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## **Animal Colonialism—Illustrating Intersections between Animal Studies and Settler Colonial Studies through Diné Horsemanship**

The objective of this paper is to highlight the relationship between violence against nonhuman animals and Indigenous peoples, and conversely to reframe the conversation about horses by positioning horses as teachers and knowers for decolonization. I highlight a theoretical and material tension marking an entry point to a number of concerns in both settler colonial and animal studies. I name this tension: *animal colonialism*. Animal colonialism is one interlocking tension that strikes upon conversations of heteropatriarchy, racism, environmental racism, Indigenous erasure, and religious fundamentalism — all forces that connect, intersect, and overlap in complex ways. Throughout the paper, I turn toward horses as “knowers” that help to demystify problematic tensions and binaries that pollute Indigenous lifeways (animal/human, alive/not alive, traditional/modern, sacred/profane).

The authority to name is a powerful tool within Indigenous and decolonial studies because it centers and locates contexts that make or circumvent erasures. Turner and Simpson explain that naming and interrogating words are vital because they are political. They write, “we use language that our scholarly training equips us with in order to convey the experience and the political positioning of our people under the difficult political conditions that we have inherited and live within and struggle with today” (10). In other words, theoretical naming is a tool for using an Indigenous framework to make sense of political and material realities wrought by settler colonial violences. Additionally, theory is done differently by Indigenous peoples. In this piece, I do some “naming” and “theorizing,” and will explain my use of each.

I name the central phenomenon *animal colonialism* not as a way to fully know or claim the phenomenon, but to articulate the interconnected nature of Indigenous nonhuman animals, peoples, and lands, and the ways these relationships encounter and are tangled with oppressions confronted by various disciplines. I also center animals in colonialism to show that settler colonial erasures specifically assault animals, but also that animals resist and show humans how to resist. I use the word “Indigenous” or “Diné” before horses, animals, or land not as a way to show anthropocentric dominance

over nonhumans (that is to say, land is possessed by those of Indigenous heritage), but to designate these nonhumans as belonging to an Indigenous ontology that might not make the same divisions that the western world does (i.e. animal/human, alive/dead). Finally, I consistently use the phrase “nonhuman animals” to recognize that animals are not animals in a human/animal hierarchy, but rather that humans are also a type of animal. I resist the hierarchy of humans over animals within my writing by designating both as animals or as both “Indigenous.”

To describe *animal colonialism* I challenge fundamental concepts of methodologies by way of certain ethnographic refusals (Simpson). I use my own experiences and reflections on my research as a Diné woman, horse trainer, and activist scholar in my community. I make this theoretical connection in hopes that it will benefit future Indigenous and decolonial researchers who position land, people, and animals as interconnected while centering Indigenous communities and their ontologies.

The topics in this paper emerged as I reflected deeply on the theoretical framework of my dissertation research with Navajo horses and decolonization in my community. Horses and Navajo/horse relationalities have historically been represented negatively, as either “mystical” or through the “feral horse problem.” Though I touch on realities and all sides of horse politics in my community, I aim to reframe the conversation as one that does not see horses as simply “feral” or “mystical.” To do this, I interrogate a number of underlying ontological binaries before I speak specifically about horses on Navajo Nation.

My work consistently centers the horse in the effort to understand and promote decolonial healing within my community. I make the connection between animal and settler colonial studies with an axis of my own ontology: Diné Horse relationalities as they relate to land and the settler colonial regulations forced upon both. In conclusion, I highlight the opposite of animal colonialism as I have come to know it. I describe a Diné epistemic framework by describing horse/human relationalities and the knowledge these relationships offer for resisting structures of settler colonial violence. My experience working with horses through a Diné epistemology is the source of my refusal on a number of fronts. Knowing that knowledges within the academy are never safe nor non-political, I find this arena one that I choose (as an Indigenous, feminist scholar) to engage, I offer my stories and not somebody else’s.

**Outline.** I begin by locating myself as a Diné feminist scholar and explain how this illuminates my work with my community. From here, I give a brief note on academic

interventions for Indigenous peoples, relaying the message that interventions are never fully “new”; they are only “new” to academic spaces because Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies have been purposefully excluded and erased from education. I trouble the concept of “newness” as it perpetuates Indigenous violence and erasures. Next, I provide a theoretical map of animal colonialism by showing how Diné horses connect and disrupt binaries in four arenas of settler colonial studies — genocide and slaughter, heteropatriarchy, wage labor, and education. With these examples, I center Diné horses and show how a horse lens reframes the conversation on feral horses in Navajo Nation. This is a central thread that defines the tensions that operate throughout this article as I straddle rhetorics, disciplines, and materialisms. Like all things in the Diné universe, Diné can and should turn toward horses for help. Therefore, I do not center the controversy regarding feral horses, rather I center the horses. Horses and horse relationality is a form of resistance to animal colonialism because it perpetuates a Diné epistemology of connection, resistance, and healing amidst the violence experienced through animal colonialism. Simply put, anyone who has ever spent any time around horses knows they are more authentic windows into all things than our own human selves.

**Positionality.** This article came about as a reflection on the methodology and theoretical foundation of my doctoral dissertation in partnership with my community — Navajo Nation. My dissertation research centers the Navajo horse as a central point of Diné decolonization. This work was inspired by my own experience riding and training Navajo horses. I grew up with horses and watched my dad train mustangs we adopted from Navajo Nation. I’ve ridden horses my whole life and more recently started working with them. I ride them to get away from academic theory, to get away from humans, and to learn, reflect, grow, and plug into something much more important than my own narrowness.

Because I wrote this article during my dissertation research process, I submitted it to the Navajo Nation Research Review Board and it was approved as a theoretical piece. I felt it was important to get the board’s approval because the work represents stories that are generalizable and experienced by many Diné, not just my family. I use my own stories and experiences to trouble the idea of “data,” while acknowledging that my stories, experiences, and knowledges are informed by my community; therefore, the knowledge is never owned by me or my family, rather it is shared amongst the larger Diné community.

