

Navajo Emergence in Diné'tah: Social Imaginary and Archaeology

By

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Many scholars speculate that Navajo culture arose as Athabaskan migrants gradually adopted Puebloan traits and maize agriculture following the Pueblo refugee period of the late 1600s. Recent archaeological work in Dinétah, the traditional Navajo emergence place, reveals sites dating from 1541 to 1625, rich in Navajo artifacts, diverse economies, and robust maize agriculture. The prominence of maize in these earliest sites is consistent with its importance in the Navajo social imaginary expressed in traditional Navajo creation accounts. Tradition and archaeology show that Navajo culture emerged quickly, distinct from Puebloan and other Athabaskan groups, 150 years before the Pueblo Refugee Period.



In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries we have witnessed increasingly complex articulations between culture and place. Global processes have impacted the creation and maintenance of community and identity under circumstances of migration, dislocation, and diaspora. Though its scale may be greater today, this is not a unique situation. Northern New Mexico, in the last millennium, was the scene of ancestral Puebloan community abandonment and consolidation, translocation of Athabaskan and Numic speaking peoples and the creation of Apache and Navajo community and cultural identity under the cross pressures of local, regional and global processes.

In the early centuries of the later half of the last millennium, ancestral Pueblos abandoned, relocated and consolidated communities in the Four Corners region of Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. Around this time (precisely when is debatable) Southern Athabaskans, by then already separated linguistically from their Chipewyan ancestors in northern Canada for several hundred years (Hoijer 1938, 1956, 1971; J. G. E. Smith 1981:271; Young 1983), entered the region and occupied the hinterlands surrounding the sedentary ancestral Puebloan settlements. Several lines of evidence indicate strong trading relationships resulted in the exchange of ideas and a variety of goods between the Pueblos and Apacheans (Parsons 1939:2:1039-1064; Opler 1983:380; Baldwin 1977; Torres 1999; Dykeman 2003). Numic speakers (Shoshone, Ute and Comanche) from the west, north and east also entered the Pueblo periphery competing with the Athabaskans. There are fewer lines of evidence supporting trading and more indicating raiding/warfare relationships between the Numic peoples and the Pueblos and Athabaskans

(Lange 1979:203; Washington Matthews in Halpern and McGreevy 1997:165). We know from linguistic evidence that prior to A.D. 1300 southern Athabaskans were a single group or a number of very closely related groups, but that after that time they became separated (Opler 1983: 381). Starting in the sixteenth century, Spanish explorers and colonizers, with their new technology and ideas and their old world diseases, entered the region from the south. Climate fluctuations produced a variety of environmental stresses.

Out of these cross pressures, separate Navajo and Apache cultural identities emerged among the southern Athabaskans. The Navajo became less mobile, increased their use of ceramics, adopted more substantial architecture forms, adapted Pueblo agriculture and tied their identity intimately to the landscape of the upper San Juan River basin. The Western Apache also became more sedentary on a relative scale among mobile groups (Seymour 2007:4) but other Apaches, *e.g.* the Chiricahua, Mescalero, Plains and Lipan Apache, perhaps more conservative and somewhat less willing to take on a sedentary lifestyle, focused less on agriculture and more on gathering, hunting, trading and raiding, ranging over larger areas through much of the Southwest and the southern Plains.

Over the last four generations, in the absence of adequate empirical archaeological data on the earliest Navajo sites, archaeologists advanced two major theories of Navajo cultural emergence: the refugee hypothesis and the acculturation hypothesis:

The refugee hypothesis (Kidder 1920; Keur 1941; Dittert *et. al.* 1961, D.A. Gunnerson 1956; Schaafsma 1979, 1981) holds that Navajo culture emerged late — coinciding with Pueblo people seeking refuge from the Spanish reconquest of the upper Rio Grande Valley in 1696 and going to live among the proto-Navajo Athabaskan speakers in the upper San Juan region. The Pueblo taught their hosts about farming, herding, polychrome ceramics, stone architecture and imparted various religious and social institutions. Out of this acculturation the Navajo culture came into existence. Refugee hypothesis adherents generally also hold that the proto-Navajo Athabaskans arrived in the Southwest as late as the 1600s from the east via the Plains (*e.g.* Wilcox 1981:219-222).

