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## Chaco Canyon: A Contested Memory Anchor in the North American Southwest

### Summary

Natural and archaeological places are powerful loci for social memories and continually negotiated meanings. As ‘memory anchors’ they are focal points for the construction of memory and meaning, and can become flashpoints for disputes over access, land-use, and knowledge claims among stakeholders with contradictory interests. In the North American Southwest the competing claims of Native American tribes, archaeologists, government bureaucrats, tourists, and the mining industry come into sharp relief. In this paper, I explore how the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Chaco Canyon figures prominently in the origin stories and sacred geographies of contemporary Pueblo and Navajo peoples – two indigenous groups with competing political stakes in the present.

Keywords: Memory anchor; landscape; Chaco Canyon; Navajo; Pueblo; Southwest U.S.

Als ‚Gedächtnisanker‘ können natürliche Plätze und archäologische Stätten wirkmächtige Orte sozialen Gedächtnisses sein, die zentrale Punkte für die Konstruktion von Erinnerung und Bedeutung darstellen. Als solche stehen sie im Zentrum der Konstruktion von Erinnerung und deren Sinn. Sie können Brennpunkte widerstreitender Interessen um Ressourcenzugänge, Landrechte oder Rechtsansprüche auf Wissen werden. Im Südwesten Nordamerikas zeichnen sich scharfe Interessengegensätze zwischen Nachkommen amerikanischer UreinwohnerInnen, ArchäologInnen, BürokratInnen, TouristInnen und der Bergbauindustrie ab. In dieser Studie erörtere ich die zentrale Rolle von Chaco Canyon, einer UNESCO-Weltkulturerbestätte, in den Schöpfungsmythen und Sakralgeographien der gegenwärtigen Pueblo- und Navajo-Gruppen spielt, zwei Stämmen mit gegenwärtig konträren politischen Interessen.

Keywords: Gedächtnisanker; Landschaft; Chaco Canyon; Navajo; Pueblo; Nordamerikanischer Südwesten.

Kerstin P. Hofmann, Reinhard Bernbeck and Ulrike Sommer (eds.) | Between Memory Sites and Memory Networks. New Archaeological and Historical Perspectives | Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 45 (ISBN 978-3-9816751-9-1; URN urn:nbn:de:kobv:188-fudocseries0000000759-7) | www.edition-topoi.org

My thanks to Reinhard Bernbeck & Ulrike Sommer for inviting me to participate in this conference. I appreciate constructive comments provided by volume editors Reinhard Bernbeck and Kerstin P. Hofmann, and by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Randy McGuire, Neomie Tsosie, Davina Two Bears, and Richard Wilshusen on an earlier version of this paper.

Stories, histories, and oral traditions create emotional connections, attaching peoples to places. Both natural and archaeological places are powerful loci for social memories and meanings that are continually constructed, obliterated, altered, and reconstructed. These intra-worldly ‘memory anchors’ become focal points for the construction of memory and meaning over time.

The North American Southwest (southwest Colorado, southeast Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, northwest Chihuahua, and northern Sonora) is a land of breathtaking topography and dramatic architectural ruins. It is also a land of competing stakeholders, including Native American tribes, government bureaucrats, archaeologists, tourists, and entrepreneurs. In the Southwest, memory anchors such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Chaco Canyon are emotionally charged places that figure prominently in the origin stories and sacred geographies of contemporary Pueblo and Navajo peoples – indigenous groups with competing political stakes in the present. They are flashpoints for disputes over access, land use, and knowledge claims among Native and Euroamerican groups with contradictory interests. In this paper I will explore Chaco Canyon as contested memory anchor claimed by diverse factions.

