
Alternative Indigenous Narratives and Gender Constructions in Sydney Freeland's *Drunktown's Finest* (2014)

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In this article, I will examine how alternative narratives of gender and sexuality update and diversify the catalog of images of Indigenous people through the 2014 drama *Drunktown's Finest*.¹ Written and directed by the Navajo filmmaker Sydney Freeland, this film questions the possibility to assume a Two-Spirit identity on and off the reservation.²

Sydney Freeland's film reminds the audience of the deep respect that has characterized traditional tribal relationships with Two-Spirit people for a long time, conveyed through the story of Felixia, a transgender woman. Living with her traditional grandparents, a medicine man and his wife, she is completely accepted by them because the concept of third and fourth genders is part of the Navajo/Diné culture, whereas the younger generation does not seem so tolerant. This dynamic allows Freeland to participate in a larger fight against homophobia that replicates the dominant cultural norm and penetrates Indigenous communities. Ultimately, Felixia learns from her grandfather about Navajo *nádleeh* and finds her inner balance³. Therefore, in this artwork, the enactment of what Qwo-Li Driskill calls "sovereign erotic"⁴ becomes a trope for Indigenous survivance.

Bringing more diversity on screen

Conceived as a visual counter narrative to the derogatory nickname "Drunk Town, USA," given to director's hometown, Gallup, New Mexico, in an episode of the ABC TV show *20/20*, *Drunktown's Finest* follows three young Navajos living in the fictional reservation-adjacent town of Dry Lake and its environs.

One of them is Nizhoni, an eighteen-year-old woman adopted by a White family who engages as a volunteer in the reservation in the secret hope to find clues about her biological parents. Another one is Luther “Sick Boy,” an expectant father who considers joining the army to support his family. And there is also Felixia who lives on the reservation with her grandparents, while nursing the dream of being featured in the newly announced Women of the Navajo Calendar.

As a result, by including transgender issues in the narrative, Sydney Freeland’s film brings more diversity in the representation of Native Americans on screen. As the issues of gender and sexuality become central to the Indigenous struggle for sovereignty and decolonization, recognizing diversity becomes crucial to our efforts to understand Indigenous cultures and policy.⁵

Moreover, Sydney Freeland participates in the process of “indigenization” of mass media, especially by focusing on and diversifying the representation of indigenous women. Centering the narrative of a transgender woman allows Freeland to challenge the stereotyped image of Native American, and at the same time to change the paradigm of transgender imagery by “indianing” it. As a Native American filmmaker, in *Drunktown’s Finest* Sydney Freeland offers a distinctively indigenous point of view and takes control over dominant narratives and imagery by “indigenizing” them, to borrow Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s term.⁶ Freeland’s inclusive approach allows the director to discuss gender issues by connecting the audience to the plight of a Navajo nádleeh person. Awarded in many festivals, *Drunktown’s Finest* is acclaimed by its audience for the “authenticity” of its characters.⁷ In her 2014 interview with Sydney Freeland for *Filmmaker Magazine* at the Sundance Film Festival, critic Lauren Wissot praises the film’s “novel characters I actually haven’t seen on the big screen before” (Wissot 2014).

Drunktown’s Finest follows its characters over the course of one weekend as they pursue their objectives, “just doing what they can to get by” as Lauren Wissot puts it, and not without some trouble, (Wissot 2014). This includes Felixia leaving the house secretly at night to run her

successful sex work business that she manages through her Facebook page. In the reservation-adjacent city, Felixia crosses paths with various people. One of them is her gay friend Eugene, who provides her a false driver's license in Felixia's woman's name that will enable her to audition for the *Women of the Navajo* calendar. Through the film narrative, we understand that Felixia has adopted the modern way of life, while remaining connected to her land and origins. Freeland's film reflects Indigenous' complexities by situating Native's stories in a multivalent context and provides new images of Native Americans dealing with a multicultural world. Through self-representation on screen, the Navajo filmmaker participates in a struggle to reestablish Indigenous agency and authority, achieving what Michelle Raheja calls "visual sovereignty" in cinema.⁸ As part of what Robert Warrior calls "intellectual sovereignty,"⁹ it is a process through which artists assert their power to make decisions that affect their lives.