For this reason, I do not use interview or observation data from my dissertation in this piece, rather I reflect on the theoretical formations through which I ground my work and ongoing decolonial projects with my Diné community. The ideas and themes from this piece were developed in the process of doing Indigenous research (see Kovach; Smith). Margaret Kovach explains that Indigenous research is never one dimensional, but involves the person, their positionally in the community and their relationships with that community (for me that is my relationship and positionality with horses in my life). My relationship with my community and my identity as a Diné woman is grounded in my relationship to horses. As I began to gather literature for the theoretical framework of my dissertation study, I realized that my topic sat in an interdisciplinary space within academic communities of settler colonial studies and animal studies. Because Indigenous research is inter/cross/trans-disciplinary by nature, I found it difficult to utilize one theoretical location within a particular discipline and in many ways refused (see Simpson) to locate the work in any one discipline because I saw it fracture the meaning. These interventions are the connections and interventions that bring potential for settler colonialism and animal studies to connect and work toward a common goal of decolonization.

Before I began my graduate study and dissertation, I observed horse relationality by watching my dad train and ride horses for over twenty years. This was my first form of education and before I knew how to navigate academic or educational systems, I could catch, saddle, and ride my own horse. As I began to conceptualize my dissertation project, I quickly realized that divisions and disconnections in theory made it hard to write with integrity as a Diné woman who values horses through a Diné ontology. However, my connection to horses represents more than just identity and experience — it is a window into a set of beliefs and traditions that characterize our existence as Diné and the ways in which we confront protection and beauty. As many Indigenous scholars do, I draw on my own experiences to tell stories that communicate what has not yet been written about or respected in academic theory (see Belin; Grande; and Lee).

I trouble conventional forms of academic “data” because I believe standing in the intersection of theory, methodology, and reflections in my research is a political stance. Research can never not be political, and so I choose to blur the lines methodologically as a refusal of separations. In the same way that theorists are troubling binaries like human/nonhuman, and alive/not alive, I methodologically challenge the division between service, theory, and method. I add this as a methodological intervention for future Indigenous scholars who might do research and/or work that involves the

interconnected and interrelated relationships between land, people, and animals. The method must fit the relationship, and as we are never just humans alone, I am never just a researcher alone. Indigenous scholars often build theory, do research, include personal and family stories, all as a way to shift and mold methodologies to reflect the integrity of our work in our communities.

Finally, my work continues to intersect with feminist and queer studies. I identify as an Indigenous feminist, meaning that I see gender as a primary organizational force for any ontology. I identify Western forms of heteropatriarchy as violent in Indigenous communities and a primary form of colonization, and tool for land seizure and genocide (see Arvin et al.). Within this framework, I also align with queer theory to trouble oppressive binaries and to break down barriers of disconnection. Even as I align myself with these communities, my work remains distinctly Indigenous and should be read as such.

**Interventions and Theoretical Bilocations.** Indigenous interventions in animal studies should not be considered an intervention at all. Though Indigenous voices are more recent in academic conversations, they are not new epistemological interventions. Diné have practiced such “interventions” for many years. Interventions may come from traditional data, or they may come from personal experiences and family knowledges. Linda T. Smith and Margaret Kovach have done great work demystifying overlapping lines between personal and community knowledges by explaining how they are always a product of and accountable to their community. On a similar front, Indigenous scholars argue that Indigenous feminisms have distinctly different goals (if they are called feminism at all) than those of white and women of color feminisms.<sup>1</sup> The distinct difference is best described by a particular practice of sacredness grounded in place and language, upheld by sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> These interrogations involve troubling longstanding divisions and intersections that uphold grounded forms of hegemony. This thread will run throughout my project, as each arena is addressed in ways that both overlap and intersect.

Even though scholarly interventions can be separate from the resistances and interventions that many Indigenous peoples perform in their communities, they are also uniquely important because theoretical interventions inform research and policy that directly affect the material realities of Indigenous peoples. Kimberly TallBear names it as an intersection between new materialisms and animal studies, dependent upon metaphysical differences of objecthood for Indigenous communities, while tying it to a number of binaries. She writes, “first of all, indigenous peoples have never forgotten

that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives. In addition, for many indigenous peoples, their nonhuman others may not be understood in even critical frameworks of Western living” (234).

To resist the theory to practice hierarchy, Indigenous scholars work directly on the ground in their communities while working in academic arenas, making service and research indistinguishable. For example, I work with rescue horses for a local horse rescue that takes in horses from Navajo Nation, and I consider this my “on the ground work.” At the same time, I write theoretically about the interconnected nature of Diné horsemanship. These projects are separate and connected at the same time. Separate, in that my service to the horses is not considered “data” or “research” but it informs my knowledge, and vice versa. Similarly, my family’s knowledges and the lessons I learned from my horses are not just “my own,” but were a gift to me through my Diné family and my positionality as a Nihooká Diyin Dinéé. The data shared with me by my community will stay with me and inform my work with these horses. It is impossible to separate these spheres.

One major academic intervention by Indigenous scholars is the vast amount of work done on settler colonialism (see Tuck & Yang; Wolfe; and Veracini, for example). This intervention defines settler colonialism in the network of oppressions that operate distinctly for settler societies like the United States. Settler colonialism is an ongoing phenomenon that undergirds policy, research, education, and culture, and works to erase Indigenous peoples, lands, and epistemologies. In settler colonial studies literature, land has been the central concern of scholars.<sup>3</sup> The direct connection between land-nonhuman animals-Indigenous bodies is less of a focus in the literature.

Animal studies, one side of the spectrum, confronts anthropocentrism as a foundation of the field. Facets of animal studies model area studies that critique existent epistemic imperialisms. But these interventional area studies rarely consider nonhuman animals, land, plants, and communities with relationships that resist dominant epistemologies outside academic contexts (read Indigenous communities). Kimberly TallBear’s work falls into a number of academic arenas, including animal studies, queer studies, environmental studies, and new materialisms, which makes locating her work challenging, even troubling in the best sense. In a publication on *Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms*, she clarifies, “from an indigenous standpoint, my work should not be seen as queering indigenous practice. Rather it should be seen as a twenty-first-century indigenous knowledge articulation, period” (230). The project of building connections between theoretical locations can’t escape the political arena. This is because the

divisions in theories, methodologies, and disciplines are political, materially acting to destroy Indigenous communities. Therefore, the connections drawn between these theoretical, academic locations is a highly political project.