## I Memory anchors

‘Landscape’ in archaeology provides an ontological framework for thinking about difficult and slippery issues such as memory, emotion, and meaning. The term often is meant to encompass both the built environment and the natural world – indeed, recent critical perspectives point out that separation of the two is a relatively recent, post-Enlightenment, Cartesian construct.<sup>1</sup> Meaningful places are not only seen – they are lived in, felt, experienced, and remembered.<sup>2</sup> Over the past two decades, a voluminous literature has arisen around the exploration of archaeological landscapes.<sup>3</sup>

Features of the natural landscape, such as boulders, caves, springs, and mountain peaks often are ascribed special significance when they take unusual shapes, or dominate

1 Latour 1993; Thomas 2004.

2 Schachner 2011; Silko 1977.

3 For example Anschuetz, Wilshusen, and Scheick 2001; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Bender 1993; Cummings and Whittle 2004; Ingold 1993; Rodning 2010; Smith 2003; Snead 2008; Tilley 1994.

the horizon from a particular direction.<sup>4</sup> These places of unusual visual drama remind people to step out for a moment from the ordinary, quotidian scale of life, to focus their attention on the metaphysical.<sup>5</sup> They highlight the disjuncture between geologic and human temporal scales – mountain peaks do not seem to change, although people do. We are conscious of time passing in our lives, while canyons, mesas and sandstone spires seem timeless. These dramatic natural features seem to act as anchors in space, holding constant against changing seasons and passing years.

Archaeological sites similarly focus human attention on time, with their material evidence of older eras and deceased people. Places and things from the past carry a sort of ‘intra-worldliness’ – they were once part of a different social life, but are now part of ours.<sup>6</sup> Archaeological sites also can become memory anchors – the loci of social memories and meanings that are continually constructed, obliterated, altered, and reconstructed to legitimate political authority or identity.<sup>7</sup> Like natural places, these archaeological memory anchors confront us with the liminal, the emotional, the extra-ordinary. Archaeological landscapes can have tremendous contemporary political volatility.<sup>8</sup> *Lieux de memoire*<sup>9</sup> can also be *lieux de discorde*; places that figure strongly in collective memory can become focal points for contested interpretations of multiple pasts.<sup>10</sup> In post-colonial contexts such as the Southwest United States, stakeholders in these struggles include not only the predominately Anglo archaeological community, but also diverse indigenous factions with interests that may conflict as well as overlap.

## 2 The North American Southwest

The Colorado Plateau in the northern U.S. Southwest is a land of long, open horizons punctuated by dramatic buttes, mesas, and mountain ranges (Fig. 1). The rugged, photogenic topography is the scar tissue resulting from geologic processes set in place millions of years in the past. On this open and empty landscape, light and sky are important components of any lived experience.<sup>11</sup> In his well-known ethnography “Wisdom Sits in Places”, Keith Basso employed the term “sense of place” to describe how the Western Apache imbue their surroundings with values, meanings, and aesthetic resonance.<sup>12</sup> For

4 Boivin 2004; Brady and Ashmore 1999; Sharma 1992; Williams and Nash 2006.

5 Bradley 2000; Eliade 1961; Taçon 1999.

6 Ingold 1993; Olsen 2010; Thomas 2006.

7 For example Alcock 2002; Bender 1998; Bradley 2002; Dietler 1998; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Yoffee 2007.

8 For example Bender 1998; Bernbeck and Pollock 1996; Bernbeck and Pollock 2007; González-Ruibal 2011; Larkin and McGuire 2009; authors in Liebmann and Rizvi 2008.

9 Nora 1984.

10 Dolf-Bonekämpfer 2002.

11 Tuan 1974.

12 Basso 1996.



Fig. 1 Overview of badlands from Kutz Canyon, New Mexico.

the Apache and many other indigenous peoples in the Southwest, natural and archaeological places are integral to religious practices, histories, and ethics.<sup>13</sup>

When the Spanish arrived on the Colorado Plateau in the 1500s, they encountered farmers whom they termed Pueblo peoples, or town dwellers. In the Southwest, 'Pueblo' refers to the people, to the town as a whole, and to the inhabitants' compact, apartment-like multi-storied dwellings. Today the Colorado Plateau is occupied by 20 indigenous Pueblo groups, including the Hopi (who speak Uto-Aztecan), the Zuni (who speak Penutian), the Acoma and Laguna (who speak Keresan), and 16 eastern pueblos (who speak Keresan and Kiowa-Tanoan) situated along the Rio Grande River and its tributaries. The Plateau is also occupied by the Numic-speaking Ute, Pai, and Paiute, and the Athabaskan-speaking Navajo and Jicarilla Apache (Fig. 2). Nearly all of these groups inscribe mountain peaks with social, ritual, and political meanings. For example, the horizontal and vertical divisions of Tewa pueblo society and cosmology have counterparts on the physical terrain marked by concentric tetrads of shrines and natural features.<sup>14</sup> At the outermost level, four sacred mountains associated with cardinal directions delimit the Tewa world. Each is associated with an earth navel or opening between worlds, a

