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# “We are lonesome for our land”: The Settler Colonialist Use of Exodus in the Diné Long Walk

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“We are lonesome for our land”:

The Settler Colonialist Use of Exodus in the Diné Long Walk

Emma Brewer-Wallin

Religion 370: Honors Thesis

April 27, 2018

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## Introduction: Personal Orientation

I spent the summers of 2016 and 2017 in Navajo Nation (Tsaile, Arizona), while I worked for a Christian-based non-profit, Sierra Service Project, which also operates sites at four other locations in California, Oregon, and Washington. I will return to Tsaile for one final summer following graduation. Each summer, hundreds of high school youth and adults volunteer a week of their time to serving elders within the Tsaile-Wheatfields and Lukachukai communities. Our staff trains them in home repair work, and our organization funds these projects, in large part paid through the volunteer fees. My job was leading the volunteers in spiritual reflection around their volunteer service. Most of these youth come from predominantly white churches, concentrated in California and Arizona; for many, their week with us is one of their first experiences considering the lives of people unlike them and dedicating their time and energy to someone else's wellbeing. Although my home church has never been to Tsaile, they have been to SSP's other locations.<sup>1</sup> In other words, my experiences growing up were similar to those of the youth I work with during the summer.

My initial interest in this project came out of my experiences in Tsaile in 2016. Every week I took our volunteers to the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, AZ, which presents a ranging exhibits that include Navajo history and contemporary art. The section on the Long Walk features both documentary history and transcribed oral accounts and flowed directly into stories of traumatic boarding school experiences. Additionally, volunteers gained greater understanding of the people they served through weekly talks about Diné history and culture from a community member, Silver Nez Perry (who happens to have a doctorate in Criminology

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<sup>1</sup> My home church is First Congregational, United Church of Christ in Salem, Oregon. Our church's first SSP trip (2015) was to Chiloquin, Oregon, where the population is significantly made up of members of the Klamath Tribes. I attended this trip as an adult volunteer after my first year at Wellesley.

with a focus in Navajo justice systems). As Silver told the story of the Long Walk a little differently each week, I learned something new. More than any particular element of his story, what piqued my interest was the *way* Silver told it. In his telling of the Long Walk, Silver would use the first person plural *we*, even though the events he described happened before even his parents or grandparents were alive. Earlier that spring I had attended my first Passover Sedar, and I noticed a similarity in Silver's speech with what I had heard from the Haggadah: I heard a parallel between Silver's use of first-person plural pronouns and lines such as "This year we are here; next year in the land of Israel. This year we are slaves; next year we will be free people."<sup>2</sup> In both cases I heard a ritualized retelling, using the first person plural, of a collective trauma that involve a long, hard walk in the desert. And so I set out to do a comparative project between the telling and retelling of the Exodus narrative with the narratives of the Long Walk. As I pursued this project, however, I began to see the ways that this comparison was rooted in Christian hegemony. Although the similarities I observed are not untrue, as I worked through my research, I saw that, explicitly or not, I was not the first (Christian) Euro-American scholar to read the narrative of the Long Walk through the lens of Exodus. When swimming in the waters of American Christianity, Exodus is not only a religious narrative, but also a nation-building event: so with this frame, of course oppression and a grueling walk through the desert turn a people into a nation.

As I write about settler colonialism and Christian hegemony, I must make it clear that these are both systems of which I am a part and from which I have benefitted. I am a highly-educated white person, raised in the Protestant tradition, and pursuing the vocation of ordained Christian ministry. As a white American, my entire country's existence – and therefore

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<sup>2</sup> "English Haggadah Text with Instructional Guide," accessed December 14, 2017, [http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach\\_cdo/aid/661624/jewish/English-Haggadah.htm](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/661624/jewish/English-Haggadah.htm).

everything from the only home I or my grandparents have ever known to my passport – is a project in settler colonialism. As someone who grew up in Oregon, my schools taught me an unproblematic Manifest Destiny, and we took field trips to view Native American artifacts in museums – without an understanding of the contemporary ties of these historical pieces. Though no longer the numerical majority, my particular branch of Christianity (Congregational) was once legally enshrined in the state where I now live (Massachusetts), and white “mainline” Protestantism is normative in all manner of religious concerns, including culturally, legally, and academically. Although I think Sierra Service Project’s work in Tsaile has departed from Christian missionary work of the past,<sup>3</sup> I know that what we do comes out of that particular legacy both in Navajo Nation and globally, and it is read as such by some community members in Tsaile and beyond. From this positionality, in this project I aim to privilege Diné histories and scholarship, to be critical of Euro-American scholarship, and to scrutinize and confess the Christian hegemony that has shaped the conversation of the Long Walk.

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<sup>3</sup> Most significantly, because conversion or “saving” plays no part in our objectives. We do not ask our homeowners (project recipients) about their religious beliefs, nor do we tell them about ours, unless they ask. That we are a Christian organization only directly affects who our volunteers are and the kind of language we use internally. We offer home repair work freely, with no request for exchange – neither monetarily nor via religious commitment.

## Acknowledgements

There are three people who have not only encouraged me through the thesis process, but are the reason I am able to enter into it to begin with. My parents, both educators, instilled in me a love of reading and a desire to learn since before I can remember. Throughout my schooling, my mom fought for me to be in a learning environment where my curiosity would be rewarded and I would be challenged to try new things. My dad is unceasing in his encouragement, from the days of his lovingly packing my lunches (complete with a note) to discussing theoretical texts, course selection, and research opportunities. My grandmother has afforded me the tremendous educational environments that I have been privileged to learn in, most certainly including Wellesley. That her giving – whether of tuition money or notebook paper – is so joyful makes it all the more wonderful to receive.

I am so grateful for my dear friend, Sofie Werthan. It has been such a pleasure to share carrel space in Clapp, talk through drafts, commiserate about footnotes, and exchange ideas. My Wellesley faculty have shaped me and my work in ways I am still discovering. Anne Brubaker, my first year writing professor (who has been so much more!) taught me not to be afraid of literature and to embrace the power of narrative. Taking Smitha Radhakrishnan's Racial Regimes course this fall greatly influenced how I approached this material, both directly and indirectly. I am grateful to Ryan Quintana for working with me throughout this process, despite the fact that I've never been enrolled in one of his classes! Components of my Religion coursework are surfacing in this project in surprising ways, for which I am particularly grateful to Steve Marini, who still encourages (though perhaps he should not) my rabbleroising. I am thankful for the Jerome A. Schiff Fellowship not only for their financial support, but for their confidence in the merit of this project. Ed Silver, my advisor, has shown tremendous faith in me and my work, particularly at the times when I could not see the way through.

## Chapter One: A Structure, Not an Event

### I. Project

The Navajo Long Walk refers to the internment of over 9,000 Navajo (the Diné) and about 400 Apache at Fort Sumner in eastern New Mexico from 1863-1868. Initial conflicts between the Diné and Anglo-American settlers (both civilian and military) centered on arguments over property ownership. Some Navajo responded to the encroaching white settlers by raiding their livestock and other goods. The official U.S. response was treaty negotiation, but as this was ineffective, citizens also responded with force. The period leading up to and including the Long Walk was marked by treaty negotiation and violation and culminated in the signing of the final treaty at Fort Sumner. In the historiography of this period, the Long Walk, specifically the Treaty of 1868, is portrayed as the moment of formation for Navajo Nation. Even as historians are critical of reservation and assimilation policies, they still tend toward an understanding that post-1868, Navajo society, government, and economy developed through contact and exchange with the United States.

Diné historian Jennifer Nez Denetdale opens up the problem of the Long Walk historiography's presentation of internment and release as the moment of Navajo nation-formation:

American history constructed... Diné acceptance of American citizenship with little resistance. Furthermore, these American narratives intimate that Navajo nation building followed a natural and inevitable progression of all societies toward nations... It is in this period that Navajos supposedly began to see themselves as one people, as a nation. Such conclusions about the meaning of the Navajo experience under American occupation remain standard and indicate the power of American narratives of exceptionalism.<sup>1</sup>

Denetdale argues that the necessary response to this presentation is to equip the Diné, and other indigenous communities, with oral histories that counter the Anglo-American narrative and are,

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Nez Denetdale, "The Value of Oral History on the Path to Diné/Navajo Sovereignty," in *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 75.



therefore, decolonizing. In order to understand how the hegemonic narrative that Denetdale discusses functions, I use this chapter to describe settler colonialism as both a system and theoretical framework. I also offer the hegemonic narrative of the Long Walk and describe the historiography of U.S.-Indian relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The normative American origin story has its roots in the exodus narrative, as transmitted by Protestant Christians. As collectively understood, the nation's beginning starts with a group of people escaping religious persecution (akin to Pharaoh's Egypt) and seeking a new home in the "promised land," in which they will constitute a new nation. The success of this venture indicates that those people who were once treated badly are in fact God's chosen people. By virtue of their chosen-ness, the people – now nation – know they are divinely justified in their action. But the influence of Exodus extends beyond the sanctification of settler colonialism: it is also a scriptural basis for liberation theologies, particularly in African American and Latin American contexts. In these cases, groups of marginalized (Christian) people recognize their own oppression in the biblical descriptions of the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt. The ensuing story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt both assures the oppressed that God is on their side and will deliver them from bondage and convinces them that, just as the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness, the road will be long and the work will be hard, but they will eventually enter the (promised) land of freedom.

However, as Robert Allen Warrior discusses in "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, conquest, and liberation theology today," the narrative of settler colonialism has not simply been laid onto Exodus, it is a core theme of the text. He argues that, while other subjugated people may see themselves as the Israelites being delivered from slavery in Egypt, indigenous people are counterpart to the Canaanites rather than the People of Israel: theirs is the

land that has been “promised” to someone else, and therefore, “Yahweh the deliverer became Yahweh the conqueror.”<sup>2</sup> Warrior’s argument points to the imposition of the exodus narrative onto native contexts as not only reflective of settler colonialism, but in fact a tool that supports that system. In Chapter 2, I examine the language and imagery of nation-formation in the Anglo-American scholarly understanding of the Long Walk. I argue that this narrative derives from the hegemony of Exodus as the essential version of a people progressing into a nation. Further, I find that in utilizing the language of Exodus, the historiography buttresses the American project of settler colonialism through its portrayal of the relationship between the Diné and the United States. Following Denetdale, in Chapter 3, I turn toward both Diné theoretical material and oral histories of the Long Walk. In doing so, I find that the Diné material counters the hegemonic claims about nation-formation by instead focusing on relationships, restoration, and self-determination.

## II. Settler Colonialism

In “Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance,” Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck outline the “somewhat awkward banner”<sup>3</sup> of settler colonial theory, tracing the various theories and terms that come together to shape it. Like post-colonial theory, settler colonial theory is concerned with the ramifications and effects of colonial subjugation, but the latter differs in two significant ways. First, settler colonialism as a process is distinct from other forms of colonialism: the colonizing power determines that a particular place is their “new home,” and therefore, the methods of exploitation and destruction that follow function to establish this home. This differs from extractive colonialism, in which

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Allen Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today,” *Christianity and Crisis* 49, no. 12 (September 11, 1989), 262.

<sup>3</sup> Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck, “Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 3–13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616653693>, 3.

resources and labor are exploited from the colonized place/people in order to serve the economic development of the colonizing power, but the colonizing forces do not seek to relocate the center of their power to that place.<sup>4</sup> In this way, settler colonialism is not solely about labor and resources, but is specifically and explicitly about land. Second, because a settler colonialist power seeks to relocate itself in the territory of the colonized, and because the settler colonialist project – particularly in the context of the United States – is widely successful, settler colonialism is actively ongoing. So although the “post” in post-colonialism refers to the fact that it is responding to colonialism rather than indicating that colonialism is over, many indigenous scholars dissent from this terminology because of the implication that colonialism is over, when, for them, it is very much ongoing.

In service of settler colonialism, the colonizing power distinguishes between land and those who occupy it. In *God is Red: A Native View on Religion*, Vine Deloria Jr. argues that this separation emerges from Western Christianity’s theology of “the Fall,” in which elements of the “natural world” are deceptive and lead to humans being removed from the Garden of Eden, thereby imposing sin upon humankind. Deloria claims that “the alienation of human beings from nature is caused by the action of humans against nature.”<sup>5</sup> From this understanding comes not only the separation between humans and “nature,” but the association of that nature with sin, something that must be restricted and overcome.<sup>6</sup> This imposed distinction between humans and “nature” allows a colonizing power to view land as an available resource that can be both exploited and made “home.” Following a separation between land and human and the

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Shoemaker, “A Typology of Colonialism,” *Perspectives on History: The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, October 2015, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2015/a-typology-of-colonialism>.

<sup>5</sup> Vine Deloria, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 90.

<sup>6</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 90.

perspective that land is a resource to be used, comes a relationship between the two that, as Tuck and Yang argue, is “restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property.”<sup>7</sup> The previous “owner,” therefore, must be erased, and thus, the racialization of the native: “Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed are made pre-modern and backward. Made savage. Indigenous peoples must be erased, made into ghosts.”<sup>8</sup> This process of racialization simultaneously marks the bodies of indigenous people as “other” than the norm of whiteness and serves to justify the elimination or removal of those bodies from the land that is desirable to the settler colonist. An understanding of racialization within the context of inherently land-based settler colonialism is necessary to understanding the United States’ policies of removal, reservation, and assimilation of the indigenous inhabitants of this land.

In “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” Patrick Wolfe examines the relationship between settler colonialism and genocide via the “logic of elimination.” In order to understand this logic in the context of the United States, we must contrast two interdependent American racialized colonialist projects: on the one hand, the white supremacist regime benefits from the existence and reproduction of black slaves because it is the exploitation of their labor that drives the economic growth of the colony/nation; on the other hand, this system is hungry for land, and the acquisition of that land requires the removal – whether by relocation or extermination – of the people native to it. Although there is a historical nature to this removal, it does not occur solely in the past. As Wolfe articulates, “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure, not an event... elimination is an organizing principle of settler-colonial society

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<sup>7</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 2012. Cited in Rowe and Tuck, “Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies,” 6.

<sup>8</sup> Tuck and Yang, 2012. Cited in Rowe and Tuck, 6.

rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence.”<sup>9</sup> Because settler colonialism is so powerfully dependent on the acquisition and control of land, the form of elimination depends on the status of the settlers’ territory. Early in the development of the American settler colony, with a majority of the territory still “available,” relocation was a possibility. Relocation affords the benefits of “emptying” the land and opening it to new “ownership.” But, as Wolfe observes, there is a limit to “empty land,” and this corresponds with a shift in tactics. He explains that in the cases of both the U.S. and Australia, “the full radicalization of assimilation policies... coincided with the closure of the frontier, which forestalled spatial stopgaps such as removal.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, once indigenous inhabitants of the desirable land can no longer be removed, the settler colonialists must identify new forms of erasure. One such method is assimilation, in which, rather than removing or eliminating the bodies of indigenous people, it is their indigeneity that is erased – they are, in other words, made white. While not affecting the literal location of native people, this whitening essentially changes the “ownership” of the land if it is held by white (or near-white) rather than indigenous people. The Long Walk of the 1860s occurred in the period preceding Turner’s “closure of the frontier” in 1893 – meaning that it represents a transitional period between the ability to relocate native inhabitants to “wild” land and the settler colonialist necessity of assimilation.

In “The Origin of Legibility: Rethinking Colonialism and Resistance among the Navajo People, 1868-1937,” Andrew Curley takes up one of the forms of the ongoing structure of settler colonialism: the imposed identity of “Navajo.” He argues this imposition is part of the assimilation project, by way of “making an Indigenous group in the American Southwest into a

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 387–409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>, 388.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 400.

standardized and simplified ethnic group in the United States... [and] a decipherable population subject to the control and sometimes manipulation of a colonial authority.”<sup>11</sup> He draws the connection between treaty-making and the naming of indigenous people, including the Diné. Through the understanding that “tribes were created from treaties,”<sup>12</sup> we can see the ways in which contemporary notions of identity are bound up in the ongoing structures of settler colonialism. Further, the larger purpose of making “the Navajo” legible gains meaning via Wolfe’s explanation of elimination and understanding of tribal identity policies such as blood quantum requirements. In other words, making indigeneity legible via the tribal system serves the settler colonial purpose of rationalizing elimination: of writing something down so that it can be erased.

Because settler colonialism is inherently land-based, it can be both better understood and countered with another land-based approach. Deloria articulates a distinction between native and Western-Christian worldview: the former is primarily land-based, while the latter is primarily time-based. This temporality of Western-Christian thinking is necessary for the American settler colonialist project: “Immigrants review the movement of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences, thereby placing history – time – in the best possible light.”<sup>13</sup> It is through the notion of “progress” that the acquisition of land – which otherwise could be conceived of spatially – becomes articulated in a temporal way. Referring to this process of possession as “manifest destiny” not only classifies time as linear, with “destiny” following “now,” but this language also gives “progress” – whether through time

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Curley, “The Origin of Legibility: Rethinking Colonialism and Resistance among the Navajo People, 1868-1937,” in *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 129.

<sup>12</sup> Curley, “The Origin of Legibility,” 132.

<sup>13</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 61.

or in space – an inevitability that is necessarily exclusionary because it leaves no room for alternatives. As Deloria explains, “If a religion is tied to a sense of time, then everything forming a part of it must have some validity because it occurs within the temporal scheme,”<sup>14</sup> thus requiring only a single Truth. But under a spatial worldview, there are an infinite number of Truths, for they correspond not with moments in time (and therefore with inevitability) but with place. For every space there is Truth, and therefore many things can be true, because they coexist in time but in different places. Unlike time, which is abstract, space exists in the world of the real: “Spatial thinking requires that ethical systems be related directly to the physical world and real human situations, not abstract principles,”<sup>15</sup> and, therefore, “The structure of [American Indian] religious traditions is taken directly from the world around them, from their relationships with other forms of life.”<sup>16</sup> Both the territoriality of settler colonialism and the spatiality of indigenous worldview revolves around the relationship between humans and the land, but it is the nature of those relationships that distinguish them. For the settler colonialist, the human-land relationship is one of ownership and therefore exploitation, while in the indigenous worldview, the human-land relationship is one of interconnectedness and harmony.<sup>17</sup>

In “The Value of Oral History on the Path to Diné/Navajo Sovereignty,” Jennifer Nez Denetdale argues that oral history allows the “reaffirmation of traditional values [and] unmask[s] American settler colonialism and also becomes the foundation for finding our way back to the ways in which our ancestors envisioned the past and the future.”<sup>18</sup> She finds that oral histories

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<sup>14</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> Miller defines indigeness as “the lifeway of those peoples who have never adopted a nation-state type of organization. Most usefully, Indigeness may be viewed as *a way of relating* to everything else in the cosmos.” Susan A. Miller, “Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm in American Indian Historiography,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 1 (2009), 27.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Nez Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 71.

and oral tradition serve the work of both decolonization and cultural sovereignty. By decolonization, she means, in part, “the possibilities of re-creating Navajo organizations, from governance to community to family,”<sup>19</sup> as well as the ability to center history and thought around Diné philosophy rather than a Western worldview. Following these notions, Denetdale follows other native scholars in arguing that sovereignty does not rely on federal recognition, but rather brings together self-government with “traditional cultural philosophies, teachings, and values.”<sup>20</sup> To the end of creating a Navajo-centered history, Denetdale rejects the Western worldview that time is linear and “progressive.” Instead, her assertions, grounded in oral histories, fit within Deloria’s spatial framework because they are inherently local and, particularly through their variation, they counter notions of sweeping historical narratives and truths.

### III. The Long Walk

Writings about the Long Walk period often differ in their word usage, based in part on whether the author is Anglo-American or Diné/Navajo. *Diné* is a Navajo word meaning “people”; it is the word they use to describe themselves and the way I refer to them.<sup>21</sup> *The Long Walk* describes the physical journey of the forced march to Fort Sumner, and can also be used to refer to their internment; it is not used to describe the return home. *Bosque Redondo* refers to the area of eastern New Mexico in which *Fort Sumner* was established. *Hwéeldi* is the way the Diné refer to both the forced march and the internment camp; it does not include the journey home.<sup>22</sup> I use all of these four terms. *Dinétah* or *Diné Bikéyah* are the ways the Diné refer to their

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<sup>19</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 76.

<sup>20</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 71.

<sup>21</sup> It is the way they describe themselves in their own language. Individuals frequently use “Navajo” to refer to themselves when speaking English; they will also use this word to describe their language, (“speaking Navajo”), culture (“in the Navajo way”), and geography (“in Navajo, there are...”). Many translations of Navajo speech, including those used here, use “Navajo” as it is the word more commonly used in English. However, within native scholarship, many writers are referring to themselves as Diné rather than Navajo, though they are sometimes used interchangeably.

<sup>22</sup> Lynn R. Bailey, *Bosque Redondo: The Navajo Internment at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, 1863-1868* (Tuscon: Westernlore Press, 1998), 109.



homeland, meaning “Navajo Land” or “Navajo Country,” and I use both Navajo and English versions to refer to the territory in which Navajo Nation now sits.

Although about to embark upon hegemonic historiography, I find it necessary to privilege Diné oral tradition. As Jennifer Nez Denetdale states, in order to understand the Long Walk via Diné ways of knowing, it is necessary to know their creation narratives, which are part of Diné history.<sup>23</sup> The creation narratives begin in the First World, in which only spirit people and Holy People lived. This is where First Man and First Woman were formed. The beings of this world moved through this world into the Second World and Third World (the Yellow World). Here, the Female River flowed from north to south, and the Male River from east to west. The place where these rivers crossed is Tó Alnáozlí (Crossings of the Waters). First Man used soil to form the four sacred mountains, and Holy People entered each of them. The mountains are secured to the earth with different elements: white lightning for Sisnaajiní in the east, a stone knife for Tsoodzil in the south, a sunbeam for Dook’o’oosliííd in the west, and a rainbow for Dibé nitsaa in the north.<sup>24</sup>

One morning, First Man and First Woman heard crying coming from a cloud; it was a baby girl, born of darkness and the dawn, her father. First Man and First Woman raised her, with the direction of the Holy People, and the baby became Asdzáá Nádleehé (Changing Woman).<sup>25</sup> Changing Woman had a relationship with Sun, and she gave birth to two sons, Naayéé Neezgháni (Monster Slayer) and Tó Bájísh Chíní (Born for Water). The boys wanted to know who their father was, and after asking for the fourth time, Changing Woman told them. They

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<sup>23</sup> In the Navajo tradition, creation stories are associated with particular seasons, meaning that they should not be told outside of that season. Because Denetdale and others have published these creation histories, I feel comfortable reproducing them here.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 135.

<sup>25</sup> Ethelou Yazzie, cited in Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 136.

decided to find Sun, and set out on a journey aided by Grandmother Spider and deities and elements, including the wind. When they met him, Sun did not believe that they were his sons. He put them through many tests before he believed them, and afterward, they rid the land of monsters before they returned to their mother.<sup>26</sup> Later, Changing Woman created more people and the first four clans by rubbing the skin from her breast (Kiiyaa'áanii clan), back (Honáháanii clan), and under her arms (left, Hashtl'isgnii clan; right, Tó'dích'íinii clan).<sup>27</sup> The People (Diné) were thus born into the Glittering World.

According to Denetdale, the creation narratives “exemplify ideal relationships between humans and deities and humans and the earth, and teach us how we should treat each other... Telling these stories also offers us an opportunity to remember that, in the face of incredible trauma, our ancestors responded with courage and integrity.”<sup>28</sup> As other Diné sources report, it was the telling of these narratives and the continued practice of ceremonies that allowed the Diné to sustain themselves through the period of internment at Hwéeldi and eventually return to their homeland, Diné Bikéyah.