The acculturation hypothesis (Hodge 1895; Huscher and Huscher 1942, 1943; Farmer 1942; Hall 1944; Hester 1962; Eddy 1966; Perry 1991) holds that Athabaskan speaking immigrants from the north, coming into contact with ancestral Puebloan peoples in the Southwest, were acculturated, gradually adopting Puebloan culture traits and slowly acquiring maize agriculture as they shed their northern Athabaskan hunting and gathering practices and material culture to become the Navajo. Some proponents of this theory propose an early arrival in the Southwest for the Athabaskan speakers anywhere from A.D. 700-850 (Hall 1944), to A.D. 1000 (Kluckhohn and Leighton 1962:33), to A.D. 1200-1300 (Riley 1954:45; Perry 1980:293; Brugge 1983:490) and some also strongly favor an intermountain route of migration (*e.g.* Huscher and Huscher 1942, 1943).

Archaeological investigations undertaken in the 1990's in the wake of oil and gas development in the vicinity of Gobernador, Pump and Largo Washes in northwestern New Mexico, are filling in some of the gaps in our knowledge of early Navajo culture. The new archaeological evidence

reveals a starkly different developmental trajectory for the Navajo than has been previously theorized.

Navajo sites, distinguished by a combination of forked stick hogans, structured site layout, characteristic ceramic and lithic technology, maize agriculture and distinctive grain storage methods, have been found in Dinétah in the upper San Juan basin that date from the first half of the 1500's (Hall 1944; Hancock 1997; Hovezak and Sesler 2002; Dykeman 2000, 2003, 2008; Roebuck, 2008).

From the earliest Navajo sites yet discovered, such as LA 55979, we find maize, maize pollen, cobs, and kernels, in every feature (Dykeman 2008). The Navajo maize varieties (identified from cob morphology and row counts) are similar to those from contemporary Pueblos of the early 1500s. Ethnobotanical and other empirical evidence at LA 55979 strongly supports idea that the Navajo grew maize and did not trade for it (Roebuck 2008).

Although it appears that the Navajo originally obtained maize and many aspects of agricultural technology (including some rituals) from the Pueblo, we note that aspects of grain storage were distinctly Navajoan — not Puebloan. Grain storage on the early Navajo sites was not for three years (as in Puebloan sites) but much less. As a result, the Navajo economy was broader-based than the Puebloan and (later) Spanish economies in the region — it encompassed maize agriculture but it did not give up exploitation encouragement and even cultivation of non-domesticated plants (Doolittle 2000; Doolittle and Mabry 2006), hunting, trading and raiding. This broad spectrum economic strategy served the Navajo well in a natural (and social) environment subject to extremes and variable conditions enabling them to quickly adapt to changing circumstances, shifting their activities as conditions warranted.

Also, the early Navajos did not acquire the more complex and efficient ground stone technology of the Pueblos. We attribute this to the conservative maintenance of traditional Navajo food preparation methods (Dykeman 2004).

The incorporation of cultural traits that occurred from the encounter of Puebloans and Athabaskans ran both ways. Pueblos adopted Athabascan cultural elements and Athabaskans adopted Puebloan elements. Baldwin (1997) suggests that sinew-backed bows, mountain lion skin quiver and bow case, the bison-hide shield, the four-pointed star motif and the heartline motif in rock art and kiva art which appear in Puebloan sites around 1400 were introduced by Apachean peoples. As early as A.D. 1520 Athabascan hunting technology, including sinew-backed bows and arctic style microblades, is found at Hopi, Unshagi (Jemez), and Pecos Pueblos (Torres 1999; Dykeman 2003). Jemez Black-on-White and Rio Grande glazeware along with high quality Jemez obsidian and Pedernal chert appear on Navajo sites in Dinétah. Several Athabascan groups adopted maize agriculture and elements of Pueblo philosophy and religion (Opler 1983).

Though Navajos adopted agriculture and became less mobile they did not cease to be Athabascans. They were not acculturated to become Pueblos. They did incorporate some select Pueblo ideas and elements of material culture but they modified these and made them their own.

From this mounting body of evidence from the earliest Navajo sites, several things are immediately apparent:

- Navajo culture did not emerge in the Refugee period but at least 150 years earlier
- The emergence of Navajo culture was not gradual but abrupt — the earliest sites contain many or most of the distinctive Navajo cultural traits
- Forked stick hogans were an important element of the emerging culture
- At the very beginning, farming maize figured strongly in Navajo economy
- Maize varieties were likely obtained from Puebloan people, but grain storage and aspects of preparation were given a distinctly Navajo form.
- Incorporation may be a better metaphor than acculturation in accounting for Navajo cultural emergence