13 For example Anschuetz 2007; Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2006; Ferguson and Hart 1985; Fowles 2009; Koyiyumptewa and Colwell-

Chanthaphonh 2011; Linford 2000; Ortiz 1972; Snead and Preucel 1999; Van Valkenburgh 1974.  
14 Ortiz 1969; Ortiz 1972.

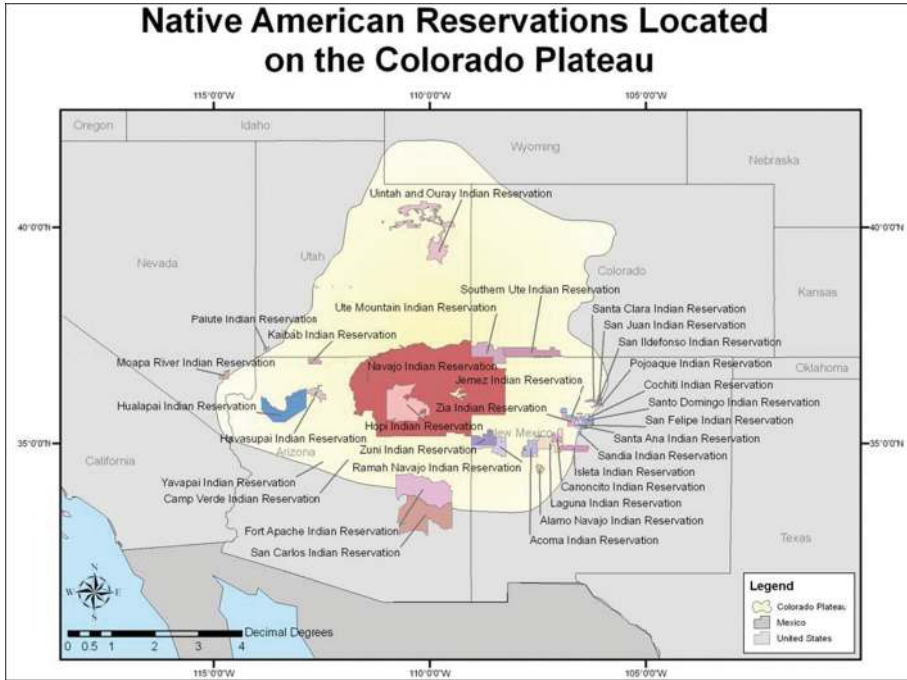


Fig. 2 Map locating tribal lands on the Colorado Plateau in the Southwest United States.

lake, a color, and various supernatural beings, and they are marked with shrines, cairns, and rock art (Fig. 3).

Similarly, the Navajo homeland traditionally is delineated by four sacred mountains: Tsis Naasjini (White Shell Mountain), or Sierra Blanca Peak in south-central Colorado; Tsoodzil (Turquoise Mountain), or Mount Taylor in central New Mexico; Doko'oosliid (Abalone Shell Mountain), or the San Francisco Peaks in northern Arizona; and Dibe Nitsaa (Big Mountain Sheep), or Mount Hesperus in the La Plata Mountains of southwest Colorado.<sup>15</sup> Mount Taylor, a 3445 m high remnant cone of an ancient volcano, is Tsoodzil for the Navajo, home of Turquoise Boy and Yellow Corn Girl, decorated with turquoise, dark mist, and female rain. The same peak is known by the Acoma as Kaweshtima, place of snow, home of the rainmaker of the north. For the Zuni, it is Dewankwin K'yaba:chu Yalanne, locus of ceremonial activities and plants associated with the medicine and Big Fire societies. For the Hopi, it is Tshipaya, the home of katsinas (Fig. 4).

