

**Lee, Lloyd. Ed. *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014.**

Lloyd Lee (Ph. D.) is Kinyaa'áanii, born for Tlááschíí (Towering House, born for Red Bottom). His third clan, his mother's father's clan is Áshijíí (Salt) and his fourth clan, his paternal grandfather, is Tábaahá (Water's Edge). He is an Associate Professor of Native American Studies at the University of New Mexico and the Director of the Institute for American Indian Research (IFAIR). His personal story makes up the preface of *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought*, which is almost verbatim to the version found in the introduction of his self-published book *Diné Masculinities: Conceptualizations and Reflections* (Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013). In collaboration with twelve other Diné authors, this book culminates from essays that “reflect elements of cultural Diné knowledge, analysis, creativity, planning, living, and reflecting” (xiv).

*Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* appears to be constructed to reflect the teachings conveyed by Sa'ą Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón<sup>1</sup> and is thus divided into four parts. In applying the epistemologies imbedded in Sa'ą Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón, the thirteen authors reflect “the four-part planning and learning process encompass[ing] the following tenets: Nitsáhákees (Thinking), Nahat'á (Planning), Iiná (Living), and Siíhasin (Assurance), [in respective order]” (Lee 6; Werito 27). This monograph at once advocates for the revitalization and reclamation of Diné epistemology by using and critiquing Western constraints of knowledge dissemination. Sa'ą Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón is not only understood to encompass the four tenants, but it is a cyclical continuum: “Specifically, the Diné philosophy [Sa'ą Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón] is associated with and orientated to the four cardinal directions, starting with the east direction; the four seasons, starting with the spring; and the four parts of the day, beginning with early dawn and moving around in a clockwise direction with the path of the sun. This is commonly referred to as the *T'áá shá bik'ehgo na'nitin*, or the Sun Wise Path Teachings” (27).

The chapters intersect life stories, art, poetry, prose, and scholarly essays that reveal multivalent Diné epistemologies and philosophies, or matrices; a term Lee borrows from Viola F. Cordova who defines matrix as a “web of related concepts” (3).

**Nitsáhákees** (Thinking). Part 1: “Frameworks and Understanding” invites us to think critically about how the stories of individual Diné conceptualize Sa'ą Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón.

Shawn L. Secatero's chapter, “Beneath Our Sacred Minds, Hands, and Hearts. One Dissertation Journey” recounts his path in developing a study, anchored in a corn model theory that “can be deemed as a higher education model that encompasses spiritual, mental, social, and physical well-being” (21). Together, these also capture the Diné principles of Hózhó, which is the focus of the next chapter by Vincent Werito.

“Understanding Hózhó to Achieve Critical Consciousness. A Contemporary Diné Interpretation of the Philosophical Principals of Hózhó” provides a critical, albeit personal, framework for understanding the complexities and intricacies of Hózhó. Werito reiterates the common translation of Hózhó as becoming or being “in a state of harmony and peace...” (26). What is most powerful about Werito's chapter is that it uses the tools of Applied Indigenous Studies by constructing and applying Sa'ą Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón to unpack the Diné hermeneutics of Hózhó. In addition to ceremonial understandings of the term, he also writes:

“hózhq̄ is more significant when the meaning is conceptualized, actualized, lived, and reflected on at a personal level” (29).

His first section, conceptualizing nitsáhákees, is “Kodóó Hózhq̄ Dooleeł: It Begins in Beauty, Harmony, and Peace.” The second section actualizes nahat’á, “Iiná Baahózhq̄ Bó’hoo’aah: Learning about Hózhq̄ in My Childhood.” Werito’s third section shares present-day experiences through the concept of iiná, “Hózhq̄ogo ‘Iiná: Living in Peace and Harmony.” Finally, he concludes his chapter with a section that reflects siihasin, “Hózhq̄ Nahásdl̄ij̄: It Is Fulfilled in Beauty” by also interweaving the tenets of Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhq̄on. This last section, named after how Diné were taught by the Diyin Dine’é to end prayers, provides reflection on how he continually improves his knowledge of hózhq̄. Werito organizes this subsection with four principles that reiterate nitsáhákees (“thinking for one’s self”), nahat’á (“critical conscientization, which entails a plan to strategize ways to empower myself and other Diné peoples”), iiná (“action...to achieve life goals”), and siihasin (“reflection”).<sup>2</sup> His chapter aims to encourage “Indigenous scholars [that] we can utilize Indigenous thought to make sense of Western concepts and vice versa” (37).