In his 2010 book *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*, Mark Rifkin argues that the US government's project to civilize Native peoples "can be understood as an effort to make them 'straight'" (8). This assertion allows us to understand what is at stake in the choice made by Freeland to present Two-Spirit and queer characters on screen. These alternative representations of gender and sexual non-conformities counteract their erasure from colonial narratives and illustrates Native resistance and survival.

The characters of *Drunktown's Finest* have adapted to changing historical circumstances and situations and have taken control over their destinies. Ultimately, Nizhoni will discover her ancestry and find out that she is Felixia's cousin as they have the same grandparents. Luther "Sick Boy" will overcome his temptation for drugs, alcohol and gang-related crime, to instead support his wife and his sister, who is preparing for the puberty ceremony under the guidance of Felixia's grandfather, the medicine man. And Felixia will receive a plane ticket for New York City from a Facebook client, who wants to help her financially, so she can get surgery. Freeland's characters attest Indigenous survival, perseverance and ongoing presence and their stories are what Gerald Vizenor calls stories of survivance: "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence" (Vizenor 15). In

her thesis, Dawna Holiday-Shchedrov sees the characters of *Drunktown's Finest* as embodiments of survivance: “Their ability to be resilient [...] is a testimony to their survival as resistance” (125). The presence of a transgender woman among them speaks of Indigenous people’s resistance to the colonial attempt to erase gender distinctness in Native cultures.¹⁰

Reminding the tribal tradition of acceptance and deep respect

In her 2011 article “Decolonizing the Queer Native Body,” Chris Finley claims for a more critical gaze on traditionalism in Native communities. “Native peoples,” she writes, “are often read as existing outside homophobic discourse or as more accepting of trans and queer people in Native communities because of traditional Native ideas regarding gender and sexuality” (Finley 38). This romanticized and essentialist vision does not correspond to the reality faced by Two-Spirit Native people whose human and civil rights are not always recognized.

Freeland was unaware of traditional acceptance for gender non-conformity in Navajo culture until she moved to San Francisco. As she explains in her interview for *Filmmaker Magazine*, “I grew up on the reservation but had no idea about this aspect of Navajo culture” (Wissot 2014). So, her film acts against ignorance and cultural loss, which contribute to maintaining homophobia in the Navajo community, even if the director declares she did not approach her movie with an agenda: “I simply wanted to tell the best possible story I could tell” (Wissot 2014).

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the persistence of homophobia as part of modern Native nations building that constitutes the filmic context. Introduced by settler colonialism, which imposed heteronormativity to Native Nations and was subsequently internalized by community members, homophobia still affects some aspects of community life. As a 2013 *Navajo Times* article describes: “Only five of the nation’s 500-plus federally recognized tribes recognize same-sex marriage. The Navajo Nation isn’t one of them because of the Diné Marriage Act.”¹¹ Back then, voices emerged seeking to repeal the Diné Marriage Act of 2005

which prohibited marriage between persons of the same sex. For scholar Jennifer Denetdale, what is important is that “there is an indication that there have always been multiple genders in societies including the Navajo society” (qtd. in *Navajo Times*, 2013). In this context, *Drunktown’s Finest* emphasizes Indigenous conceptions of gender and acts toward recognition and acceptance of gender nonconformity through the character of Felixia. Felixia is accepted by her grandparents, because the concept of third and fourth genders is part of their culture; however, the younger generation does not seem to have reached this level of acceptance. These tensions come to a head in the scene of the calendar audition.