The emphasis on maize in the early sites is consistent with the Navajo's own account of their origins. Most origin accounts (Matthews 1897, Stephen 1930; Goddard 1933; Spencer 1947; Fishler 1953; O'Bryan 1956; Wyman 1965; Zolbrod 1984) claim that

- maize was present from the beginning
- many of the Navajo divinities are made from maize
- maize figures prominently in the creation of this world and the conditions for the flourishing of the earth surface people in this world.
- The Navajo people themselves were created, in part, from maize
- Aspects of maize agriculture were learned from/influenced by the Pueblo

The emphasis on maize is also consistent with the earliest Spanish historical accounts referring explicitly to the Navajo. In 1640, one hundred years later than the earliest known Navajo sites, Fray Alonso de Benevides' identifies the "Apaches de Nabajo" — the Apache of the wide fields (Hewett 1906; Hodge *et. al.* 1945). Brugge (1983) points out that the Spanish names for the different Apache groups may be geographical place names rather than descriptions of their activities, but the Spanish descriptions, even if place names, do refer to farming.

Many archaeologists have used Spanish historical accounts to help them locate Navajo ethnogenesis in time and space, understand Navajo origins and provide context for their hypotheses. Fewer have used the Navajo's own accounts of themselves or those of their neighbors. And some ignore all historical evidence, oral or written, and prefer to rely purely on empirical archaeological evidence.

For example, Jemez Pueblo oral history (Sando 1979:418) records the Jemez origin in a lake south of Dulce, New Mexico near the continental divide and that while they resided in that region, the Jemez, "accepted a nomadic race identifiable as the Athabaskans who arrived in the Southwest probably after A.D. 950". The Jemez are clear that their relationship with the Athabaskans occurred well before their departure to the vicinity of their current location, which we can date to circa A.D. 1300. Some archaeologists ignore these oral accounts of Athabascan presence because of insufficient corroborating empirical evidence from archaeological sites. Indeed, in the same volume where Joe S. Sando cites the Jemez oral history of relations with the

Athabaskans, James Gunnerson (1979:162) says unequivocally, “there is no evidence for the presence of Athabaskans in the Southwest before the 1500s.”

That archaeologists do not have good empirical archaeological evidence of the beginning of the southern Athabascan occupation in the upper San Juan basin may be an artifact of how we recognize and record sites in the region. Seymour (2007) raises an interesting argument that archaeologists may miss low visibility remains of highly mobile groups because of employing systems developed studying more sedentary peoples. Highly mobile peoples leave very different traces than sedentary peoples. Raiders may not want their camps discovered, they may dismantle their wickiups and obscure their living areas. Roasting pits may have been located far from habitations. They made small fires of brushy materials on the surface of the ground and avoided reusing firepits. Sites may have been located on saddles or other areas highly prone to erosion. The remains from such sites are far less visible than the substantial architecture of a pithouse, roomblock or hogan. Given the cost of carbon dating, modern archaeologists may unintentionally select larger chunks of charcoal to ensure good dates, thereby biasing their samples by avoiding sampling thin ashy thermal features using brushy woods and thus miss the presence of components left by more mobile peoples. We may have to change how we see and sample the landscape before we recognize the remains of mobile peoples. This archaeological myopia may account for the lack of clear empirical evidence of early Athabascan presence in the upper San Juan prior to the appearance of the Navajo.

The debate on when the southern Athabaskans moved into the upper San Juan basin and how long they occupied it before Navajo culture emerged is complex and has many partisans and differing explanations. It is clear that the debate will continue until additional evidence comes to light from a variety of sources. Our interest here is in the earliest emergence of distinctive *Navajo* culture and when, where and how that emergence occurred as well as what forms it took.

We believe ideas are an important source of cultural change and find Navajo origin accounts and other oral traditions essential sources of information for understanding the emergence of Navajo cultural identity. Understanding Navajo oral tradition has great utility for developing models that can be tested by archaeological information (Brugge 1981; Gill 1983; Roessel 1983; Dykeman 2003:32; Dykeman 2004). A helpful concept for bridging the Navajo oral tradition, Spanish historical accounts and modern archaeological theory is the idea of *social imaginary*.

Social Imaginary, as used by Charles Taylor (2004, 2007), is a term that describes the cultural milieu. The idea originated in the concept of public space discussed by, among others, Jürgen Habermas (1989) Michel Warner (1990) and further developed as social imaginary by Taylor and Benedict Anderson (1991)

Of “social imaginary” Taylor (2007:171-2) says

What I am trying to get at with this term is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking rather of the ways in which they imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their

fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.