Esther Belin’s chapter, “Morning Offerings, Like Salt” challenges us to think critically about contemporary “California style” and other urban and relocated Diné experiences that delineate Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhq̄on. Her vignettes begin by acknowledging her presence among rocks from the northerly of the Navajo Four Sacred Mountains; she says “I am surrounded by the rocks from Dibé Ntsaa” (39). Belin’s positioning continues in musing about and critiquing the Navajo Nation’s complicity in the erasure of traditional ways of belonging, being and doing. Her vignettes return to the rocks and tell of how her parents instilled Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhq̄on, albeit with a hybrid of terms from Diné bizaad and bilagáanaa bizaad. Belin’s chapter incorporates history, theory, and personal anecdotes of life by the ocean with wit and nuance, while also maintaining a strong position as one who is on the path to “full Diné personhood” (42) despite being legitimated by her 4/4 blood quantum and census number.

All four parts of this book, end with a chapter by Venaya Yazzie. Through her poetry and artwork, Yazzie concludes each part with a creative perspective that offers “the essence” and “visual metaphor” (9) of each section, thereby revealing yet another way to revitalizing and reclaiming Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhq̄on. In this first section, Yazzie’s poem, “7pm thought, memory @ Dziłnaodil̄thle-Eastern View” evokes Diné epistemologies of the kinetics of naashá (which she interprets as walking, moving, existing, and living), along with imagery of Dziłnaodil̄thle, located centrally among the four traditional sacred ones. Her artwork titled “Dinétaah” (traditional homelands meaning “among the Diné”) concludes this section.

**Nahat’á** (Planning). Part 2: “Analysis of Methodologies” shares how to plan out and actualize reclamation and revitalization of Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhq̄on through the works of leading Diné scholars.

Larry W. Emerson’s chapter, “Diné Culture, Decolonization, and the Politics of Hózhq̄” offers six concepts to critically engage in order to return to the teachings of hózhq̄ and k’é (relationships, kinship) with a firm eye on global Diné futurities. Like others in this book, he begins with introducing himself by adhering to Diné clan protocol, and he outlines his personal journey to affirm why his plan to actualize is worthy of implementation. Emerson’s honest personal narrative of the disastrous role that colonization has played is one that many can relate to. He was “taught to deny [his] Diné identity, history, culture, language, and politics” (51). Colonization is the first of the six concepts and it caused an imbalance across Diné Bikéyah

(Navajo land). This imbalance is the opposite of hózhó. To return to hózhó, necessitates decolonization and Emerson writes it is “impossible without a creative drive to change things that are not appropriate and are unhealthy for Diné peoples” (52). He offers a concise history of colonization from the era of the Spanish invasions of the mid-sixteenth century through the pivotal return of Diné from Hwéeldi in 1864 that marks a new Navajo history to contemporary times, where he says we are in a “quasi recovery from colonialism” (54). Emerson broadens his critique of neocolonialism to include Navajo Nation citizens who have embraced Western ways of being, knowing, and living, which have had unhealthy results. He transitions to the second of his six concepts, the theory of “Intergenerational and Historic Trauma,” to help elucidate why hózhó and k’é are rendered meaningless throughout the Navajo Nation. The third concept is decolonization as theory, and Emerson’s goal is to educate other Diné in order to engage “community-wide healing, transformation, and mobilization” (58) that will embody a form of liberation. In order to get to this freedom from internal (Diné) and external (non-Diné) oppression, he proposes a return to our “beautiful philosophy of life” (61) whereby hózhó is at the core. The fourth concept naturally flows from decolonization theories, and it is that of indigenization, where he sees the role of kinship as ongoing, among other Indigenous ways of doing, knowing, and being, as pivotal to Diné continuity. Indigenization necessitates traditional knowledge, which is the fifth concept that Emerson outlines. He views “traditional knowledge in two branches: (1) theory and practice and (2) as a set of primordial truths” (63). The sixth and final concept Emerson proposes that will revitalize and reclaim Navajo thought is to recognize Indigenous Human Rights, which Lee takes up at length as a complete chapter in the final section of this book. Emerson’s foray into this brief introduction of Indigenous Human Rights affirms for Diné elders and scholars how we can safely move towards thinking, planning, living, and reflecting using hózhó and k’é.