Any scholarly intervention by Indigenous peoples cannot ignore the obvious — that research, education, and scholarship are tools characterized by and embedded within colonial narratives (see Grande, and Smith). Therefore, scholarly interventions from Indigenous peoples must walk the line between documenting Indigenous knowledges to build up the community and confronting settler colonial ideologies that construct current academic area studies. For example, this paper offers very little of what might be considered “traditional Navajo knowledge” about sacred horse practices because the audience is largely non-Navajo. I reserve sharing Diné knowledge systems for Diné spaces.<sup>4</sup> Instead, I focus on settler colonial ideologies that destroy horse/Navajo/land relationalities and show how Diné resist these settler colonial violences. The purpose of this paper is to “decolonize” academic arenas and not to display sacred information in an inappropriate context. Therefore, I am cautious and intentional about the type of information I share in any academic context. Another important point to acknowledge is that the individuals who do this work do it largely outside formal academic institutions.

In particular, animal studies have failed to be accountable to urgent interventions from settler colonial studies. These interventions begin with the connection between nonhuman animal and Indigenous genocides as inherently interrelated and non-distinguishable theoretically or materially. Decolonizing animal studies means recognizing that animal genocide is a tool used to control and subdue Indigenous peoples for the purpose of resource extraction and land seizure. Furthermore, the settler colonial narrative is delivered in all educational and research arenas and should not be only a concern of Native American or Ethnic Studies (see Smith).

Various scholars take on and trouble these intersections with the agreement that posthumanism, new materialisms,<sup>5</sup> and queering inhumanisms must grapple with questions of colonialism and interrogate global white supremacy, both of which require centering voices of marginalized Black and Indigenous women of color. As McMillan explains, “theorizing blackness has long required considering existential questions of life and death, the limits of humanity, and a stultifying thingness” (224). This further introduces the lens of Indigenous and Black feminist thought. Indigenous feminist theory challenges methodologies and interrogates heteropatriarchy, specifically

demonstrating how gender violence operates as the most central tool of settler colonialism (see Arvin et al; Lugones; Tuck & Yang).

**Animal Colonialism.** In this section, I flesh out the parameters of animal colonialism by connecting Diné horse relationalities to various sites of oppression confronted in settler colonialism studies. Indigenous animals are not only devalued because they belong to, are in territory of, and in relationship with Native peoples, but are also assaulted to disrupt non-anthropocentric Indigenous knowledge systems.<sup>6</sup> Animal colonialism can be carried out in policy or ideology, materially or theoretically, and exists in intersecting arenas of material and nonmaterial knowledges. Most often it demystifies sacredness embedded in Native worldviews by severing the connection between nonhuman animals and the sacred. For Diné, animal colonialism is obvious in the blatant depreciation of Navajo mustangs, Diné/horse relationalities prior to colonial land, and animal knowledge structures. Navajo livestock are consistently judged as less valuable than non-Navajo livestock, based on their proximity and connection to Navajo people — a phenomenon that has re-occurred throughout history. Diné and their horses continue to be separated by time and space, and the agency of horses is silenced.

Deeply intertwined with the interlocking forces of settler colonialism, the devaluing of distinctly Diné animals is the face of settler colonialism most apparent in the historical moment of the 1930s and 1940s livestock reductions. I spiral around this particular moment not because it is a linear point of change, but because it exemplifies a moment that illustrates the tensions of the paper. Projects of animal colonialism regulate and control the material landscapes of Navajo people with an institutional gaze that enforces a “proper” way to relate to both land and livestock (especially on the Navajo reservation). In the following section, I outline four different networks where animal colonialism is intertwined with settler colonial practices, which in turn police Diné land, horses, and people. First, I describe the legacy of animal slaughter as tactic of forced removal and genocide against Native peoples. Second, I outline the connections between normative gender, sexuality, and family structures as they relate to animal and land care. Third, I look at the history of the Navajo livestock reductions and their connection to wage labor, reservation boundaries, and social control on Navajo Nation. Fourth, I discuss the destruction that ensued by replacing informal education with formal schooling.

**Animal Genocide.** Any inquiry specializing in animals and human relationships is a study into the multiple forms of erasure in Native American communities — both human and nonhuman (John). This inquiry necessitates focusing on the direct linkage

of the extermination of animals to the extermination of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. settler society. Violence against animals in the U.S. settler nation is frequently discussed in animal studies; however, there are few conversations about how violence against animals is used as an extermination tactic against Indigenous peoples for the purpose of relocation and genocide (See Hubbard; Jaffee & John; John; Voyles; and Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep*). Furthermore, violence against animals should not be read only insofar as it regulates and polices human bodies and lands, but as an assault on the reverence of inhumanisms generally.

Tasha Hubbard argues that the slaughter of animals, specifically the plains buffalo, is part and parcel to the genocide of American Indian peoples. Hubbard defines nationality and sovereignty as concepts which include both humans and nonhuman animals writing, “being a people is not a domain exclusive to humans” (294). Nations and groups are formed by the connections that peoples make with lands and animals, and one cannot exist without the other. The un-doing, circumventing, and erasing of Indigenous nationalities and sovereignties is connected to the erasure of livelihoods embedded in traditional pastoral practices. For Hubbard, this “challenges human centric and territorially shallow definitions of group life” (294) by including the animal-human-land connection found in many Indigenous epistemologies.

My entry point to this conversation is at the horse-human-land connection and its destruction on Navajo Nation. Prior to the forced removal of Navajo people from Diné Bikeyah to Bosque Redondo, various tactics were used to force Navajos to submit. One primary tool was the burning and slaughter of Diné livelihood — crops and livestock. After Navajo resources were destroyed, the people were forcibly removed through starvation. Diné returned to Diné Bikeyah by the Treaty of 1868, but the damage caused by disrupted connection still continues. In one colonial swoop, Diné land, livestock, and livelihood (and the strong connection between all three) are targeted for removal.