I want to speak of "social imaginary" here, rather than social theory, because there are important differences between the two. There are, in fact, several differences. I speak of "imaginary" (i) because I'm talking about the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc. But it is also the case that (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

When we look at cultures, their social imaginary provides a context and rationale for understanding broad-based social and economic and other behavioral practices and beliefs — the elements that set a group apart from their predecessors and their neighbors and mark them as a distinct cultural entity. We can begin to get at that social imaginary through images, stories, legends and social practices — some of which leave evidence in the archaeological record.

John Farella (1993:130), in examining the use of contemporary anthropological narratives says,

The stories provide a template, a standard, through which [people's] lives ...can be ordered and understood. They describe the range of emotions and behaviors that are available to humans; they describe the range of the possible. Everyone in the world has stories like this, about the pattern of the universe. Anglo stories involve molecules, or stories about economic trends, or theories on developmental psychology. But all these stories describe the features of the world that matter, that are relevant and that must be paid attention to. We all try to describe and understand any particular instance in terms of the more general order described in our own stories.

For Paleo and Archaic peoples in the Southwest we have little access to the social imaginary. We do not know the oral histories, stories, legends, religion and common beliefs of these peoples.

With the Navajo we have a great deal of material — much of it from ritual contexts and much of it part of the creation accounts of prior worlds and the current world, gods and holy people, the adventures of culture heroes, the preparation of this world for and the coming to be of the Navajo (see Matthews 1897, Stephen 1930; Goddard 1933; Spencer 1947; Fishler 1953; O'Bryan 1956; Wyman 1965; Zolbrod 1984) including the gathering of the clans. (*e.g.* Matthews 1894, Reichard 1928, Spencer 1947).

We also have family accounts from Navajo people whose family histories extend back into the 1700's to a time when they lived in Dinétah (Benally 1982; Cleveland *et. al.*). We have healing ceremonies centered on founding stories that are tied to specific places on the landscape. For example, Coyoteway (Lukert 1979), Male Red Antway (Wyman 1965), and Shootingway (Blue Eyes n.d.). Brugge (1993:33) cites a number of these, and he points out that many of them are

concentrated at the old ancestral Puebloan centers: the Hopi Mesas, Canyon de Chelly, Mesa Verde, Mancos Canyon, Aztec Ruins, Chaco Canyon, and Chimney Rock. These places are mentioned in contexts of Navajo contact with living ancestral Pueblo people. There is, ostensibly, a large amount of information on Navajo use of lands in Colorado and Utah in oral history accounts held by the Navajo Nation (Rena Martin 1997 cited by Allan Taylor 2004). There are numerous Navajo ethnographies (*e.g.* Haile 1938, Klah 1942; Kluckhohn and Leighton 1946) as well as texts on Navajo philosophy (McNeley 1973, 1981; Witherspoon 1974; Reichard 1977; Farella 1984) which give insight into Navajo thought and sense of place.

All of these accounts taken together constitute the Navajo national historiography — the explanation of how they came to be and how their identity sets them apart from their neighbors as viewed from both the inside and the outside.

Like most national histories, especially for societies that prize individualism as much as the Navajo (Farella 1984:195, 1993; Perry 1991:138), the Navajo differ on some of the details. For example, Spencer (1947) presents twenty-three different versions of the origin stories set down since 1895. However the general outline of these accounts are consistent and provide a strong basis for coming to understand basic elements of the Navajo social imaginary. The Navajo worldview is celebrated, recreated and renewed in ceremonies, healing practices and other oral traditions. And it has shaped how the Navajo have lived and adapted to their homeland in the Southwest.

If our theories are to adequately address complex social realities, we must avoid the temptation to reduce our explanations to a single variable (environmental or economic or sociobiological determinisms). Instead, we are looking for a variety of cross pressures: cultural values, mores, and restrictions; marriage rules and kinship systems; food taboos; war and peace; drought and abundance; new technologies and old traditions; competition and cooperation; economic innovation; new religious movements, new trade arrangements, population dislocations, environmental limitations and so forth. These are the explanatory factors in culture continuity and change. As archaeologists we expect to see these ideas and practices reflected in architecture, the organization of public and private space, hunting technology, agricultural practices, ceramic manufacture, color symbolism and decorative arts, rock art, differences in wood use and thermal features, the location and abandonment of communities, shifting boundaries between different groups, *etc.* In other words, we expect to see them reflected in all aspects of material culture which are, themselves, shaped and inspired and tied to aesthetics, religious belief, ritual practice and traditions, as well as the exigencies of earning a living and getting along with other groups — in short, the social imaginary.