As this example shows, the meanings of memory anchors can coexist and overlap. However, they can also be contested. Archaeological sites in the northern Southwest are

15 Kelley and Francis 1994; McPherson 2001, 5.

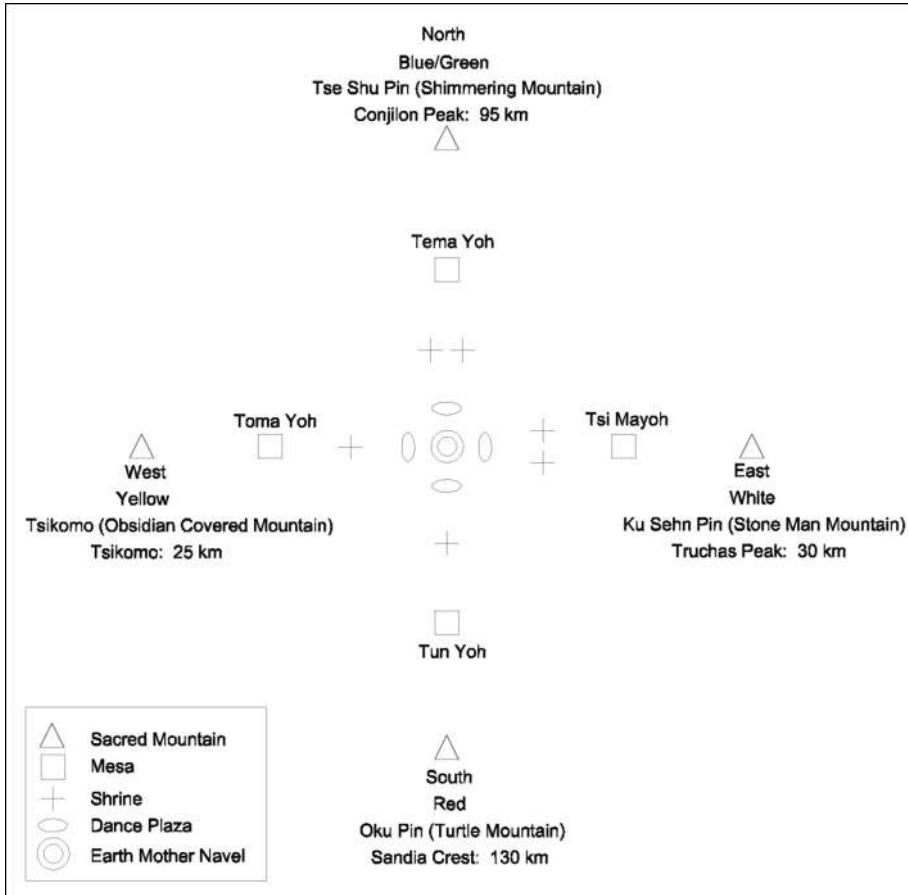


Fig. 3 Schematic depiction of the nested, directional, topographic elements of Tewa cosmology.

claimed in multiple ways by diverse indigenous groups. Chaco Canyon, in the center of the San Juan Basin in northwest New Mexico, is a topographically compelling archaeological locale that figures into the oral histories of many contemporary indigenous peoples in the Southwest. The area, now a National Historical Park, played a prominent role in the development of the history of North American archaeology, inspiring the passage of the 1906 Antiquities Act.<sup>16</sup>

Chaco Canyon is well-known as the location of one of the most complex sociopolitical phenomena in the ancient American Southwest.<sup>17</sup> During its heyday between AD

