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The Modern Sheep Keeper; A Comparative Analysis Utilizing Spatial Storytelling Techniques

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The Modern Sheep Keeper; A Comparative Analysis Utilizing Spatial Storytelling Techniques

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Abstract: “If you take care of the sheep and the land, then the sheep and land will always take care of you.” This was what my grandfather told me as I left for college. It was a saying from his mother, my great-grandmother Dorothy. These days, I have been able to visit the sheep camps of my friends. I have become fascinated with the day-to-day workings and that is why I have become interested in the modern-day shepherd. In this spatial storytelling project, I interviewed two Native shepherders. These men raise and look after sheep camps in two similar, but very distinct communities: Zuni Pueblo and the To'hajiilee Navajo community. The shepherd from my community of To'hajiilee has been vital in the protection of the Navajo Churro sheep, bringing the species back from the brink of extinction. The shepherd from Zuni takes care of sheep because it's been his family's tradition since before he was born. The comparative analysis of the two shepherders focuses on various components of sheep camp including the sheep species, the traditional grazing routes, proximity to available water, sheep camp maintenance and overall sustainability. Mind mapping and asset mapping techniques were used for the visual mapping component of the project. I conclude this analysis with questions about sustaining the future of sheep camps and uses for the sheep in each community. Then I look into the roles outside of sheep camp that the shepherders take on to help them sustain. Some final thoughts: my great-grandma Dorothy was not allowed to attend school, she was the one that stayed behind to watch over the sheep and livestock in To'hajiilee. Although she did not obtain a formal western education, she gained years of traditional Navajo knowledge of how to raise and take care of her sheep camp. In the end, her words resonate with me and also rings true across the To'hajiilee Navajo reservation and transcend boundaries. My great-grandma Dorothy's sheep camp is now long abandoned and all I have are stories from the past.