Archaeologists can and should look to Navajo oral traditions and social imaginary for context for our models of Navajo culture emergence, continuity and change. To understand Navajo thought, we look for paradigms, social norms and organizing principals—the extended metaphor of the world built as a hogan, or life force moving in whorls/whirlwinds, the creative tension of male and female, or the power of thought and speech — and we expect to see those paradigms reflected in the natural world (its geography; the movement of the sun, moon, stars and seasons; the reproduction of life) and in social practice — in sunwise concentric circles, finger, hand and footprints in rock art, in star lore, the Navajo calendar, agricultural fields planted in spirals or

other ritualized patterns, in hogans and sites oriented to cardinal directions, female and male activity areas in and around the hogan, the uses of colors, shell, minerals, semiprecious stones and herbs, in the power of ceremony to create and recreate the world, and the subtle and not-so-subtle ways those beliefs and practices shape the social, cultural and physical landscapes.

The origin stories tell us, among other things, where the Navajo emerged into this world — where Navajo culture was created; how the hogan serves as a microcosm of the universe; that maize was essential and important to Navajo identity from the very beginning of their existence; how the Navajo interacted with the Pueblo; how the Navajo migrated to their homeland by several different routes and how they gathered the clans from different directions and at different times and incorporated different peoples as they returned to Dinétah.

Also remarkable are the things left out of the accounts. The stories note the arrival of the Spanish (known as *Naakaitbahi Nináádąą* to the Navajo) but do not consider the Pueblo Revolt or the *Reconquista* worth mentioning. They do not mark the Pueblo refugees coming to Dinétah as a significant event. They account for the arrival of Ute— known to the Navajo as the Arrow People (Washington Matthews in Halpern and McGreevy 1997:165) but do not emphasize conflict with them. They do emphasize agriculture and hunting but barely mention or do not mention at all herding or domestic animals. All of these omissions and inclusions strongly indicate that the stories' form and content were set well before the Pueblo Revolt and Spanish *Reconquista* at the end of the seventeenth century and before herding became an important economic practice or conflict with the Ute intensified in the eighteenth century. This is consistent with the new empirical archaeological evidence of Navajo sites dating from 1541 to 1625 from the Fruitland projects in Dinétah.

We can compare oral histories in a manner analogous to lexicostatistics to help reveal how Navajo culture differentiated from other Apachean group and how the Navajos distinguished themselves from their neighbors. The Navajo, Western Apache, Jicarilla and Lipan share a story of the beginning of agriculture involving a man who travels down a river in a hollow log and is aided by his pet turkey. That story is not shared by the Chiricahua, Kiowa Apache or the Mescalero Apache. The same four groups share with the Pueblo origin accounts that involve emergence from an underworld – other Apachean peoples do not. We can use the presence or absence of common concepts as evidence of shared public space where these ideas were exchanged and discussed. Shared stories and beliefs argue against the early separation of the Navajo and Western Apache from the Jicarilla and Lipan (Goodwin 1939; Matthews 1897; McAllister 1949; Opler 1938, 1940, 1942, 1983:369).

Language itself is important in understanding social imaginary. Gary Witherspoon (1977:34) explains that in Navajo philosophy knowledge, expressed in speech transforms the world — reality is a mirror of language. He says, ...”

“The language of Navajo ritual is performative (Austin, 1962) not descriptive. Ritual language does not describe how things are; it determines how they will be. Ritual language is not impotent; it is powerful. It commands, compels, organizes, transforms, and restores. It disperses evil, reverses disorder, neutralizes pain,

overcomes fear, eliminates illness, relieves anxiety, and restores order, health, and well-being.”

However it not just ritual language, prayers and songs that have power. Everyday thought and speech matter. A common belief among Navajos is that if one thinks of good things and good fortune, good things will happen. If one thinks of bad things, bad fortune will occur. Witherspoon (1977:28) says,

In my first few years among the Navajo, I was constantly scolded for thinking about unhappy possibilities. As a product of another cultural world, I had learned to “save something for a rainy day.” Among the Navajo I was told that planning for that “rainy day” would bring about “rainy days,” and that I had better forget about planning for “rainy days” unless I wanted it to “rain.”

This moral axis of Navajo social imaginary — that it is wrong to plan for and save grain for a three-year drought — is consonant with practice, observed in the archaeological record — we do not find the massive storage facilities.