Coming to apply for the audition, Felixia enters the room where several young girls are present and hesitates for a while before taking her place apart from the other candidates. One of the girls, who is also a former schoolmate, recognizes her and comes closer: “Felix, what are you doing here?” she exclaims. Embarrassed, Felixia mumbles some confused explanation about being accompanying her cousin. The cinematography conveys a sense of proximity between the viewers and the character, placing the camera close to Felixia’s, who is sitting, while a low-angle shot shows the other girl’s face, who thus appears as threatening. A closeup shows Felixia’s gaze as seeking help while the girl insists, amused: “You are not auditioning, are you?” At this moment, a woman calls Felixia’s name. Felixia stands up and follows the woman. The girl turns towards the other candidates, sneering: “I know him.” The use of the pronoun “him” demonstrates her refusal to recognize Felixia’s new identity. Right from the start of the dialogue, the girl deadnames Felixia, emphasizing her hostility. With this scene, Freeland makes us understand that Felixia’s gender specificity is not acknowledged by everybody in the community and that people like Felixia are not accepted by the young women of her generation.

Notwithstanding, Felixia keeps pursuing her dream to perform for the *Women of the Navajo Calendar*. The day of the photo shoots, she is praised by the jury for her beauty, and for her ability to speak Navajo. In fact, among all the Navajo candidates, she is the only one who speaks their language. Felixia is radiant, happy to pose under the flashes of the

photographs. For a little moment of time, we share her joy, until the moment when she is betrayed by her biological sex becoming obvious under her skirt. Felixia is forced to run away and while backstage, she encounters her contender and former schoolmate, who shows her the box of Viagra she had introduced in Felixia's drink.

The hostility faced by Felixia illustrates Navajo youth's refusal to acknowledge gender diversity and informs us about their ignorance of cultural specificities. Though pretending to represent Navajo women in photographs in a calendar, these young people do not even speak their language. They do not recognize that Felixia is not Felix dressed as a woman, but rather a Two Spirit person who does not fit into a male/female binary. Through the character of Felixia, Freeland achieves to connect her audience to the plight of a Navajo *nádleeh* person on the reservation, showing that the way for acceptance is long and difficult.

As a transgender woman, Freeland felt it was very important to cast someone who was transgender for the role of Felixia. As the director explains in her interview, she was "very grateful to have met Carmen Moore, who is both trans and Navajo ... she brought a depth and authenticity to the character that very few people would have been able to" (Wissot 2014). Moore's character is a present-day young person, living a modern way of life, enjoying parties and using the Internet. But she is also attached to her Navajo culture and proud to speak the Navajo language. And it is in the Navajo knowledge that she will find support.

Freeland offers key contextual information to the film's audience through the story of the *nádleeh* people narrated by Felixia's grandfather, Harmon. The scene is set in the intimacy of the family house, in the morning of the puberty ceremony organized for Sick Boy's sister Max, which is to be performed by the medicine man. Felixia is in her bedroom, feeling somehow apart from all these preparations, when her grandfather joins her. A middle shot of them sitting face to face in each extremity of the bed creates a sense of intimacy with the viewer. The old man smiles and starts to tell a story:

A long time ago, all Navajos lived alongside the Great River. Men,
women, and the *nádleeh*. One day, they began to argue over who was

more important than the other. The men said they were, because they hunted, and the women said they were, because they tended the crops. On and on they argued. Until finally, they decided, maybe they were better off without each other. The men rafted across the Great River, and they took the nádleeh with them. And for a while, everything was fine. Then the men began to miss their wives and children. But they were too proud to go back. So they sent the nádleeh back, to check on things, and the nádleeh returned with the message, that things weren't so well with the women, and that they missed the men, and that they had no one to hunt for them. It became apparent, both sides needed each other: the men needed the women, and women in turn, needed the men. And they both needed the nádleeh. To this day, we carry this lesson, this balance.