In order to understand the ways in which the hegemonic historical narrative of the “Navajo Long Walk” propagates the ongoing system of settler colonialism, it is necessary to understand the elements of that historical narrative. In presenting this material, it is not my intention that we ignore settler colonialism theory or the work of indigenous scholars; rather, I have prefaced the presentation of the historical material with this theoretical framework in order to read the historiography critically. Deloria’s claim that indigenous histories have a spatial orientation while Western histories have a temporal one is one way of seeing the structure and function of

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<sup>26</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 137-138.

<sup>27</sup> Yazzie, cited in Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 139.

the Euro-American presentation. In the hegemonic historical narrative, the role of land is crucial, though not in the same way as in Diné oral histories. For the Euro-American writer, the land is necessary in order to understand history, not because it is a character, but because it is the stage upon which the drama unfolds. For the settler colonialist, the land is something to be forcefully contested, and American settlers have confidence that they will win out in the end because of their belief in the steady march of time that leads toward “progress.”

The internment at Fort Sumner is a significant period of trauma in the Diné experience, and it has clear consequences in terms of the creation of the Navajo reservation and the institution of a Western-style democratic government. However, these changes are not synonymous with the creation of a collective identity, as the Diné oral histories reveal. Furthermore, the trauma of American-Diné interaction is not limited to that which occurred at Hwéeldi. Rather, the lead-up began long before 1863 and the effects have continued beyond 1868 and into the present, consistent with Wolfe’s argument about the structure, rather than the event, of settler colonialism and genocide. The internment at Fort Sumner functions as an event of colonization, but it is indicative of pervasive structures, and we must keep an eye on these forces.

#### A. Historiographic context

In “The Navajos in Anglo-American Imagination:1807-1870,” William Lyon argues that initial Anglo-American perceptions of Navajos was “flattering,” explaining that Anglo-Americans found the Spanish and Mexicans to be “cowardly,” and considered Navajos to be “a powerful nation” and therefore superior to those groups.<sup>29</sup> However, as Carol Douglas Sparks contends, the Americans changed their minds upon seizing control of the region, because

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<sup>29</sup> William H. Lyon, “The Navajos in the Anglo-American Historical Imagination, 1807-1870,” *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 3 (1996), 484.

Navajos viewed them as superior: “Americans quickly came to view Navajos as savages who attacked their settlements and required either extermination or relocation to a place where they would not be a threat.”<sup>30</sup> This perception, according to Lyon, was contradictory: “on the one hand, [Navajos] were resilient, hardy, and resourceful; on the other hand, they constituted an anarchic, uncivil society, deficient in Anglo-American ways.”<sup>31</sup> Though Lyon is drawing upon primary source material from the 1850s-60s, these conflicting notions are pervasive in the historiography.

As Lyon explains, in the 1880s-90s, the development of the railroad increased access to the Navajos for “humanitarians, literati, political leaders, traders, intellectuals, and photographers,” thereby increasing the American public’s familiarity with the Navajo.<sup>32</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, Anglo scholarship of the Diné was primarily anthropological. At first, Navajos were classified as “savage” on an “evolutionary scale.” As Lyon explains, under this thinking, “all mankind, Indians as well as Anglos, came from the same seed and were evolving toward the same destiny: higher civilization.”<sup>33</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Washington Matthews shifted the Anglo perspective, noting that Diné culture ought to be studied, publishing accounts of the creation stories and ceremonies in 1885-86. However, Matthews still followed the prevalent understanding of evolution toward civilization, and his work sits in a troubled place in Navajo Studies: on the one hand, his work catalogues traditional information from indigenous people, but his methodology is exploitative of native people and their knowledge as he uses their lives for his own gain.<sup>34</sup> Anthropology dominated Anglo

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<sup>30</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 19-20, referring to Sparks, “Land Incarnate.”

<sup>31</sup> Lyon, “Historical Imagination: 1807-1870,” 484.

<sup>32</sup> William H. Lyon, “The Navajos in the American Historical Imagination, 1868-1900,” *Ethnohistory* 45, no. 2 (1998), 241.

<sup>33</sup> Lyon, “Historical Imagination: 1868-1900,” 264.

<sup>34</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 20.

scholarship of the Diné into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and as Denetdale explains, the studies of the 1930s-50s remain part of the active body of work of Diné life and culture. This collection includes that of Clyde Kluckhohn, Alexander and Dorothy Leighton, and Ruth Underhill, which I analyze in Chapter 2.

The development and approbation of the discipline of American history relied in part on the depiction of U.S.-Indian relations in order to assert American supremacy, both in this regard and relative to Europe. As Blackhawk argues, “In such ‘frontier’ narratives, Indians became antitheses of American subjectivity and modernism, either tragic victims of an increasingly industrializing society or uncultured impediments incapable of inclusion in the nation.”<sup>35</sup> As Frederick Jackson Turner asserted in 1893, the “frontier” – that is, the boundary between “civilization” and “wilderness” – is limited. In announcing that the frontier was “closed,” Turner claimed that the “wilderness” was disappearing, because “civilization” took its place. The histories published in the much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came from Anglo historians, who continued to find that the Navajo were an initially aggressive people, tamed toward civilization through the U.S. military and government.<sup>36</sup>

Denetdale argues that there is tension between how historians and anthropologists depict the Diné. This contention is rooted methodologically: anthropology’s cultural emphasis “[creates] a portrait of Navajos as cultural borrowers and late arrivals in the Southwest,” while historians, seeking authority in written documents and therefore those of the U.S. military and government “[present] Navajos as aggressive nomadic people who required subjugation by the Americans so the region could be stabilized.”<sup>37</sup> Denetdale does not take issue with the

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<sup>35</sup> Ned Blackhawk, “American Indians and the Study of U.S. History,” in *American History Now* (Temple University Press, 2011), 377.

<sup>36</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 18.

disjointedness itself, but rather with the use of this troubling scholarship from both disciplines to support all manner of Anglo-Navajo interaction, including with federal officials, missionaries, and scholars – those who enforce a relationship of unequal power.

In the 1950s, an interdisciplinary field called “ethnohistory,” emerged, combining anthropology and history – in part to manage Indian land claims cases.<sup>38</sup> Beginning in the 1960s-70s, indigenous scholarly and activist discourse began to span continents, rejecting Western narratives of savagery and denouncing colonial violence. The 1980s-90s ushered in a new movement: the New Indian historians focused on native resilience and resistance to colonialism.<sup>39</sup> This shift occurred in anticipation of and response to the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus’s conquest of what would become the Americas. Blackhawk argues that in the field of American history, the period between 1992-2000 is significantly characterized by American Indian history, constituting a marked shift.<sup>40</sup> Denetdale and many of the other theorists I take up in Chapter 3 emerged in this period.

#### B. Hegemonic historical narrative

The narrative that I reconstruct here is drawn from multiple authors in order to present a full picture of the historical sources. My use of the term “hegemonic” refers to the ways in which this narrative was researched and written, as well as the people it features and gives agency to. What I present here does not incorporate all elements or arguments articulated by Euro-American scholars. My intention for this production is to offer familiarity in the events and players of the Long Walk, as they are described in the Euro-American historiography. I have not included the elements that are significantly contradicted by other contributions and/or portray the

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<sup>38</sup> Blackhawk, “American Indians and the Study of U.S. History,” 376-377.

<sup>39</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Ned Blackhawk, “Look How Far We’ve Come: How American Indian History Changed the Study of American History in the 1990s,” *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 6 (2005), 13.

Diné (or other native people) in an explicitly racist way because the purpose is to orient the reader to this context. I have “smoothed” the material so that it reads cohesively, as these historians in fact range in their portrayal of Diné agency and American culpability. In Chapter 2, I analyze various elements of the historiography, including some of this problematic material.

Navajo histories often begin by noting that, prior to the Long Walk, the Diné organized themselves around extended kinship structures, but not in larger community or governance<sup>41</sup> (as defined by contemporary Navajo Nation society or by Anglo-American standards). According to anthropologist Oliver Lafarge, the Diné were “not disorganized but unorganized.”<sup>42</sup> Prior to the Long Walk, Diné way of life was primarily pastoral, particularly through the tending of sheep. As their herds grew, thereby increasing the amount of land necessary to sustain them, significant disputes over land began. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the primary tension was with the Spanish settlers of New Mexico, also pastoralists.<sup>43</sup> This ushered in a long period of land disputes in the region, between natives and settlers (both Spanish and American) as well as among native groups (Diné, Apache, Comanche, Ute). These aggressive disputes were agitated by the colonial Spanish slave trade, in which Diné women and children were particularly preyed on.<sup>44</sup>

As Bailey observes, Anglo-American settlement in New Mexico brought with it U.S. involvement in the sheep industry, “raised not so much for wool as for food, and the discovery of gold in California, the opening of silver camps in Nevada, and tapping of mineral wealth in the Pike’s Peak region, as well as establishment of the Mormons in Utah, [which] created a vast market for mutton.”<sup>45</sup> Because of this important commodity, Anglo-Americans were both enticed

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<sup>41</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Oliver La Farge, “Forward to the Second Edition,” in Gladys A. Reichard, *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*, xviii; cited in Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 29.

and authorized to infringe upon Diné land. Under the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of June 30, 1834, it was illegal to graze on native land without the consent of the tribe, and this Act was extended to the New Mexico Territory in 1852; however, in early 1854, the District Court in Santa Fe declared that, “under the rules of Congress, there was no Indian country in New Mexico,” thus allowing settlers to graze their sheep on Diné land.<sup>46</sup> The role of sheep in supporting Anglo-American westward expansion is an important reminder of the interplay between seemingly isolated land disputes in the southwest with larger forces of American politics and government.

In 1846, two years prior to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,<sup>47</sup> the U.S. military was attempting to enforce Anglo settlers’ claims to the land inhabited by the Diné.<sup>48</sup> Because the United States claimed the New Mexico territory, the U.S. military also attempted to reclaim prisoners or property they believed the Diné had stolen from “inhabitants of the territory of New Mexico.”<sup>49</sup> In response, Diné near the Rio Grande raided cattle and horses from a New Mexico community, which led to Stephen Watts Kearny, commander of the Army of the West, granting permission to Anglo-Americans living in the New Mexico territory “to form war properties... to recover their property, to make reprisals and obtain redress.”<sup>50</sup> A month later, the Americans had convinced some Diné to sign a treaty, which was not ratified.<sup>51</sup> A second treaty was signed in 1849, but in the time leading up to the signing, an argument between Americans and Diné became a skirmish that killed seven Diné, including a respected community leader who

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<sup>46</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> This treaty would transfer “ownership” of land including present-day Arizona and New Mexico from Mexico to the United States.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Iverson and Monty Roessel, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 1st ed (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>49</sup> Instructions from Stephen Watts Kearny to Colonel Alexander W. Doniphan, 1st Regiment Missouri Mounted Volunteers, cited in Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Watts Kearny, cited in Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 38.

<sup>51</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 39.



had signed the previous treaty.<sup>52</sup> This treaty, which the U.S. Senate ratified in 1850, granted the United States permission to “establish such military posts and agencies, and authorize such trading-houses, at such time and in such places as said Government may designate.”<sup>53</sup>

Construction of these posts began prior to ratification, starting with Fort Defiance in 1849.<sup>54</sup>

In 1855, New Mexico Governor David Meriwether convened a new treaty council, negotiating with Manuelito, a single representative “headman.” Although Manuelito argued that the Americans misunderstood the scope of Diné Bikéyah, he eventually signed a treaty that would require the Diné to give up 20 million acres, primarily in the east, in exchange for \$102,000 a year for 21 years; the Senate did not ratify this treaty.<sup>55</sup> Bailey finds that it was the presence and threat of American military power that forced Manuelito to sign this treaty.<sup>56</sup> The following year was particularly hard for crops and livestock, so the Diné were forced to push back on the eastern boundary in order to survive. By this point, New Mexico settlers were grazing their sheep on that same land, and they demanded both “bodily removal” of the Diné and the re-definition of the borders of the reservation.<sup>57</sup> In response to the calls of the settlers, troops went forth and killed sixty sheep as a warning against further encroachment.<sup>58</sup> Tensions mounted on both sides, and a Diné representative, Zarcillas Largos, would go to Fort Defiance to attempt negotiation. Six weeks later, in the summer of 1858, a Diné man shot (with an arrow) the black servant, Jim, of the new commander of Fort Defiance, Major Brooks. Brooks demanded that Zarcillas Largos turn over the man, but because there had been no recompense for the slaughtered sheep, Largos only promised to look into it. When Jim died two days later, Brooks

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<sup>52</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 40-41.

<sup>53</sup> Senate ratification, September 9, 1850, cited in Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 31-32.

<sup>57</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 34.

gave Largos 20 days to turn over the murderer. In September, the Diné reported that the man who had shot the arrow was dead after a struggle with the army, and they brought a body to Fort Defiance, but it in fact belonged to a Mexican captive. At this point, Colonel Miles, commander of all U.S. troops in Navajo Country, issued a formal declaration of war, which resulted in between a half-dozen and a few hundred Diné casualties, as well as the slaughtering of several thousand sheep.<sup>59</sup> The treaty signed at the end of this period moved the boundary between Diné Bikéyah and the New Mexico territory further west, limiting Diné land even more significantly.<sup>60</sup>

In 1860-61, Colonel Canby, commander of the Department of New Mexico, launched a failed campaign to capture the Diné and their land.<sup>61</sup> In 1860, around 1,000 Diné, led by two headmen, Manuelito and Barboncito, nearly succeeded in capturing Fort Defiance. In 1861, another treaty was negotiated, but not ratified.<sup>62</sup> In the period between 1854-1862, Colonel James Henry Carleton, commander of New Mexico Territory, had begun to make plans for a joint Navajo/Mescalero Apache reservation, with the aim of “civilization” through segregation and assimilation. Carleton identified the Bosque Redondo area, which he renamed Fort Sumner, as the site for this reservation. Following Canby’s failures, Carleton saw the need to intern the Diné outside of their own land, using force. In his view, “the United States Army was the means of extending economic advancement and civilization, and all that stood in the way, whether human or natural barriers, had to be pushed aside.”<sup>63</sup> Carleton enlisted Colonel Kit Carson, already known as an decisive “Indian fighter,” to force the Diné out of Diné Bikéyah and to Fort

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<sup>59</sup> Bailey *Bosque Redondo*, 35-36; Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 46-47.

<sup>60</sup> Bailey *Bosque Redondo*, 37-38.

<sup>61</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 60.

<sup>62</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 47-48.

<sup>63</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 85-86.

Sumner.<sup>64</sup> Carleton's campaign began by interning approximately 400 Apache at Fort Sumner, and with them out of the way, his forces could focus their efforts on the Diné.<sup>65</sup>

Carson's methods included crop burning and killing the Diné who would not cooperate. As Bailey describes it: "The strategy to be used against these Indians would be simple, basic. Destroy their immediate means of subsistence, their agriculture, and then hound and harass them during all seasons so they could not return to their farm plots, and scatter or slaughter their livestock. Prevent lambing and force tribesmen to consume their reserve of sheep."<sup>66</sup> This campaign began in the summer of 1863, carried out by the First New Mexico Volunteers and Ute allies. The troops would attempt to catch and arrest the Diné, who would respond by fleeing and hiding in the mountains or canyons, which presented challenging and unfamiliar terrain for the soldiers. If they could not capture the Diné, Carson's men would respond by burning crops. Although the Diné could survive on livestock for a while, their ability to do so was limited, and they would eventually either turn themselves in to be incarcerated or die.<sup>67</sup> However, there were some Diné who successfully lived in the mountains, who Carson's carnage never reached.<sup>68</sup>

In October 1863, amidst Carson's campaign, a Diné delegation went to Fort Wingate to attempt to make peace, but their effort was not welcomed: they were told that "all must go to Bosque Redondo", whether by their own "willingness" or by force.<sup>69</sup> If they surrendered, they would be allowed to keep their livestock at Fort Sumner.<sup>70</sup> The forced march from Fort Defiance to Fort Sumner was around 300 miles. The Long Walk was not a single march; the number of Diné in a particular grouping varied tremendously, it occurred over a period of several years, and

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<sup>64</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 48-51.

<sup>65</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 87.

<sup>66</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 88.

<sup>67</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 93.

<sup>68</sup> Bailey *Bosque Redondo*, 106.

<sup>69</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 85, 98.

<sup>70</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 94.

took several different routes.<sup>71</sup> The path up until the Rio Grande followed an established wagon road, but on the other side of the river, the route varied significantly and depended on the officers leading the march.<sup>72</sup> The harsh weather (both the freeze of winter and heat of summer), lack of food and water, and direct violence caused many Diné to die along the journey. According to Bailey, “Between summer of 1863 and December 1866 a total of 11,468 Navajos were forwarded to Bosque Redondo. Since the highest count of captives at Fort Sumner was 8,570 men, women, and children in November 1864, it is obvious many did not reach their destination.”<sup>73</sup>

Once they reached Hwéeldi, the Diné were interned at Fort Sumner, along with the Mescalero Apache. Unlike Diné Bikéyah, Hwéeldi was barren and there were no mountains in sight.<sup>74</sup> Carleton’s expectation was that this would be a permanent reservation, striving for both segregation from white settler society and assimilation to it. Further, Carleton had an ideal of converting the Diné into Pueblo, whom he considered a more “civilized” group, in terms of both social structure and housing. In his attempt to achieve these goals, Carleton tried to divide the Diné into ten “bands” (with Apache forming an eleventh), each with a chief and six sub-chiefs; doing so ignored the matrilineal nature of Diné society. Further, Carleton tried to get the Diné to arrange their dwellings in orderly communities (essentially villages), but they were not used to living in coordination with those outside their families. Carleton ended up conceding many of his expectations, including that the Diné would build Pueblo-style homes, instead allowing them to construct hogans, their own dwellings.<sup>75</sup> Although many of his efforts were aimed at converting

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<sup>71</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 103.

<sup>73</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 102.

<sup>74</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 119-120

the Diné into Pueblo, there were also attempts at assimilating the Diné, particularly Diné children, to Anglo-American society. However, attempts to get Diné children into the Catholic-run school at Fort Sumner were mediocre at best, and by the end of 1866, this particular effort ended.<sup>76</sup>

As Lyon explains, prior to the Carson campaign, Anglo-Americans saw the Diné as powerful, but also disinclined to peaceful society. Anglo-Americans gathered this sense of lawlessness from the failure to maintain treaties, in part because they maintained the assumption that the Diné had chiefs who could make decisions on behalf of the whole. Lyon argues, “Their sense of Navajo dominance was at once a tribute to Navajo power and ingenuity and evidence of their determination to apply law and order to Navajo relationships.”<sup>77</sup> These presumptions about the Diné’s simultaneous power and “lawlessness” supported both the internment itself and the attempts at “civilization” and assimilation that occurred there.

One of the most significant problems of Fort Sumner, both from Carleton’s administrative perspective and for those interned there, was a lack of food. In Carleton’s imagination of Fort Sumner as a permanent reservation, the Diné would be primarily sustained by agriculture (rather than a mixture of agriculture, livestock, and hunting/gathering). However, after several years of attempts, it became clear that the land of Bosque Redondo would not sustain the approximately 9,000 Diné interned there. The first year of crops, in 1864, were lost to “army worm,” costing an estimated \$150,000.<sup>78</sup> In October of that year, significant rain came over New Mexico: Bosque Redondo itself was not drenched, but the Pecos River overflowed and destroyed the wheat crop. Carleton was able to secure funds to purchase replacement grain, but the rain had affected so

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<sup>76</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 123-125.

<sup>77</sup> Lyon, “Historical Imagination: 1807-1870,” 499.

<sup>78</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 130.

much of New Mexico that there was none available.<sup>79</sup> In order to feed the thousands living at Fort Sumner, they turned to the livestock. In order to stay alive, as Bailey describes, the Diné had to “[butcher] the very life and status of the Indians,” their sheep.<sup>80</sup> In 1865, the corn crop was again destroyed due to insects, and there were few local alternatives; importing beef from Texas risked Comanche raids, but this was determined to be worth the risk, actually forcing down prices in New Mexico.<sup>81</sup> Initially, the army personnel with personal experience farming had been overseeing the crops, but by 1866, they were no longer stationed in Fort Sumner. Their replacements either had no farming experience or refused to be put to work in this way, and thus the crops failed due to human error.<sup>82</sup> Throughout all this, Carleton was forced to provide rations, which were often criticized as inadequate. In order to get enough to eat, the Diné would find ways to work around the ration system, such as creating replicas of the tokens necessary for receiving rations. However, the Army changed their distribution system in response to their ingenuity, and there remained a food shortage.

In addition to the challenges posed by lack of food, infectious diseases, including pneumonia, malaria, and syphilis, were also a problem. Though caused by a variety of factors, the Diné blamed the water, which was later determined to have a high alkaline content.<sup>83</sup> Although there were American doctors available at Fort Sumner, the Diné strongly associated them with death, so the Diné did not want to see these doctors or use their treatments. Instead, they relied on their own medicine men and traditional methods of healing or would escape Fort Sumner and flee to the healthier areas on the other side of the Pecos River.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 130.

<sup>80</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 131.

<sup>81</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 137-138.

<sup>82</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 139.

<sup>83</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 143.

<sup>84</sup> Baiely, *Bosque Redondo*, 147.

During their incarceration, the Diné population at Fort Sumner significantly lowered, due to disease- or starvation-induced death as well as successful escape. In the period between March-December 1865 alone, the interned Diné population dropped from around 9,000 to under 6,000.<sup>85</sup> In 1867, a federal Peace Commission, made up of Senators, Generals, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, formed and determined that a new treaty should be negotiated with the Diné. In 1868, members of the Commission, Lieutenant General William T. Sherman and Colonel Samuel F. Tappen, arrived to observe Fort Sumner, and they quickly determined that the Diné could no longer be held there. Sherman's preference was to move the Diné to Indian Territory, a reservation in what is now Oklahoma where the federal government forcibly relocated multiple native groups. However, Diné representatives, including Manuelito and Barboncito, convinced them to allow the Diné to return to their homeland, though the terms of the Treaty of 1868 did not include all of Diné Bikéyah.<sup>86</sup> On June 15, 1868, the return home began: the procession included military escort, wagons, animals, and all those who had been interned at Fort Sumner. Due to the size of their procession, as well as the children, elderly, and all those who were weak from lack of food, they moved slowly.<sup>87</sup> As part of the treaty negotiation, the Diné interned at Fort Sumner received livestock upon their release: in November 1869, every man, woman, and child (approximately 9,500 in total) received two sheep or goats each.<sup>88</sup>

These historical accounts mark the 1868 return home with formative power for the Diné. Anglo historians argue that the Treaty of 1868 created the Navajo Nation, via the understanding that the internment at Bosque Redondo transformed the Diné from a loosely structured pastoral

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<sup>85</sup> Baiely, *Bosque Redondo*, 163.

<sup>86</sup> Bailey *Bosque Redondo*, 191; Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 63-64.

<sup>87</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 192.

<sup>88</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 194.

society into a recognizable political system. For example, Iverson describes this social birth with phrases such as, “They had *begun* to see themselves as a great people, destined to do great things.”<sup>89</sup> Beyond political organization, scholars – especially anthropologists – credit Fort Sumner with shaping those interned into the Navajo we now know them to be: “The Bosque Redondo experience impacted Navajo material culture, enlarging the Navajo tool kit... Iron working skills attained at this time greatly benefitted Navajo silversmithing.”<sup>90</sup> The hegemonic scholarship of the Long Walk period concludes with the claim that, in 1868, with a new tribal cohesiveness and agricultural and productive skills, the Diné were better off upon their return home than when they had left.