As Hubbard extends the definition of nationhood, I also think about nations, sovereignties, and agencies prior to nation-state politics. By centering on the Buffalo, Hubbard expands the concept of sovereignty by extending agency to nonhuman animals. Sovereignty is an ongoing conversation amongst Indigenous nations and the definition varies across communities and peoples. In many ways, sovereignty is a rhetorical tool adopted by Indigenous nations for the protection of land, animals, people, and worldviews. I respect the work done by Indigenous peoples that harnesses sovereignty as a tool for self-determination and the deep theorizing required to deploy

a Western concept for the protection of Indigenous lands and peoples. As I trouble the concept, I want to recognize and respect its uses for Indigenous liberation.

Jaffe and John trouble the concept of sovereignty in an aim to decolonize disability studies lenses. They argue that “disablement” is not only a concept for humans, but that disabling the land or Earth is central to settler colonialism. They write,

the disablement of land/body as a tactic of settler colonialism has persisted for centuries and takes various forms. By highlighting Indigenous struggles to protect Mother Earth and her sacred resources, we suggest that Indigenous ontology, specifically relationships to land (Deloria), challenges disability theory at the epistemological level by rejecting the taken-for-granted dualism between the environment/space and (disabled) humans/bodies within (settler) disability studies. (1408)

As binaries between land and humans are troubled, so too are the concepts that they produce — nationhood, self-determination, and sovereignty.

Tavia Nyong’o queers the inhuman while also brining in the unavoidable perspective of race. They ask: how might we read the human exercising sovereignty over the nonhuman? How does the nonhuman prevail in an act of sovereignty, and how might we be accountable to and aware of “the reduction of racialized others to human prey” (252). They warn against de-centering humans who have never been considered “human” (Indigenous and Black folks) and theorize, “what promise wildness might hold for queer, feminist, and antiracist projects” (265)? Such questions foreground settler colonialism and the violences toward nonhumans and humans as breeches of sovereignty that complicate the narrative of sovereignty in posthuman studies. *This conversation challenges definitions of sovereignty, who has sovereignty? Who speaks and knows? Who is a self? And how are nonhuman animal selves or land selves, knowers, and speakers silenced? Furthermore, how do Indigenous peoples un-silence and already listen to nonhumans?*

**Gendered Colonialism.** Any relationship to land involves the familial and kinship networks through which that relationship is defined and enacted. Diné feminist scholar Jennifer Denetdale contextualizes local Diné experiences as sites of both colonization and resistance: “Indigenous feminist and queer analysis demonstrates how the spaces of domestic and intimate are also sites of colonial surveillance and control, thereby gendering settler colonialism” (“Chairmen” 72). Colonization is woven into all aspects

of life and continues to characterize both local and extra-local experiences of Diné peoples. Furthermore, “the transformation of the Diné into seemingly willing citizens not only of the United States but also of their native nation occurs through institutions that regulated and surveilled their traditional practices in arenas that ranged from governance and education to health, marriage, and sexuality” (74). Concerns of family, gender, and sexuality connect to all institutions and areas of life for Diné. A pre-colonial network is disrupted by settler colonialism in both the public and private spheres, as each interacts and regulates the other.

One of her many interventions in Feminist scholarship illustrates how the Navajo Nation government is complicit in systems of settler colonialism, particularly in upholding Western patriarchal norms, regulations, and hegemonies (Denetdale, “Return”). She zooms both in and out to capture public and private concerns in relationship to each other, showing both disruptions and resistances. When talking about Indigenous animals, especially Diné horses, it’s never just about the horses or livestock. It connects to the interrelated Diné epistemology and requires attention to how disruptions ripple through and split this interconnected way of knowing.

As heteropatriarchy is enforced in various systems, Diné were characterized as “deviant” or “wild” because they didn’t uphold Western, Christian gender norms or practice heteropatriarchal family structures — which ultimately became required by the U.S. for participation in private property and livestock ownership (Denetdale, “Return”). In the Western worldview, private property was held in the male name and passed down through the male. The space and resources provided subsistence necessary for families and livestock. By regulating the ownership and possession of resources to men, political, economic, and social power is typically held by men.

In contrast, Diné are matrilineal, meaning that land, livestock, and family groupings (or clans) are passed down through the female line. Marsha Weisiger explains that livestock was in the care of, and seen as, property of the women, giving Diné women increased political and economic power. In a western, patriarchal worldview, this was characterized as backward and barbaric, making it an area of Diné life and worldview that must be corrected through the Christianization and formal schooling of Navajo people. I add that this corrective process also involved transferring Navajo livestock ownership and grazing permits to men’s names. Denetdale explains how heteropatriachial normativity directly impacts and regulates Diné pastoralism. During the livestock reductions and the animal slaughters that prompted forced removal, the U.S. “attempted to transform the Diné from a pastoral people with a flexible political

system into a village dwelling, self sustaining people, organized into nuclear households with a man as the head" (76).

Voyles also draws the connection between heteronormativity and reproduction for peoples, lands, and animals. Under the western gaze, Navajos, their land, and their livestock were caught in the Catch-22 of both too populous and too uncivilized. This connection is best seen in the livestock reductions imposed on Diné during the 1930s — a policy enacted under the guise of land conservation, but ultimately resulting in massive social and economic destruction for Navajo Nation.

To connect imagined ideals about normative gender, sexuality, land/people Voyles explains,

in the eyes of the federal conservationists, it was not just livestock but the Navajo people as well who were overpopulating Navajo land. In the 1930s, long-held federal impressions of Navajo overpopulation of their "inadequate" land base were folded into the discourses of the Navajo problem. An increase in the size of the reservation to accommodate Navajos and their herds seemed a political impossibility, due in normal part to a noisy campaign by the non-Native stockmen who ran their herds in the area east of the reservation proper." (43)

It is important to note that the land is either desired or detested by the Western world, but either way it constructs limits to the reproductive sovereignty of Diné. This results in the overarching belief that there were too many Navajo.<sup>7</sup> She writes, "thus the discourse around the Navajo problem privileged the 'problem' of population, framing the Navajo as irrationally hyper-reproductive given the 'barrenness' of the land base" (43). In short, the regulation of sexuality, gender, and family organization extends to the regulation of land, livestock, and vice versa.

