CHAPTER I. DZIŁ ŁEEZH – ENTER, EXIT, RETURN HOME

Sometimes the best solution to a problem has been staring us in the face all along. Philosophy of Diné governance is imbedded within Dził Łeezh. One might superficially understand Dził Łeezh as a bundle of abilities granted to the four sacred mountains. Dził Łeezh can be catered to by humans with the ability to lead. The characteristics needed for leadership went through a trial and error phase during pre-contact Diné history. Several episodes of leadership were attempted by various animals long ago. Each of these attempts by the animals at leadership failed to yield an appropriate approach to governance, (Benally 2006, 1-40). Hence, the four sacred mountains were given to the Diné as a foundation for leadership. Within each mountain are certain attributes contained in the Dził Łeezh. These attributes are necessary for future leaders to possess or they will fail in their leadership duties, (Denny 2010). It is within the traditional Diné home, or hooghán, that one can also find tools to govern. The hoogoahn is a scaled down model of the sacred mountains. The stories expressed here are very superficially mentioned but form the basis for Diné philosophy of leadership. Some state that contemporary Diné government officials no longer consider such foundation for leadership to be legitimate or relevant to contemporary issues(Denny 2010). Relevancy and legitimacy questions are an aside. I am assuming that the role of Diné philosophy does have an important function today and tomorrow concerning questions of government and politics. Specifically, I would like to answer the following research question: What do traditional Diné institutions of governance offer to our understanding of the contemporary challenges faced by the Navajo nation today and tomorrow? Before we can address the research question, we must first define traditional Diné philosophy and its relationship to pre-contact leadership characteristics.
A. Creation and recreation of four worlds

What follows is a very brief discussion of Diné creation for the purpose of outlining tenets for governance. One may consider the following work the first attempt to truly link Indigenous philosophy to governance. Diné philosophy holds that there are four worlds that have been navigated by Diné people. The entire span of Diné existence in time and space is contained in table 1.1 (which was furnished by Mr. Avery Denny, a cultural liaison working for Diné Policy Institute at Diné College). Early in the fourth world, the four sacred mountains were created. They are called Sisnaajini, Tsodzil, Dook’o’oslii, and Dibé Nitsaa. Mr. Denny explained to me that these mountains were given to Diné people by the holy ones as a foundation for their governance. Within each mountain is contained Dził Leezh. Each mountain and its inherent Dził Leezh is necessary for good governance to exist. In terms of time, the next event was the birth of hero twins. Due to the consequences of mistakes made in previous worlds, several monsters were born. The hero twins destroyed the various monsters roaming the earth. Seven monsters begged for their lives pleading that they could help human kind in the future. The twins agreed to let hunger, thirst, lice, indolent poverty, sleep, old age, and death live. These monsters lived in order to motivate humans to survive and thrive, (Benally 2006, 42). The monster slayer event is noted on the timeline in table 1.1. At this point, changing woman leaves to the west. She returns and the four clans are recreated. These four clans are instructed to lead themselves and learn from the mistakes of the past. The four clans are instructed to live within the four sacred mountains. It is now that two more mountains are given to the Diné people. They are called Dzilná’oosił and Ch’ool’í. Dzilná’oosił is the doorway. Ch’ool’í is the chimney. These six mountains contain the necessary conditions for domestic and international relations.
Table 1.1: Fourth World – White world – important events that are applicable today

- Creation of Four Mountains
- Birth of Twins
- Monsters are Killed
- Changing Woman Leaves
- Recreation of 4 clans
- Glittering World – Fifth World – about 70,000 years old

See next diagram for close up
B. Mountains – a model for external (international) sovereignty