### C. Segregation, assimilation, and “civilization” as tools of the settler colonialist racial regime

Fort Sumner required immense federal and military resources – and in context of the Civil War, we might imagine that these funds could have been better spent elsewhere. However, understanding this seemingly minor and remote land conflict in the context of the U.S. settler colonialist racial regime makes Carleton’s solution far more intelligible. Under the thought process of settler colonialism, indigenous inhabitants of colonizer-claimed land are a barrier to the settlers’ full ownership of that land. As Wolfe outlines, there are a few possible techniques, all under the banner of “removal” that address this problem. Each of these tactics requires the racialization of the native in order to justify their removal and accurately distinguish between the white settler and the indigenous other. Relocation, in which indigenous people are moved from their own land to another territory, serves the settler colonialist project when the original land is more desirable than the site of the relocation, which is usually significantly smaller. However, as Wolfe observes, this is only a temporary solution, for settler colonialism’s hunger is never

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<sup>89</sup> Iverson and Roessel, *Diné*, 65, emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup> Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 198-199.



satisfied, and settlers will eventually come back for the “new” land as well. Isolating indigenous people in a reservation segregates them from white society. Segregation may seem to be in opposition to another tool of removal, assimilation or “civilization,” but these in fact work hand in hand. The underlying ideology of assimilation (“civilization”) is that the “raw material” of the native is worth saving, and, with a little work, could become essentially white. In this way, like segregation, assimilation also does the work of removal. While relocation or “elimination” (killing) physically removes indigenous people, assimilation concedes that perhaps the people cannot be removed, but their native-ness can be – in service of opening up the land.<sup>91</sup>

In Fort Sumner, Carleton attempted both removal and assimilation, both of which were essentially unsuccessful. However, there is another, slower acting tool put into use in 1923 and still in effect: blood quantum policy.<sup>92</sup> Unlike other racial or ethnic groups in the United States, Native Americans must “prove” their indigeneity through tribal membership and a tactic called Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood.<sup>93</sup> White supremacy rules with a “one-drop” rule to enforce blackness, meaning that any amount of African/black heritage identifies someone as racially black. The settler colonialist nation benefits from black bodies because they drive production and labor, resulting in economic growth. Native-ness, on the other hand, does not benefit the nation monetarily: as long as indigenous people insist on inhabiting their own land, they hinder the economic development that relies on that real estate. In order to cut out that form of resistance, blood quantum policy reduces the number of people with status as an “Indian” by defining who is, and who is not, “legitimately” native, according to state-determined definitions. This policy

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<sup>91</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 399.

<sup>92</sup> Yolynda Begay, “Historic and Demographic Changes That Impact the Future of the Diné and the Development of Community-Based Policy,” in *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 116.

<sup>93</sup> Begay, “Historic and Demographic Changes,” 105.

does not literally extinguish indigenous people; rather, in removing their native identity, it eliminates their “ownership” of the land. As Curley asserts, through the process of treaty-making, settler colonialists impose legibility onto native groups in order to institute control over them. In the hegemonic historical narrative, the Treaty of Bosque Redondo is credited with the moment of birth for the Navajo Nation. This sort of treaty represents an imposition of false sovereignty in which native communities, including Navajo Nation, supposedly have control over their own affairs, but in fact are under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs – an agency of the American settler colonialist regime.

## Chapter Two: The Treaty as Covenant

In this chapter, I argue that the exodus narrative informs the Western hegemonic sense of nation formation, and through this, Anglo-American historiography of the Long Walk interprets the historical event as the story of emerging Navajo nationhood. By “the exodus narrative,” I mean the themes and arc, primarily told within the biblical book of Exodus, of the Israelites’ enslavement in Egypt, their liberation from bondage, formation as a “nation” via their Covenant with God, and eventual entry into the “Promised Land.” In this chapter, I trace six narrative themes: the People, Oppression, Freedom, the Wilderness, and the Promise. In Section I, I look at these themes within Exodus itself and in interpretations of the biblical material, and following Michael Walzer’s argument, I affirm that the exodus narrative has formed the Western basis for understanding the process of nation-formation and political transformation. In Section II, I argue that Anglo-American scholars, swimming in the Protestant American waters that associate Exodus and nation-building, impose the exodus structure onto the Diné experience of the Long Walk and creation of Navajo Nation. In Section III, I interpret the imposed pattern of the exodus narrative as a tool of settler colonialism. Rather than merely finding the reading of a Western framework onto an indigenous experience problematic, I argue that, in situating the Long Walk into the ideal of exodus, Anglo-American scholars assert the supremacy of the United States over the Diné.

### I. Exodus

The exodus narrative describes a people in bondage, a hero who emerges to lead them, a troublesome tyrant who must be persuaded to let them go, a moment of release paired with 40 years of struggle, and an eventual triumphal entry into a better land. In all this, the suffering people are portrayed as good and sympathetic, unlike the wicked ruler. Through their ordeals, the relatable characters are aided by a fair-minded and strong God who ensures their wellbeing, and,

at the end of the chronicle, they arrive in their new home not only a people renewed politically – in terms of their relationship to one another – but also religiously – in terms of their relationship to their guiding power (God).

The literal and metaphorical movement of the exodus narrative allows it to serve as a story of collective transformation. In his commentary on the book of Exodus, William H. C. Propp observes that the exodus is compared to a rite of passage: one in which “the [Hebrews] change... social status – from slavery to freedom – and change... location – from Egypt to the desert.”<sup>1</sup> In *Understanding Exodus*, Moshe Greenberg identifies three sections to the narrative, each with its own thematic elements, primarily centered on the relationship between the people and God:

- (1) The historical preparation for the covenant: How God redeemed Israel from slavery, and thus showed his faithfulness, his care and his wonderful might.
- (2) The covenant made: How God established his covenant with Israel, and gave them a rule to make them his kingdom of priests, a holy nation.
- (3) The sovereign’s residence: How God ordained a sanctuary for himself amidst his consecrated people, so that he might dwell among them to care for them and guide them.<sup>2</sup>

Within each of these sections, Greenberg identifies God as the primary actor rather than Pharaoh or Egypt, Moses or the Israelites. Greenberg usefully articulates the premise that the unifying factor for the Israelites is their collective relationship and history with God. In other words, in the sense that Exodus is a narrative of a group’s transition from slavery to freedom and from a people to a nation, Greenberg’s analysis illuminates the fact that such movement could have neither been understood nor made meaningful without the involvement of God.

An exclusively religious look at the exodus narrative, however, does not explain the ways in which it is the normative pattern for Western nation-formation. Michael Walzer’s 1985

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<sup>1</sup> William Henry Propp, ed., *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible, v. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1969), 16.

*Exodus and Revolution* is particularly useful for understanding this archetypal process implicitly understood within Euro-American political theory.<sup>3</sup> In this project, Walzer pursues the structure of political formation presented within the exodus narrative – as interpreted by later political actors – rather than a contextual or religious focus. To that end, this work is cited within the areas of nationalism, collective memory and trauma, and political communities and imagination.

Walzer lays out a structure of the exodus narrative's political implications as follows: First, the people live in conditions of oppression, which Walzer emphasizes is rule under a tyrant. Under these conditions, a leader offers them a hopeful, alternative vision and literally leads the people from the land of their oppression. The people then struggle in the “wilderness,” where their poor conditions cause them to yearn for what they had before, for though they lived in deplorable conditions, it was both familiar and in contact with a wealthy system – and therefore felt more secure. The leader then brings the group together politically via covenant-making and law. Finally, the people literally enter the “promised land,” the physical space in which their new political agency can be exercised. However, the leader's utopian vision is never fully realized, and must continue to be worked for; this is paired with the people's inability to fulfill their covenantal promises, and thus, the “promise” remains unfulfilled.

Following Walzer's argument about the shaping of political events to follow the exodus narrative, this structure creates a certain cast of characters: a binary between good guys

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<sup>3</sup> Walzer is a political theorist whose work has focused within the realms of ethics and justice and is prominent in the field of just war theory, particularly as influenced by Judaism. This book has been received and critiqued on a variety of fronts. In the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Neusner finds that Walzer's argument lacks necessary historical and scholarly context, instead focusing on ideology. In *Political Theory*, Strong also notes that Walzer's argument is contextually problematic for giving too little attention to the religious, particularly because he finds that the People of Israel are well suited to become a nation because they already have a collective understanding of themselves as a people – which, for Strong, hinges on their religious identity. Somewhat similarly, in *Modern Judaism*, though Botwinick supports Walzer's focus on the Covenant as a formative event, he is critical of Walzer's lack of attention given to God as a critical political actor.

(Israelites) and bad guys (Pharaoh) and another between the good place (Promised Land) and the bad place (Egypt). Additionally, the Wilderness – the space between the good place and the bad – functions as Victor Turner’s liminal space.<sup>4</sup> Turner describes liminality as the “essentially unstructured,”<sup>5</sup> and in this way the Wilderness is consistent with this notion, as it lacks both Pharaoh’s structure in Egypt or the Covenant’s structure in the Promised Land. Further, Turner primarily understands liminality in the context of rites of passage, especially coming of age rituals for adolescents. From this perspective, liminality sits as the in-between on a progression between two places – though the liminal space is ambiguous, it is amidst two defined sites in order to mark a clear distinction between them. God is the agent who delivers the good guys from the bad guys and brings them from the bad place to the good place. Understood via Greenberg, God’s agency is secured in the institution of the Covenant, extending as long as the Covenant retains its prominence.

Walzer is conscious of this pattern of revolution and political-formation as a Western creation: “This isn’t a story told everywhere; it isn’t a universal pattern; it belongs to the West, and its source, its original version, is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt.”<sup>6</sup> Not only does he suggest that Westerners interpret events through the exodus lens, he argues that Western political actors actively work to give “revolutionary” events this shape: “We complain about oppression; we hope (against all the odds of human history) for deliverance; we join in covenants and constitutions; we aim at a new and better social order.”<sup>7</sup> Walzer argues that the exodus narrative leads to the Western perspective that “first, wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; second, that

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<sup>4</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1967), 98.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 133.

<sup>7</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 134.

there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land; and third, that ‘the way to the land is through the wilderness.’ There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.”<sup>8</sup> Walzer’s analysis focuses on groups who self-identify with the Israelites, using the narrative to tell their own story of oppression and liberation. He does not take up the question of the exodus narrative being read onto another group, for although he knows that the use of Exodus is contextual and limited, he still sees it as a tool for revolution and liberation. The case of the Long Walk, which, as I argue, is forced into the mold of the exodus narrative, reveals that though this structure may be liberatory for Jews and Christians, it can just as well distort the experiences of people whose experiences *seem* to reflect those of the Israelites. The combination of the understanding of the exodus narrative as political formation and religious identity illuminates its potency in a Christian, Euro-American context. The presence of six identifiable features (The People, Oppression, Freedom, The Wilderness, Covenant, and The Promise) within the narrative itself allows us to identify when and how those themes are transferred to other contexts.

### The People

Although the book of Exodus includes many named, individual characters, it is fundamentally a story about a people – the Israelites. Exodus opens with, “And these are the names of Israel’s sons coming to Egypt with Jacob; man and his *house* they came,”<sup>9</sup> and what follows are the names of Jacob’s sons. This introduction continues to establish that the descendants of Jacob were quite fertile, filling up the land of Egypt. This is more than just a large family, it is the establishment of a people within a foreign land – in a way that is threatening to the leader of that land (Egypt). Pharaoh himself identifies these descendants of Jacob as “the

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<sup>8</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 149.

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 1:1 /translated in Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 119.

people of Israel” (1:8). Walzer argues that the description of Pharaoh’s treatment of the Israelites points to their status as a people, for “it is a crucial part of the experience of the Israelites in Egypt that they were not enslaved one by one, but all together.”<sup>10</sup> As Greenberg also identifies, at this point in the narrative, there is a verbal transition between how the people are described: “children of Jacob/Israel” earlier and “Israelites” later.<sup>11</sup> The opening chapter of Exodus does more than pick up the story of some individuals who share a common ancestor: it establishes that this group with shared heritage in fact knows themselves to be – and are interpreted as– a common people.

### Oppression

The opening of the book of Exodus immediately transitions from Israel’s prosperity in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh’s being threatened by their existence and his ensuing decision to enslave them (1:13-14) and institute genocidal policy (1:15-22). Greenberg explains that the reason for Pharaoh enslaving the Israelites is both that they are too numerous (perhaps more numerous than the Egyptians)<sup>12</sup> and that “Pharaoh [claims] absolute authority over all in his domain...[what he wants is] to keep them in his power as subjects, to do with them as he sees fit.”<sup>13</sup> From this description of the collective oppression, the history slows down to focus on the narrative of an individual, Moses, and those surrounding him: the story continues with Moses as the central figure for many chapters.

Even with Moses as the hero, we do not completely lose touch with the circumstances of the Israelites. The description of Moses’ developing life in Midian is interrupted when we are reminded of what is happening in Egypt, with notes of both the Israelites’ pleas and God’s ability

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<sup>10</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 29-30.

<sup>11</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 22.



to hear and “make himself known to them” (2:23b-25). For Walzer, the oppression of Egypt is not enslavement itself, but rather the conditions surrounding it. He argues that the Israelites in Egypt were more strangers in the land, and they did not understand themselves to be slaves. Their oppression, therefore, comes from their alienation and their position as a people “poor and needy” without political protection in a foreign land.<sup>14</sup> This sense of oppression stemming from both enslavement itself and separation from land of their own resonates with Nadav Naaman’s suggestion that the term “Hebrew,” when used in a literary context to describe the Israelites, has a dual reference. On the one hand, he says, “Hebrew” designates an Israelite in a foreign country, including Joseph and later Israelites in Egypt, but it also refers to Israelites who are enslaved, as it is commonly used in Exodus.<sup>15</sup>

Moses and the Israelites’ stories intersect once more when he returns to Egypt and follows God’s charge to demand that Pharaoh release the Israelites from bondage (beginning 5:1). This begins several chapters of back-and-forth between Pharaoh and Moses (acting as a mouthpiece for God), principally marked by negotiation and the plagues: water turned to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, diseased livestock, boils, thunder and hail, locusts, darkness. Each of the plagues resembles something that might occur naturally, but as Greenberg argues, “pains are taken to distinguish them from the products of magic on the one hand, and, on the other, from natural calamities.”<sup>16</sup> For both Greenberg and Nahum Sarna, this divine/natural combination demonstrates God’s supremacy over Pharaoh and God’s sovereignty over the land.<sup>17</sup> For Walzer, the natural aspect of the plagues serves as a linkage to “the corruption of the land”<sup>18</sup> (Egypt),

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<sup>14</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 29-30.

<sup>15</sup> Nadav Naaman, *Canaan in the Second Millenium B.C.E.: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, UNITED STATES: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 270.

<sup>16</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 169.

<sup>17</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Wazler, *Exodus and Revolution*, 39.

demonstrating not only the inhospitableness of Egypt, but also God's leading of the people elsewhere.

### Freedom

The transition from oppression in Egypt to freedom begins without a clear delineation from the previous section, for it starts with another (and final) sign as part of the battle between Pharaoh and God/Moses. However, chapter 12 marks the beginning of this shift as Moses and Aaron relay information (from God) to the People on how to be spared from the killings of the firstborn. Pharaoh announces that the Israelites should leave Egypt in 12:31-32, but what follows is more instructions about how to properly follow God's conditions; it is not until 13:17-20 that the Israelites actually begin their departure from Egypt. Emphasized in this section is the haste with which the Israelites were told to prepare for their imminent deliverance, including the preparation of the unleavened bread.

Crucial to Walzer's argument, particularly in the movement from oppression to freedom, is directionality: the exodus narrative is a movement forward, and though there may be "slipping," it is crucial that the nation begin and end in temporally and spatially distinct places.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the movement in time and space, Walzer emphasizes the importance of this direction ethically: "It is a march toward a goal, a moral progress, a transformation."<sup>20</sup> This notion of history as "progress" fits closely with Deloria's assessment of the core of Western religious thought. Walzer argues: "The direction is definitive not only for the deliverance of Israel but for all later interpretations and applications of that deliverance. Henceforth, any move toward Egypt is a 'going back' in moral time and space."<sup>21</sup> This follows the dichotomy between "good guys" and "bad guys," "good places" and "bad places;" in other words, that which is not "us" (good) is

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<sup>19</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 40.

not only morally wrong, but also “backwards” and “primitive” – all connoting a positive, forward evolution of time.

### The Wilderness

The wilderness period picks up as the Israelites cross the sea and continues until the proclamation of the Covenant, chapters 15-18. As Propp explains, the wilderness period is a time of testing, as well as “both ordeal and rite of passage,”<sup>22</sup> following Turner’s sense of liminality. Within the wilderness period are the ordeals of bitter water and manna. Three days into their wilderness journey, the Israelites had no water; eventually they came upon a source, but the water was too bitter to drink. They “complained” to Moses, asking what they would drink, and he turned to God with the complaint. God instructed Moses in how to turn the water clean, and God becomes “healer” (15:22-26). Following this passage is a parallel story in which the people wonder what they will eat and God, via Moses, answers them. Moses reveals that God will make bread (or something from which to make bread) rain down from the heavens, and the people are to collect their daily fill each morning. The people’s suspicion of Moses’ leadership is present here, and they question the bread-from-the-sky, saying to one another, “That is What (*mān*)?” (16:15). Their questioning provides the English term *manna* for referring to the sustenance, likely also deriving from the root meaning “to provide, feed.”<sup>23</sup>

For Propp, the liminality of the wilderness makes it formative, for it is the stage upon which the people are bound together via the Covenant, and it is also where the people face many collective ordeals. He also argues that “the people metaphorically and literally mature, as a new generation replaces the old.”<sup>24</sup> In this way, the wilderness, via the people’s maturity, also plays

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<sup>22</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 579.

<sup>23</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 596.

<sup>24</sup> Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 35.

into the necessity of forward movement because the people (pre-wilderness) are less developed and mature than the nation (post-wilderness).

Like a maturing individual, the Israelites undergo a kind of adolescence, characterized by rebellion and “murmuring,” notably including their complaints about food and water as well as their creation of the golden calf. As Walzer describes, “Interwoven with the story of the Sinai Covenant and continuing on into the later narrative is the motif of the *murmuring and complaint of the people against God*... The motif of the *forty years’ wandering of Israel* in the wilderness is not really distinct from the ‘murmuring tradition.’”<sup>25</sup> He explains that in the wilderness period, the people are freed from bondage, yet they long for the proximity to wealth that their former life afforded them. Their distrust of Moses’s vision and God’s promise causes them to complain about their wilderness circumstances. Within the adaptation of the exodus in Deuteronomy, “the Deuteronomist expands the scope of the murmuring tradition... [because of] the Deuteronomist’s great interest in the possession of the land, [he lays] unusual emphasis on Israel’s failure to possess the land as a prime example of rebellion, which he then urges should not be repeated.”<sup>26</sup> Here Brevard S. Childs illuminates the connection between the murmuring tradition and ownership of the land. This furthers the good people-good land / bad people-bad land dichotomy, for it emphasizes that the people cannot be good without possession of their own land. However, for Walzer, it is important that this act of nation-formation occurs in the “wilderness” rather than in the “promised land” – God’s act of deliverance only takes the people so far, after that, the people must take collective action in order to be further liberated.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, the Wilderness is not just any liminal space chosen for its metaphorical potency,

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<sup>25</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 15-17.

<sup>26</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 258.

<sup>27</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 78.

rather, the very emptiness of the land is key. The life of the Promise cannot simply be consumed, the people must first build it.

### Covenant

As Propp argues, the institution of the Covenant between the Israelites and God is “more than a general contract. It is specifically a *political* treaty between a suzerain (Yahweh) and his vassal (Israel).”<sup>28</sup> Propp explains that the Covenant is informed by the vassal treaties of the surrounding context, such as those of the Hittite, Syrian, and Assyrian empires, and he extracts eight features that the biblical covenant has in common with these treaties.<sup>29</sup> However, he argues that, unlike vassal treaties, “The Torah does not contain the Covenant text per se. Instead, Scripture speaks *as if* quoting from or alluding to such a document, whose existence is only implicit.”<sup>30</sup> Propp further explains that the Covenant takes the form of a vassal treaty and not (as could be a potentially reasonable alternative), “articles of servitude, land sales, or marriage contracts.”<sup>31</sup> This emphasizes the fact that the Covenant between God and the Israelites is a political document – which requires the involvement of a nation.

For Walzer, a fundamental element of the exodus narrative is the collective: “The people as a whole are enslaved, and then the people as a whole are delivered.”<sup>32</sup> Walzer describes

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<sup>28</sup> William Henry Propp, ed., *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible, v. 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 34.

<sup>29</sup> “a. Identification of the document as a treaty. b. Identification of the two parties. c. Review of past relations between the parties, in particular the overlord’s beneficence toward the vassal. d. Stipulations of what the suzerain requires of the vassal, especially exclusive fidelity and regularly submitted tribute. e. Provisions for the storage of the document and its public recitation. f. A list of divine witnesses. g. Blessings for obedience. h. Curses for disobedience.” Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 34, referencing McCarthy, who argues that the covenant follows the vassal treaty form, but not in its entirety. “It reveals an idea of covenant which is somewhat different from that exemplified in the treaty. The manifest power and glory of Yahwe and ceremonies effecting a union, these are the things which ground and confirm alliance more than history, oath, threat and promise. It is an idea of covenant in which the ritual looms larger than the verbal.” Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, New ed. completely rewritten, *Analecta Biblica* 21 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), 256.

<sup>31</sup> Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 301.

<sup>32</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 32.

Rousseau's admiration of Moses for his role in this transformation: "He didn't do this merely by breaking their chains but also by organizing them into a 'political society' and giving them laws. He brought them what is currently called 'positive freedom,' that is, not so much (not at all!) a way of life free from regulation but rather a way of life to whose regulation, they could, and did, agree."<sup>33</sup> Rousseau affirms the necessity of the covenant in creating a collective political body because, via the Covenant, the people give their assent to the terms of their freedom. In this way (removed from the theological assertions of the covenant model), Rousseau, via Walzer, asserts that the law itself need not be just in order for the people to be justly ruled over, having given their consent. In the exodus narrative – indeed, the tradition that shaped Euro-American political sensibility – “the covenant is a founding act... that [creates] alongside the old association of tribes a new nation composed of willing members.”<sup>34</sup> This inscribing of a social contract in the Covenant binds the people together and marks them with responsibility: “Each citizen, then, has a right and perhaps a duty to concern himself with what ‘the whole people’ do.”<sup>35</sup> This joining gives the nation itself agency as the people who make it up learn to act collectively.

Although, as Propp argues, the Covenant in the structure and form of a vassal treaty does not appear within the text, it is written into the narrative of Exodus (chapters 19-31). This includes both what is commonly known as the Ten Commandments, followed by the “Book of the Covenant” or “Covenant Code,” serving as a far more detailed explanation of God's expectations, including the detailed description for constructing the Tabernacle.<sup>36</sup> Propp explains that the Covenant serves to “[horizontally] unite the people into a common society and nation...

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<sup>33</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 84.

<sup>36</sup> McCarthy argues that the presence of the Covenant Code in Exodus is a late arrival to the text, and that in earlier versions, the narrative lacked the blessings and curses characteristic of vassal treaties (246). He also claims that, for the Deuteronomist, the Covenant Code is meant to be carried out in the Promised Land (195).

[which is] merely the precondition for the more important relationship between all Israel beneath and Yahweh above.”<sup>37</sup> In this way, the Covenant is the mechanism for nation-formation, not for the people alone, but in their relationship with God.

Propp further explains the relationship between this (new) Covenant and the earlier covenant God made with Abraham. The earlier promise was for a multitude of descendants, which is realized with the Israelites’ high fertility in Egypt. Now, “at Sinai, Israel learns that the promise of land has strings attached, and great amounts of fine print. Like any solid compact, the Covenant entails specific obligations, as well as specific consequences for compliance and noncompliance.”<sup>38</sup> Like a vassal treaty, the Covenant lays out the relationship between God and Israel, including the bounds of upholding that relationship. But, as Sarna argues, compared to Near Eastern vassal treaties, the Covenant determines internal, as well as external, affairs.<sup>39</sup> This Covenant at Sinai, therefore, brings the Israelites from a people to a nation, but it remains concerned with the conduct within that nation, rather than solely between Israel and its neighbors. The Covenant determines that Israelite nationhood is necessarily bound up in the need for land, as well as the proper treatment of that land.