I cannot ignore the similarities between the characterization of Indigenous lifeways as uncivilized, Indigenous femininity as uncivilized, and Indigenous animals as uncivilized. To trouble another binary, I align with a critique continuously articulated by Indigenous feminist thought: what do the civilized/uncivilized or wild/tamed binaries mean, especially for Indigenous women? Maria Lugones explains that Indigenous women are always excluded from white feminist spaces, and that their dehumanization is inherent in the intersection of Black and woman or Indigenous and woman. She writes, "they [Indigenous and Black women] were also understood to be

animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals. They were understood as animals in the deep sense of 'without gender,' sexually marked as female, but without the characteristic of femininity" (202-203).

Furthermore, as violent binaries of wild/tame become more defined, the intersections that subordinate women of color go unnoticed. The project of interrogating the "wild" is once more not exclusive to sexuality, Indigeneity, and nonhuman animals, it permeates all lifeways for Indigenous peoples and hides opportune intersections of resistance.

**Stock Reductions and Wage Labor.** Grazing policy and land management are political tools that regulate life beyond just the range. The creation of Western livestock policy on Navajo Nation can be traced back to the livestock reductions in the 1930s and 1940s. The Indian Service (now the Bureau of Indian Affairs) began to conduct research on the state of Navajo rangeland in the early 1930s. Through multiple surveys and reports, it was determined that the Navajo range was "overgrazed" and "mis-managed" by Diné.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, an urgent narrative of impending doom and destruction emerged and undergirded a new generation of policy. The overall goal of the program was to reduce Navajo livestock by approximately 56%.<sup>9</sup>

I make this connection to show how livestock reduction policies were not instated to address overgrazing on Navajo Nation at all, but were aimed toward assimilating and controlling social and economic determination for Navajo people through the introduction of wage labor and a push toward uranium mining (Voyles). Furthermore, the state sanctioned regulation of lands is the regulation of nonhuman animals inhabiting these lands. In addition, the policies can be seen as a sort of plan B for land control, since Navajo Nation refused to adopt the General Allotment Act 1887, "the primary objective of which had been to change the cultural habits of the American Indian" (Fonaroff 208), to transform them into farmers and land owners through the Western notion of private property.

As the policy reduced family income and livelihood, one proposed solution by the U.S. government was for wage work to replace any income lost through livestock economies. This seamless transition set a path for companies to secure low wage labor from Native peoples, and while their original source of wealth was destroyed, Navajos became dependent upon income and wealth that benefits the U.S. Henderson argues that, "wage work was more necessary for men from families with small herds, whereas

it was a supplement and diversion for men from wealthy families” (381). The government promised that stock reduction would increase productivity, progress, and “security of property and freedom of mobility” (Fonaroff 212). Additionally, community education through extension work and other avenues was enacted as an informal training on “best practices” for grazing and range management. All of these imposed changes aimed to transfer Diné grazing into white regulated grazing.

What followed was the adjustment of grazing policies on Navajo Nation in accordance with goals to conserve and restore the range. However, the term “land conservation” masquerades as a tool of settler colonialism in the same way as education in Indian Boarding Schools, because it adjusts, alters, and destroys Diné relationships with the land and livestock through a network of boundaries, limits, and the introduction of wage labor. Fonarnoff recounts that the beginning stage of social control was enacted when three Navajo individuals were charged with the violation of grazing limits. This move served as a scare tactic against the Navajo people who continued to disregard polices on stock limits. In the rhetoric of “conversation,” I am brought back to Kimberly TallBear’s work that interrogates rhetorics of “preservation” and “conservation.” She explains that narratives of a disappearing or vanishing Native extend beyond Native bodies to Native cultures, languages, lands, lifeways, objects, and nonhuman animals. The myth of the vanishing Native then becomes a justification for the extraction of Native American DNA (see TallBear) and the enforced methods of “conservation” automated by non-Indigenous actors.

In the same way that wage labor limits one’s ability to expand, grow, and accumulate wealth, grazing management of Navajo limit the expansion and growth of livestock economies. The two work hand in hand. For the Navajo, grazing management is particular insofar as it is established in and for a reservation setting. Pre-reservation, grazing occurred expansively with traditional pastoralism focusing on cyclical movements; conversely, reservation confinement and policies of grazing inside reservation borders make livestock ownership reductive and limiting. It goes without saying that some (settlers) were encouraged to expand, while others (Indigenous) were prevented from expanding.

The confinement of the reservation limits the amount of expansion allowed by any one family through the enactment of grazing management plans, permits, and stock limits. This is a spatial arena of erasure comparable to gendered population control and animal slaughter. Prior to contact and the confinement of a reservation that comes soon after, growth and expansion were not limited. With reservation borders and increasing

expansion by white ranchers and farmers, expansion was limited by a material, spatial border that restricted growth, time, wealth, and tradition for the Navajo people. The confinement of Navajo and their livestock, in turn, allowed for the expansion of the Western frontier. In the same way that a fence might block grazing and herd expansion, wage labor acts as a time barrier restricting time spent developing herds. Simply put, limits on expansion are a form of erasure. Furthermore, expansion should not be read in the capitalistic sense. Wealth and expansion in a Diné framework are defined differently.

**Education.** Often left out of the residential boarding school documentation is the knowledge that was replaced through formal schooling. Loss of language, culture, and religion are highly cited consequences of residential boarding schools, but the loss of livestock relationships and time spent with horses and sheep is hardly mentioned. This loss of time and space which originally created, sustained, and was passed down through sacred relationships is a direct result of forced formal schooling on Navajo Nation.