This scene evokes the transmission of the knowledge from the elder to the younger generation through the oral tradition and Freeland invites her audience to share the legend that forges social acceptance and respect for diverse gender expressions, with the aim to help us understand the Navajo worldview. It is also a reminder to the younger generations who have abandoned much of their Indigenous culture. In doing so, *Drunktown's Finest* acts towards an acknowledgement and understanding of gender diversity. As Harmon concludes, "I know you, you're struggling with acceptance. This world can be cold, and hard on our people. But you must always remember, wherever you go, whatever you choose to do, you'll always have a home here, in this place." The medicine man's words underline the importance of spiritual support for Two-Spirit people's quest for acceptance. As Lee Schweninger points out in his article about the film, "The nádleeh story, [...] suggests an important theme running throughout—that of the fundamental and inherent need for a place for the nádleeh in Navajo life and culture" (Schweninger 110, 111).

Drunktown's Finest teaches us that Navajo Nation, and other Indigenous communities as well, must find cultural meaning and strength in the aim to fight homophobia and promote acceptance for gender-diverse people.¹²

Disrupting established power relationships

In their “Tools for IINA (LIFE) Curriculum,” scholars underline the importance of the Navajo conception of gender diversity for the community as one of the foundational concepts of the Ways of Life. They argue that “[w]ithout the presence of Third and Fourth gender people, the Diné could not have survived as a people and become a nation, and the oral traditions convey a very strong appreciation for people of all genders” (Arviso et al. 135). Promoting Indigenous knowledge has psychological, social, and political implications in Native peoples’ lives. Through the character of Felixia, Freeland enacts what Qwo-Li Driskill calls a “Sovereign Erotic” which, according to them, “relates our bodies to our nations, traditions and histories” (Driskill 52). Then, the “sovereign erotic” grounds healing and regeneration in Indigenous knowledge, and encourages a renewal of Native nationality through queer pride, following a long and painful history of land and body dispossession, to paraphrase Driskill. Thanks to alternative narratives of gender, Indigenous people recover their ability to become agents of their own stories. Grounded in a specifically Indigenous way of knowing, the character of Felixia embodies the connection between the personal and the cultural. Considered by many Indigenous GLBTQ2 people as “at once a point of continuity with tribal traditions and a statement of contemporary intertribal identity and politics,” Two-Spirit identity helps us understand Indigenous constructions of personhood and gender, and Freeland places her character at this point of continuity between tradition and modernity (Driskill et al. 14).

In Freeland’s film, Felixia receives recognition from her grandparents and after having heard the story of the nádleeh, she joins her grandmother in the kitchen, where they prepare the traditional fry bread together. Then Felixia is invited to take part in the ceremony, and she

joins Max's family and they all head for the fields as the sun rises. Thus, Felixia finds her inner balance in her connection to her family, their land, and their traditions.

The final scenes of *Drunktown's Finest* invokes Mark Rifkin's definition of erotics as "interrelations with others, the land, and ancestors" (39). Inviting Felixia to the ceremony signifies that she is fully accepted by the community as a part of this community. Moreover, this pattern suggests the opening of more than one possibility for young Max, who has just entered puberty. Thus, Felixia's participation in the kinaaldá ceremony organized for Max suggests new perspectives on Indigenous womanhood including alternate possibilities for gender construction.¹³

Aware of the importance of resisting the imposed what? by the colonial orders of heteropatriarchy and gender roles,¹⁴ Freeland introduces elements of Navajo cultural tradition such as the kinaalda celebration which honors "a young woman's entry into adulthood, and emphasizes a woman's role as a maternal guardian and leader in a matriarchal and matrilineal society" (Arviso et al. 135). Staging elements of the traditional puberty ceremony on screen allows Freeland to reaffirm Navajo matriarchal order and matrifocal jurisprudence against US law. By opening new possibilities for gender constructions in her film, Freeland opposes heteropatriarchal order based on gender binaries, while simultaneously resisting to essentialize Navajo culture. As Sophie Mayer observes, "the kinaaldá does not just represent an essentialist femininity predicated on biological fertility, but an entry into citizenship [...]" (11). The final images of *Drunktown's Finest* reunite Felixia, her grandparents, her cousin Nizhoni, Max, and her brother Luther, and illustrate the Navajo worldview and sense of kinship and community, which include men, women and the nádleeh.