Among the features of the newly-instituted Covenant is, as Propp calls it, covenant ideology. Under the theology of the Covenant, God is just and in charge, the Covenant is just, and the people’s following of the provisions of the Covenant results in good and just outcomes; therefore, any misfortune can be attributed to a breaking of the Covenant. In this way, the Covenant is necessarily both a religious and political agreement. A breaking of the terms of the Covenant occurs in 32:1-35 when the people construct and worship an idol of gold. As Propp

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<sup>37</sup> Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 300.

<sup>38</sup> Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 301.

<sup>39</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 140.

explains, disobedience stories, including this one, are directed to later generations, “[making] it clear that Yahweh will punish Covenant violators in every generation.”<sup>40</sup> However, following the breaking of the Covenant, it is restored, and Moses recreates the stone tablets (33-34) in order to uphold the Covenant itself. For Sarna, the construction of the Tabernacle, “must be a cooperative enterprise,” and in this way furthers covenant ideology because it is “meant to be a living extension of Mount Sinai.”<sup>41</sup> The physical reminder of the Covenant shapes the actions and attitudes of the people and determines their understanding of the ensuing outcomes.

The Covenant is not merely a political document, nor is it a solely religious one. It takes a people and transforms them into a nation, but they do not lose their people-hood. “Unlike all other treaties, which are individual, discrete documents of state, the Sinai covenant is embedded in a narrative context from which it cannot be separated... The ensuing history of Israel is measured and determined by the extent of the people’s fidelity to or infraction of the Covenant.”<sup>42</sup> Incorporating the “constitution” into the national story ensures that the people will know not only the origins of that document, but its contents – what it requires of them. In this way, the Covenant doesn’t just rule over the people, but it becomes part of their lives. In establishing this collective lexicon, the stories of the people cannot be separated from the story of the nation.

### The Promise

The Israelite’s entry into the “Promised Land” (Canaan) does not occur within the book of Exodus, but rather in the book of Joshua. As Greenberg argues,

Critics speak of the Hexateuch – the Torah plus the book of Joshua – as presenting a continuous interweaving of Israelite traditions concerning beginnings. Yet the Hexateuch is a product of critical theorizing, while the Pentateuch alone is a historical entity – at least as early as the Samaritan schism. The constitution of Israel, the Torah, ends without

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<sup>40</sup> Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 566.

<sup>41</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 203-204.

<sup>42</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 140.



telling the story of the conquest. This is a fact of the first importance; it signifies the absolute character of the covenantal obligation in contrast to the conditioned character of the possession of the land.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, for Greenberg, the Covenant tradition can exist without the land itself, for the Covenant is established before the Israelites enter the land. This does not reduce the emphasis on the land as Walzer and Childs describe, but rather, for Greenberg, it is the *promise* of the land that is critical. Following covenant ideology, the Israelites are obligated to carry out the responsibilities of the Covenant, which will, in turn, lead to their possession of the land.

For Walzer, the land of Canaan is the site upon which covenant ideology plays out, for God sets the expectations, but the people must do the work. “God brings the Israelites out of Egypt, but they themselves must make the trek across the desert and conquer Canaan and work the land... Since the laws are never fully observed, the land is never completely possessed. Canaan becomes Israel, and still remains a *promised* land.”<sup>44</sup> Though the land itself is an important marker of safety and sovereignty – contrasted in particular with being a stranger in an oppressive land or a wanderer in the wilderness – equally important is the promise. Under the terms of the Covenant, God promises the people a better life, but they must uphold their end of the bargain. Although Walzer acknowledges certain “territorialist tendencies,” the magic of the Promised Land will not be fulfilled simply by inhabiting the land, but rather only when a righteous nation lives in it.<sup>45</sup> He makes clear that the people need not be perfectly in accordance with the Covenant when they enter the land because “the promise doesn’t change in the promised land.”<sup>46</sup> To put it simply, the people must both live in the promised land (the land itself matters), but they must also live properly – that is, in accordance with the covenant. Because fulfillment of

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<sup>43</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 13-14.

<sup>44</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 102.

<sup>45</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 107-108.

<sup>46</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 117-118.

the Covenant is ongoing, realization of the Promise is also continuous, contingent on both the people's behavior and their possession of the land.

Although my focus here is on the *promise* of the land, I cannot ignore the land itself. As Robert Allen Warrior demonstrates, the exodus narrative makes the theological claim that God is one who delivers the slaves from bondage – but God's power does not end there, for the people need a new place to live, so God uses “the same power used against the enslaving Egyptians to defeat the indigenous inhabitants of Canaan.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Warrior argues, “the obvious characters in the story for Native Americans to identify with are the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the promised land.”<sup>48</sup> In this way, Warrior convincingly claims that, in the conquest of Canaan, the exodus narrative embodies settler colonialism. Indeed, in the opening verses of the book of Joshua, God refers to Canaan as “the land that I am giving to [Israel],” and instructs the people to cross into the territory because “every place on which you will set the soles of your feet I have given to you.”<sup>49</sup> As Boling observes in his commentary on Joshua, the amount of space given to describe the people's entering Canaan parallels the time spent describing their departure from Egypt.<sup>50</sup> These first five chapters describing the Israelites entry into the land and their establishing of themselves are immediately followed by their initial conquest of the city of Jericho. Chapter six thus transitions from a sense that the land is empty to the explicit knowledge that it is not. In the description of the Israelites' acquisition of Canaan, the primary actor remains God – again, paralleling God's role as the deliverer from Egypt. God's primacy here emphasizes that the Israelites' occupation of Canaan is contingent on God's fulfillment of the promise made with the Covenant. As Wright argues in the

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<sup>47</sup> Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” 262.

<sup>48</sup> Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” 262.

<sup>49</sup> Joshua 1:2b-3, translated in Robert G. Boling, ed., *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible 6 (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1982), 113.

<sup>50</sup> Boling, *Joshua*, 135.

commentary, “The land was not won by Israel. It was a gift of God.”<sup>51</sup> Although, through the Covenant Israel becomes a nation, the Covenant also requires that they are subservient to God, their sovereign.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Warrior’s claim about “Yahweh the conqueror” is apt: though the Israelites dominate a foreign land and its people in order to call it their own, they are only able to do so because God ordains it, thus making God the ultimate authority in this biblical case of settler colonialism.

## II. The Long Walk

The patterns of nation-formation that Exodus lays out in some ways parallel the events of the Long Walk period. It is not my assertion that the Diné viewed themselves as Israelites or saw their internment as political revolution; rather, I trace the ways in which observers entrenched in Western political thought see the Exodus pattern in the Long Walk, thereby actively distorting the Diné experience. In this section, I argue that the six segments of the exodus narrative as outlined above are implicitly written into the historiography of the Long Walk. I find that Anglo-American scholars deploy these features to argue that the internment and treaty-making experience shaped the Diné into a nation.

### The People

One of the key features of the historical narratives of the Long Walk is the changing treatment of the Diné as a people. In the pre-internment phase (roughly 1846-1862), white American settlers (civilian or military) interacted with the Diné as a common people, but not a nation: this is true both in attempts at treaty-making and in “raiding.” Historians often indicate that one of the reasons the series of pre-1868 treaties failed was because the Diné negotiating the treaties did not have direct control or relationship with those violating the treaties – in other

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<sup>51</sup> G. Ernest Wright, “Introduction,” Robert G. Boling, ed., *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible 6 (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1982), 12.

<sup>52</sup> Wright, “Introduction” to *Joshua*, 7.

words, that the Navajo were not a collective people or nation. For example, Bailey and Bailey (1986) say, “Despite this treaty, Navajo raids scarcely diminished. The tribe had no central government to bind it together under the treaty, and many Navajos considered themselves superior in military strength to Americans.”<sup>53</sup> This use of “tribe” is consistent with a sense of the Navajo as a people, and the comment about military power gives them collective agency. Further, as the concern with raiding might suggest, the presence of the Diné was threatening to the white settlers in New Mexico Territory. For example, Lyon (1996) says, “The Navajos were the only Indians in North America whose population was increasing. Yet they were marauders, and their unceasing warfare had finally led to their removal to the Bosque Redondo.”<sup>54</sup> In his view, the Diné provoked their own incarceration, not only through their “unceasing warfare,” but also with their increasing population. Like the biblical Pharaoh, the United States is threatened by the rising presence of these strangers. Despite a sense that the Diné represent a common people, in describing this period, scholars do not perceive the political cohesion essential for nationhood.

Despite the portrayal in the scholarship, within the primary source material,<sup>55</sup> federal and military agents convey the sense that they were dealing with “the Navajos,” and although their general treatment of each native group did not significantly differ, they did differentiate between each tribe living in the region.<sup>56</sup> In the 1863 Office of Indian Affairs New Mexico

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<sup>53</sup> Garrick Alan Bailey and Roberta Glenn Bailey, *A History of the Navajos: The Reservation Years*, 1st ed (Santa Fe, N.M. : [Seattle]: School of American Research Press : Distributed by University of Washington Press, 1986), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Lyon, “Historical Imagination: 1807-1870,” 503.

<sup>55</sup> Because Western historiography traditionally relies on written records and physical evidence, particularly as created from “official” sources, looking at with primary source material – i.e., the primary source material created by the U.S. military and federal government – is a necessary step toward deconstructing the hegemonic understanding of the Long Walk.

<sup>56</sup> “In my judgement, three reservations should be established in this Territory, viz: one for the Apaches, one for the Utahs, and, after the Navajoes are sufficiently humbled, one for that tribe in their own country.” M. Steck, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, New Mexico, United States Office of Indian Affairs, “Annual Report of the

Superintendency report, General Carleton demonstrates the mindset that though the Navajo are a people, they are not unified in governance: “They have no government to make treaties; they are a patriarchal people. One set of families may make promises, but the other set will not heed them. They understand the direct application of force as a law; if its application be removed, that moment they become lawless.”<sup>57</sup> William Lyon quotes William Watts Hart Davis’ 1857 book *El Gringo; or, New Mexico and Her People*, through which Lyon portrays a confused sense of Diné self-governance: “Politically, the Navajos were anarchic: ‘In their councils they are little better than a tumultuous rabble.’”<sup>58</sup> On the one hand, Davis refers to “councils,” accepting that the Diné were self-governed prior to internment; on the other hand, Lyon states that the Diné were “anarchic” – that is, without government. Together, Lyon presents a muddled understanding of the polity, but both his anarchy and Davis’ tumult suggests that neither the primary nor the secondary source material recognizes Diné political organization as nationhood. Further, as the Israelites alarm Pharaoh, the conduct of the “foreign” Diné threatens the establishment of the American settler colonialist democracy in the region.

In an 1864 editorial defending Fort Sumner, General Carleton twice refers to “Navajo nation.” In the first instance, Carleton advocates Fort Sumner as a tool that will “wipe the whole Navajo nation from the face of the earth”; in the second, he says that “Navajo nation...retard[s] the advance of your country for an indefinite number of years.”<sup>59</sup> Though he uses the term “nation,” he does not do so in order to ascribe them with the political agency of successful treaty-making, but rather to demonstrate their military might and buttress his own decision to wipe

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Commission of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1863” (Government Printing Office, 1863), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep63>.

<sup>57</sup> James H. Carleton, Office of Indian Affairs, “Annual Report 1863.”

<sup>58</sup> Lyon, “Historical Imagination: 1807-1870,” 496.

<sup>59</sup> “‘To the People of New Mexico’: Gen. Carleton Defends the Bosque Redondo,” Gerald E. Thompson, *Arizona and the West*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter, 1972), pp. 360, 366.

them out. Like Pharaoh's fear of the Israelites' ability to rise up and overpower him – and his resultant decision to enslave them – Carleton is concerned with the combative Diné threat to westward expansion, and thus determines that he must intern them. Following 1868, when Fort Sumner left the Diné haggard and weary, this pre-internment label no longer held for such a “loosely bound” and unthreatening group.

Underhill's 1956 anthropological text reflects Carleton's position. In describing the pre-U.S. history, she explains that with Spanish colonization and naming of “the Navajo,” “the Navajos were now a recognized people, with a name well known both to Spaniards and Indians.”<sup>60</sup> She goes on to describe the U.S. decision-making process to intern the Diné at Fort Sumner, and here she – like Carleton himself – describes them as a nation. However, she seems to do so in order to reflect the language in the primary source material. First, she says that “It did not cross the mind of either Calhoun or Colonel Washington that Narbona was not the head of a well-organized nation,” and the second time she uses the word, she places it in quotation marks: “They decided that the ‘nation’ was to be summoned to Canyon de Chelly, and the great and final treaty was to be signed.”<sup>61</sup> This indicates that, even in her recognition of the Navajo as “a people,” Underhill does not understand them to be “a nation” – though she acknowledges that the primary source material treats them differently.

### Oppression

In the imposed reading of the oppression segment of the exodus narrative onto the Long Walk, the Diné are the Israelite “strangers,” though of course they are not strangers to their land. In the Anglo reading of the story, however, the land is owned by white settlers, and therefore, the Diné and other indigenous groups are “strangers” on it, characterized not by their lack of

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<sup>60</sup> Ruth Underhill, *The Navajos*, The Civilization of the American Indian Series (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press: 1956, n.d.), 62

<sup>61</sup> Underhill, *The Navajos*, 96.

familiarity, but by their lack of ownership. Like the Israelites, as the story goes, the Diné were not “enslaved” (brought to Fort Sumner) one by one, but rather all together – though it actually took Carson several years to satisfactorily complete this mission, and even then, some Diné remained free. However, the vision of containment and assimilation requires that the entire group be treated wholly and collectively, rather than individually or partially.

General Carleton’s vision of Bosque Redondo as the permanent home for the Diné was thwarted, in part, by a series of natural events that disrupted the ability for the fort to be agriculturally self-sustaining. This agricultural trouble was a great expense to the U.S. Army, in part because the crop failure meant that they had to provide rations for the people interned and the soldiers stationed at Fort Sumner, and this cost led to Sherman and Tappen’s decision to close the fort. Underhill describes these natural forces – various forms of insects, things that come from the sky, and livestock afflictions – in a sequential way, with the sense that one flowed to the next (although they in fact came over a series of years): “the caterpillar which fills vegetation with white webs, like tents, and is known as the ‘army worm.’ The next year the trouble was floods, then hail, then drought and wind. Each catastrophe seemed to the Navajos to be a direct visitation from the spirits. Most singers would not hold ceremonies to banish the ill luck since they were out of sanctified ground.”<sup>62</sup> Her list does not directly parallel the biblical plagues, but, like in the biblical material, she does not attribute them to “natural” causes. Rather than arguing that these are the work of God, she makes an indirect supernatural argument, saying that “the Navajos [thought they were] a direct visitation from the spirits.” Departing from the exodus pattern, however, she suggests that the Diné considered these happenings to be “ill luck” and that they were powerless in the face of this misfortune, because she claims that their

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<sup>62</sup> Underhill, *The Navajos*, 129.

ceremonies would not be performed (for lack of efficacy) outside of their own sacred land. In doing so, Underhill reveals that she does not see these pre-Treaty Navajo filling the role of the Israelites – the people with whom Anglo-Americans are used to identifying.

In focusing on the deplorable conditions at Bosque Redondo, including the stories of “catastrophes,” the sense that Fort Sumner was made up of a tyrannical power structure (like Pharaoh’s Egypt) emerges, even when the scholarly material does not describe the decisions that caused these circumstances. The indignity of the conditions is compounded by a combination of political powerlessness (incarceration and forced labor), natural powerlessness (toxic water, infestation, drought, etc.), and territorial alienation (held in a foreign land). No single piece of the historiography explicitly identifies these as the categorical elements of the Diné’s oppression in Fort Sumner, however, these components do parallel the Israelites’ oppression in Egypt. Rather than contributing to the argument that the Long Walk follows the pattern of the exodus narrative, I suggest that the presence of these elements (whether stated in their entirety in the historiography or not) sets up the expectation that, following the oppression of the Long Walk, there will be freedom and nation-building.

It is also important to consider the role of the oppression period itself in the understanding of the formation of the people. Within the exodus narrative, the Israelites are already considered a people, but they become a nation through the formation of the Covenant – and the periods of oppression and freedom are requisite steps in reaching that point. However, some interpretations view the trauma of oppression as a crucial force of people-making and nation-formation. In this way, some historians of the Long Walk point to the experiences on the way to and at Bosque Redondo as equally if not more important than the signing of the treaty in forming Navajo nationhood. Kluckhohn and Hill (1971) argue that the internment at Fort Sumner



led to a cohesive identity, but rather than pointing to the treaty itself, they offer a more direct explanation: “At Fort Sumner the Navaho were forced to live in close proximity and for the first time had an opportunity to share each other’s knowledge. Presumably this resulted in a consolidation of the total inventory of culture and led to a degree of cultural homogeneity that had been previously lacking.”<sup>63</sup> Thompson (1972) similarly points to the power of the situation itself (rather than the treaty), saying: “The reservation experience had truly placed the Navajos on a new course.”<sup>64</sup> In these cases, the scholars do not point to changes in government or nationhood explicitly, but they do argue that the oppression of the internment experience eventually led to an improved Navajo society – a notion emerging from the roots of the exodus narrative that describes a collective struggle leading toward progress.

#### Freedom

In the direct overlay the exodus narrative onto the Long Walk, the Diné release from Fort Sumner parallels the freedom of the Israelites from Egypt. Iverson’s (2002) word choice in describing the events surrounding the successful treaty negotiation follow this format: “They could not quite believe the promise of deliverance from Hwéeldi... The people noticed the haste of the preparations,”<sup>65</sup> where “promise of deliverance” and “haste of preparations” allude, for the Western reader, to the moments just before liberation from Egypt. For Iverson (2002), framing the return to their own land in this way seems to grant humanity and agency to the Diné, because he allows them to take the place often occupied by a Western, Christian, or American imagination. Iverson continues, making assumptions about what the Diné would have been thinking (as if they were collectively thinking one thing):

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<sup>63</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn, W. W. Hill, and Lucy Wales Kluckhohn, *Navaho Material Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>64</sup> Thompson, “To the People of New Mexico,” 347-366.

<sup>65</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 66.

Elation mixed with memory; prospect collided with deeply etched recollection. They remembered the terror of the Long Walk; they recalled those who had died. Now they had to retrace the steps of that horrible experience. What about crossing the Rio Grande? What about the kind of treatment they would receive from the soldiers? Such questions leavened the excitement they felt as they began their journey.<sup>66</sup>

When Iverson assumes what the Diné were remembering, he does not write that they remembered their homes, but rather, that they focused on their traumatic experience, therefore allowing the entry into Diné Bikéyah to be essentially entering a new (promised) land in keeping with the progressive orientation and directionality of the exodus narrative. Further, his assumption of the real-time memorialization of the moments of deliverance follows the Passover tradition of the remembrance of the Israelite's deliverance from Egypt and assumes that something so significant (such as nation-building) had occurred that it therefore ought to be remembered and reflected upon in the moment.

This sense of directionality and progress, illuminated by both Walzer and Deloria, offers an explanation for why the Exodus pattern is useful for American historiography. Though the Diné return to their homeland following internment – indicating either a cyclical pattern or “slippage” that would break with the exodus narrative – this movement is framed as “progressive.” Though the powers of settler colonialism continue to be asserted within Navajo Nation in the post-1868 context, their return to their homeland, rather than Indian Territory in Oklahoma, constitutes a political victory for the Diné. Rather than attributing agency or sovereignty to the pre-treaty Diné and granting the disruption of the forward-moving exodus pattern, the hegemonic historiography instead portrays this as the first realization of political consciousness. In doing so, scholars frame this movement toward home in a progressive – rather than corrective – sense, framing the moment as one of nation-building for the Diné.

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<sup>66</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 66.

### Wilderness

In much of the historiography of the Long Walk, the pattern of oppression in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness is somewhat reversed and generally not quite clearly portrayed. In many cases, the internment itself acts as the oppression in Egypt, particularly because of the tyrannical power structure, Diné acting as laborers, and role of the “plagues” in convincing the powerful to deliver the Diné from bondage. However, the return home is not given enough space within the historiography to clearly parallel 40 years in the wilderness, nor is this where the “murmuring tradition” occurs. In this sense, then, it is rather the pre-internment phase that is read as the liminal “wandering” period that precedes nationhood: the Diné lack the structure of either Pharaoh’s oppression (Fort Sumner) or of God’s covenant (the Treaty of 1868). This inversion of the typical arc also seems to fit with the progressive narrative of Manifest Destiny, in which indigenous people are “wild” and part of the “nature” that must be subdued in order to make room for civilization.

This inversion is nearly explicitly stated early in the historiography when Charles Amsden makes a direct allusion to Exodus: “The Bosque Redondo – part of a reservation forty miles square, with Fort Sumner in its center – proved no Promised Land, and the ‘children’ who were forcibly led forth from their wilderness to people it clamored unceasingly to be led back again.”<sup>67</sup> In this case, Amsden associates the Long Walk with the Exodus narrative, but not clearly with the nation-building pattern. First, he suggests that the people come from wilderness and then ask to return. Although he acknowledges that Fort Sumner was “no Promised Land,” he does not seem to argue that Diné Bikéyah was either. Further in his argument, Amsden suggests that the Long Walk was in fact a reversal of the Exodus pattern, for rather than moving from oppression to freedom, they go the opposite direction: “From a freedom almost idyllic they were

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<sup>67</sup> “The Navajo Exile at Bosque Redondo,” Charles Amsden, *New Mexico Historical Review*; Jan 1, 1933, 45.

plunged into a perpetual semi-servitude, in just five years.”<sup>68</sup> However, he goes further, first saying, “five years of bitter exile is not an inhuman retribution for two centuries of rapine and murder... the Navaho deliberately threw themselves in the pathway of a relentless force, the westward march of European civilization, and came off very well in the end.”<sup>69</sup> Through this naming of American settlement as “a relentless force, the westward march of European civilization,” Amsden is, in a typical fashion, associating American settler colonialism with the progress narrative and “chosen-ness” of the Israelites settling in the Promised Land (Canaan), framing the Diné who “deliberately threw themselves in the pathway” as the Canaanites. Even so, he goes on, saying, “No longer free, they are a nation still: larger, wealthier, more secure, than ever before.”<sup>70</sup> Amsden’s use of “a nation still” indicates that he views the pre-treaty Navajo as a nation, rather than a people or mere collection of individuals. Despite this, he also views the post-internment nation to be better off than they had been, indicating either that he does not think the civilizing force of the westward march has done its job (because the Diné are relatively unchanged), or, more likely, that the contact with the westward push has been effective, consistent with the progress of exodus freedom.

Underhill’s description fits the traditional pattern of Oppression-Wandering-Promised Land more closely. Carleton himself describes (with Underhill echoing his language) the Diné protesting their conditions of internment not as political agency, but as “murmuring”:

Many had died, perhaps from the poor food and water or perhaps from sheer discouragement. Poor General Carleton from his office desk wrote: ‘Tell them to be too proud to murmur about what cannot be helped,’ but the Navajos were murmuring. ‘Oh our beloved Chinle, they would say, that in the springtime used to be so pleasant: Chinle, they would say. Oh beloved Black Mountain! Would that one were at these so-named places.’ It sounds like the Hebrews by the waters of Babylon, but the Navajos were not repentant. The wails ended by the rich and peaceful ones scolding the raiders. ‘Oh you

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<sup>68</sup> Amsden, “The Navajo Exile,” 49-50.

<sup>69</sup> Amsden, “The Navajo Exile,” 49-50.