Horses are present in Diné creation stories alongside the Nahooká Diyin Dinéé and are understood as an integral part of the Diné narrative from the beginning. This relationship sustains and underpins the entire worldview, because horses are embedded in the four cardinal directions, with a horse in each direction. Diné worldview is in the four cardinal directions, which map out Diné understandings of life, learning, and movement through time and space (Lerma).

Although horses and humans are not directly linked in a kind of evolutionary chain that science likes, they are linked by their emergence from the Earth and its four sacred elements. At their introduction, the horses come to the Earth's surface and are made to be a tool for and a gift to Diné. With them comes a set of instructions in husbandry, songs, and prayers that reflect the deep and intrinsic connection that both share with Nahasdzaan (Mother Earth). Sustaining this sacred connection takes time, generational education, land, and a preservation of traditional religion — all of which are systemically interrupted through residential boarding schools, reservation confinement, policies on reduction, and the introduction of wage labor. Excluding this narrative from education is a form of epistemic violence (John).

Before formal schooling, Diné learned from their family members, primarily their maternal grandparents. Before formal schooling, students would spend their days learning about cooking, weaving, herding, horse training, and grew up as fluent

speakers of the language. The worldview and connection to the horse is embedded in Diné bizaad, and the complexities of a horse- Diné-Diné Bikeyah connection are all embedded in the particulars of the language. For example, words like Danihilií or Shiliíłago translated loosely to “our livestock” or “appearance of livestock for me” respectively, seem, in English, literal and devoid of their embedded meaning. However, in Diné bizaad these words note the mystical, embodied, and spiritual embodiment of the livestock which are created to fulfill a purpose alongside the Diné people. It shows the sacredness of horses in this world, and the relational possession (not in the sense of Western property) fixed in the creation of livestock particularly for Diné survival, healing, and empowerment.

Formal education of the boarding school era has disrupted Diné forms of education; Diné bizaad is largely a second language for most young people, and time spent with livestock is restricted. The price of stock can no longer sustain a family’s income, and the introduction of wage labor has made the upcoming generations even more dependent upon formal schooling. Thus, the language, songs, and prayers regarding horse training and husbandry are kept mostly by the older generation. In short, wage labor and formal schooling have stolen time from Navajo people: the time to learn, to relate, and to embody sacred relationships given since the beginning of creation. As wage labor and formal schooling become more common for Navajo, the ontological destruction circles in on itself, fracturing horse-human-land health even further.

Animal colonialism is the intersection of humans, animals, and land within arenas of settler colonial studies. It necessitates a holistic and interconnected look at not just Indigenous perspectives, but perspective of Indigenous lands and animals. Through these four theoretical locations, I show how Diné horses specifically connect to settler colonial studies and point toward the multifaceted and interlocking forms of oppression, erasure, and violence inherent in settler colonialism.

**Contextualizing feral horses through the lens of animal colonialism.** *There’s a lump in my stomach every time I see a skinny horse on the Navajo range. This happens frequently as I drive to work on weekdays and to my dad’s house during weekends. On a healthy horse, you can’t see ribs or hip bones. But these horses look like skeletons on the horizon, like death. This particular form of violence is usually blamed on Diné rather than contextualized in our entanglements with settler colonialism. The range is not enough. Even though it’s expansive, it’s regulated by barbed wire fences and policies that mirror handcuffs. I worry about what the violence of seeing these horses everyday does to me, does it desensitize me? It impacts my rib cage the same way I shudder at violent films. Seeing these horses is like taking a bullet, spiritually. Every single day.*

*We can't take in another horse, or feed another horse. I can't train another horse. I can't fight about it or even let myself shed another tear. But this is just one side of a warped mirror maze of a colonized world. And if I turn away, I'll see it again somewhere else.*

*So I stay in the round pen an extra 30 minutes with a little mustang horse picked up off the highway. I try to understand why she resists, work with her and not against her, hear my dad's instructions, and embody his patience. I go slow with ropes and work through her trauma from being rounded up. I postulate that my studies in settler colonialism resonates with her, too.*

In this section, I show how the network of concerns within animal colonialism has helped me contextualize and reframe the conversation about feral horses in my community. This is an area that is very close to my heart and my life. Most of the horses I grew up with were Rez ponies from the Navajo range. I often think about how I relate to them versus how I relate to other feral horses on the Navajo range. Through the lens of animal colonialism, I can frame why and how things are they way they are. How the localized horror of seeing starving horses is much more than a matter of neglect, it is a matter of violences wrapped up with other violences of settler colonialism.

At present, there is a high number of feral<sup>10</sup> horses roaming the Navajo Nation. This is a highly controversial issue among both Navajos and non-Navajos. In 2013, horse slaughter became illegal in the United States. At the time, Navajo Nation was facing its own choices about whether to round up free roaming horses on the Navajo range or let them be. Traditionally, this issue has been divided between “traditionalists” who claim that the horse’s sacred position in Navajo epistemology and philosophy means the tribe should not round up and sell horses for slaughter, and on the other side, “non-traditionalists,”<sup>11</sup> who advocate for the round up in order to alleviate the effects of feral horses on rangeland, homesites, and water. In 2017, the most recent aerial survey estimates 38,223 horses on the reservation.<sup>12</sup> Some issues with an increased unauthorized horse population are: overgrazed range areas, horses in the right of way, homesite destruction, inbreeding, water usage, and erosion.

As I have done throughout the paper, I continuously trouble the binary of traditional/modern as I think about its origins and how it is utilized within my community. Maria Lugones explains this longstanding use of the binary within a network of coloniality writing: “A conception of humanity was consolidated according to which the world’s population was differentiated in two groups: superior and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern” (192). I remember TallBear’s critical framing of “traditional” and “nontraditional” to reflect the

longstanding idea that traditional Indigenous peoples (their biology, DNA, and blood) and their lifeways are somehow disappearing. This is problematic in that it justifies the extraction of Indigenous blood, DNA, and materials in the name of “preservation.”