Table 1.2 is a visual expression of the organization of this dissertation. There has not, to date, been any other attempt to utilize the gift of the mountains as a philosophy for governance. It is a two dimensional model furnished by Avery Denny as a way to organize philosophy of Diné governance. The four recreated clans were instructed to live within the bounds of the four sacred mountains. When an individual must leave the hooghan, they must behave based on a cycle of philosophical thought-based ideals contained within Dził Łeezh. Dził Łeezh is contained in each of the four mountains. Each mountain has its own cycle or process for governing. All cycles must start with the eastern facing slope. Hence, (as shown in table 1.2) each mountain’s eastern facing slope is demarcated with “1” creating a pattern for the four recreated clans to follow. It is up to the holy ones (Diyin Dine’e) to follow the external path which begins with Sis Naajiní but the humans must follow the internal circle beginning with Dook’o’oosliid. This process will be visited in detail in Chapter II and relies on table 1.3 for explanation. The philosophy inherent in the sacred mountain pathway outlines the foundation for international relations.
Table 1.2: Simplified Expression of Diné Governance

- Ideal Home
- Knowledge
- Ceremonial
- Sodizin Hooghan
- (Nitsahakees)

- Ideal Child
- First laugh
- First walk – hozhóó'jí nahagha
- Nahata Hooghan

- Spiritual child
- Spiritual development
- Faith, songs, prayers
- Sihasin Hooghan/tách 'éeh

- Ideal Parent
- Birth
- Husband/Wife
- Iina Hooghan

Diagram by Avery Denny
Table 1.3, furnished by Avery Denny, explores the necessary conditions for leadership at home or in terms of domestic politics. Within the hooghan are imbedded Dził Łeezh. In the hooghan, it is necessary to begin in the east and move clockwise south, west, and north. It is in the hooghan that Diné philosophy introduces the doorway and chimney mountains. Mr. Denny explained that a leader must have a home, a spouse, children, and Dził Łeezh in order to qualify as a leader. Mr. Denny was alluding to the fact that as a leader of a home, as a successful manager of the traits inherent in the hooghan, one has proven that he or she can lead beyond the hooghan. Inherent in the hooghan is the necessity to exit the hooghan for sustenance of life within the home. When you exit the hooghan, you turn to guidance from the four sacred mountains. Collectively, life within the hooghan and life outside the hooghan are templates for leadership within the bounds of and beyond the bounds of Navajo Nation.
Table 1.3: Leadership within the Home
Diné philosophy, therefore, has at least two inherent approaches to governance and leadership I will call domestic and international relations. These two approaches have yet to be explored in other research. Previous research has boiled down the philosophy to thinking, planning, living out, and reflecting. What has yet to be discussed is the way in which domestic politics of the Navajo Nation must employ at least the two approaches imbedded in table 1.2. First, it makes sense and was confirmed by Mr. Denny that a process for contemporary international relations should not take the form that the holy ones took when dealing with the non-Diné world. Rather, it is more sensible to have humans behave as humans have behaved in the past. This means that humans should follow the path first followed by the four recreated clans. It should be assumed that humans will always be guided by the holy ones. Mr. Denny points to the pathway followed by the holy ones to restore the world after coming to the brink of disaster. This perspective makes sense. If Diné philosophy has restored a balance at least four times in the past, by contrast, the process of restoring balance to governance today should be a very light task by comparison. As Mr. Denny states, however, “we have the solutions that no one wants to hear” (Denny 2010). Mr. Denny’s implies that it may make more sense to deal with the non-Diné world by beginning in the west where Dook’o’sliid faces the east. This is noted in table 1.2 in which Dook’o’sliid is labeled with numeral 1. Moving clockwise, it will take the process through Dibé Nitsaa, Sis Naajini, and Tsoodził. These ideas will be further elaborated upon in Chapter II. For now, we need to merely understand that Diné philosophy has imbedded within it the necessary conditions for good governance and good politics. Unfortunately, it has become necessary to briefly discuss the definition of politics since all cannot agree that politics has the potential to a good thing.
C. What is Politics