<sup>70</sup> Amsden, “The Navajo Exile,” 49-50.

wicked people! You did not finish what you started. The Mexicans that you killed, the Americans that you killed, you did not defeat them!”<sup>71</sup>

In this case, the quoted material (Sapir and Hoijer) directly makes the comparison to Israelite lament (though not within Exodus), but with a key exception – the Diné, they say, were not repentant. Unlike the murmuring Israelites, who God rightly looks upon with mercy, the Diné here are portrayed as illegitimately murmuring. For the Israelites may murmur and rebel, but they are forgiven when they recommit themselves to the terms of their Covenant. While the Diné are in the wilderness period of Fort Sumner, they do not yet have a Covenant or a promise of a hopeful future – only the failed treaties of the past, the terms of which are no longer on the table, though the associated failures continue to hang over their heads. This statement that “the Navajos were murmuring...but [they] were not repentant” emphasizes the liminality of the wilderness period because they are neither able to respond to the conditions of the past nor uphold the promises of the future.

#### Covenant

In the historiography of the Long Walk, the Treaty of 1868 is portrayed as “birthing” Navajo Nation, thereby acting as the Covenant. In this reading, the Diné are the Israelites and the United States, their covenant partner, takes the role of God. Within the governmental primary source material, even before the treaty was signed, there was progressive and nation-building potential for a “covenantal” relationship between the Diné and the United States. The implication of the “Indian policy” is that if and when the Navajo follow the rules that are set out for them (the “Covenant”) they will be transformed and rewarded with good things (the “Promise”).

To collect them together, little by little, on a reservation, away from the haunts, and hills, and hiding places of their country; there be kind to them; there teach their children how to read and write; teach them the arts of peace; teach them the truths of Christianity. Soon they will acquire new habits, new ideas, and new modes of life; and the old Indians will die off, and carry with them all latent longings for murdering and robbing. The young

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<sup>71</sup> Sapir and Hoijer, *Navaho Texts*, 359, quoted in Underhill, *The Navajos*, 135.

ones will take their places without these longings, and thus, little by little, they will become a happy and contented people; and Navajoe wars will be remembered only as something that belongs entirely to the past.<sup>72</sup>

The final sentence in this excerpt indicates the potency of this covenantal framework. First, “the old Indians will die off... they will become a happy and contented people” demonstrates the transformative nation-building potential of their new patterns of living as they gain a new collective identity. Further, the “Navajoe wars will be remembered only as something that belongs entirely to the past,” demonstrates the ability of the Covenant to move history forward and furthers the association between forward and civilization, past and primitive.

In the historiography, there is an important distinction between the Treaty of 1868 and the earlier failed treaties. Under the initial system, the Diné did not act as a collective, and though some may promise to end their raiding, they could not properly control the actions of others. Under the exodus logic of nation-formation, once the Diné become “a people” via the treaty/Covenant at Fort Sumner, they are able to be properly responsible for one another and, therefore, uphold the treaty. In fact, it is the treaty itself which inscribes them with political collectivity, and therefore the treaty itself which allows them to successfully uphold the treaty.

This sense of the Treaty of 1868 as the moment of nation-building is present in Kluckhohn and Leighton’s 1946 text: “Previous to 1868, the largest unit of effective social cooperation seems to have been a band of Indians... When The People were all treated as a unit by the United States Government and were assigned a common Reservation, this doubtless had the effect of promoting tribal cohesiveness.”<sup>73</sup> In this case, not only is 1868 an important shift, but Kluckhohn and Leighton give the U.S. government agency in creating this nation – or perhaps, from the phrasing “when The People were all treated as a unit,” not so much creating

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<sup>72</sup> James H. Carleton, “Annual Report 1863.”

<sup>73</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Cross Leighton, *The Navaho* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press; C. Oxford University Press, 1946), 122-123

something from nothing but allowing something natural to be realized. Though Kluckhohn and Leighton mark 1868 as the key year, they do not see this as a moment of complete transformation. Writing in 1946, they indicate that “The People” are continuing to come into their collective identity: “Just as there is no complete cultural or ‘racial’ unity, so also The People are only beginning to have what may accurately be designated as a ‘tribal’ or ‘national’ consciousness... The People are becoming increasingly conscious of common background, common problems, a common need to unite and protect their interests against the encroachment of whites.”<sup>74</sup> This sense of continued development reflects the Exodus pattern of the Israelites struggling to live into their Covenant. It also asserts American dominance over the Diné because, as a nation more fully aware of their collective story and promise, Americans are able to present themselves as more developed, and therefore more authoritative, than a group that it still coming into their collective consciousness. This supremacy and perceived self-knowledge grants the U.S. the authority to enter into a nation-forming treaty in the way that a just and all-knowing God can enter into a Covenant with the Israelites.

For Iverson (1981), there is a key difference between pre-1868, when he considers the Navajo to be one people culturally, and post-1868, when he sees them becoming one political people – a nation.

Thompson’s final point is the most central and the most valid. It was indeed at Bosque Redondo, or perhaps one might say in the context of the whole Long Walk era, that the Navajos were dealt with as one people by the U.S. government and equally that they began to view themselves politically as one unit. Previously, the Navajos had had things in common culturally, but politically there had been little centralization. They had lived in widely scattered locations, and authority was vested solely in local headmen. Their allegiances and frames of reference were based on a far more limited area. But now things would be altered. They had gone through the common crucible of the Long Walk experience. Now, through the treaty of 1868, they would be returned to a portion of their

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<sup>74</sup> Kluckhohn and Leighton, *The Navaho*, 122-123.

old home country, but they would return to a reservation with strictly defined borders. Their political boundaries had been established: the Navajo Nation had begun.<sup>75</sup> Like Kluckhohn and Leighton, Iverson looks at the role of the U.S. government, who created a Navajo nation by treating the Navajo as one. And like Kluckhohn and Hill and Thompson, Iverson also emphasizes the experience itself, calling it a “common crucible.” Ultimately, however, Iverson draws the connection of collective political identity directly from the Treaty of 1868, for it was the Treaty that defined the borders of the reservation, therefore creating political space and making those who live within those borders a nation.

#### The Promise

Greenberg observes that, though the possession of the land is a component of the Covenant, the latter does not rely on the former. In other words, the Covenant is established – and becomes binding – prior to the Israelites’ entry into Canaan.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the timing of the negotiation of the Treaty of 1868 is consistent with this relationship: the terms of the Treaty had to be agreed to in order for the Diné to be released from Fort Sumner and to return to their homeland. As with the Israelites, if they did not follow the outlines of this treaty, the “promised land” would never be reached. “Promise” language raises the question of who is making the promise and what that promise entails. Coming out of treaty negotiations, Manuelito and other Diné leaders promised their people a return home, but the Americans promised their people (including their new political subjects, the Navajo) reservation and assimilation – “civilization.” Either of these promises – whether a return to the land and ways of life prior to internment or assimilation to Anglo-American society – requires work due to Carson’s scorched earth campaign and the deaths of hundreds or thousands of family members during this short period. But whichever promise they pursue, the laws that the Diné must learn to live by are American

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Iverson, *The Navajo Nation*, Contributions in Ethnic Studies, no. 3 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981), 10.

<sup>76</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 14.



laws. Both in the cross back to Diné Bikéyah and in the 150 years since, neither promise is fully realized: not fully assimilated, not fully sovereign. According to the covenantal logic, neither promise is realized because of the people's own failures to uphold their end of the bargain, for they do not assimilate into American society, nor do they return to life as it was before.

However, in keeping with the pairing of covenantal responsibility and a hope for the future, the Promises' opportunities to make things right – whether according to their own sense of sovereignty or by Anglo-American standards – linger before them.

Though the Covenant is a historical document in the sense that it originates from a particular point in time, the people's relationship to it continues to evolve. Iverson (2002) finds exactly that centrality and remembrance of covenant in the 1999 commemoration of the Treaty: “Yet the signing of the Navajo treaty on June 1, 1868, defined the heart of a homeland rather than ripping the heart out of a people. June 1, 1868, became known as Treaty Day, as important in its own way as July 4, 1776, became to Americans. In a ceremony held 131 years later, the people remembered.”<sup>77</sup> In Iverson's view, the treaty is a sign of sovereignty and celebration that “defined the heart of a homeland” – whether the Diné are understood to be one politically, culturally, or both, the Treaty of 1868 inscribes their space and collectivity with meaning.

Furthermore, Iverson overlays this sense of importance and remembrance onto the Fort Sumner experience itself:

They would never forget the tragic dimensions of this experience. They would always carry with them the trauma of the Carson campaign and the Long Walk, the painful exile from Diné Bikéyah, and the many indignities and insults that they had had to endure. At the same time, they would recall that they had made their way through this crisis. They had learned as they went through so much with each other, that they had much in common. The U.S. government had insisted on dealing with them as one people, and this era had increased their own sense of themselves in this way... They had begun to use flour, and that would lead to fry bread. In time the blouse and the dresses and the fry bread would be considered traditional, but their beginnings can be traced to this place and

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<sup>77</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 36.

this time... They had begun to see themselves as a great people, destined to do great things. That, too, would be remembered.”<sup>78</sup> Although his cataloguing of the events gives agency to the Diné leaders who negotiated their release, Iverson also superimposes his own perspective onto them, saying they “no doubt reflected.” Iverson emphasizes remembrance, both in a literal sense and in the way that the experiences at Fort Sumner carried into contemporary Diné life, such as through dress and fry bread. This tying of remembrance via cultural elements (fry bread, blouses, etc) and destiny parallels the living reminder of the Covenant in the Tabernacle, which is a reminder not only of the terms of the agreement but also of the hope of the promise.

### III. Exodus: A Tool of Settler Colonialism

For the Anglo-American, the hegemony of exodus in narratives of nation-formation is hard to escape. As Walzer observes, in the Westerner’s pursuit of revolution, those desiring political transformation actively (though perhaps subconsciously) pursue the establishment of the exodus pattern in lived reality because, for Walzer, it gives the people agency. However, Childs argues that the moment of nation-formation is not God’s promise to Abraham, the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, nor the institution of the Covenant: instead, it is “God’s miraculous rescue of Israel at the sea.”<sup>79</sup> For Childs, unlike Walzer, the role of God’s deliverance is crucial. Though the people are transformed, they are transformed specifically by and because of God’s action: “Israel left Egypt as fleeing slaves, and emerged from the sea as a people who testified to God’s miraculous deliverance... the rescue was accomplished through the intervention of God and God alone. He had provided a way of escape when there was no hope.”<sup>80</sup> For Childs, the political transformation of exodus comes externally (from God) rather than internally (from the people’s own formation).

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<sup>78</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 64-65.

<sup>79</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 237.

<sup>80</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 237.

As Warrior articulates, the establishment of the Israelites in the land of Canaan is a case of settler colonialism: the Israelites install themselves and their new nation into a land they perceive as available for their use, but which in fact is already inhabited. Without using the language of settler colonialism, Greenberg observes the same, saying, “In order to acquire its homeland Israel had to dispossess the nations living in Canaan. Being born into a world full of nations made the existence of Israel problematic from the start; it was anything but natural and self-explanatory. In order to justify itself, this late-born and rootless people looked to the torah of its God.”<sup>81</sup> In this way, he begins to trace the relationship between the Covenant form and the possession of another’s land. In Greenberg’s description of the pieces of the exodus narrative, he says that the third section can be described as “The sovereign’s residence: How God ordained a sanctuary for himself amidst his consecrated people, so that he might dwell among them to care for them and guide them.”<sup>82</sup> God asserts his power over the people not only through the establishment of his laws, but through his very dwelling among them. God’s indwelling, assured via the Covenant, parallels the joint political and territorial presence of a settler colonialist. Through the Covenant, God reframes the people’s sense of how to live and does so to the extent that they enforce this upon themselves. Their formulation of covenant ideology means that they internalize God’s expectations, and the Israelites therefore self-enforce the requirements of the Covenant. As the Israelites structure their new society around God’s conditions, his physical presence is not necessary for him to assert his power.

The hegemony of the exodus narrative makes its characters and plot familiar and easily accessible to the Anglo-American reader. For the Westerner entrenched in the political theory of exodus – that is, the progression from peoplehood to nationhood – the narrative arc becomes the

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<sup>81</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 12.

<sup>82</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 16.

proverbial hammer and all accounts of collective struggle and nation-formation become the nail. This inelegance creates the fluidity necessary for exodus to be applied in various, and otherwise contradictory ways. In the typical American imagination, (Anglo-) Americans play the part of the Israelites – the ones who shook off their chains of bondage in order to seek freedom in a new land through the assurance of God. In the overlay of exodus onto the Long Walk, it is the Diné who take the part of the Israelites, escaping the burdens of oppression in order to establish a new nation in a distant land. Because scholars present both the “lawlessness” of the pre-internment period and the atrocity of Fort Sumner itself as the oppression the Diné are escaping, the arrangement of Pharaoh in this context is relatively pliable and functions more as an archetype than a precise comparison. Both interpretations feed the progressive premise that the exodus narrative puts forth: regardless of the specific forms of oppression the Diné are escaping, they are better off post-1868 than they were before.

As it is the Covenant that transfers the people from the bad place to the good place, then it follows this understanding of the forward-movement of the exodus narrative that the Treaty of 1868 functions as the Covenant. If the Treaty takes the place of the Covenant both in forming the Navajo Nation and in establishing the Promise, and the Diné take the part of the Israelites, then the United States – the other party in the Treaty/Covenant – takes the part of God. Within the biblical account, it is God who is the settler colonialist, establishing himself within the land and lives of a dependent. In the case of the Long Walk, the United States assumes the role of God: a power that is able to show mercy or inflict punishment upon a subservient body, establishes terms of right living, and imbeds itself within the everyday lives of the people in order to assert its sovereignty. As Greenberg explains, God’s emancipatory power authorized his supremacy in the Covenant context: “When, faithful to his oath, he delivered them from slavery, he became

their sovereign, and as such, was entitled to their obedience.”<sup>83</sup> This also describes the relationship between the U.S. and the Diné: according to the terms of the Treaty, when the United States allows the release of the Diné, the Treaty requires their obedience to the laws the U.S. sets out. With the imposition of the framework of the exodus narrative onto the Long Walk, the Treaty of 1868 acts as the Covenant between God (the United States) and the people (the Diné), and Diné Bikéyah becomes the Promised Land.

Although the Diné are the ones to settle their own land (rather than strangers or colonizers), the rules that they must abide by in order to uphold their end of the Treaty are not their own rules for right living. In the exodus narrative, the rules for living in the Promised Land, as set forth in the Covenant, are determined by God and are intended to mark the Promised Land as the land of the People of God – ultimately belonging to God, not the people. Furthermore, as Wright argues, the Israelites do not “win” the invaded land, it is a gift from God. By portraying the Diné as Israelites and the United States as God, the historiography removes agency from the Diné in their hard-fought return home. Instead, the land outlined in the Treaty of 1868 becomes a “gift” of the good-hearted United States rather than the Diné’s reclamation of something that is rightfully theirs. When they return to this “gifted” land, the Diné are bound to uphold the laws and standards outlined in the Treaty that forces them to be subservient to the sovereign giver. In working the land to realize its “promised” potential, the imposed laws of the treaty (Covenant) become the Diné (Israelites) settling Diné Bikéyah (Canaan) under the terms laid out by the U.S. (God), and therefore, a tool of Anglo-American settler colonialism that parallels God and the Israelites’ joint occupation of the Promised Land.

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<sup>83</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 9.

As Andrew Curley asserts, “treaties created tribes.”<sup>84</sup> When the United States created the category of “Navajo Tribe of Indians,” they enabled themselves to relate to the Diné on a group level. By using the Treaty to create an official categorization of people, the United States ensured that they can enforce the requirements of the Treaty on those bearing the state-sanctioned mark of legibility – tribal membership. In the exodus narrative, through the Covenant, the Israelites simultaneously become a sovereign nation and are inextricably bound to God and God’s laws. In the same way, the United States creates a “sovereign” category for the Diné, ostensibly granting them their own nationhood. However, in inscribing them with this identity, the United States in fact guarantees that the Diné – or rather, the Navajo Tribe of Indians – remains under their control. Further, not only do treaties, including the Treaty of 1868, create political identities through which the U.S. can control the people so inscribed, they also establish political boundaries, setting up borders in which the subjugated people must remain in order to retain that imposed identity. This reinforces the fact that that the territory the new nation lives on is in fact granted to them only by the greater power, the ultimate “owner” of it.

The framing of the initial battles between Euro-American settlers in the New Mexico Territory and the indigenous people living there, including the Diné, is usually explained by references to “raiding” perpetrated by some. In the exodus narrative, the implicit conflict between Pharaoh and the Israelites cannot go on without adjustment. For Pharaoh, the Israelite population increase is an imminent threat that could subvert his power at any time; for the Israelites, their conditions of servitude are no longer bearable as they begin to demand relief. By centering complaints about raids in the historical understanding of conflict between the Diné and the Euro-American settlers, historians portray the attacks as creating a situation so unstable that

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<sup>84</sup> Curley, “The Origin of Legibility,” 132.

something had to give. In doing so, they make visible the type of relationship settler colonialists have with the land: one between property and its owner. Without making this perspective explicit, scholars draw the parallel between the petty theft of settlers' property and the understanding that native presence on colonists' land was akin to stealing, since the land "rightfully" belonged to the colonists. Through this implicit argument, scholars invert the Diné from native to "stranger," who, like the Israelites in Egypt, are intruding upon the land of another.

Under the ideology of the Covenant-Treaty, the United States asserts that the Diné have the potential to progress to civilization, and by abiding by the expectations of the Treaty, they will get there. One of the primary mechanisms the Treaty uses for this "development" is education:

In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted... and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school... and the United States agrees that, for every thirty children between said ages who can be induced or compelled to attend school a house shall be provided, and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education shall be furnished.<sup>85</sup>

This section of the Treaty of 1868 outlines the Promise that the United States makes to the Diné: civilization. This explicit understanding that the Treaty commits to civilization – which serves the needs of the United States – demonstrates that this document furthers the settler colonialist project rather than granting the Diné sovereignty.

For Greenberg, the order of the establishment of the Covenant prior to the entry into the land has crucial meaning for the religiousness and collective identity of the Israelites. Under this framework, the Israelites were able to maintain their relationship to the Covenant when they were later exiled. Greenberg argues, therefore, that "There is thus an integral relation between

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<sup>85</sup> Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, "Treaty With the Navaho, 1868" (Government Printing Office, 1904), Indian Affairs. Laws and Treaties. Vol II. (Treaties.), 1017.

the exclusion of the book of Joshua from the Torah and the covenant's surviving the Exile, between the idea that the covenant took effect before Israel took their land and the decision made by the exiles still to be bound by the covenant even after they had been expelled from it."<sup>86</sup> In other words, though the land is an integral part of the Covenant, the Israelites remain bound by those promises even when they are separated from the land. However, for the Diné, it is the land that comes first, rather than the Covenant. When scholars ascribe formative power to the Treaty, they ignore that it is preceded by the shared sense of Diné homeland.

Greenberg argues that, unlike elsewhere in the ancient Near Eastern context, the Torah describes the Israelite nation's "distinctive way of life, [their] very reason for being," and therefore preserving these documents maintains the Israelites' collective identity.<sup>87</sup> Greenberg refers to this national story as "the constitution," including not only the events of nation-formation and the presentation of the laws (Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus), but also the accounts of creation and the establishment of the people of God (Genesis).<sup>88</sup> In this way, the creation of the people sits alongside the creation of the nation, and the two stories belong together in the same text. For the Diné, however, the moments of nation-formation do not coexist with the origins of the people, and these two do not make up equal parts of a whole. As Denetdale argues, the Diné creation accounts should properly be considered part of Diné history, and yet Anglo-American scholars instead consider them myths.<sup>89</sup> Unlike the Israelite "constitution," the Diné creation accounts and the Treaty of 1868 do not sit together as part of the same canon of collective identity. The Treaty asserts and establishes a particular, Western-imposed political structure onto the Diné. The Treaty begins by describing the parties entering

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<sup>86</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 15.

<sup>87</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 13-14.

<sup>89</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 7.



into the agreement: “the Navajo Nation or tribe of Indians, represented by their chiefs and head-men, duly authorized and empowered to act for the whole people of said nation or tribe.”<sup>90</sup> This statement both imposes nationhood onto the Diné and requires that their government operate in such a way that particular individuals are “authorized and empowered” to speak on behalf of the whole.

That the United States outlines what a proper political structure looks like ignores the fact that, prior to internment, the Diné already had a functioning form of self-governance:

The fundamental political entity was called a "natural community" composed of ten to forty families. Naataaniis, or leaders, led only the families that belonged to the natural community. They did not speak for all Dine people. Regional gatherings, called the naachid, of twenty-four naataanii, half of whom were peace leaders and the other half war leaders, constantly occurred. They met to discuss internal matters for the region... [including] intertribal affairs, hunting excursions, food harvests, and ceremonial rituals. During years of peace, the twelve peace leaders presided over meetings and in times of war, the war leaders commanded. Families chose the naataaniis, who always relied upon the hastoi (elder men) and hataali (healer) for guidance, advice, and support. In the role of Naataanii, leaders modeled proper behavior, maintained moral injunction, and enforced economic laws in the families. They did not function as dictator. Prosperity of the community was the goal for all leaders. Naataanii could be male or female... This form of government functioned for a millennium... Although problems did occur and life was difficult, the Dine people were self-sufficient and free.<sup>91</sup>

Lee describes a system of political organization that incorporated Diné worldview and was set up to respond to their realities – and yet the United States imposed a new form of government in order to move the Diné toward “progress.” In this way, the Treaty of 1868 does in fact constitute a moment of nation-formation, in the sense that it established a society of the sort Anglo-Americans preferred. As Lee argues, however, this is not a creation from nothing, but rather a conversion of an existing system: “The time spent at Bosque Redondo transformed the Dine political system. No longer would the naachid be performed. Although naataaniis were still selected for the large natural community, the autonomous and independent way of life prior to

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<sup>90</sup> Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, “Treaty With the Navaho, 1868,” 1015.

<sup>91</sup> Lloyd L. Lee, “The Future of Navajo Nationalism,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 22, no. 1 (2007), 55-56.

1863 was gone.”<sup>92</sup> Following this sense of longing, in the following chapter, I turn to Diné oral histories of the Long Walk in order to understand their self-understanding of the continuity between pre- and post-internment. Using Diné theorists, I argue that, rather than following the progressive pattern of exodus, the Diné oral histories in fact portray an instance of restoration.

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<sup>92</sup> Lee, “The Future of Navajo Nationalism,” 56

## Chapter Three: “We are lonesome for our land”

*“The best way to celebrate a people is to share their stories, because the best way to kill a people is to kill their stories.”<sup>1</sup>*

As Michael Walzer argues, the exodus narrative constitutes the Euro-American normative pattern of revolution and nation-formation.<sup>2</sup> As I argue in the previous chapter, this narrative effectively functions within the paradigm of settler colonialism, both because of the settler colonialism present within the text itself (the Israelites’ settling of Canaan) and its use for furthering a hierarchical, colonial relationship between a dominant power and its vassal. Although this narrative, particularly as I have presented it, primarily serves a political purpose, we cannot escape the theological claims that arise when the United States positions itself as God. However, Walzer contends that the potency of the exodus form, despite its religious orientation, transcends the secularization of European political theory.<sup>3</sup> For the descendants of the Reformation, the “spheres” in which people operate are separate: with this thinking, the state must be secular, and, therefore, religion is a distinct category that can be separated from other elements of society.<sup>4</sup>

What we might consider “religious” (in the sense that they belong to the discrete Western category of “religion”) are critical elements of Diné worldview, tradition, and community and are not necessarily separate from “secular” social elements, including collective decision-making (what we might consider “government”). By “religious elements,” here I am specifically referring to creation narratives, ritual ceremonies, and understandings of relationships between people and non-human beings, which I find are articulated within the oral histories of the Long

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Doyle, *Chicago: A Novel* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2016), 221.

<sup>2</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 133-134.

<sup>3</sup> Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 134.

<sup>4</sup> Noah Feldman, “Religion and the Earthly City,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2009): 989–1000.

