. But we also know that is not the end of our story. The moment can serve as a transition to a new and different world, for Diné people did not arrive in our

present world by accident. Rather, beings discussed, prepared, and responded by charting new worlds.

In a phone conversation with Jennifer Clark, my oldest sister, we talked about removal, home, and relocation. She relayed to me that the weekend before our call, her family and our mother returned to T'iis Yaa Tó, Water Under the Tree, where our family resided before our forced relocation that was mandated by the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974. Although it had been years since her last visit, the strong connection to our ancestral homeland remained, and she left feeling comforted and renewed. The visit reminded her of the goodness in our family and Diné people. Because of this experience, she could never imagine living anywhere else. No other place could offer this.

On December 18, 2020, the Salt River Project demolished the Navajo Generating Station stacks, ending one of Diné people's many complex relationships with the extractive industry.[237] Some Diné people streamed the demolition on social media to mark the occasion. Diné responses on social media varied. Some individuals lamented job loss and the end of a reliable income while giving thanks for the power plant that had allowed them to provide food and shelter for their families. Other Diné people celebrated the collapse of the stacks as a long envisioned outcome of their struggle against the

[237] Jariel Arvin, "After Decades of Activism, the Navajo Coal Plant Has Been Demolished - Vox," *Vox*, December 19, 2020, https://www.vox.com/2020/12/19/22189046/navajo-coal-generating-station-smokestacks-demolished; Ryan Randazzo, "Coal Stacks at Navajo Generating Station in Arizona Demolished," *Arizona Republic*, December 18, 2020, sec. Energy, https://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/energy/2020/12/18/coal-stacks-navajo-generating-station-arizona-demolished/3905369001/.

extractive industry. For them, the demolition signaled a new beginning no longer obstructed by the power plant that hazed the skies, caused the removal of Diné and Hopi families, siphoned resources from the Navajo Nation, and inflicted irreversible environmental degradation.[238]

The power plant, constructed in 1976, was a feature of Diné social, economic, and political life for two and half generations; many of us only know Diné life with this monolithic structure in our presence. For me, witnessing the three stacks collapse one after the other was like seeing the Death Star implode for the first time, sans the John Williams composed soundtrack. In the era of anthropogenic climate change and in the context of this conversation, the destruction of the Navajo Generating Station marks a new and different future, one in which we can imagine beyond the once seemingly permanent power stations that spoiled and obstructed the Diné horizon. Now that the stacks no longer jut into the sky, we can imagine the Diné future without an impeded view.

The people arrived in the White World. The rising waters did not recede. It kept rising and started to flood this world too. It was then that people discovered what coyote had done. They returned the children to Tééhoołtsódii and made an offering. The flooding stopped and began to recede. Once again, the people sent explorers in all four directions.

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[238] Andrew Curley, Diné geography scholar, details the complex histories and relationship formed by energy development on the Navajo Nation. See Andrew Curley, "A Failed Green Future: Navajo Green Jobs and Energy 'Transition' in the Navajo Nation," *Geoforum* 88 (January 2018): 57–65; Andrew Curley, "T'áá Hwó Ají t'éego and the Moral Economy of Navajo Coal Workers," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 109, no. 1 (2019): 71–86; Andrew Curley, "Infrastructures as Colonial Beachheads: The Central Arizona Project and the Taking of Navajo Resources," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, February 2021. Also see Melanie Yazzie's dissertation which I cite throughout my work. See Yazzie, "Contesting Liberalism, Refusing Death."

The explorers moved in one direction for days but found nothing. The land was barren. The people immediately proceeded to the Fifth World because there was nothing in the Fourth World.

Anthropogenic climate change caused world shift requires that Diné people critique and challenge colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. We must deconstruct these power systems and actively work toward not replicating or carrying these problems into any new world. This key consideration is vital to people's movement through time if our objective is to seek and protect life. Without this critical reflection, we are not attending to an ethic of life seeking since we are uncritically moving from time to time with the same systems that cause life to end.

Bundles are living archives that require us to remember our past, present, and future. In this chapter, I present a bundle of narratives, questions, and considerations focused on climate change and the threat of removal. The bundle approach does not hold one artifact, knowledge, or experience above the other. Instead, they are placed next to one another so that together they offer a full picture of the matter at hand. Presented this way, the bundle reveals tensions, connections, and insights that otherwise might not be visible.

In Diné thought, life and the world undergo constant transformation, move in and out of balance, and produce beginnings and ends. In those fluctuations and shifts, the people and other-than-human beings can imagine, tell, and create. Recontextualizing climate change and colonialism in the history of world-ending-beginning events charts a longer life trajectory that begins, ends, and starts again before and beyond settler

domination and destruction. This is not to say that these events are not catastrophic and that they do not threaten the people's existence, but it is to say that each end is the beginning of another world. It is cyclical, and there is always an opportunity for us to make more life, engaging in worldmaking practices so we can transition from this world to the next.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jerome Clark is Kinłichíi'nii, born for Tséníjikiní, Mą'ii Deeshgiizhinii are his maternal grandfathers, and Tábąąhá are his paternal grandfathers. He is enrolled with the Navajo Nation. His mother Marlene Clark's family is from T'iis Yaa Tó. His father Jeffery Clark's family is from Bis Hadaash Chíí'í.