This distinctly Navajo practice, different from that of the Pueblo and Spanish settlers sets the Navajo economy apart, marks it as changeable and adaptable (see Dykeman 2004 for a model of Navajo culture change based on incorporation and the coexistence of tradition and change through time and space in Navajo social imaginary). When harsh conditions cause Pueblo and Spanish economies to collapse, the Navajo appear rich by comparison and these differences are reflected in the Spanish historical accounts (Reeve 1957)

Interpreting the Navajo oral tradition to help understand Navajo cultural emergence is not new. Washington Matthews (1897) was one of the first anthropologists to estimate the time of Athabaskan entry into the Southwest. Bishop-Usher-like, Matthews estimated the lifetimes of prominent characters in the Navajo origin accounts and counted backwards. He concluded that the Navajo were in the region by the fifteenth century or earlier.

Although we generally agree with Matthew’s estimate, we take issue with his method. The origin accounts that Matthews was analyzing — those that express the traditional Navajo social imaginary, are based on a different conception of time — one Mircea Eliade (1959, 1965) calls the “time of origins”.

Walter Benjamin (1973:263) describes the Modern sense of time as homogenous and empty. Benedict Anderson (1991) discusses the crucial importance of this linear sense of time to the Modern (Western) social imaginary — the one within which Matthews was operating. However the traditions of most cultures are based on what Charles Taylor (2007:57), describes as “Great Time” as opposed to a secular time:

an “*illud tempus*”, when the order of things was established, whether that of the creation of the present world, or the founding of our people with its Law. The agents in this time were on a larger scale than people today, perhaps gods, but at least heroes. In terms of secular time, this origin is in a remote past, it is “time out of

mind” But it is not simply in the past, because it also something that we can re-approach, can get closer to again. This may be by ritual only, but this ritual may also have an effect of renewing and rededicating, hence coming closer to the origin. The Great time is thus behind us, but it is also in a sense above us. It is what happened at the beginning, but it is also the great Exemplar, which we can be closer to or farther away from as we move through history.

John Farella (1993:40) in talking about the Navajo Night Chant says,

In this ceremony, as in some others, men put on buckskin masks and appear as Ye'ii. Anglos always describe this as a reenactment of a mythical time, and the dancers as masked impersonators. But, here again, that isn't really correct. It isn't so much a reenactment as it is a re-creation, bringing the essence of that past moment, that prototypical time, into the present. Although that doesn't really capture it either, as what is represented here tends to be atemporal rather than arranged lineally into a past, a present, and a future.

The understanding that different cultures have different social and cosmic imaginaries can help us be sensitive to cultural differences and temper our interpretations. It can keep us from projecting our own ethnocentric prejudices onto others and it can help us avoid interpreting other's accounts as just-so stories.

That said, it appears that a number of Navajo informants have tried to bridge the different concepts of time inherent in Navajo and non-Navajo social imaginaries in providing information to anthropologists (Matthews 1890:90; Van Valkenburg 1938: 3; Witherspoon 1977:139; Wyman 1970: 139; Zolbrod 1984: 409, note 3). Gladys Reichard (1950: 243): says:

A large and unexplainable number is the reference to 102 as the age of man—probably the ideal of a long lifespan. Matthews was also told that ‘seven times old age has killed.’ Meaning that seven full generations of Navajo had existed up to the time that he had collected the legends.

By the implied reckoning, the narrative would be 714 years old, placing it from the time of Matthew's recording at A.D. 1176. Such a date is considerably older than proposed by most archaeologists for Athabaskan entry into the Southwest. However it is internally consistent with some of the Navajo accounts of Pueblo—proto-Navajo interactions at the old ancestral Puebloan centers (Brugge (1993:33) and with the Jemez Pueblo oral history of their interaction with Athabascans (Sando 1979:418).

Another type of temporal interpretation of Navajo origin accounts is given by Young (1968:2) who views the Navajo account of the story of the movement of beings from the first to the present world on a horizontal rather than a vertical plane. He interprets the First World as the Arctic north, the Second group as the northern plains, culminating with the place of emergence into this world as the point at which the earliest ancestors of the Navajo entered the Southwest.

Zolbrod (1984:359 note 39) calls Young's suggestion "fascinating" but warns that we should take care be not to "reduce the artistry of the story to facts of history as we like to reckon them in accounting for our own recorded past". He says, "the narrative should be seen primarily as art and only secondarily as historic data".