Walk in such a way that suggests their importance in the agency of collective self-determination at Fort Sumner and beyond. In “Diné Culture, Decolonization, and the Politics of Hózhó,” Larry W. Emerson articulates an essential question of what he calls Diné journeying: “How do I respectfully make relational and interconnected decisions for myself, the land, the plants, my family and kin, and community within the Diné Four Sacred Mountains in a good way (*hózhoojí*)?”<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I am interested in the worldviews, grounded in Diné teachings, that arise in answer to this question and are articulated in the tellings of the Long Walk. Considering these Diné perspectives ingrained within the oral histories of the Long Walk reveals a focus on relationships, interconnectedness, and restoration rather than the Anglo-American narrative of progress and nation-formation.

Emerson’s phrasing of the essential question identifies key elements of the Diné tradition, including relationships (with family, within the clan system, and in the community broadly), interconnectedness (with the land, plants, and animals), and pursuit of *hózhoojí* (beauty way). In his article on *hózhó*, Vincent Werito identifies this central philosophy as “the lifelong journey of striving to live a long and harmonious life,” which is “part of our thoughts, language, prayers, and songs and is integral to our inherent human quality for making sense of our lives and striving

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<sup>5</sup> Larry W. Emerson, “Diné Culture, Decolonization, and the Politics of Hózhó,” in *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (University of Arizona Press, 2014), 52.

Although I have heard convincing critiques of Christian Smith’s argument (from my Wellesley colleagues), Smith’s broad definition of religion helps to frame “religion” as the underlying perspective that guides people’s (both individually and communally) actions and beliefs, as I see reflected in Emerson’s question. Smith says, “Religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with these powers, in hopes of realizing human goods and avoiding things bad” (22). Despite the problem’s with Smith’s definition, there are a few elements useful here: that religion fundamentally involves “practices,” that those practices are informed by “premises” (stories and beliefs), religion occurs because of the desire to “realize goods and avoid bads”, and that all of this, though perhaps expressed individually, is “culturally prescribed.” These are the four elements of “religion” that I see reflected in the Diné oral histories. Whether “superhuman powers, personal or impersonal” authentically fits into the Diné tradition, I do not know, and does not factor into my argument.

Christian Smith, *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

for harmony, peace, and justice.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, Diné philosophy, via hózhó specifically, incorporates not only “religious” elements such as prayers and songs, but also identifies the values that ought to be pursued and held in high regard, articulated here as harmony, peace, and justice.

The use of Diné worldview in understanding the Long Walk presents an alternative to the exodus-framed narrative of progress and nation-formation and replaces it with one of restoration and interconnectedness. Analysis of oral histories of the Long Walk via Diné philosophy exposes the imposition of a Western framework and supports oral tradition as a mode of decolonization. In “The Value of Oral History,” Jennifer Nez Denetdale says, “rather than take the construction of history as a process of becoming a progressive democratic state, Native American perspectives on the past focus on the creation as a time of perfection, and the narratives become instructional tools about how to return to those philosophies and values.”<sup>7</sup> Following Denetdale’s argument about a return to the time of perfection, in this chapter I use published oral histories of the Long Walk to assert that Diné collective identity, primarily as demonstrated via shared ceremonial and mythic<sup>8</sup> understanding, did not undergo a marked shift following the internment at Fort Sumner. Rather, oral histories of ceremonies that occurred around the time of Hwéeldi (Long Walk / Fort Sumner) indicate that the return to Diné Bikéyah (Diné homeland) in fact constitutes a restoration of prior patterns and worldview. Further, I follow the ways in which the oral histories themselves, including the modes of speech within them, serve decolonizing

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<sup>6</sup> Vincent Werito, “Understanding Hózhó to Achieve Critical Consciousness: A Contemporary Diné Interpretation of the Philosophical Principles of Hózhó,” in *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (University of Arizona Press, 2014), 26-27.

<sup>7</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 73.

<sup>8</sup> In using the term “mythic,” I am not claiming that Diné creation stories are mythological (false). Instead, I use this term to describe the function of stories in creating Diné ontology, informing religious and spiritual practices, and shaping commonly held language for asserting meaning. In this sense, I am intending to use “mythic” in a way that parallels “scriptural” for religious traditions based in written texts.

purposes by recognizing the patterns of settler colonialism and depicting “Native American cultural persistence and survival.”<sup>9</sup>

## I. Diné Worldview and Oral Tradition

At the core of Diné philosophy and worldview is *hózhó*, often translated as “beauty.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than a superficial beauty, however, this describes a sense of balance, harmony, and wholeness. In “Understanding *Hózhó* to Achieve Critical Consciousness: A Contemporary Diné Interpretation of the Philosophical Principles of *Hózhó*,” Vincent Werito explains that *hózhó* ought to be evoked and carried in all moments and activities so that all aspects of life may improve toward this harmonious, peaceful beauty. He addresses working toward *hózhó* in mundane activities such as driving or sitting in a meeting, and he also claims that *hózhó* is “a part of all traditional Navajo ceremonies and cultural teachings because of its emphasis on harmonious outcomes in most every situation. For example, many Diné prayers start with ‘*kodóó hózhó dooleel*’ (‘it begins with beauty’) and end with ‘*hózhó náhasdliiI*’ (‘it is done with beauty’).”<sup>11</sup> Though the various interpretations and applications of *hózhó* vary, it is central to Diné worldview.

The pursuit of *hózhó* is grounded in interconnected teachings about the cardinal directions, seasons, and times of day – and therefore symbolism of the number four. Diné philosophy is visually represented as a circle, divided into four parts by diagonal lines. These four segments represent the four cardinal directions, the four seasons, and the four parts of the day, and beginning from the right segment – representing east, spring, or dawn – one moves clockwise

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<sup>9</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 72.

<sup>10</sup> “For Diné peoples... SNBH [Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh *Hózhóón*, “or the lifelong journey of striving to live a long and harmonious life”] is who we are; it is part of our thought processes and everyday lives. SNBH is what we strive for, hope for, and pray for, because we believe that its essence and meaning lie at the base of our language and cultural identity and traditional cultural knowledge and teachings.” Werito, “Understanding *Hózhó*,” 26.

<sup>11</sup> Werito, “Understanding *Hózhó*,” 26.

around the circle, following the path of the sun.<sup>12</sup> Paired with these elements is the Diné philosophy of living and learning, whose four parts are incorporated into the circle and also flow clockwise: nitsáhákees (thinking), nahat'á (planning), iiná (living) and siihasin (assurance, reflection, or hope).<sup>13</sup> These four elements flow together into a cycle that empowers Diné people with making choices that will bring them toward hózhó; the cyclical nature of this philosophy emphasizes hózhó as a way of living rather than a destination.

The circular process of thinking, planning, living, and reflection sustains the central value of restoration. Unlike the Western emphasis on progress, Diné worldview holds close the notion that beauty, wholeness, and balance are the innate order of things, and therefore human action should be oriented to bringing relationships (within an individual, between people, and with plants, animals, and the land) to their rightful state of hózhó. Emerson explains that “Diné knowledge is predicated on the assumption that an ancient people can restore and regenerate its understanding of truths and can organize those truths through ceremony and present those truths through sacred song, prayer, and dance.”<sup>14</sup> The ceremonies and prayers described in the oral histories of the Long Walk emphasize this notion of restoration as they seek to assert sovereignty, right relationships, and return to hózhó.

In Diné teachings, the root of self and collective identity is the clan system, *k'é*, demonstrated in part by the traditional manner of introductions, beginning with stating one's four clans. As Denetdale explains, “Central to Navajo identity are the stories that relay how clans originated and how they continue to construct many aspects of Navajo organization, from the social to the political. Furthermore, the clan stories indicate how concepts of *k'é*, or relationships,

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<sup>12</sup> Werito, “Understanding Hózhó,” 27.

<sup>13</sup> Werito, “Understanding Hózhó,” 27.

<sup>14</sup> Emerson, “Diné Culture, Decolonization, and Politics,” 61.

inform all relationships based on *hózhó*. Changing Woman created four key clans, and all other clans are related to those four original clans.”<sup>15</sup> Each Diné person has four clans: the primary clan comes from the mother, and additional clans are passed from the father, maternal grandfather, and paternal grandfather. Upon meeting someone with a shared clan – regardless of age, other relationships, or social status – one refers to this new relative with a term of endearment that represents this relationship. In this way, someone who was previously a stranger might become a mother or grandfather, emphasizing the strong sense of kinship and interconnectedness in Diné society. Further, as Susan A. Miller argues in “Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm in American Indian Historiography,” indigenous sovereignty is grounded in kinship. She contends that kinship, coupled with language and a shared origin (or origin narrative), creates the collective identity necessary of sovereignty.<sup>16</sup> In this way, she says, “kinship is a feature of Indigenous law.”<sup>17</sup>

Kinship as a crucial determinant of sovereignty is demonstrated, in part, through oral tradition. Oral tradition can push back against hegemonic historiography through both its content – what is remembered – and its form – how and why the stories are told. Waziyatawin (formerly Angela Cavender Wilson) offers a useful distinction between oral history and oral tradition.<sup>18</sup> The former is a history told orally that comes from a person’s experience, or from experiences of others relayed to them orally. Oral tradition encompasses oral history: it is “the way in which

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<sup>15</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 77.

<sup>16</sup> Although Miller outlines an indigenous vision of sovereignty, she also describes the ways that this term is problematic: “The idea that sovereignty is the best concept in which to base tribal claims to self-determination has lately been called into question, however. Sovereignty is a European, and not an Indigenous, concept. It carries connotations of monarchy and state-type organization that are largely alien to American Indian nations” (32). Because of this origin, she emphasizes the work of indigenous scholars who are defining collective self-determination in other ways, grounded in their own teachings and philosophies – such as Miller’s argument about kinship, language, and origin.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, “Native Historians Write Back,” 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> Waziyatawin is speaking specifically to the Dakota context, but Denetdale upholds her argument in her Diné context in “The Value of Oral History.”



information is passed across generations,”<sup>19</sup> and is therefore reliant on the relationships afforded by kinship structures for its vitality. Oral tradition can include “personal experiences, pieces of information, events, incidents, and other phenomena... [which might become] part of the oral tradition at the moment they happen or at the moment they are told, as long as the person adopting the memory is part of an oral tradition.”<sup>20</sup> In arguing that oral histories make manifest indigenous thought and practice, Denetdale argues that they “are powerful tools for engaging with the ongoing consequences of colonialism for Native Americans and remain sources for creating, re-creating, and affirming the value of Native American traditions.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, Diné oral histories of the Long Walk are not merely counter-narratives to hegemonic scholarship of 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S.-Navajo relations, they are part of an oral tradition that offers both broader experiences of colonization and understandings of the Diné teachings of how to approach the world.<sup>22</sup>

Denetdale describes the historical context out of which transcribed oral histories of the Long Walk and other histories constructing a “Navajo national past” arose. First, she points to a period of empowerment, beginning in the civil rights era of the 1960s, that encouraged Navajos to control the narrative of their histories, “defining and affirming Navajoness against colonial rule.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the orientation toward empowerment and self-determination, much of the

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<sup>19</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 73.

<sup>20</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson, “Power of the Spoken Word: Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History,” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald Lee Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 103.

<sup>21</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 69.

<sup>22</sup> It is useful to note here that the biblical material, though written, edited, and redacted, emerges from an oral culture, as argued in part by Susan Niditch (in *Oral World and Written Word*, cited in Person). Though originating from an oral culture, the biblical material, particularly in its form known to the Europeans and Americans Walzer examines, is canonized: that is, there is not just a written version, there is an official version. Raymond F. Person, *Deuteronomic History and the Book of Chronicles: Scribal Works in an Oral World* (Atlanta, UNITED STATES: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 6

historical research has been reliant on anthropological and land claims researchers' work from the 1950s-60s. She also points to the colonial context in which these narratives arose, due primarily to academia's privileging of men and the emphasis on men's action in history. Therefore, Denetdale argues, "Navajos have negotiated meanings by selectively appropriating parts and incorporating them into their own narrative about the past... There remain unwritten Navajo narratives told within communities and matrilineal clans that privilege women's roles and indicate their places in the conveyance of tradition and its persistence in our society."<sup>24</sup> In this way, she suggests that the Navajo history that exists has not yet presented a complete picture, and that, for Diné scholars like her, much work remains to be done.

In this chapter, I use two published collections of Diné oral histories of the Long Walk in order to recognize how Diné elders of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century understood this period, particularly in regard to how Diné worldview can be understood through their modes of history. *Navajo Stories of the Long Walk Period*, published in 1973, was collected, transcribed, translated, and edited by people affiliated with Navajo Community College (now Diné College); it set out to be a publication "by Navajos, for Navajos, about Navajos."<sup>25</sup> *Oral History Stories of the Long Walk*, published in 1991, comes from the Eastern Agency of Navajo Nation. The Agency's bilingual program staff worked with elders in the community to gather these stories, eventually translating and transcribing them into their current form. *Navajo Stories* includes 40 oral histories, *Oral History Stories* features 39. In recording these histories, many storytellers note the parent or grandparent, and their clan(s), who initially told this story, and those relationships are sometimes noted in the actual stories. In considering how these oral histories reflect Diné worldview,

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<sup>24</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 6

<sup>25</sup> Broderick H. Johnson, ed., *Navajo Stories of the Long Walk Period* (Tsaile, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1973), vii.

particularly as would have been practiced at the time, I sought out reference to rituals or ceremonies, songs and prayers, or connections to creation stories and the land. Of the 79 histories, 45 include these elements; in some cases, there is a passing comment, while in many others, ceremonies or other religious elements are a significant feature of the story itself. In other words, for about half of the elders whose contributions were included in these collections, their descriptions of the events around the Long Walk involves articulation of Diné resilience via ceremonies, prayers, and connections to the land, features that are absent in the Anglo historiography.

## II. Relationships, Self-Determination, and Restoration

In “Discontinuities, Remembrances, and Cultural Survival: History, Diné/Navajo Memory, and the Bosque Redondo Memorial,” Jennifer Nez Denetdale contextualizes the memorialization of the Long Walk among the Diné. In particular, she considers the 1968 Centennial celebrations of Navajo Nation, the context out of which *Navajo Stories* (1973) was published. She says that these stories survive as part of a “collective Navajo memory,” but in the era of the Centennial, “Navajo leaders drew on these same memories to articulate a Navajo vision of sovereignty.”<sup>26</sup> She argues that, for Navajo Nation leadership, the Treaty of 1868 was the “nation-building event” Western historiography suggests it was (the very notion of a Centennial celebration affirms this). However, Denetdale also sees oral histories as a necessary part of the work of decolonization, thus able to present a vision of sovereignty that is not dependent on U.S.-imposed legibility (via treaty-making) and nationhood.

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<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Nez Denetdale, “Discontinuities, Remembrances, and Cultural Survival: History, Diné/Navajo Memory, and the Bosque Redondo Memorial,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (2007), 296.

Denetdale further explores the ways in which elders and others part of this oral tradition remember the Long Walk, particularly noting the difficulty of remembering and retelling due to the trauma of the genocidal experience.

After returning to their homeland, the Navajos were reluctant to speak about the overwhelming trauma of Hwéeldi... Even as Bighorse acknowledged the deep psychological and emotional scars from those dark years, he also voiced his need to tell his stories... Stories, however traumatic, also had healing powers. Despite their deep doubts and hesitance about speaking of Hwéeldi, many Navajos eventually shared their narratives, which were often conveyed generationally within matrilineal clans.<sup>27</sup> The “healing power” released in the telling of these traumatic stories is indicative of the Diné value of restoration. This articulated purpose of storytelling disrupts the Western notion of history with the objective of documenting “progress” for posterity. Rather than a mere “passing down” from one generation to the next, the telling and retelling of these oral histories ensures the stories – and indeed, those who tell them – remain living. Oral tradition is necessarily alive, not only in the sense that it (unlike history documented in writing) requires active, living storytellers, but specifically because – through the active, living storyteller – the oral history has life breathed into it every time it is told. Stories shift based on who is telling them and the context in which they speak. For the elders expressing their ancestors’ teachings and resilience, the telling of these stories ensures the longevity of both their traditions and their descendants: “These narratives present moments to reflect upon the Navajos’ perseverance, courage, and integrity in the face of atrocity and prove once again the value of the traditional Navajo worldview and practices. The Navajos’ truths, ceremonies, and prayers have ensured their survival and revitalization as a people.”<sup>28</sup> The oral histories – and indeed, the experiences of those who tell them – are neither entirely trauma nor entirely sovereignty and agency. Rather, these stories present accounts of

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<sup>27</sup> Denetdale, “Discontinuities, Remembrances, and Cultural Survival,” 298-299.

<sup>28</sup> Denetdale, “Discontinuities, Remembrances, and Cultural Survival,” 300.

both how the tellers have encountered colonization and how they have responded, particularly with Diné worldview and practice.

Joe Billy, one of the elders who gave an oral history, heard the stories from his grandmother. For her, there is a huge importance in remembrance, because, as she suggests, these experiences will in some way happen again: “When my grandmother told us these stories, she said, ‘We suffered at Hwéeldi, my grandchildren, and you will be living the same life yourselves someday. You must remember these stories as you live.’”<sup>29</sup> Jane Hasteen’s grandmother, on the other hand, did not want to talk about her experiences: “What my grandmother told us about her experience was terrible and horrifying. She did not want to talk about it. She used to say it was not worth telling others because they suffered from everything.”<sup>30</sup> Somewhat similarly, Mary Pioche speaks to the difficulty of talking about the Long Walk:

When men and women talk about Hwéeldi, they say it is something you cannot really talk about, or they say they would rather not talk about it. Every time their thoughts go back to Hwéeldi, they remember their relatives, families, and friends who were killed by the enemies. They watched them die, and they suffered with them, so they break into tears and start crying. That is why we only know segments of stories, pieces here and there. Nobody really knows the whole story about Hwéeldi.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike Jane Hasteen, Mary Pioche does not claim the difficulty in talking about the Long Walk as a reason not to, she simply offers it as an explanation for the divergent narratives. The range of these storytellers’ perspectives conveys the fact that, although the Long Walk was in some ways a collective event, individuals experienced and remembered it differently. Rather than looking at these individual narratives with a discrete and siloed approach, treating them holistically reveals the fullness of Diné responses to this trauma.

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<sup>29</sup> Joe Billy, Navajo Nation, Arizona, New Mexico & Utah, Lake Valley Navajo School (Lake Valley, San Juan County, N.M.), and United States, eds., *Oral History Stories of the Long Walk: Hwéeldi Baa Hané* (Crownpoint, N.M.: Lake Valley Navajo School, 1991), 47.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Hasteen, *Oral History Stories*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Pioche, *Oral History Stories*, 99.

For Denetdale, one of the decolonizing features of oral tradition is that the sense of time substantially differs from the forward-moving, “progress” timeline normative of Western history. Denetdale observes that in telling their oral histories, elders do not stick to the boundaries of 1863-1868; instead, they allow their narratives to move forward and back in time, including – in addition to stories from Hwéeldi – moments from the Spanish massacre in Canyon de Chelly (Massacre Cave) in 1805 and livestock reductions in the 1930s-40s. To the Western ear, this mode of storytelling sounds like badly told history and would perhaps be an indication of confused elders. But as Denetdale argues, this is in fact a “[declaration of] a history of sustained colonialism that has not drastically changed far into the twentieth century.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, via the disordering of incidents of colonialism (perpetrated by various actors: Spanish, Mexican, and American), these storytellers implicitly argue that settler colonialism is indeed a structure and not an event.

In his oral history, Frank Goldtooth demonstrates an understanding of the ongoing structures of settler colonialism furthered by the Long Walk and the Treaty of 1868. He articulates tension between who holds power for the Diné: on the one hand, the Holy People established the land for the Diné to live in, while on the other hand, the white people have taken that land away.

We now live within our four great sacred mountains, where our *Diyin Din'é* (Holy People) want us to live, but most of the mountains themselves were taken away from us by the white people. Today, we hear that some of the land that was given to us to live on belongs to the *Kiis'áanii* and that they have the authority over it. What became of the agreements? What became of the documents that show that this is our land, even before our march to *Hwéeldi* and even before the White Man came. Today, we have no land to call our own, our words are not respected and they are not heard in *Wááshindoon*. What is to become of us and our children? What right do the *Kiis'áanii* have that they claim almost our whole Reservation. After all, our ancestors suffered for it and they paid with their lives.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Denetdale, “Discontinuities, Remembrances, and Cultural Survival,” 299.

<sup>33</sup> Frank Goldtooth, *Navajo Stories*, 153.

His claim that “we have no land to call our own” demonstrates the potency of settler colonialism: even though Frank Goldtooth knows that “we now live within our four great sacred mountains,” he also understands that the great power over that land is the U.S. government (*Wááshindoon*).

While outside sources frequently point to the Treaty of 1868 as the moment of “nation-building” for Navajos, these oral histories significantly remember the treaty as the start of Diné children being forced into U.S.-run schools. They note that Diné leaders at the time “agreed to” this education policy as a condition of their freedom, and that generations of children continue to face these consequences. In highlighting this contrast, these elders indicate a suspicion of the so-called sovereignty the Treaty imposes: on the one hand, the elders allow that the Diné negotiating the Treaty made the agreement, but on the other hand, there is a clear understanding that the education policies are according to the standards and interests of the United States rather than being determined by Diné leaders. Akinabh Burbank, for example, makes these connections: “As I said, the people had agreed that their children would be educated by the White Man, and the result is evident today. Also, this land is not our land. The Navajos had to surrender their children and their land so that they could come back to the land. At least, that is the way our parents and grandparents have told of history and events.”<sup>34</sup> Akinabh Burbank demonstrates that, although the Diné literally returned to the land that they had previously lived on, after the Treaty, the land belonged to someone else. The association of education policy and land ownership demonstrates one of the mechanisms of settler colonialism: although the Diné occupy their own land, they do not have control over it. In fact, the United States has the means of ongoing assimilatory practices of cultural destruction in their education of Diné children

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<sup>34</sup> Akinabh Burbank, *Navjao Stories*, 134.

according to their standards rather than what is important for young Diné to learn, as determined by their own parents, grandparents, and communities.

In some of the oral histories, the presentation of traditional Diné worldview is explicit: some storytellers mention ceremonies, while others' language is oriented toward the philosophy of hózhó. A few elders draw connections between the atrocities at Hwéeldi and the loss of culture they see in contemporary young people. Frank Keesonnie says, "Today, we still have people with evil minds who cause all kinds of problems. Our younger generation is learning only the English language. They do not respect what our people have from the yesteryears. I do not know what is going to happen when our language is all forgotten."<sup>35</sup> For him, there is a connection between his memories of the Long Walk and lack of collective knowledge – particularly among young people – of traditional ways, teachings, and experiences.<sup>36</sup> Notah Draper claims that ceremonies in the past – namely at the time around the Long Walk – were done correctly: "At that time sacred ceremonies were being held, and they were done right. Now our people aren't performing some ceremonies the correct way because they get hold of the bottle and drink too much wine. That's the trouble with us Navajos. A long time ago, when our ancestors performed a ceremony, it was holy for them and no alcoholic beverages were used."<sup>37</sup> For both of these elders, the connections they draw highlight the problems they see in among their contemporaries, and the fact that they do so in the context of a Long Walk oral history supports Denetdale's

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<sup>35</sup> Frank Keesonnie, *Oral History Stories*, 85.

<sup>36</sup> The tension between Navajo language and English is crucial: while many elders only speak Navajo, many children and young adults only speak English. While the oral tradition is in Navajo, the collections of oral histories I am working with are both translated into English. While the memorialization of these histories (whether orally or literarily) is important for Diné self-determination, that they are in English makes a significant claim about the state of Diné sovereignty. Despite the decline in Navajo language exposure, recovery is possible, as Diné College's Language Immersion Program director, James McKenzie, articulates (unpublished presentation, March 2018). The program is blending academic language acquisition with culturally-relevant instruction from elders whose teachings go beyond language.