The film's ending conveys the sense of balance and harmony encapsulated in the Navajo concept of hozho.¹⁵ According to Michelle Kahn-John and Mary Koithan, encompassing both a way of living and a state of being,

the Hózhó philosophy offers key elements of the moral and behavioral conduct necessary for a long healthy life, placing an emphasis on the importance of maintaining

relationships by “developing pride of one’s body, mind, soul, spirit and honoring all life. (citation)¹⁶

Thus, in *Drunktown’s Finest*, Nizhoni is satisfied in her quest toward finding her true self by reconnecting with her biological family and achieves a state of peace, Sick Boy chooses a healthy and responsible behavioral conduct, and Felixia finds inner balance, and all three advance towards a state of wellness. In her 2020 article, “Reel Restoration in *Drunktown’s Finest*,” Renae Watchman argues that through hozho, translated as “to be in a state of wellness, balance, peace and harmony, culminating in beauty,” Freeland’s characters ultimately find their Indigeneity and humanity (Watchman 29).

In her 2015 review of the film *Drunktown’s Finest* for *Indian Country Today*, Jennifer Denetdale argues that the author did not go far enough in condemning the roots of the injustices caused to the Navajo, and that the film end could be seen as suggesting a simplistic means of healing an ongoing trauma only through traditional spirituality.¹⁷ According to Denetdale, “The separation of ‘tradition’ from the ‘politics’ of challenging structures of domination and exploitation individualizes our responses to self-healing and keeps the undercurrents of a town like Gallup intact” (Denetdale 2015). However, Freeland’s strategy seeks to bring awareness for social justice around the issue of gender diversity to heterogeneous audiences and elaborate a basis for ethnic solidarity as well. *Drunktown’s Finest* is a fiction where the individual character stands as a signifier of the collective and the personal story as emblematic of the political.

Through her filmic message, Freeland underlines the importance of preserving Native worldview in the process of indigenous nation building. Thus, reflecting and reaffirming Navajo spirituality and understanding of the world, *Drunktown’s Finest* opposes existing power relationships which reflect colonial modes of thought such as heteropatriarchy and gender roles, required by the colonial regimes, and acts towards decolonization and sovereignty.

In his 2017 film comment on IMDb, one of the netizens, darrellwatvhman,¹⁸ criticizes Freeland for failing to address the issue of violence against women and Two-Spirit people.

However, this painful subject is treated in a subliminal way in the scene showing Nizhoni during one of her nocturnal marauding as a volunteer with the social services of the reserve. At the side of the road, the torches of the officers accompanying Nizhoni illuminate a dead horse covered by red handprints. Suddenly, in Nizhoni's mind, other similar images intermingle, giving the young girl an impression of *déjà vu*. Indeed, Nizhoni had seen these pictures in her dream, thus relating to her Diné identity and to the Navajo dream culture as an important element of Navajo identity. As Watchman explains, this prophetic dream foreshadows the identity of Nizhoni's biological parents whose family name was Pinto: "A pinto is a spotted or painted horse" (Watchman 38).

Moreover, in Native American culture these marks are the symbol of the violence suffered by women, children, and Two-Spirit people, revealing the reservation as a site of violent events which still occur in the present day. Thus, through the symbol and without words, a single image is enough for Freeland to poignantly evoke Indigenous victims of violence from past and present. At the same time, *Drunktown's Finest* clearly shows Freeland's intent to present a positive and optimistic image of Native American women instead of their persistent stereotypical representations as victims. Here, Nizhoni as well as Felixia, take control of their lives and pursue their aims accordingly with their own decisions.

In *Drunktown's Finest*, Freeland examines the fragility of Felixia's sexual life. The spectator can see Felixia with a client in a car, or lying in the bed in a hotel room, in a moment when a client gives her money and leaves, while a very close up on Felixia's face reveals her sadness. Freeland's exploration of the character's intimate life allows us to understand that in her search for love and affection, Felixia cannot establish a balanced relationship. In her struggle to reconcile her psychological and physical being, she is helped by her grandfather, the medicine man. Acknowledging herself as *nádleeh* and understanding her place in the world, Felixia can engage in what Driskill calls the "journey back" to the "first homeland: the body" (Driskill 53). In so doing, Freeland's *nádleeh* character establishes the notion of

Sovereign Erotic as a means of healing Native’s sexuality from the historical trauma that Indigenous Two-Spirit people continue to survive.