Historian Jennifer Nez Denetdale traces “The Value of Oral History on the Path to Diné/Navajo Sovereignty” by beginning with her own family story that involved her grandmothers and Diné culinary practices that involved the use of a long lost tsé’ est’éei (cooking stone). Denetdale’s captivating narrative corrected my own knowledge of traditional foods. Formerly, I only knew of this bread as Hopi Piki Bread, and her story illuminated that this was, in fact, also a Navajo delicacy called nóogazi. Her chapter aims to promote cultural sovereignty (of which she provides several sources on how this concept is understood) through oral stories and Denetdale emphasizes that stories from the Diné Creation oeuvre, particularly those that emphasize the importance of Diné women, of matriarchy and of k’é, relationships, are key to reclamation and revitalization. She says oral stories reflect traditional thought, and knowing and narrating oral history, the tellers and re-tellers of the stories implement decolonial, didactic tools that teach “how to return to those philosophies and values” (73). Denetdale’s scholarly journey began with her rejection of non-Navajo versions of Navajo history, which “erod(-ed) tribal sovereignty and den(-ied) the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Indigenous peoples” (71) in the section “Decolonization, Cultural Sovereignty, and Oral History.” In arguing for the actualization of oral traditions as a framework to decolonize how history has been conveyed, she clarifies that it is a way “for finding our way back to the ways in which our ancestors envisioned the past and the future” (71). In the next section, “Decolonization and Oral History,” Denetdale highlights the “Long Walk (1863-1866) [as] a historical watershed” (74) because ancestors of the survivors memorialize experiences of the Long Walk through oral stories, which are counter-stories to the American (Western) narrative. Historical stories and creation narratives interweave to make meaning for contemporary Diné. Denetdale’s own oral history research combined with

the didactic stories of creation: of the importance of place, Diné Bikéyah; of how clans were formed, which relay the importance of k'é and hózhǫ́; of the role of girls and the ceremonial significance of becoming Kinaaldá, of becoming women like 'Asdzaa Nádleehé. Denetdale explains, "Changing Woman is one of our most benevolent and compassionate of the Holy Deities. She is the Mother of the Diné peoples. In the telling of stories about women and cooking, the imagery of ideal Navajo womanhood was relayed" (78). This invites a return to Denetdale's story of the tsé' est'éeí, in the final section "Reverberations." The significance of recovering this cooking stone, invited the re-telling of her grandmothers who used it and as such, enacted cultural sovereignty and sustained their family.

The third chapter in part 2 is by Melanie K. Yazzie and is called "Narrating Ordinary Power: Hózhǫ́jí, Violence, and Critical Diné Studies." The chapter commences with a memory that explains what "ordinary" and "hózhǫ́jí" (Blessing Way) mean by way of the poetic beauty of Luci Tapahonso. Yazzie then expands her narration to include the poetic dystopia envisioned by Sherwin Bitsui with both reflection of, and theorizing of, power and violence. Turning to Foucault, Fanon, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Patrick Wolfe, Yazzie relates her own personal journey when she was an (extra-)ordinary graduate student in developing Critical Diné Studies methodology that captures the intersections these writers (and others) introduce in order to "center the ubiquitous issue of power...a conceptual tool for addressing the realities of colonial violence *alongside* and *in relation to* the realities of hózhǫ́jí in ordinary Diné life..." (91, emphasis in the original). Similar to Denetdale's argument that stories are valuable for reclaiming and revitalizing Diné thought, Yazzie expands upon this: "Like power, oral traditions are alive and constantly changing" (92). This leads to the section "Critical Diné Studies and Oral Documentation." Before engaging in her argument, Yazzie summarizes Andrea Smith's call for Native American Studies to "take up queer theory's insights regarding 'subjectless critique'" (92) because "subjectless critique legitimizes the use of oral traditions to uncover these forms and influences of power, because oral traditions potentially describe the complexities inherent to constructions of knowledge and history" (93). To give more credence to her argument, Yazzie also evokes Michel-Rolph Trouillo to demonstrate how Diné oral traditions act to historicize and centre "Diné subject formation" (93). She ends this section by outlining three ways that these interwoven insights propel her theory of Critical Diné Studies, grounded by oral traditions and Diné subjectivity vis-à-vis the Diné everyday and the Diné ordinary. The final section in this chapter, "Critical Diné Studies and Interdisciplinarity" argues for Diné studies scholars to "draw from interdisciplinary studies on colonialism and histories of modern power to inform our critiques of colonialism, settler desire, power, and discourse as they play out in the lives of ordinary Diné peoples" (95). She offers several examples of interdisciplinarity as an approach, while also maintaining Diné cultural significance in order to address power (which she notes there is no equivalent term in Diné bizaad). While her arguments are sound, in terms of analyzing how the five-fingered negotiate power, violence and hózhǫ́jí, Yazzie does not engage directly with how her theory moves Sa'a Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhǫ́n forward. Instead she pleads for "our research ... to rigorously commit to understanding all these forms of power if we are to ... commit ourselves to being responsible members of k'éeí, past, present, and future" (97), which implies that clan membership, oral stories, and hózhǫ́jí are anything but ordinary.