<sup>37</sup> Notah Draper, *Navajo Stories*, 227.



argument that there are no clean lines between the various moments of colonization in Diné history. In both of these statements, the elders lament loss of culture and tie this damage to Euro-American presence; both view these changes as a kind of imbalance, with Frank Keesonnie describing “evil minds” that outweigh goodness, and Notah Draper arguing that the excess of alcohol keeps the Diné from properly performing ceremonies.<sup>38</sup> Their yearning for a return to how things once were emphasizes the prominence of restoration – rather than progression – as the orientation of social change.

In many of these oral histories, storytellers describe their ancestors’ escape from their captors and subsequent journey home. Although typically describing an individual returning home, these histories serve as critical narratives for asserting the importance of relationships in Diné worldview. Rather than seeing humans as separate from or superior to the natural world, these accounts portray the Diné sense of interconnectedness, not only with one another via the clan system, but also with plants, animals, and the land. John Beyale Sr., Mayla Benally, Fred Bitsillie, and Betty Tso all describe owls as a signal of safe passage as the animals offer guidance through both their flight and with sound. Frank Johnson tells of a direct address to an owl which leads to help while on a journey home: “...At this instant an owl hooted nearby, and I said to the owl, ‘*Schicheíí* (My Grandfather), where is the path down to the bottom of this canyon? Can you lead me down?’ The owl flew off and hooted again some distance away. When I caught up with him I found him sitting on an old stump near the edge of the canyon...”<sup>39</sup> The relational term to address the owl, *Schicheíí* (My Grandfather), points to their being part of a common ancestry,

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald Vizenor describes some of the complexity of native relationships to alcohol, including the “drunken Indian” stereotype. His analysis includes consideration of the relationship of alcohol, alcoholism, and drunkenness to European colonization and assimilation. Gerald Vizenor, “Firewater Labels and Methodologies,” *American Indian Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1983): 25–36.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Johnson, *Navajo Stories*, 88.

revealing an underlying worldview in which humans are in relationship with other animals, and humans are not dominant – the owl takes the elder, respected position. Hoskie Juan also describes an owl indicating a safe direction of travel, again using the relational term

“Grandfather”:

She heard an owl in the distance. The sound came closer, and then the owl sat on a tree branch that she was standing under. She said to the owl, ‘Please, Grandfather, help me. I am freezing.’ She spread her saddle blanket on the snow and sat on it. Then she heard tree branches breaking off a tree, and she listened to the sound. She went to sleep and slept all night. When she woke up at dawn the next day, she noticed that her blanket, buckskin dress, and moccasins were dry. The snow had melted and dried around her, and the horse was eating grass. The owl was sitting on the tree branch looking at her. She said to the owl, ‘Thank you, Grandfather, for helping me to survive the snow storm.’ It was a beautiful morning. There were no clouds or snow, and she could see her way to the sheep camp. The owl flew off in that direction, and she followed it.<sup>40</sup>

This account goes beyond merely following the owl for safe passage, but describes direct pleading with the owl and fulfillment of the request. In this case, the owl’s aid in getting her through the night directly leads to her ability to return to the sheep camp. This history describes a reliance on traditional teachings, specifically a familial interconnectedness between people and non-human beings, that directly produces the woman’s survival. In this way, the content of the oral history demonstrates to its hearers that Diné practices and worldview ensure the endurance of the people in the face of trauma and hardship.

One of the recurrent themes of the oral histories is an understanding that the Diné demanded their release because they were “lonesome for their land.” Akinabh Burbank’s account gives particular detail about this longing:

By the end of four years at Fort Sumner my mother was more than four years old. The Navajos were pretty restless and yearned to go to their homeland in spite of the free food that was provided for them. It was planting season, and the people from *Tséyi*’ (Canyon de Chelly) were the ones who had the strongest urge to go back. They kept wondering how their orchards of fruit were – or they were worrying about it being time to plant again. The Navajos confronted the white leaders, saying they wanted to go back to their own land because they were lonesome. Now that the Navajos were lonesome for their

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<sup>40</sup> Hoskie Juan, *Oral History Stories*, 77-78.

homeland, the white leaders had to figure out what kind of an agreement should be made to send the Navajos back to their homeland...<sup>41</sup>

This story offers threefold detail about the longing for the land: who, when, and why. The note that “the people from Tséyi’ were the ones who had the strongest urge to go back” emphasizes connection to the land in determining identity. Next, the storyteller establishes that the Diné had been held at Fort Sumner for four years, and then continues to explain that it was planting season. Establishing the length of time the Diné had been interned demonstrates their physical and temporal disconnection from their land, emphasizing the importance of their yearning to be reunited. The impetus for their confrontation being planting season reflects the Diné philosophy that revolves in part around the seasons, and allows time for each period in the year. In the overlay of different elements of this philosophy, the action phase is paired with Spring (the season for planting) – and indeed, this is when “the Navajos confronted the white leaders” at Fort Sumner. Even as the Diné are disconnected from their land, this account suggests that they are still grounded in their teachings about the proper way for things to occur, as driven by the sun and seasons.

Howard Gorman’s account also offers a specific explanation for why returning to the land is important. His report is rooted in a geographical description of what the homeland is: “*Hastiin Dahghaa*’I said that from the Rio Grande west was their homeland, that what they were staying on was not.”<sup>42</sup> Not only does this define the location of Diné Bikéyah as west of the Rio Grande, as told in the creation stories, it also explicitly differentiates between land that is home and land that is foreign. In the sentence immediately following, he points to the meaning of home: “A man by the name of *Tótsohnii Hastí* (Big Water Clan Man) agreed. He said, ‘I’m not about to give up my life here – even to think of dying here. I would rather return to my homeland and die there.’”

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<sup>41</sup> Akinabh Burbank, *Navajo Stories*, 132.

<sup>42</sup> Howard W. Gorman, *Navajo Stories*, 37-38.

And that's exactly what happened to him."<sup>43</sup> From this, we learn that it is not only *living* on the land that is important, but that it is necessary for the Diné to *die* in their homeland. In this way, the Diné are not only asserting where the right place to live is (their homeland), but they are affirming their own agency in declaring not only where they will be, but also the proper way of relating to the land. In other words, it would be improper for Tótsohnii Hastíí to die outside of his homeland, so he did not – according to this history, he asserted agency by living long enough to die in his homeland.

While other storytellers describing the relationship between the people and their land emphasize the people's yearning to return to their land, Harry Pioche offers a more mutual sense of interconnectedness.

While the Navajos were at Hwéeldi from two to three years, the Navajo land became red and barren without rain. It was not the same as they had left it. There was concern about the land while the Navajos were gathered at Hwéeldi... After the Navajos returned to their homeland, the condition of the land returned to normal. It was believed that the Navajo land needed THE PEOPLE to inhabit it in order for it to prosper.<sup>44</sup> The normative Western perspective, rooted in a particular interpretation of Christianity's creation accounts, contends that the land was created for people's use.<sup>45</sup> From this viewpoint, there is a lack of emphasis on the fact that people need the land in order to survive – let alone the claim that the land requires the people in order to survive. For Harry Pioche, he is not presenting an

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<sup>43</sup> Howard W. Gorman, *Navajo Stories*, 37-38.

<sup>44</sup> Harry Pioche, *Oral History Stories*, 95.

<sup>45</sup> "For this is the argument of the Book of Genesis: After the world had been created, man was placed in it as a theatre, that he, beholding above him and beneath him the wonderful works of God, might reverently adore their Author. Secondly, that *all things were ordained for the use of man*, that he, being under deeper obligation, might devote and dedicate himself to obedience towards God. Thirdly, that he was endued with understanding and reason, that *being distinguished from brute animals he might mediate on a better life*, and might even tend directly towards God, whose image he bore engraved on his own person." (emphasis added) John Calvin begins by articulating a hierarchical relationship between humans and God, saying that humans were created so that they might worship God. He goes on to describe what God gave to humans: that is, "all things" so that man might use them, including "understanding and reason" so that humans would be distinct from "brute animals" – that is, nature. Calvin furthers a theology that, though humans are charged with "dominion" over the land and all that is in it, they do so in order to further their own purposes and livelihoods rather than out of concern for the land itself or the non-human beings who occupy it.

John Calvin, *Genesis* (Crossway, 2001).

argument about people being superior to the land; rather, his history demonstrates a worldview of interdependency and balance. When things are out of order – when the Diné are forcibly removed from their home – the land itself suffers, a symptom that all is not well. When the people return, the land returns to health, because order and harmony have been restored. This argument does not rely on some sense of progress, of things “moving forward” after the people return; instead, the focus remains on “*returning* to normal” (emphasis added) in order to “prosper.”

A recurrent theme in these oral histories is the both the potency and presence of ritual ceremonies during internment. In itself, the practice of these ceremonies is striking because it indicates both shared religious understanding of the so-call “disorganized” Diné as well as the resilience to engage in integral ways of living and meaning-making. For example, Hosteen Tso Begay lists some of the ceremonies that were practiced at Hwéeldi, noting that they had particular status there: “As for religion and ceremonies, our people practiced them as usual, except that they were considered especially sacred and were respected very much.”<sup>46</sup> The phrase “as usual” serves as a reminder that, despite the traumatic disruption to their life, these ceremonies allowed the Diné to assert control over an aspect of their lives and retain connections to their homeland. Mary Pioche states that, “At Hwéeldi the Diné still had squaw dances,”<sup>47</sup> with the phrase “still had” conveying that the ceremony brought a sense of normalcy to life in Hwéeldi. Similarly, Yasdesbah Silversmith conveys that ceremonies, including Squaw Dances, were a continuation of normal life: “At Fort Sumner our people spent four years of a miserable life. In spite of that, religious ceremonies were practiced. Squaw Dances and singing ceremonies

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<sup>46</sup> Hosteen Tso Begay, *Navajo Stories*, 264.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Pioche, *Oral History Stories*, 99.

were held.”<sup>48</sup> Yasdesbah Silversmith directly contrasts the wretchedness of the circumstances with the singing and dancing of religious ceremonies, conveying the sense that engaging in these ceremonies was undermining the oppressive conditions the U.S. imposed. Annie Succo ties the Hozhóójí ceremony to the Diné’s ability for survival while interned: “They had small Hozhoóójí (Blessing Way) ceremonies for themselves to help them continue to live.”<sup>49</sup> However, she does not discount the conditions of surveillance and fear of Hwéeldi, adding that “They tried to keep it a secret and not have too many ceremonies at their hidden place... The Diné used a medicine man to help them pray for serious matters of their lives, but they kept their ceremonies short.”<sup>50</sup>

One of the key elements of Diné culture and identity is k’é, the clan system, which determines how people relate to one another and creates familial bonds between people who may not be “related” to each other in a Western sense. An individual’s primary clan is passed through the mother. A girl aging into womanhood is an important marker not only for her, but for all of her family. One of the ceremonies most frequently described as occurring at Hwéeldi is Kinaaldá, the female puberty ceremony. In addition to being an expression of agency, normalcy, and hope for the future during the time of internment, Kinaaldá also brings particular connection to Diné creation stories. The Kinaaldá (Walked Into Beauty) ceremony originated with Changing Woman, the daughter of First Man and First Woman; the Holy People held the ceremony so that she would be able to have children.<sup>51</sup> First Woman instructed Changing Woman in the ceremony, saying: “You must run four times in the direction of the rising sun. As you turn to come back, you must make the turn sunwise.”<sup>52</sup> This ceremony highlights how various elements of Diné

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<sup>48</sup> Yasdesbah Silversmith, *Navajo Stories*, 119.

<sup>49</sup> Annie Succo, *Oral History Stories*, 113.

<sup>50</sup> Annie Succo, *Oral History Stories*, 113.

<sup>51</sup> Ethelou Yazzie and Navaho Curriculum Center, eds., *Navajo History*, 1st ed. (Many Farms, Ariz: Navajo Community College Press, 1971), 32.

<sup>52</sup> Ethelou Yazzie, *Navajo History*, 32.

worldview are tied together (for young women): not only was Changing Woman the first to have a Kinaaldá, she is also the root of the original four clans; the number and direction of the runs is indicative of the key symbols of Diné philosophy (the number four and clockwise movement); and the overall purpose of the ceremony (“Walk Into Beauty”) emphasizes the prominence of hózhó in Diné thought.

As part of a broader oral tradition, the oral histories describing the performance of Kinaaldá ceremonies while interned serves several purposes. First, and perhaps most importantly within the historiography of the Long Walk, these depictions assert that the Diné held common cultural and religious practices prior to 1863, countering notions that Fort Sumner was the moment of nation-formation. Second, the practicing of these ceremonies indicates agency for the Diné while they were interned: though they had little control over much of their life, they still asserted their own definitions of womanhood and family, and in doing so, staked the claim that they would have a future as a people. Third, in the telling of these ceremonies, particularly as they are tied to the resiliency of the Diné, elders assert the importance of continuing to engage in these traditional practices and make the claim that such ceremonies will continue to ensure the longevity of the Diné moving forward.

In both collections, all of these stories come from the storyteller’s ancestor, often a grandparent or great-grandparent, which is reflected on each page when the editors introduce the next storyteller. However, the storytellers themselves reflect this carrying of another’s story in different ways. For some, the subject is, for example, “my grandmother,” and the storyteller will use “she” pronouns to refer to the grandmother and “they” pronouns to refer to a whole group. Other storytellers, however, might begin by saying, “this is the way my grandmother told her story,” and then proceed to tell the story from the position of the grandmother: using “I” and

“we” pronouns and speaking as if from direct experience. Although she is not specifically referring to this grammatical form, Denetdale argues that someone hearing oral histories herself becomes part of that history and tradition: “As a person listens to stories relayed, she or he takes on the memories of the person who tells the narratives. In this way, our ancestors’ memories become our memories, and we become part of the vehicle of oral history.”<sup>53</sup> This contraction of time and space – in which the storyteller assumes the grammatical position of the subject of the story despite a 100-year gap – seems to reflect the clan system in which strict relationships between individuals are made fluid due to the interconnectedness within communities. The first-person stance facilitates the life of oral tradition in which histories breathe and change.

Under this system of determining familial relationships, every Diné is “born for” their mother’s clan, but also has three other clans: father’s, maternal grandfather’s, and paternal grandfather’s. When Person A meets Person B, whose primary clan is the same as A’s maternal grandfather’s, A now refers to B as her maternal grandparent. In this way, an infant can be a grown man’s grandmother. K’é allows for the muddying of strict familial relationships in terms of what “makes sense” by rules of Western, time-based history: how could an infant be a grandmother? Emphasizing the proximity of family regardless of time allows storytellers to take up the position of their ancestors, and, in so doing, ensures the carrying forward of this oral tradition. By situating these histories in the present, rather than the past, these storytellers assert the relevance of their ancestors’ experiences and indicate that stories of resilience and restoration will continue to carry meaning for their children and grandchildren, as they continue to face the structures of settler colonialism.

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<sup>53</sup> Denetdale, “The Value of Oral History,” 73.



For many of the elders sharing oral histories, the importance of the passing of this knowledge must be expressed explicitly. Many of these stories are passed through female relatives, and the importance of women is crucial for some. Jane Hasteen's grandmother, though initially unwilling to talk about her experience, emphasizes the importance of women's survival in contemporary Diné existence: "She told us that if she had been killed during the conflict, the young girls would not be here today. If the Navajo women had all been killed during the conflict, there would not be any Navajo people today."<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Rita Wheeler makes linkages to generations of women that connect her to the telling of this story, explicitly conveying the notion that the surviving and thriving of the Diné relies on the women who had these experiences. "That is how the story goes, according to my ancestors. I saw the woman myself – the one who, as a baby, had been found by her grandmother. She died of old age not many years ago near *Da'ák'ehóteel* (Large Corn Field) at her own old homestead. A daughter whom she bore is now an old woman – very much alive. She's the older sister of my own mother."<sup>55</sup> For both of these women, it is women in particular who allow – or rather, create – the resiliency of the Diné.

Because many Diné teachings are gendered, with some ceremonies limited to women and others to men, the relationships among women are particularly important in the passing of traditional knowledge. In Chahadineli Benally's description of his grandmother's labor with what would have been his aunt or uncle, he weaves together a number of themes present throughout these accounts. This includes a sense of continuity with pre-internment practices as well as the role of songs (or chants or ceremonies) in determining good outcomes: "She had observed, and helped with, some babies being delivered at home. Once in a while, she gave a good massaging to her abdomen. While she massaged she sang the sacred song for the safe

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<sup>54</sup> Jane Hasteen, *Oral History Stories*, 74.

<sup>55</sup> Rita Wheeler, *Navajo Stories*, 80.

arrival of the baby.”<sup>56</sup> First, that she had been part of other women’s deliveries gives a sense that births would have been a familial or communal experience for women. That she sings the sacred song for safe arrival demonstrates the tying together of religious practices and agency in remaining strong in the face of trauma. As his account continues, there is an implicit understanding of the role of the land in allowing the ongoing life of the Diné, because it is not until she crosses the threshold to her homeland that she goes into labor: “So she had borne the baby after she had come back to her land and while she was barely making it to her home.”<sup>57</sup> Although this woman was able to conduct some of the traditional practices herself, she did not undergo labor alone. That she did not deliver the child until after she had returned to her land reflects the relationship between the Diné and their homeland, one in which the people were lonely for their land the way they might be lonely for a relative.

Some storytellers describe the practicing of particular ceremonies at Fort Sumner in general, while others offer that religious practices, including ceremonies as well as singing, prayers, and chants, are directly tied to the people’s release. For Herbert Zahne, there is an association between his hearing of the stories of Hwéeldi and the practice of ceremonies and prayers while interned: “Also, my late father used to tell me of these events as he had heard of them through his grandparents. His stories pertaining to *Hwéeldi* were similar to those I had heard. He explained that while the people were confined at *Hweéeldi* they held their sacred ceremonials and their prayers, asking the *Diyin Dine’é* (Holy People) to take them back to their homeland.”<sup>58</sup> Mary Jim Charley describes the necessity of these acts, saying: “Many of us were lonely for our homeland and our sheep, so we kept praying and singing chants.”<sup>59</sup> Like many others, this use of

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<sup>56</sup> Chahadineli Benally, *Navajo Stories*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> Chahadineli Benally, *Navajo Stories*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Herbert Zahne, *Navajo Stories*, 234.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Jim Charley, *Oral History Stories*, 60.

the phrase “lonely for our homeland,” indicates a relationship with the land, thereby causing it to be something that might be missed to the extent that the Diné would feel incomplete without it. In order to bring about the necessary healing, prayers and ceremonies were necessary to restore order.

Hosteen Tso Begay offers the idea that it was a ceremony that served as a catalyst for the successful negotiation of release between Diné leaders and the U.S. “Some medicine men conducted a ceremony in connection with the request to be sent back to their homes. After the ceremony was over some men went again to see the officers in charge. This time the request was considered, and, a few days later, the treaty between the Navajos and the United States was signed.”<sup>60</sup> Even without offering the particulars of this ceremony, Hosteen Tso Begay frames a recurring association in these oral histories: the tying together of (political) negotiation and (religious) ceremony. Similarly, Matthew Succo says that “Prayers and ceremonies were performed to win the people’s freedom,”<sup>61</sup> introducing a mechanism that recurs in other oral histories. These religious practices serve as a mediator for Diné agency in their pursuit of returning home.

The ceremony most often credited with returning the Diné to their homeland is *Ma’ii’ Bizéé’nast’á* (Put Bead in Coyote’s Mouth). There are numerous versions of the details of this ceremony, always involving a live coyote. Some accounts, such as Betty Tso’s and John Smith’s, describe the people gathering in a circle, suggesting a more collective ritual, while others give more attention to particular leaders. In all accounts, this ceremony immediately precedes – and typically causes – the release of the Diné and their return home. “One time, all the Navajos held each other’s hands in a circle. A coyote was the sign for the Navajos as to whether or not the

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<sup>60</sup> Hosteen Tso Begay, *Navajo Stories*, 265.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Succo, *Oral History Stories*, 121.

people would go home. The coyote ran around the outside of the circle in a counter-clockwise direction and entered from the east end. The coyote's signal said, 'We will go home.' Then the Navajos were sent back to their land."<sup>62</sup> The final two sentences in this passage constitute illocutionary speech; though this form is present in other cultures' religious and mythic narratives, it is also an important aspect of Diné speech. As Toelken argues, "For Navajos, actually uttering words creates the reality of their world: spoken or sung language is a creative act."<sup>63</sup> In this case, the coyote('s signal) said "we will go home," and immediately following, "the Navajos were sent back to their land."

Other versions of the Put Bead in Coyote's Mouth ceremony also link the power of speech with the interconnectedness of humans and other animals in the restoration of the Diné to their homeland. As in Betty Tso's account, for John Smith, this ceremony is communal and ritualized, with the people and the coyote working together to perform the ceremony. Again, the coyote's movement determines the right outcome, and this directionality is translated to speech.

As the years passed, they discussed what the commanding officer, *Haskééjinaat'áá'* (War Chief), would say to them about returning to their homelands. The Diné had talked about it among themselves, and that is how the *Ma'ii' Bizéé'nast'á* (Put Bead in Coyote's Mouth) ceremony took place. I still have the bead with me which was used in the ceremony at that time. My ancestor got that white shell bead from *Hwééldi*. In the ceremony, the Diné made a circle; then a coyote was turned loose in that circle. The Diné wondered which direction the coyote would go when he got out of the circle, and it went in our direction – that is, toward what is now our Reservation. Maybe that meant that our people were to return back to their own land. The next day, when the Diné gathered again, a white shell bead was put under a tongue, and a ceremonial prayer was said with it to the commanding officer. After that, the Diné were informed that they could start for their homeland within four days. The news got around fast, and the people were saying, 'We are to return to our land.' Women and men started crying from happiness, saying they were lonely and homesick. Being in confinement was like being in jail, they would say.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Betty Tso, *Oral History Stories*, 123.

<sup>63</sup> Barre Toelken, "Oral Patterns of Performance: Story and Song," in *Anguish of Snails: Native American Folklore in the West* (Logan, Utah: University Press of Colorado, 2003), 111.

<sup>64</sup> John Smith, *Navajo Stories*, 136-137.

John Smith's version includes the white bead for which the ceremony gets its name, and it is clear that this element actualizes the power of the ceremony, for the bead was put under a tongue – the instrument of speech – then a ceremonial prayer was said (using the bead) to the commanding officer, after which the Diné were told they could return home. Although differing in the details, Fred Descheene also indicates that the coyote's power is manifest through speech, saying, "The little coyote sat like a dog on the deerskin, and in that way spoke to the leader. Soon after that, agreements were made with the White Men, and the Navajos started back to their beloved homeland."<sup>65</sup>

While other narratives begin with the question among the people of how to return to their land, Curly Mustache's version begins with the statement that they had made several unsuccessful attempts at negotiating a release.

As the years went by, the people kept asking that they be sent back to their own country, but the result was always the same – unsuccessful! Finally, it looked as though there was no more hope, but there was a man named *Dibéyázhí Bich'áhí* (Lamb Cap). He told the people to rope a *ma'ii'* (coyote); so a number of men saddled their horses, and a few minutes later they had found one of the animals. They chased it a little way, roped it and brought it back. When the coyote was on hand a *Ma'ii' Bizéé'nast'á* (Put Bead in Coyote's Mouth) ceremony was held. During the ceremony our main leader was blessed with coyote power. Then the leader again talked to the commanding officer about being let free from Fort Sumner, and this time the officer approved the request and the people were released.<sup>66</sup>

The phrase, "the result was always the same" establishes that listeners should expect negotiations to fail, thereby setting up the ceremony in a particularly powerful way as it emphasizes the ceremony's efficacy rather than the leaders' negotiation skills. Curly Mustache explains that through this ceremony, the leader is "blessed with coyote power," which gives ability to the negotiators.

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<sup>65</sup> Fred Descheene, *Navajo Stories*, 212.

<sup>66</sup> Curly Mustache, *Navajo Stories*, 270.