I do not provide a solution for the highly controversial phenomenon of increased horse populations, but I do offer a helpful framework to consider: the context of nonhuman animals using a horse lens to interrogate settler colonialities. I situate the phenomenon in the social, historical, and settler context within which the Navajo and their horses have long endured, beginning with their forced removal and into present day.

Given the holistic position of horses in Diné communities, I return to the preceding binaries enforced by settler colonialism that narrates the stories both Diné and non-Diné tell about horses [e.g. sacred/not sacred (read round-ups v. free running horses), or human/animal (read preservation of land for humans v. preservation of land for horses), or researcher/researched (read humans v. horses)].

To better articulate these ideological separations as they relate to Diné land and animals, I draw from Indigenous geographer Mishuana Goeman, who explains how the creation of Indian reservations lead to the on-rez/off-rez Indian identity dichotomy. Often this identity bifurcation leads to the traditional v. non-traditional Indian identity. An “on Rez” Indian becomes synonymous with “traditional,” while an “off Rez” Indian is viewed as “non-traditional.” This lens, created by settler colonial ideologies of bifurcation, becomes the primary lens for viewing horses on Navajo Nation. The binary can then be extended into multiple problematic spheres outlined earlier. Traditionalists are those who are characterized as believing in the sacredness of the horse and who oppose round ups, while the non-traditionalist is viewed as having a pro-slaughter agenda. Theorizing divisions between traditionalism and non-traditionalism is a complex endeavor and different in different contexts.<sup>13</sup> However, the lens of on/off Rez or traditional/non-traditional is scarcely critiqued for being a consequence of settler colonial land policy. To address the Navajo horse specifically on Navajo Nation, I argue that a dualistic lens cannot be used; instead, Diné must use and center a Diné framework.

In her work on both genetics and new materialisms, TallBear brings an Indigenous critique to current conversations in the fields of both animal and queer studies. She writes,

in general usage, the terms *animate* and *inanimate* reflect a categorical divide between entities — those that are seen to live versus those that are

deemed to be not alive, and this is the West defined at the level of the organism. I use the term *de-animate* after Mel Chen's use in *Animacies* (2012). Chen derives the concept of animacy from linguistics. A "hierarchy of animacies" refers to the greater and lesser relative degree of entities' sentience, aliveness, (self-)awareness, and agency. The animal hierarchy is actualized through the associated verbs/adjectives "animate" and "de-animate" that refer to greater and lesser aliveness attributed — in the non-indigenous knowledges I interrogate — to some humans over others, and to humans over nonhumans." (180)

One doesn't need to equate "traditional" with anti-round up in order to believe horses are sacred. In fact, the sacredness of horses is commonly interpreted by self-identified traditionalists as sacredness within the relationship between humans and horses, where both are bound to one another through creation. The sustained relationship of the horse to Diné land and people makes them sacred. Therefore, wild or free roaming horses do not fulfill their full potential of sacredness without Navajo people's particular contribution. The sacredness enacts itself in the relationship between the two where land, resources, time, spirituality, and education are all needed to sustain *hózhó*, or balance.

Although the increased population of horses on Navajo Nation is problematic, the refusal to auction them for slaughter should be recognized as an intentional resistance against slaughtering and erasures of settler colonialism. Traditional medicine people and community members who resist round-ups, as I understand it, do so as a stance against past atrocities involving animal slaughter and to display the positionality of the horse in Diné creation frameworks. Even if an individual is pro-slaughter, that individual will almost always state that they understand that the horse is sacred. I've found that the two sides are not as rigid as we might think; instead, it is the choices offered through settler colonial histories, policies, and narratives that are rigid.

### **Diné Resistance through Diné Horsemanship.**

Dancing with Ms. Bambi  
 She's a mustang  
 Without a permanent home  
 Sweet tempered and gentle natured  
 I can tell that she's seen things  
 and more

So I dance with Ms. Bambi  
 Slow and gentle  
 Pressure and release  
 Feel the movements, anticipate the steps  
 Think forward and around at the same time  
 Dancing with Ms. Bambi

Patience, kindness, and empathy  
 I think about fences, ropes, and roads  
 They affect her like they affect us  
 I know my history  
 And it frames her history

So I dance with Ms. Bambi  
 Move with intention  
 Raise my arm slowly  
 Change my thought patterns  
 Resist frustration and anger  
 Change direction  
 Dancing with Ms. Bambi

Watch her move and trust  
 Relearn and unlearn  
 Watch her heal as I heal  
 And we move together  
 Watch her head lower toward mine  
 Dancing with Ms. Bambi

The bleak realities of settler colonialism are always met with resistance, survivance, and preservation among Indigenous peoples. To highlight this form of resistance on Navajo Nation I relocate the conversation to Diné horsemanship and narrate horse-human relationally as refuse as it has shaped my life, research, service, and resistance according to what my horse thinks.

Resisting and re-thinking frameworks dominated by animal colonialism is an enactment of resisting oppression, genocide, and destruction of Indigenous lands, animals, and peoples through the embodied and maintained relationship of each

together. It's about reconnecting what has been disconnected, erased, or bifurcated through any and all violences to the land, the people, or the nonhuman animals. It is about centering the horse as a knower and a speaker, and therefore about maintaining relationships which resurrect epistemologies assaulted by settler colonialism. It reconnects what has been severed by animal colonialism. Therefore, the creation and preservation of relationships with horses through training is an act of survival and resistance.

Diné horsemanship involves the practice of relating to horses on Diné land with the horsemanship instructions given to Diné in our philosophy of education. It requires a connected network of land, language, and spiritualism that builds up and is built from family, land, and livestock. For Diné, family is k'é, or a complex network of familial and social relations given through creation scriptures and enacted with animals on land.<sup>14</sup> I learned how to relate to horses by watching my mom and dad for twenty years. When I saw my dad embody patience, kindness, empathy, and relationships, I saw a choreographed dance that gave me a lens to view all things — good and bad.