According to *Drunktown’s Finest’s* narrative, Felixia envisions going to New York City, and the film does not give more information. Whether she will return or stay there, she does not know. As Lee Schweninger observes, Felixia’s possible desire to have surgery is never clarified in the film and this idea could be seen as corresponding to audiences’ perception which tend to reduce gender diversity to gender binary.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Felixia’s excitement and joy about the trip reveal her expectations for more than a mere adventure. Her choice is personal and sovereign, and her determination indicates the failure of governmental strategies to control indigenous sexuality through education, religion, and law. But she knows, as do spectators too, that she has a family that supports her. As Felixia’s grandfather told her, “wherever you go, whatever you choose to do, you’ll always have a home here, in this place.” Thus, the film uses such an approach to underline the need for spiritual support that only the reservation home could provide.

In *Drunktown’s Finest*, Felixia’s gender identity is distinct from those of Luther and Nizhoni. They all complete and balance each other. As in a triptych, Freeland paints the portrait of Navajo youth: a young man, a young woman, and a Two-Spirited person, thus echoing the origin story Harmon has told, and the film clearly shows that the community needs women and men, but also the nádleehi. At the same time the film conveys the idea that all three are part of the portrait of the Navajo nation which also includes elders and children. Through the sovereignty of the erotic, the transgender character of *Drunktown’s Finest* finds routes to self-determination. Felixia’s relation to her family, history and land speaks to her affect, it is related to her family, history and land. But the film also reinforces the deep respect that tribal nations have long had in their relationships with Two-Spirit people, thus engaging Indigenous knowledge routes toward hope.

In *Drunktown’s Finest*, the presence of a Two-Spirit character on screen not only counteracts their erasure from colonial narratives but also claims the need for acceptance and

spiritual support for indigenous queer and Two-Spirit people, and through the Sovereign erotic, ultimately challenge established power relationships. The very presence of a queer character, as well as its centrality in the film, update and diversify the catalog of Indigenous images, bringing together traditional and modern aspects of the ever-evolving Indigenous culture and ultimately make manifest their survival. By exploring different dimensions of identity, *Drunktown's Finest* contributes to the modernizing and de-essentializing Native American's representations in cinema. By imagining alternatives of Indigenous beings, Freeland's film participates in what Dean Rader calls aesthetic activism, a "political and social activism that finds representation in the artistic realm" (Rader 5).

The alternative representation of gender in *Drunktown's Finest* works towards an acknowledgement, acceptance, and respect for queer and Two-Spirit indigenous people as well as a claim for acceptance and respect for all kinds of difference.

Notes

¹ With respect to indigenous people's sovereignty and inherent right to the North American continent, in this article I use the hyperonyms "Native American," "Native," "Indigenous," "Indian," and "American Indian" interchangeably.

² Adopted in 1990 at the Third International Gathering of American Indian and First Nations Gays and Lesbians in Winnipeg, the term Two-Spirit encompasses complex gender systems in various tribal societies and responds to the necessity of a term specific to Indigenous experiences, cultures and histories.

³ Nádleeh is a Navajo concept of gender distinctness, rooted in the Navajo origin story.

⁴ In their 2004 article "Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey To A Sovereign Erotic," Cherokee scholar and poet Qwo-Li Driskill writes about "historical trauma" and proposes the erotic as mean of healing Native peoples sexualities, forwarding the concept of Sovereign Erotic which, according to them, is "a return to and/or continuance of the complex realities of gender and sexuality that are ever-present [...], but erased and hidden by colonial cultures" (51, 56). Driskill defines the Sovereign Erotic as "an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations" (51).