From the perspective of the modern, Western social imaginary, when looking at historic data, time is linear. Zolbrod's suggestion that the Navajo narrative should be approached aesthetically may help non-Navajos avoid confusing different kinds of time and assuming their own social and cosmic imaginaries hold for all other peoples in all other times and places.

Not only does the traditional Navajo social imaginary reveal a different understanding of time – it also encompasses a different concept of space. Navajo understanding of sacred geography is different than the space-as-container concept familiar to Western modernity. The landscape itself figures prominently in Navajo accounts and specific landscape features are cited as proof of the veracity of the stories. Kelly and Francis (1994:187) say, the "stories map the place and the landscape onto a dense structure of powerful cultural symbols, images, and beliefs that give meaning to that landscape and place". Wyman (1962:78) talks about the Navajo "passion for geography" and notes that "preoccupation with locality" is revealed in Navajo speech. In Navajo "movement is described in great details". He claims the Navajo "lives conceptually and linguistically in a universe in motion." In a sense Navajo geography is more dynamic than that of Western modernity and this requires extra effort for non-Navajos to understand the Navajo emphasis on place and landscape. This has implications for the definition and understanding of sacred places and traditional use areas (Luckert 1977).

The Navajo's account of the creation of this world is centered on the emergence place in Diné'tah and the sacred mountains that are at its limits. The emergence place is considered to be an actual, tangible place — a lake or an island in a lake, or a confluence of rivers, known to knowledgeable persons. Some accounts place it in the San Juan Mountains near Pagosa Springs (*e.g.* Hastin Tlo'tsi hee in O'Bryan 1956:note 44 page 12, see also Washington Matthews 1897 note 43 page 219), others place it in the La Platas (*e.g.* Teddy Draper Sr. in Kelly and Francis 1994:76) and still others at the confluence of the San Juan and the Los Pinos Rivers (*e.g.* Sylvia Many Goats in Kelly and Francis 1994:36).

The Navajo origin stories all place the emergence of the Navajo divinities in Diné'tah (Benally 1982; Goddard 1933; Klah 1942; Matthews 1897; Mitchell 1978; Wyman 1970; Yazzie 1984; Kelly and Francis 1994). Many place the creation of the Navajo people in Diné'tah as well. Those that place Navajo creation elsewhere have Changing Woman traveling west from Diné'tah, her place of origin and taking up residence in the west. While there she creates the Navajo who then travel east back to Diné'tah to take up residence. All the stories (*e.g.* Matthews 1894, Reichard 1928, Spencer 1947) locate the gathering of the clans in Diné'tah. That these stories locate the center of the Navajo universe, Diné'tah, not in the Navajo's current location but at a site to the east of the current Navajo Reservation, in the vicinity of where we find the earliest Navajo archaeological sites, helps us locate where Navajo cultural identity emerged. The origin accounts are consistent with the archaeological record. We do not find evidence of emergent *Navajo* culture elsewhere. Prior to their arrival in Diné'tah, the southern Athabaskan speakers were not Navajo. They were not Navajo for the eleven hundred years that they were linguistically isolated

from their Chipewanean cousins in northern Canada. They were not Navajo at Avonlea or Besant or in the Wyoming or Colorado Rockies, the Northwest Coast or any other place where anthropologists have theorized that these Athabaskan speakers sojourned during their “migration” to the Southwest (translocation would be a better term – migrations do not take 1100 years). They did not become *Navajo* until they arrived in Dinéah, until they began to grow maize, build hogans and, importantly until they embraced stories and accounts of the world that set them apart from other Apachean peoples. Navajo identity emerged in Dinéah. It is intimately tied to the place. And our theories should take the Navajo social imaginary into account. Those theories that argue that Navajo identity emerged elsewhere need to account for why they differ from the Navajo’s own oral history of themselves.

The concept of the social imaginary applies to all cultures. It applies to both our interpretations of Navajo *and* non-Navajo thought including our underlying assumptions regarding anthropological and historical theory. Recognizing the normative force that certain ideas have in shaping theory can help us understand practices in social science that may be culture bound.

For example, many authors have noted contemporary Western society’s bias toward written history over oral history (see Zolbrod 1984, 1994). Such a prejudice may be a subset of what Pearce (1953) calls *savagism* — a deep-seated prejudice of modern Western social imaginary against tribal peoples. Something of this may account, in part, for the fact that references to Spanish historical documents are far more frequent in the archaeological literature on the Navajo than are references to Navajo oral tradition.