John Tom offers a different version of this ceremony, focusing less on the collective ritual and more on the role of an individual leader, *Dibéyázhí*, Lamb.

When the Navajo people were set free from that captivity, two Navajo leaders were in charge of moving-out operations. The two were *Ch'il Haajini* (Manuelito) and a man named *Dibéyázhí* (Lamb). Lamb was a man of great knowledge of religion and ceremonies. A few days prior to the Treaty of 1868, four Navajo leaders came to see him, saying that the conditions at Fort Sumner were getting real bad and that they had heard all Navajo people were going to be killed starting in four days. The leaders wanted the old man's opinions on the situation. *Dibéyázhí* (Lamb) said, 'Whoever they are, they don't have the authority to do that. Early tomorrow morning I want some people to find and bring back two baby coyotes.' So, early the next morning, people started looking for the two coyotes. It did not take long to find them; and, as the old man had requested, the coyotes were brought back, one male and one female. Then the old man conducted a ceremony – *Ma'ii' Bizéé'nast'á* (Put Bead in Coyote's Mouth) – for the four Navajo leaders, using the two baby coyotes in his ceremony. The four leaders then were blessed with the power of the coyotes. After the ceremony the four leaders went to see the man in charge at Fort Sumner. Again, they asked to be set free. They said, 'What are you going to do with us next? You brought us here, and we are suffering very much from everything now. Besides that, we are very homesick and want to go back to our land very much.' The man replied, 'All right, you people will be free to go back four days from now.' You see, it was according to Lamb's will and ceremony that our people were freed from Fort Sumner. A day after they left, the old man died of old age.<sup>67</sup>

Although John Tom's focus is on a specific leader, this concentration is not due to *Dibéyázhí*'s political prowess, but rather for his "great knowledge of religion and ceremonies." That said, *Dibéyázhí*'s actions constitute a significant political achievement. Like the other accounts of this ceremony, John Tom describes the people yearning to return home, but here there is a particularly acute reason for them to act: "they had heard all Navajo people were going to be killed starting in four days." What follows is *Dibéyázhí*'s assertion of sovereignty, saying, "they don't have the authority to do that." As a religious leader, the rest of *Dibéyázhí*'s response involves gathering the necessary elements to conduct a ceremony. Unlike other accounts of the coyote ceremony, John Tom's describes two baby coyotes, one male and one female. This reflects the Diné emphasis on balance between genders and could embody a ritualized element of

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<sup>67</sup> John Tom, *Navajo Stories*, 178-179.

restoring harmony. As in the other tellings of this ceremony, the coyotes give the negotiating leaders newfound rhetorical power: once again, they ask to be set free, but this time – through the coyote power – their demand is granted. In John Tom’s account, following the coyote ceremony, the impending threat of being killed in four days is replaced with being released in four days.

For Friday Kinlicheenee, the verbal power that comes from the coyote ceremony is expressed not only in the ability to negotiate release, but also in the memory of Fort Sumner afterwards: “...the Coyote ceremonial was performed. After that, the Navajos’ talks convinced the White Men to let them be free from Fort Sumner. The men who used the Coyote ceremonial rituals were the only ones who had straight stories about Fort Sumner.”<sup>68</sup> This telling indicates a proximity to power determining the accessibility of memory. But rather than claiming that it was those in the negotiation with federal officials who had “straight stories,” Friday Kinlicheenee says that it was those who were involved in the coyote ceremony who have access to this power. Further, he offers that this ceremony had a kind of prophetic quality: “They were told at Fort Sumner that there again would be more boys and men, girls and women; and that was the way it was discussed according to the Coyote ceremonial. Likewise, there again would be sheep, and the Navajo people again would spread out.”<sup>69</sup> This again reflects the agency of Navajo speech through its ability to determine outcomes, including those orientated toward restoration.

Mose Denejoie offers a particularly detailed account of the coyote ritual, which involves both named leaders and the people more broadly. As in several others’ accounts, the coyote’s very movement is an indicator of forthcoming release, and in this version, it moves clockwise, the proper direction in Diné philosophy.

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<sup>68</sup> Friday Kinlicheenee, *Navajo Stories*, 238.

<sup>69</sup> Friday Kinlicheenee, *Navajo Stories*, 239.

After discussing the questions, ‘How and in what way, or what can we do, to be released?’ *Yichi’dahyilwóh* (Barboncito) said, ‘Tomorrow, we’ll go hunting in a fence-like movement.’ So, early the next morning, all Diné ran off in every direction. Some went this way, others went that way. They formed a big circle and started closing in. When they had closed in to about the size of a sheep pen, they had a coyote within their circle. *Yichi’dahyilwóh* or *Dahghaa’í* (Barboncito) told the Diné to stay calm, and he approached the coyote. When he walked up to it he made, or did, what is called *Ma’ii’ Bizéé’nast’á* (Put Bead in Coyote’s Mouth) ceremony. The coyote, a female, was facing east. Barboncito caught the animal and put a piece of white shell, tapered at both ends, with a hole in the center, into its mouth. As he let the coyote go free, she turned clockwise and walked off timidly, with her tail between her legs – toward the west. Barboncito commanded the Diné to make way for the coyote, and they did. Once she had gone through the circle, the coyote started running westward, and Barboncito remarked, ‘There it is, we’ll be set free.’ Four days later the commanding officer asked the Diné if they really missed their country. The Diné responded noisily, ‘YES, we miss our country very much and would like to go back.’ Soon after that, they were set free and walked back to Fort Defiance, Arizona.<sup>70</sup>

As in the other versions of the coyote ritual, there is a link between the ceremony and the successful negotiation that leads to release. In other descriptions, the ceremony bestows coyote power upon the Diné leaders involved in the negotiation. In this case, however, the coyote appears to have a more prophetic role: after she leaves the circle, heading west (the direction of Diné Bikéyah from Bosque Redondo), Barboncito states, “there it is, we’ll be set free.” In this account, as in some of the others, it is the coyote’s movement that is the determinant of release – which here Barboncito then speaks aloud. Unlike other accounts, however, the ultimate mechanism of release lies with the people themselves. In other versions, the coyote power is given to a few leaders, who then meet with the U.S. officials separately. Mose Denejoie, however, grants this power to the people as whole, for it is “the Diné” who assert: “YES, we miss our country very much and would like to go back.” While the U.S. officials were long convinced that they needed to negotiate with a few “chiefs” or “headmen” (such as Barboncito), Mose Denejoie affirms the whole people’s ability to make decisions and assert what is right for them.

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<sup>70</sup> Mose Denejoie, *Navajo Stories*, 244.



In these oral histories, it is the coyote power that marks the shift in the Diné's ability to successfully negotiate their release – for they had tried and failed before, and in these accounts, it is only after being blessed with coyote power that they prevail. Toelken argues that, although the coyote is commonly portrayed (in Anglo description of native storytelling) as a “trickster,” in Diné storytelling, the coyote is used to describe and portray the consequences of immoral behaviors such as greed, gluttony, self-abuse, etc.<sup>71</sup> For the Diné, coyote stories, along with ceremonies and prayers, are intended to maintain or restore health, whether of a person or of the land. Rather than portraying a character who maintains perfect balance, coyote is known for his pursuit of things that are unnatural or otherwise unhealthy, so telling stories about a coyote serves the purpose of cautioning against these behaviors. The morals coyote stories teach – “not to mistreat their bodies, not to step outside the natural relationships in nature, not to betray friends and relatives, not to be selfish with resources”<sup>72</sup> – are the very breaches the U.S. committed against the Diné at Hwéeldi and the period leading up to (and following) it: selfish hoarding of resources that disrupts the right relationship with the land and all who occupy it. The “coyote power” received through the ceremony is the reminder of the consequences of unnatural and selfish behavior and sets those who receive the power toward restoring order, harmony, and balance. Because “Navajo language is thought to create reality,”<sup>73</sup> coyote power, mediated through a ritual ceremony immediately prior to negotiation, allows diplomatic speech to effectively cause release, which in turn restores the proper relationship between the people and the land.

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<sup>71</sup> Toelken, “Oral Patterns of Performance,” 136.

<sup>72</sup> Toelken, “Oral Patterns of Performance,” 138.

<sup>73</sup> Toelken, “Oral Patterns of Performance,” 138.

Throughout these oral histories, one of the dominant themes is the Diné's desire to be restored to their previous life, particularly acutely through yearning for their homeland. While interned, much of the ceremonies, prayers, and songs were directed toward that end, but the necessity of these rituals in realizing restoration did not end at Fort Sumner. Rather, the continuity between pre-1863 and post-1868 Diné collectivity is demonstrated through the need for healing ceremonies as people return to their families and homeland from captivity (at Fort Sumner and elsewhere). The need for and occurrence of these ceremonies counters the overlay of the exodus narrative. Under that framework, which emphasizes progress, there is a marked shift between who the people are before internment and who they become after, with an emphasis on the experience bringing the people together into a collective. These healing ceremonies insist, to the contrary, that the people are returning to their lives as they were before and that the experience at Fort Sumner was harmful rather than forward-moving. In addition to describing a ceremony upon someone's return from Fort Sumner, some of these accounts portray a homecoming from enslavement – in other words, these stories spill over the bounded context of the Long Walk. Denetdale argues that when the oral histories appear not to keep to the limits of a particular period (for the Westerner), they are in fact declaring a “history of sustained colonialism.”

George Littlesalt explains that a Fire Dance is performed when a woman who had been captured as a slave returned home: “The Navajos who had fled returned and started butchering their sheep – the good fat ones and the non-reproductive ones – because, before the enemies' attack, the Navajos had planned to have a sacred nine-day ceremonial called the *Azniidáá'* (Fire Dance) for a lady named *Saanii Yázhi*, who was a member of the *Ashiihí* (Salt People) clan,

because the lady had been a *yisnaah* (slave).<sup>74</sup> Although this account does not describe the Fire Dance ceremony itself, it does convey the importance of restoring to the community those who have been forcibly separated from it, whether by enslavement, as here, or internment. In Chahadineli Benally's narrative of his grandmother, the ceremony is the key without which she would have been unable to enter the communal space of those who remained in Diné Bikéyah.

It was the custom that when a person had been captured and held in captivity a certain length of time, upon his or her return, a certain ceremonial had to be performed over the person before he or she could begin to associate again with family and relatives... While she was walking in, the family started preparations for the ceremonial. Upon her arrival she undressed some distance from the Hogan where the ceremonial was to take place. The medicine man came out of the Hogan, singing and carrying a prayer stick in one hand. He extended the end of the prayer stick to her, and together they walked into the Hogan where yucca soap was ready. She was bathed and then dried with white cornmeal. The medicine man started his prayers, which continued until evening. When they were over, she was greeted by each member of the family. Tears of joy were shed, and they were happy. Together they shared the blessing of yellow corn pollen.<sup>75</sup>

In this ceremony, healing must occur upon a person before that individual can return to the collective life of the extended family.

Frank Johnson offers a similar account of a ceremony as necessary prerequisite to reentering the community, both socially and physically.

A man ran out of a hogan and stopped the crowd from rushing up to me. He told them not to touch me – that certain ceremonial songs would have to be conducted before I could be allowed to enter the hogan. I was ordered to stay out and wait under the shade of a cedar tree. From inside the hogan I heard the songs begin, and, after a while, a medicine man came out singing and walked toward me. He went around me counter-clockwise four times; then he told me to go with him into the hogan. The medicine man had also ordered the people not to shed a tear over me. An all-night ceremony was performed, starting with songs, prayers, a bath with holy water and drying with holy cornmeal. After that I spent four holy days and nights in the hogan. Then I was allowed to return to my home in *Tsézhin Náshjíní*.<sup>76</sup>

Again, this ceremony is a necessary mediator of restoration, for the person returning home cannot reunite with relatives or even enter the home until it begins. As part of this ritual, the man

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<sup>74</sup> George Littlesalt, *Navajo Stories*, 162.

<sup>75</sup> Chahadineli Benally, *Navajo Stories*, 72.

<sup>76</sup> Frank Johnson, *Navajo Stories*, 90-91.

presiding over it circles around the individual four times, but his counter-clockwise direction suggests that this movement (rather than the traditional clockwise motion) is meant to offset the negative forces the person experienced. The restoration for this individual is completed through four days and nights in the hogan before returning home. The medicine man keeping people from “shed[ing] a tear over me,” coupled with Chahadineli Benally’s account that “tears of joy were shed” suggests that the return home – the restoration of a Diné person and their land – is not made real until after the ceremony is complete.

After the people had returned to Diné Bikéyah and were attempting to restore their former lives, ceremonies continued to play an important role in bringing the Diné back to thriving – and, historically, demonstrating cultural continuity. For example, Betty Shorthair explains that, following return, the Diné were issued farm tools from the U.S. government; among these tools were plows, but they had no horses to pull them. She explains that the Beauty Way ceremony brought the return of horses:

There were two men by the name of Adiildilí (One Who Plays Stick Game) and Chaayiyiishíní (One Who Kills Belly). Someone called Gáamalii (Mormon) was the only man who had horses, as I was told. Then the two men said, ‘We will build a house and we will perform a sacred ceremonial called *Hozhoojí* (Beauty Way).’ A few of the women made a saddle blanket from the sheep’s wool that was given to them, some wove the black; others the white, and they carried it to the Beauty Way ceremonial, which was held all night. They sang after they were washed with Yucca root soap and after they were dried with ground corn flour, in the way that the Navajos do to a sick patient. A special sacred ritual was done all night for the bridle, rein, saddle blanket, saddle and rope; and, on account of the Beauty Way ceremony, we once again had horses.<sup>77</sup>

Several of the elements described here – yucca soap, drying with corn – parallel the ceremony that allowed an individual to reenter the community. Indeed, Betty Shorthair names that these components follow “the way that the Navajos do to a sick patient.” Taken together, the use of *Hozhoojí* in these instances emphasizes the need for restoring beauty: whether in order to allow

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<sup>77</sup> Betty Shorthair, *Navajo Stories*, 115.

an individual to reenter the community or in allowing the entire community to return to their way of life. Like Chahadineli Benally and Frank Johnson, Betty Shorthair affirms the efficacy in the ceremony, saying “on account of the Beauty Way ceremony, we once again had horses.” This directly links the power of the ceremony with the desired and necessary outcome, and the language used – “once again” – claims that the necessary change is one of return rather than progress.

Francis Toledo’s narrative also includes direct linkages between a ceremony performed after the return home and the success of the Diné in returning to fruitful life: “After all this had taken place, Mauelito [sic] said to his people, ‘We will build hogans, so our population will increase rapidly from this day on.’ So Diné gathered and put on a ceremonial chant to sacrifice *nitl’iz* (precious stones). The ceremony was held for about four days, and that is the reason why our population has increased rapidly up to these days. If it had not been for the ceremony it wouldn’t have happened like this.”<sup>78</sup> Chahadineli Benally offers a similar account, also tying his narrative to the thriving that he find occurs today:

The following year all of the Navajos who had survived returned from Fort Sumner to Fort Defiance where several sacred ceremonies and prayers were performed asking the *Diyin Dine’é* (Holy People) for guidance as the Diné went back to their land. These prayers were answered as the situation today proves because the Navajos are by far the largest tribe in the United States and Canada, and they gained abundantly after Fort Sumner until the time of Stock Reduction about 35 to 40 years ago. And today there are many changes for the better.<sup>79</sup>

In these accounts, there are linkages between what happened at Fort Sumner – specifically the decline of the Diné population – and how these elders understand their contemporary society, linked through the successful utilization of ceremonies as the people returned to their land. For both, there is an understanding that the growth of the Diné is contingent on proper grounding in

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<sup>78</sup> Francis Toledo, *Navajo Stories*, 147.

<sup>79</sup> Chahadineli Benally, *Navajo Stories*, 261.

tradition. Francis Toledo links the building of hogans, the traditional home structure, with an increasing population, indicating that living in the proper way allows the people to flourish. Chahadineli Benally indicates that, as the Diné returned home, they yearned to return to traditional ways of life as well, “asking the Holy People for guidance.” For Chahadineli Benally, the ceremonies were effective and continue to have a positive impact, but their potency has also been interrupted by further U.S. intrusion on Diné life, namely the stock reduction policies of the 1930s.

These oral histories disrupt the singular Anglo-American narrative of progress through their multiplicity, in which different storytellers present varying accounts of what happened at Hwéeldi, how individuals escaped, and how the people negotiated their release. While these histories include descriptions of the atrocities of Fort Sumner, their focus in describing the people’s yearning for release is on their “loneliness,” in which they describe their aching to be reunited with their land. This loneliness is not passive; rather, the Diné maintain their commonly held cultural and religious practices as they sing, pray, and conduct ceremonies, both to observe life transitions and in order to bring themselves home. These shared traditions practiced at Fort Sumner dispute the notion that the Navajo achieved cultural unity through their exposure to one another while interned. That their ceremonies and prayers are what allowed successful return home presents the Diné as the party with greater power entering into negotiation with the United States, demonstrating their agency and self-determination. These histories are part of an oral tradition that both self-consciously (through storytellers’ explicit emphasis on the importance of telling the stories) and implicitly (through the performance of an indigenous practice) sustains Diné teachings and wellbeing. In all of this, these histories present patterns of restoration of right behaviors and relationships that resist the Euro-American narrative of progress.

## Conclusion

Anglo-American historiography makes two conclusions about the Diné as a collective in the period of the Long Walk: first, that prior to internment, the Diné were loosely organized because they were connected only through family relationships; second, following internment, the Diné had the exposure to one another and to the United States necessary to form them into a nation, as proven by the subsequent existence of the Navajo Nation government. These claims, however, are not consistent with the experiences described in Diné oral histories. The assertion that Diné society was unorganized prior to internment undermines the complexity of the clan system, not only in structure, but also in determining how individuals ought to relate to one another, regardless of previous interaction. That the clan system does not determine a hierarchical leadership structure for the Diné does not mean that the people were disorganized. The argument that the Treaty of 1868 created Navajo Nation is inaccurate, including by Western historical standards: government in the form of the Navajo Tribal Council was formed in 1923 and not named “Navajo Nation” until 1969.<sup>1</sup> The oral histories further argue against the notion that 1868 was a marked shift for the Diné in their collective identity or organization. Instead, the oral histories demonstrate that the primary focus for people returning to their homeland was restoring their prior way of life and healing themselves and their land, not “progressing” into a new form of government.

Denetdale contextualizes and problematizes the memorialization of the Long Walk among the Diné, Navajo Nation, and the wider (Anglo-) American public. She describes the predominant narrative among Anglo scholarship, which she claims has pervaded Navajo leadership as well: “The messages that the leaders [present]... reflect the sentiments of American

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<sup>1</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 98; 245.

historians who have concluded that the defeat and removal of Navajos led to the birth of the modern Navajo Nation. This sort of interpretation confirms America's reputation as a model modern multicultural nation that has embraced its people of color."<sup>2</sup> Throughout her article, Denetdale points to the ways in which this colonialist narrative of civilization and nation-building has been read onto the Long Walk for the purposes of incorporating Native people, and the Diné in particular, into what she calls a "model modern multicultural nation" that erases the realities of its past.

Understanding the Treaty of 1868 as a parallel of the Covenant between God and the Israelites in the exodus narrative illuminates the use of portraying the Long Walk as the moment of nation-formation in constructing the "model modern multicultural nation" myth. This form of covenant, though it empowers a sense of nationhood, is made between unequal parties. In the covenant tradition, the Israelites receive a renewed collective identity, laws for right living, and the promise of a hopeful future. Although serving their needs as a nation and a people, each of these elements necessarily wraps the Israelites up in the language, identity, and theology of being worshippers of their God. Though they receive structure for a new society and are liberated from their oppressors, they are not free from all outside control. Because the exterior force in this case is divine, the Israelites were able to understand this relationship theologically and as ultimately good and in their interest. When the Diné are read as Israelites, and the United States thus assumes the role of God, this unequal power relationship remains. In this case, however, the tie cannot be interpreted theologically because the United States is not God. So unlike the Israelites, who religiously construct a nation-state, the Navajo Nation government is not authentically religious: that is, whether Navajo politicians, bureaucrats, and voters follow traditional Diné

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<sup>2</sup> Denetdale, "Discontinuities, Remembrances, and Cultural Survival," 296.



practices, Christianity, or another religious tradition (or no religion or any combination), they do not understand themselves to be participating in a theocracy. Instead, the overlay of the exodus narrative, and the subsequent analogue between God and the United States, ensures a hierarchical relationship between the U.S. and Navajo Nation. Just as the Israelites can know themselves as “the people of God” but not “God,” the Treaty-as-Covenant puts the Navajo in the place of “the people of the United States” (Denetdale’s “multicultural nation”) but not “the United States.” In other words, the United States can own the Diné – the people, their policies, their land – but this relationship cannot be reversed.

### Personal Reflection

In the year since I began to pursue this project, my thinking about the relationship between Exodus and the Long Walk changed significantly. As I suggested in the introduction, at the outset, I intended to do a comparison between the way these events are remembered and told and thus create a collective identity for the descendants of those who endured these experiences. As I began to explore the Diné oral histories, however, I realized my Western presumptuousness. Although, politically, I knew I must change course, I could not shake my interest in reading these two narratives together. It was through my pursuit of this conversation – with the understanding that these were not equal dialogue partners but rather one violently informing the other – that I did in fact understand each of these narratives better, including their relationship to collective identity.

First and foremost, I learned that the memory of the Long Walk does not create Diné collective identity – but there is a rich tradition that does. My brief exposure to this worldview, both in the scholarship and in person, has been a gift, and I am grateful to these conversation partners for sharing perspectives that have revealed ways of thinking and being that I otherwise

would not have known, enhancing my sense of the study of religion and my relationship to the world. However, I must remain conscious of my role as a white, Anglo-American continuing the legacy of non-Navajo dominance in the scholarship of Navajo history and culture. I am glad that I had access to published (and translated) oral histories and contemporary Diné history and theory – I am grateful for the work of these elders and scholars. However, I must also hear the critique of the predominance of Anglo publications that Diné scholars, Jennifer Nez Denetdale in particular, are making: “As long as this [dominance] is the case, Navajos will continue to be understood within Western categories of meaning that sustain colonialist discourse and serve to perpetuate ideas of dominance, hierarchy, and asymmetry.”<sup>3</sup> While I have attempted to recognize and set aside the Western framework that I am entrenched in, I know that I will not be entirely successful in doing this and that people need to be able to write their own histories. To that end, it is my hope that my work with Diné oral histories and theorists functions not so much to reveal new conclusions but rather to uplift the narratives and arguments that already exist.

Secondly, I learned about the tradition that I come from – but which my people by no means are owners of. This project has helped me better appreciate, through a single example, some of the complexity of bringing Christian texts into the world, particularly justice-oriented spaces. While Exodus certainly has millennia of emancipatory power, it cannot be our only narrative of liberation. Within the context of the Church, particularly the white church, this kind of counter-narrative needs to be preached in order to illuminate that Christians have not just engaged in practices of colonialism, subjugation, and violence, but have actively fueled them with our stories and theology. This is not to say that harmful narratives and creeds are the only ones, or even the rights ones – and so alternatives need to be spoken too, not because we need to

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<sup>3</sup> Denetdale, *Reclaiming Diné History*, 6.

be “right,” but because we are responsible for the wounds that, though inflicted in the past, continue to cause pain.

At its best, the exodus narrative serves a religious purpose that, among other things, gives instruction for how followers ought to relate to one another, the land and natural world, and their God. At its best, God’s sovereignty of the covenant tradition allows the faithful to reject earthly power intent on exploiting and harming others. At its best, the exodus narrative describes a compassionate and just God who has particular care for the poor, the enslaved, and the homeless. But this story is too big to only function at its best, for it is also a story of fear, destruction, and invasion. Though the text is canonized, the story need not have only one meaning. As part of the rising leadership of the Church, breathing new life into this story and thousands of others in our tradition, I commit myself to remembering both the harm and potential for healing within these texts as well as listening for worldviews these narratives cannot imagine.

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