Why do we all have a different idea of what politics is? My thought is that the idea of conceptual stretching has had an impact, (Sartori 1970). The idea of conceptual stretching involves the problem of assigning words in English the ever expanding duty of representing more and more diverse ideas with no thought about the cross cultural syntax error inherent in such a process. In other words, the word politics has come to represent so many different ideas that it is probably unfair to continue using the word politics without some further explanation. The problem of, and solution to, conceptual stretching will be explored in detail in Chapter V. Suffice it to say that I will use the concept building method to demonstrate that an alternative to conceptual stretching is necessary for many ideas beyond the definition of politics. For now, I believe it is possible to discuss politics as an abstract and lifeless construction in which objective decisions are made about the distribution of money and power. Without heart or feeling, (and without self interest) it is possible to have a government perform like a computer or robot. When a file is not found, the system may come to a halt. The sentient in us all inherently attempts to fill such problems with assumptions which, to us, may be as plain as breathing. These assumptions are subjective and they are inherent in all philosophies. Inductive reasoning requires philosophy. Deductive reasoning can be mechanical. Politics, to me, means that we have boiled down our governing institutions to deductive decisions which can be plain, dry, mechanical, and downright heartless. Self interest should have no role in politics at an assumption free level. No system of politics currently exists as I have described here.

So what are the necessary conditions of politics? That depends on your agenda. What do you want politics to do for you? What does the study of politics and political science really do? Within five subfields of politics and political science one will find comparative, theory,
international relations, American, and methods. Comparative is a look at least two nations. Comparativists will typically focus on one nation such as the U.S. then comparativists will compare other nations with U.S. models. Theory of philosophy involves a study of a vast array of European philosophers on many topics based on individual philosophers including Marx, Locke, Machiavelli and others. I prefer to focus less on individuals and more on schools of thought such as liberalism. I believe that liberalism is the dominant theoretical model at work in the world today and deserves more attention in terms of native nation building, (Richardson 2001). Methods involve reliable, replicable, and valid ways of answering research questions, (CITE MCCARTY). Such approaches can be quantitative, statistical, and game theoretic in which it is possible to use models to predict politics. Qualitative methods involve case study, qualitative comparative analysis (qca), and can be used to develop strategic models of policy formation in conjunction with game theory methods. Hybrid models combine qca and game theory approaches supplemented by case study research to explain patterns and anomalies in research. Political history is also possible. Navajo political history is probably most associated with the work of David Wilkins. So why bring up the question of politics?

Mr. Denny once explained that “politics” did not take place during the Diné creation and pre-contact existence. Rather, he explained that politics took place between humans and animals, or humans and nature, (Denny 2010). I took this to mean that he assumed that the term politics was a dirty word. I have asked others in classes at Diné College about the meaning of politics. A memorable response was, “a way to lie, cheat, and steal”. Hence, I wanted to be upfront with my own assumptions. Politics is not an opinion. Discussions of politics require one to know their biases in favor or against something. That being said, I have my own take on politics. I believe politics is a tool to be used to govern. Like any tool, you can use politics to help people, help
yourself, or destroy people while you destroy yourself. On predicting politics and policies, it is possible to have reactions to potential future policies. It is possible to have contingency plans for shocks to the system, (Collier and Collier 1991). Politics can mean many things to many people. I’d like us to consider how the study of politics and political science has potential to create a system of government that is built from the bottom (people) moving up toward leadership. A bottom up political institution is built on an assumption that bottom up is consistent with Diné philosophy. Bottom up politics is certainly not consistent with most European philosophical thought. This is an idea in tune with pre-contact Navajo philosophy of life. Regardless of which philosophy is used, philosophy can be credited, or blamed, with breathing life into any institution of governance. Still, politics must remain predictable to some extent or things will fall into chaos.

D. Replicable, Reliable, and Valid

In terms of producing quality research, I thrive to produce documents which are replicable, reliable, and valid, (Lomawaima and McCarty 2002). In this way, I am pushing the current limits of research in American Indian Studies. If we are to take the models proposed here as instruments that can be tuned to multiple environments, special attention must be given to calibration. Replicable research ensures that others may reproduce findings and draw similar or identical conclusions absent of my influence. Replicability provides predictability to the research meaning that others may learn the method and then foretell where the conclusions will fall. In this way, a group of scholars can independently deduce logical outgrowths of research that the original author never considered. But reliable research approaches require that we ensure we are answering the research question we intend to address. Validity is the way we ensure that assumptions are made based on a clear connection to Diné philosophy. We can apply
replicability, reliability, and validity in at least two ways. We can create new models based on
the concerns voiced here or we can test existing institutions of governance for their ability to
perform under such a threshold. But, in the end, we are really talking about building (or
rebuilding) institutions of governance that must account for philosophy, structure, and agents.
Philosophy makes assumptions, structure is a conduit between philosophy and agent, and the
agent is the human that must carry out the directives (philosophy) via a structure (institution).