Until recently, I was scared to train horses, even though I'm an experienced rider and have maintained relationships with them for years. But I started to push myself to go further because my academic goals felt heavy and constraining to me. As I opened myself to practice, to what my dad showed me about Diné epistemology, I knew that I needed to be on Diné land, with Diné horses, practicing the Diné epistemological relationalities my dad and his horses demonstrated around me. This is where I locate myself in my poem "Dancing with Ms. Bambi." It's about learning to move and be holistically. It's about learning to contextualize the present moment, to have empathy for the violences of settler colonialism, and to heal and resist by way of a relationship. Bambi is like me, she knows, she understands, and together when we build and restore our relationship. We heal together. As a Diné woman, I encounter gender violence head on, and at times I felt like the crying out for justice was only ever heard by Bambi. We dance, and sometimes step on one another's toes, sometimes we're off beat, but when we feel each other and move together, it's like a well choreographed dance.

Practicing a Diné epistemology means enacting relationships that reconnect horse-human-land-language, in the sovereign space of Diné Bikeyah. Diné Bikeyah is not the reservation area of Navajo Nation, but it is the pre-colonial name for the space between the four sacred mountains where Diné and their universe are placed. Diné Bikeyah is my view of nationhood that precedes national definitions and boundaries from a Western lens, and foregrounds the agency and autonomy of nonhumans.

Any project of destruction of land-language-livestock destroys the entire network. In reverse, projects of restoration for Diné must take place on Diné spaces *with their horses and other nonhumans*. This connection positions individuals outside of academia as experts and draws attention to the urgency for young people to have spaces to be with horses and to learn about the traditional stories given with them — all of which are nation building exercises and promote Diné resistance to the separations and violences of settler colonialism.

Horses remain a vital part of life on Navajo Nation, and many people still train through horse songs and prayers — all done in the Navajo language. Down to the smallest act of feeding and watering a feral horse that might come through a person's grazing area one evening, Diné love and relate to horses unlike any other people. Specifically, horse training is a form of resistance. Today, many individuals besides my family obtain, by chance or circumstance, a Navajo mustang<sup>15</sup> and train it. In my personal experience and conversations with Navajo people, mustangs are unanimously the best and most versatile horses. However, they take longer to train, making them an investment of time, money, and heart. Right now, I'm invested in one horse named Bambi as my form of resistance and a symbol of my love for Diné land, people, and horses.

Even amidst the systematic genocide of Navajo livestock, many Diné preserve traditional instructions — horse songs, ceremony, husbandry, and language. Offensive to the Navajo community is the idea that animal studies is a new and emerging field, because Diné have maintained their practices, beliefs, and knowledge systems amidst the full assault on land, animals, peoples, and the sacred connections that bind each together. In short, animal studies has already existed in the lived, material, messy, visceral remains from colonization on the Navajo reservation — the place where most people would not want to be, the place where Rez dogs and Rez ponies roam around: the place where the Navajo horse roams.

Finally, decolonizing animal studies means handing off the project to the Indigenous peoples — like Diné — who have maintained the epistemological and material structure which sustains knowledge of/with animals — in particular, horses. Decolonization aligns with a number of fields that have challenged oppressive binaries — new materialisms, queer studies, Indigenous feminist thought, animal studies, and settler colonial studies. Animal studies, therefore, must take specific strides to decolonize, meaning that it must be place-based, promote Indigenous resistance, and position first knowers of animal knowledge as experts — Indigenous peoples and in particular Diné. Decolonization is about restoring right relations. For Navajo, those right relations

involve an intertwined restoration of animals, humans, and land together through the network of sacred knowledge. Decolonization, for Navajo, means resisting a network of interlocking settler colonial forces — Indian boarding schools, livestock reduction, gender and sexual violence, land allotments, Christianization, environmental racism, and animal colonialism. Navajos continue to resist animal colonialism and the destruction imparted upon distinctly *Diné livestock* for the purpose of destroying Navajo people and/or forcefully mapping Navajo people's relationships with land and the U.S. government. Such practice is embedded in aspects of Diné epistemology with horses.

### Notes

1. See Arvin et al; & Mihesuah.
2. I will trouble the concept of sovereignty as I build on the discussion of horses as "knowers."
3. See Snelgrove et al; & Wolfe.
4. After I finished my dissertation research, I organized a horse knowledge conference in my community. The conference was hosted by a Navajo Tribal University on the Navajo Nation and was free and open to the public.
5. New materialisms challenge concepts like life, living, knowing, and voice while simultaneously challenging ontologies through which we understand being and knowing.
6. For example, Navajo mustangs, today are still valued at only \$35 a head, regardless of their high potential to learn and inherent trainability.
7. We see this played out biopolitically in the forced sterilization of Navajo women. See DeFine.
8. I utilize a few overviews of this era and the reports and policies enacted. I draw heavily from Fonaroff; Henderson; Voyles; and Weisiger, *Dreaming* and "Gendered Injustice."
9. There are different estimates on the amount of stock are reported in the literature. 56% is reported in Voyles. "Comparing figures for 1933 and 1937 indicates a substantial

decline number of goats (a loss of between 100, 000 and 200,000) and a smaller d in the number of sheep” (Henderson 382).

10. There is a debate about whether to use the word “feral” or “wild”; generally, “wild” means completely wild without human contact (generally not the case with horses), while “feral” means horses let loose on the range and uncared for. Most recently, policy regarding Navajo Nation refers to these large number of horses as “unauthorized horses.”

11. Traditionalist vs. Non-traditionalist is a complex binary which is not always an accurate representation of the diverse set of beliefs across Navajo Nation.

12. 95% confidence interval; estimated number from presentation at Division of Natural Resources 2017 Summit, based on an aerial survey done by the Horse Management Task Force under the Fish and Wildlife Department of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources.

13. In my experience in my community, the word traditional is often used as a signifier of agency within my Diné community. As people foreground “tradition” in certain contexts, it signifies pre-colonial ceremonies, ideas, and relationalities.

14. For more on K’é see Kulago, Lee, and Weisiger, *Dreaming* and “Gendered Injustice.”

15. I alternate terminology with horse, feral horse, unauthorized horse, and mustang. The definition of a mustang is essentially a wild, stray, or feral horse. The pretense is that it was once domesticated.

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