⁵ In the Introduction to their 2011 book, *Queer Indigenous studies: Critical interventions in theory, politics, and literature*, the authors observe: "Indigenous GLBTQ2 peoples appear as part of the diversity of their own nations and of Indigenous peoples generally, crossing many cultural, national, racial, gender, and sexual identities" (9).

⁶ See Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd.

⁷ As Leung describes in her 2016 article "Always in translation: Trans cinema across languages," at Vancouver's Queer Film Festival, *Drunktown's Finest* was acclaimed by a long standing ovation, and "At a panel discussion held after the screening of her film, Sydney

Freeland was inundated with questions about how she was able to bring such ‘authenticity’ to the film” (12).

⁸ See Raheja, Michelle H. *Reservation 303ealism: Redfacing, visual sovereignty, and representations of Native Americans in film*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011. According to Raheja, visual sovereignty “intervenes in a larger discussion on Native American sovereignty by locating and advocating for indigenous cultural and political power within and outside of Western legal jurisprudence” (1162).

⁹ See Warrior, Robert Allen. *Tribal secrets: recovering American Indian intellectual traditions*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995. In his chapter(?) Warrior states that, “The decision to exercise intellectual sovereignty provides a crucial moment in the process from which resistance, hope, and, most of all, imagination issue” (124).

¹⁰ Over the last few decades, notwithstanding the lack of information that makes any study in the area “partial” and “unsatisfying” as Daniel Heath Justice points out in his 2010 article “Notes toward a Theory of Anomaly,” scholars demonstrated how colonization and religion have shamed and erased traditional Indigenous beliefs about sexuality and family structure. However, as queer Indigenous scholar Craig Womack observes, the resulting silence which surrounds queer Natives does not signify their absence.

See Justice, Daniel Heath. “Notes toward a Theory of Anomaly.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.1-2, 2010, pp. 207–242.

See Womack, Craig. “SUSPICIONING: Imagining a Debate between Those Who Get Confused, and Those Who Don’t, When They Read Critical Responses to the Poems of Joy Harjo, or What’s an Old-Timey Gay Boy Like Me to Do.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.1-2, 2010, pp. 133–155.

¹¹ <https://www.navajotimes.com/news/2013/0713/070413marriage.php>, consulted 09.27.2020.

¹² In the columns of *Navajo Times*, Denetdale underlines: “What’s important about the current issues facing Navajo LGBTQ is the significance of the creation stories, in which they draw upon the story of nádleeh to validate their places in society” (Quoted in *Navajo Times* 2013).

¹³ Discussing the critical revision of the image of the Indigenous woman in *Drunktown’s Finest*, in her 2015 article “Pocahontas No More: Indigenous Women Standing Up for Each Other in Twenty-First Century Cinema,” Sophie Mayer notes that: “Felixia’s participation in the ceremony holds out the possibilities of gender distinctness and fluidity to Max as a Navajo way of life [...]” (10).

¹⁴ Andrea Smith declares in her 2015 book, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, that “It has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender relationships on Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native Peoples in the first place” (139). Smith considers that Native people will be unable to decolonize and fully assert their sovereignty, if they “maintain these patriarchal gender systems” (139).

¹⁵ See Yazzie, Melanie K. ‘Narrating Ordinary Power: Hózhóóíí, Violence and Critical Diné Studies.’ *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought*. Ed. Lloyd K. Lee. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014, pp. 83–99.

¹⁶ In their article, “Living in Health, Harmony, and Beauty: The Diné (Navajo) Hózhó Wellness Philosophy,” Michelle Kahn-John and Mary Koithan propose routes for healing and wellbeing in accordance with the Navajo philosophy.

¹⁷ Denetdale, Jennifer. ‘Drunktown’s Finest’ Papers Over Border Town Violence and Bigotry’, *Indian Country Today*, accessed 07.21.2021.

¹⁸ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3091286/> User Reviews, consulted 09.27.2020.

¹⁹ See Schweninger, Lee. “Nádleeh and the River.” *Transmotion* vol. 7. no. 1 (2021), pp. 110–131.

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