**Iiná** (Living). Part 3: "Political Challenges" outlines the contemporary realities of life for upkeeping Diné thought amid assimilative and genocidal governmental policies.

Yolynda Begay examines “Historic and Demographic Changes that Impact the Future of the Diné and the Development of Community-Based Policy” and Andrew Curley’s chapter is “The Origin of Legibility: Rethinking Colonialism and Resistance among the Navajo People, 1868-1937.” Begay critiques the governmental policies that continue to measure Diné identity, and like others in the book, prefer to identify by way of k’é. Her chapter “evaluates the current and historical Diné population dynamics and how these dynamics impact tribal enrollment policy” (106). Her aim is to ultimately heed the call to adopt a decolonial way of Diné recognition, i.e. tribal enrollment, to “integrate traditional knowledge into policy” (107). As the title of her chapter suggests, she employs the use of figures, charts, and data to track changes in enrollment and recognizes an imposed “Political Identity” versus “Diné Worldview on Identity” that includes not just head counts, but also traditional names that became moot for governmental officials and thus anglicized. Begay recognizes the contemporary and lived experiences of Diné who are negatively affected by policy. And given the rising population, she argues that this is the moment, in the here and now, to rethink the enrolment policy for a sustainable Diné future and doing so by asserting our sovereignty and reclaiming pre-assimilation, decolonial ways of belonging, which may or may not define identification and include enrollment.

Andrew Curley’s astute observation that “When trying to understand Navajo Thought in an era of colonialism, we must also examine how we became the Navajo Tribe in the first place” (129) introduces his study on “The Origin of Legibility: Rethinking Colonialism and Resistance among the Navajo People, 1868-1937.” His analysis of how Diné (the term) was erased and replaced by another term: “Navajo,” is one that critiques the U.S.’s rationale of attempting to make the Diné a “legible” minority who were to be in tune with, aligned with, and standardized with everyone else. These attempts were not without resistance from Diné people, and Curley hopes “this chapter contributes to the development of a new understanding of our recent history with greater emphasis on how we came to look the way we do in the eyes of the federal government—namely, though [sic] the establishment of political institutions around new forms of political leadership” (130). Curley’s chapter is framed by the political timeline, spanning from the Treaty of Bosque Redondo in 1868 to 1937 with the establishment of the second Navajo Nation tribal government. He charts governmental policy and its contentious impacts on Diné, who did not sit idly by and resisted colonialism through acts such as ceremony, outright ignoring policy to that of enacting violence; these continue today. Living as Diné (and not as Navajo) recognizes and promotes Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóǫn in ways that simply reading about Navajo history does not.