16 R. W. Lister and F. C. Lister 1984.

17 Judge 1989; Lekson 2006; Sebastian 1992.

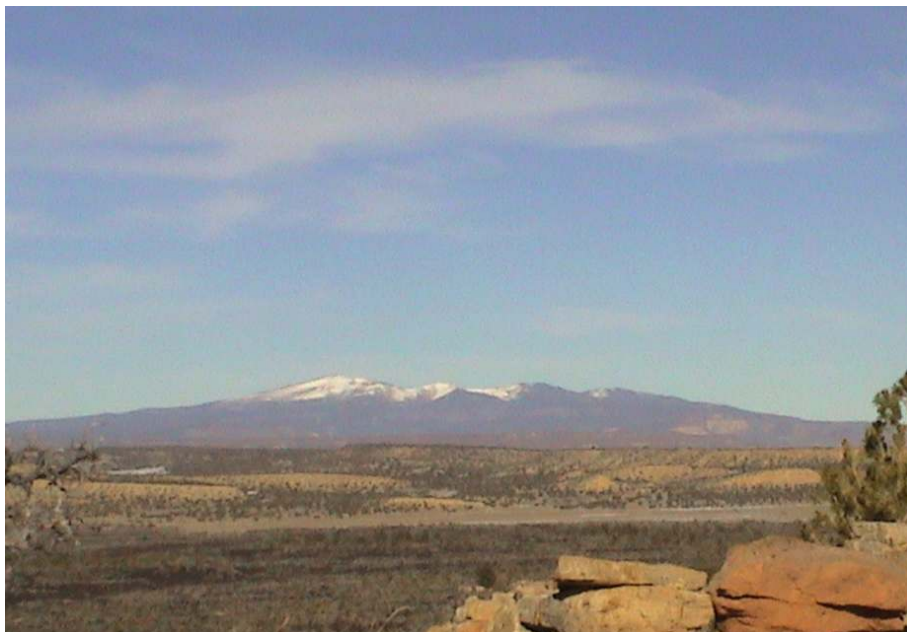


Fig. 4 Mount Taylor, in northwest New Mexico.

1000–1140, Chaco Canyon was a “rituality”<sup>18</sup> – a focal point for ritual, political, and economic activities that brought together thousands of inhabitants from approximately 100 ‘outlier’ settlements across the San Juan Basin.<sup>19</sup> Outlier inhabitants made periodic trips to Chaco Canyon, contributing resources and labor to large-scale events, participating in ceremonial practices, and creating shared memories and experiences.<sup>20</sup>

In Chaco Canyon, builders erected formal monumental architecture.<sup>21</sup> At the heart of Chaco Canyon lie twelve massive great houses – very large pueblos exhibiting unique Chacoan architectural characteristics.<sup>22</sup> Pueblo Bonito is one of the earliest and best-known of the these (Fig. 5).<sup>23</sup> Chacoans crafted these buildings at an exaggerated scale, with formal symmetry, according to specific designs.<sup>24</sup> Builders stacked hundreds of very large rooms – many of them devoid of hearths or other indications of use – in blocks up to four stories high. The Chacoans also built circular, masonry-lined, semi-subterranean great kivas – underground meeting rooms for secular or religious societies – according to

18 Renfrew 2001; Yoffee 2001.

19 Kantner and Mahoney 2000; Marshall et al. 1979; Powers, Gillespie, and Lekson 1983.

20 Van Dyke 2007.

21 Lekson 1986; Lekson 2007.

22 Lekson 1986; Lekson, Windes, and McKenna 2006; Vivian 1990.

23 Judd 1964; Neitzel 2003; Windes and Ford 1996.

24 Fritz 1978; Marshall 1997; Sofaer 1997; Stein and Lekson 1992.



Fig. 5 The great house of Pueblo Bonito, looking down from the north rim of Chaco Canyon.

formal guidelines for size, layout, and orientation (Fig. 6). These structures, by contrast with great houses, are nestled within the earth. The monumental buildings contrast dramatically with the many small, domestic habitations that form clusters of low mounds along the south side of Chaco Canyon. Over time, Chacoans increasingly formalized the landscape with the addition of shrines, staircases, mounds, ramps, and road segments.<sup>25</sup>

The Chacoan landscape can be understood as the large-scale spatial representation of a worldview that emphasizes balance between the visible and the invisible, the cardinal directions, the celestial and the subterranean visibility.<sup>26</sup> The landscape connotes, on a visceral level, the sense of Chaco Canyon as center place. For example, the Great North Road leaves Chaco and heads 50 km due north to end at Kutz Canyon, a prominent gash in the earth. Exactly opposite, a south road exits through a gap in the canyon and points towards Hosta Butte, a prominent knob on the horizon (Fig. 7). As people arrived for ceremonies at Chaco, their spatial experiences confirmed for them that the canyon was an appropriate location in which to conduct the rituals necessary to ensure agricultural success and to keep their lives – and the world – in balance. The canyon