We can build a mechanical government. It can maneuver based on war, diplomacy,
economic prosperity, recession and everything in between. It's the subjective questions which get
us into trouble. Why three branch government with checks and balances? Is it because you fail to
trust anyone in charge? Is distrust the reason for term limits? The philosophy of a people must
fill in the subjective gaps. But they are subjective. Why a Naat’áanii system in which a leader
knows peace ways, is a good speaker, has a connection to medicine people, the holy ones, and is
supported by the community? Once again, the philosophy must guide these answers but the
answers will be subjective. The choices early on are subjective. It's only when a status quo
develops that we suddenly MUST build all institutions a certain way. Hence, there is no reason
to assume that a European school of thought will do anything but cause more problems among a
group of people that have a different philosophy based on Mormonism or Christianity or Navajo
philosophy. So can we identify the objective needs of government? Can we agree to fill the
subjective gaps with philosophy? Such is a heavy task.

In Chapter I – Dził Leezh – Enter, exit, return home, I discuss traditional institutions of
governance as they are embedded, philosophically, in the elements placed in the six sacred
mountains which encircle past and present Diné people. One must first enter to utilize such
elements. In Chapter II – Sis Naajiní – Philosophy of Diné Governance, I explore traditional
institutions and how one can expect humans to utilize one of many cycles which exist in Diné philosophy allowing humans to simultaneously think about their governance and their lives as they find it today and as they expect to find it tomorrow. Chapter III – Tsoodzil - Interrupted Planning in the History of Diné Governance, traditional institutions frame the disruption of Diné governance from its precontact form to its post contact form forcing future leaders to plan for a catastrophic change while simultaneously reflecting on their current situation within the context of disruption. In Chapter IV – Dook’o’osliid – Living with Contemporary Approaches to Native Nation Building, we focus on how traditional institutions frame the process of living with a disrupted Diné cycle while simultaneously planning for a future based on Diné Philosophy. Chapter V – Dibé Nitsaa – Reflecting on Concepts of Diné Governance considers how traditional institutions demand that a frank discussion take place over the recent Diné governance evolution in which clear evidence of self interest demands beginning the process again per Diné philosophy. Chapter VI – Dziłná’oodii and Ch’ół’il’i’i asks how traditional institutions exist today perhaps because colonial practices failed to destroy them or potentially because traditional institutions are designed by the holy ones for the purpose of surviving catastrophic events so that future humans can use them to resolve their contemporary problems or recreate their world. Humans must enter and exit only to return home to a sanctuary of Diné philosophy. Chapter VI – Atsa doo Ma’ii Tso discusses how traditional institutions of governance currently exist today and need to be better understood by future leaders by relying on the attributes of the Eagle to search from above and simultaneously looking from the earth by way of attributes possessed by the wolf.

As we move forward, it may be useful to consider the following overarching and unique perspective: for governance to function it must have a foundation in philosophy, have a structure
to distribute directives, and it must have humans to carry out directives. For the purposes of this research, we can assume Diné philosophy will be the foundation. Such an assumption in and of itself is unique. Second, and most breath taking, is the fact that there is NOT a structure by which Diné philosophy can distribute directives from the holy ones to the humans. This research will begin the process of building such structures. This research will not contain the definitive answer on how to distribute the philosophy of the Diné to those willing to follow it. Finally, this research will leave it to the human agents to find their own pathway via structures offered here. In terms of Diné philosophy, one might consider this research as a communication between those that inhabit mother earth and those that guide from above or father sky.