**Siihasin** (Reflection/Assurance). Part 4: “Paths for the Future” engages readers to reflect upon how to move forward with active Diné presence that includes examining Diné language and culture loss as well as implementing articles outlined in the UN’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Both Kim Baca and Tiffany S. Lee reflect on the contemporary challenges that Diné youth have in learning and living the language and culture. Baca’s short essay, “Sustaining a Diné Way of Life” introduces two Navajo youth whose divergent stories reflect many in similar situations. They go to a Native American public school in Albuquerque and claim that their twice weekly Navajo classes instill Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóǫn. This short essay highlights their struggle with Diné identity, while they yearn to embody Diné identity.

Tiffany S. Lee’s chapter “If I Could Speak Navajo, I’d Definitely Speak It 24/7” proposes the creation of “Critical Language Consciousness” that is communal, collaborative, and holistic.

She reflects upon why Diné bizaad is not at the heart of Diné education, given the presence of a few key immersion schools that are on the Navajo nation. This query invites more queries of why Diné language is not prioritized as part of the contemporary daily Diné life and worldview. The answers, she argues, are found in Critical Language Consciousness, whereby students have become “well informed of the injustice and oppression that their people and Indigenous people across the world have suffered, and they desire to make a difference” (160). Knowing about the effects of colonialism is a prerequisite to transformative thinking that will continue to inspire language reclamation and revitalization. The section “Diné Youth and Diné Language” exposes the divergent views of youth who are either proud of their Diné identity or ashamed of it. As an educator, Lee advocates knowing genocidal and colonial histories that have promoted Diné language loss; she notes that youth who have become critically conscious are the ones who yearn to make changes in terms of language revitalization. She has a wealth of research that spans from engaging her university students in written reflection to interviews that discuss how to reclaim languages to a questionnaire aimed at exposing high school students’ attitudes on Diné language. The results of this combined research make up the next section “States of Confusion, Marginalization, and Stigmatization.” While many were confused, felt marginalized or stigmatized for either not speaking or speaking incorrect Diné bizaad, Lee has stories of “Diné Youth Language Activism” whereby youth “have been very active as change agents in instigating language revitalization efforts in their families and communities” (166). All of the ways youth have taken initiatives to reclaim and revitalize Diné bizaad are inspirational and range from becoming language teachers of sorts to family and community to combating racism by actively resisting censorship of the language. These stories highlight how youth are in control of their own language destinies through critical language consciousness and how as a community of Diné, we need to embody Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón in ways that continue to motivate and inspire language reclamation and revitalization.

This final section coalesces active Diné presence via language with active Diné presence as recognized by the “Navajo Nation and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” which is the name of the final chapter of the book and authored by Lloyd L. Lee. He provides a concise summary of the premise of the declaration, including the initial oppositional votes, now reversed, from the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Lee then scrutinizes seven articles that the Navajo Nation is implementing whose topics are: self-determination through economic development, protecting Diné traditions, customs and ceremonies, repatriation, language education, subsistence and development, land, recognition of rights pertaining to cultural heritage and Indigenous knowledges, and determining identity and membership. In focusing on these specific articles, Lee “offers a discussion on how Diné individuals and communities can hold the tribal government and the United States accountable” (171). To scrutinize these articles, Lee incorporates evidence where the “Fundamental Laws of the Diné” worked in tandem with the declaration to advocate for a decolonial and sustainable system of governance for each respective topic. Lee encourages turning to the laws to support a sustainable Diné continuum that focuses on language, education, and privileging stories. Together, the recognition and implementation of articles from the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples alongside thinking, planning, living and reflecting, by way of Sa’ą Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón, will aid in a transformative future for Diné people and Diné worldviews.

This outstanding book synthesizes diverse stories of Diné artists, writers, thinkers, and community members and is written for both academic and non-academic audiences. *Diné*

*Perspectives* privileges Diné readers of all ages and it invites further dialogue about how one actively works towards Diné revitalization, reclamation and renewal of Sa'ą Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón, the foundational epistemology that will ensure Diné continuum.

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#### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> In speaking with local elders in the Shiprock area, I have been instructed not to reduce our foundational epistemology of Sa'ą Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón to a metaphor, or to the acronym of SNBH, as the authors in this book do. When in contexts outside of academia, elders do not say “SNBH” in every day or ceremonial parlance. To continue to do so reverses Diné continuance and is an act of epistemicide.

<sup>2</sup> all quotes are from pages 34-35.