25 Hayes and Windes 1975; Kincaid 1983; Vivian 1997a; Vivian 1997b; Wills 2001; Windes 1978.

26 Marshall 1997; Stein and Lekson 1992; Van Dyke 2007.





Fig. 6 Excavated great kiva at the great house of Chetro Kettle in Chaco Canyon.

represents a balanced dualism between celestial and subterranean, highly visible, and entirely hidden.

The name Chaco Canyon suggests depth, but Fajada Butte and the mesas that form its walls are some of the highest points in the surrounding San Juan Basin (Fig. 8). Chacra Mesa is visible from many locations across the San Juan Basin and from landforms along the Basin's edges, 50–100 km away. From Chacra Mesa, visually dramatic landforms such as Huerfano Mountain, Cabezon Peak, Mount Taylor, Hosta Butte, and Shiprock punctuate the horizons. Places such as Huerfano Mountain and Hosta Butte may have represented particular directions or boundaries, or they may have been memory anchors, associated with particular myths or histories. We cannot know the precise meanings these places held in the past, but it is clear that Chacoans positioned some buildings and other features to create lines of sight with specific landforms. They also marked many of these high places with shrines.



Fig. 7 Looking down the South Road towards Hosta Butte from a stone circle on the north rim of Chaco Canyon, framed through South Gap.



Fig. 8 Fajada Butte, the remnant mesa at the center of Chaco Canyon, on a misty morning in June 2010.



Fig. 9 Historic Navajo hogan on Chacra Mesa, above Chaco Canyon.

### 3 Chaco and the Native American Past

The archaeological evidence indicates that Pueblo peoples migrated away from Chaco Canyon near the end of the 13th century. Today, the canyon and its immediate surroundings are occupied by the Navajo. Contemporary reservation boundaries were fixed by the US government in the 19th century (with additional and in some cases ongoing adjustments). These boundaries reflect the effects of four centuries' worth of colonial occupation on indigenous settlement and landuse. The archaeological space of Chaco, so quintessentially Pueblo, is today in the very heart of Navajo country. Navajo have been in Chaco Canyon since the early 18th century, engaging in farming, sheep herding, and hunting (Fig. 9). Local Navajo have been employed on archaeology projects in Chaco Canyon from the 1880s onwards,<sup>27</sup> and some Navajo continued to live there for some 40 years after the establishment of Chaco Canyon as a national monument in 1907.<sup>28</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that the archaeology in the park would become a *lieux de discorde* or flashpoint for Navajo and Pueblo contested claims to the Chacoan past and, by extension, to the Chacoan landscape and its resources.

27 Gabriel 1992.

28 Brugge 1986.

Both archaeologists and contemporary Native peoples view Chaco Canyon as a location important to Pueblo ancestors. Archaeological evidence and Pueblo oral traditions suggest there are strong relationships between Chaco and Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, Laguna, and the eastern Pueblos. This is not surprising – archaeologically, we know that many groups came together at Chaco Canyon a thousand years in the past. Those peoples also later dispersed, carrying with them ceremonies, stories, traditions, memories, beliefs, and practices traceable back in various forms to Chaco Canyon. Hopi, Zuni, and Eastern Pueblo oral traditions tell of an ancestral place called White House, where a series of seminal events transpired that relate to the development of Pueblo ceremonialism.<sup>29</sup>