The tendency of many theorists to give greater credence to written history over oral history help explain the vigor with which some archaeologists (*e.g.* Schaafsma 1996, 2002) have attempted to make their theories of Navajo origin coincide with specific interpretations of ambiguous Spanish historical documentation in support of the refugee hypothesis even in contradiction of Navajo and Pueblo oral accounts (see Brugge 1996:258).

As with written history versus oral history, so too empirical evidence versus historical evidence. Gunnerson’s (1979) dismissal of all non-empirical evidence cited above is an example of a kind of prejudice in favor of naturalistic social science that ignores the beliefs and ideas of the people under study.

Both prejudices may have a bearing on Seymour’s (2007) “low visibility archaeology” where traces of mobile peoples are ignored in archaeological study as mobile peoples are considered less civilized or less important than sedentary ones and the faint empirical evidence of their presence is ignored or overwhelmed by the architecture and ceramics and substantial thermal features of more sedentary peoples.

When we look at the context of our theories we note there is a certain intellectual and emotional appeal to the refugee hypothesis of Navajo cultural emergence — it is clear and simple and ties the emergence of an entire cultural identity to a single historical event (recorded in writing and in a European tradition). Its assumption that the culture change that occurred when the two cultures met was largely one way — from Pueblo to Navajo reinforces our notions of progress. It accounts for several Puebloan elements in Navajo thought and practice.

As an example of its enduring power, in discussing the syncretism in Navajo thought that shares symbols and stories with neighboring Zunis, Hopis, other Pueblos and Apaches, Kelly and Francis (1994:188) recur to the refugee hypothesis:

The emergence of the Navajos as a distinct ethnic group forged in the crucible of Spanish rule from pieces of many disparate communities, mainly Pueblos and Athabascan. The story we construct suggests the possibility of a nativistic movement to forge the various stories and customs of these refugees from Spanish rule into a coherent belief system to help unite these resisters, fighters for the land, at a time when organization and unity were essential for survival

The refugee hypothesis has a romantic appeal underlying current Western modernity's social imaginary relating to colonialism, indigenous resistance to colonialism and pan-Indian cooperation and also, perhaps, to the continuing application of the Black Legend (Juderías 1917) in Anglophone countries.

It is difficult to give up such appealing stories even in light of the mounting evidence that Navajo culture existed and flourished and had already forged a coherent belief system at least 150 before the Pueblo Revolt and the *Reconquista*. Our new stories regarding the Navajo will have to take the new evidence into account. However the appeal of the old theory is strong enough that it will likely take some time to die out.

As with the Refugee hypothesis, so too the acculturation hypothesis. The acculturation theory reinforces modern notions of slow, gradual, progressive cultural evolution through fixed stages from primitive cultures up to ourselves. There is an underlying assumption that nomadic hunting and gathering societies will gradually evolve into sedentary agricultural ones upon exposure to them.

Instead we see evidence that Puebloan and Athabascan cultures existed side-by-side perhaps for hundreds of years without the Athabaskans becoming acculturated. The evidence of Navajo cultural emergence demonstrates that cultural change need not be slow or gradual – it can be abrupt. Furthermore, the Navajo adopted agriculture but managed to preserve both their northern hunting tradition and relative mobility. The incorporation of cultural traits that occurred from the encounter ran both ways. Pueblos adopted Athabascan cultural elements and Athabaskans adopted Puebloan elements.

Navajo cultural emergence did not occur because the Navajo adopted maize agriculture — other Apachean groups also adopted maize agriculture but did not become “Navajo”. It did not occur because the Navajo became more sedentary — the Western Apache were also relatively sedentary as compared to other southern Athabascan groups. It did not occur because the Navajo adopted some Pueblo ideas, rituals or religious practice — the Navajo, Western Apache, Jicarilla and Lipan all share origin stories based on emergence and several other aspects of religious belief and practice, as discussed above. What were critical to the emergence of Navajo cultural identity were specific stories and symbols tying the Navajo people to a particular place, Dinétah, and the social practices of the people who shared those stories. These stories constitute a collective nationalist historiography. Foreign ideas and practices were incorporated into Navajo

culture but they were symbolically Navajo-ized (Vogt 1961; Brugge 1963) as part of the Navajo practice of changing to preserve tradition (Farella 1984; Langenfeld 2003; Dykeman 2004).

If we understand something about how proto-historic peoples understood the landscapes they lived in we can potentially see those landscapes in a new light. Understanding Navajo social imaginary has great utility for developing models that can be tested by archaeological information. Social imaginary is a useful concept for approaching the Navajo oral tradition and bridging Navajo concepts with Spanish historical accounts and with modern archaeological theory.

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