Hopi clan histories describe emergence into this world through a succession of worlds below. After they emerged, a spirit being, M̄asaw, directed the Hopi to undertake a series of migrations before ultimately gathering to live at their current home, Tuuwanasavi, or the center place. For the Hopi, Chaco Canyon is Yupkōyvi, a place where the Parrot, Katsina, Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Tobacco, Cottontail, Rabbitbrush and Bamboo clans gathered and shared their ceremonial knowledge before proceeding on their migrations to Tuuwanasavi. The kivas of Pueblo Bonito are for the Salako ceremony, brought to Yupkōyvi by the Bow Clan, and the great kiva Casa Rinconada is for the basket ceremony, sponsored by the Parrot Clan.<sup>30</sup> Along their migrations, M̄asaw instructed the Hopi to make footprints, or “ang kuktota,” in the form of shrines, petroglyphs, and structures to record their passing. Many Hopi believe that archaeological sites survive today because they are the tangible, intentional markers that ancestors left to connect the present with the past, and to indicate ongoing Hopi land stewardship.<sup>31</sup>

Chaco also figures prominently in Navajo stories and ceremonies, including traditions surrounding the origins of the Kin yaa’ áanii (Towering House Clan), the Tl’ízlání (Many Goats Clan), Ánaasázi Táchiiní (Red Running into Water Clan), and Tséńjikiní (Cliff Dwelling Clan).<sup>32</sup> Navajo stories tell about a Great Gambler, or Nááhwi-ihbíihí, who lived at Chaco and enslaved all the people before he was overthrown.<sup>33</sup> But Navajo voices are marginalized in Southwest archaeology. This is, in part, the legacy of a 20th century anthropological narrative that has portrayed a homogenous group of Athabaskans (including Navajo ancestors) entering the empty landscape of northwest New Mexico several centuries after the departure of all Pueblo peoples for Hopi, Zuni, and the Rio Grande.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the Navajo have been considered by some to have little to say about a past that is not theirs, despite the fact that contemporary Navajo occupy

29 Lekson and Cameron 1995, 194–195; Lekson 1999, 145–150; Stirling 1942, 83; White 1942, 145.

30 Kuwanwisiwma 2004.

31 Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006, 156.

32 Begay 2004; Warburton and Begay 2005.

33 Judd 1954, 351–354; Matthews 1897; McPherson 1992, 87–93.

34 For example Adams 1991; Kintigh 1994; Kohler, Varien, and Wright 2010; Lyons 2003; Ortman 2010.

the Chacoan landscape and have close historic cultural and demographic relationships with Pueblo peoples.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4 Navajo ethnogenesis

Part of the controversy centers around the problem of Navajo ethnogenesis. The Navajo are Athabaskan speakers with linguistic ties to the Apache and to indigenous groups in northwest Canada. The timing of the arrival of Athabaskan speakers in the Southwest, and the nature of their interaction with Pueblo peoples, are topics of considerable contention. Traditional Navajo oral histories describe the Gathering of the Clans – a complex and prolonged process of ethnogenesis that suggests Navajo culture emerged out of interactions among Athabaskan, Numic, and Pueblo groups.<sup>36</sup> Linguists estimate Southwest Athabaskan speakers separated from the northern language complex between AD 950–1000.<sup>37</sup> Archaeological and historic evidence indicates that small, mobile groups of Athabaskans arrived in the Southwest around AD 1450.<sup>38</sup> These hunter/gatherer/horticulturalist sites are identified by the presence of forked-stick hogans, grayware pottery, maize, sweat lodges, and Pueblo ceramics obtained through trade.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the linguistic differences, there are many similarities between Pueblo and Navajo worldviews. Anthropologists have two hypotheses to account for these similarities: the *refugee* hypothesis, and the *acculturation* hypothesis. According to the refugee hypothesis, Navajo-Pueblo interactions date from the late 17th century when Pueblo groups joined the Navajo, and vice versa, as indigenous communities temporarily drove Spanish invaders from northern New Mexico during the Pueblo Revolt, between 1680 and 1692. But the Navajo had maize agriculture and Pueblo-style, polychrome pottery well before the time of the Pueblo Revolt.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, the acculturation hypothesis suggests that Athabaskan and Pueblo mixing happened in deep history, possibly as early as AD 1000–1300. The acculturation hypothesis fits well with the Gathering of the Clans scenario described in Navajo traditional histories. Oral traditions describing a Chacoan past may represent clan memories of ancient Pueblo peoples who joined with Athabaskan groups to become Navajo.

Clearly, Navajo – Pueblo relationships in deep history are a topic crying out for more research. However, this is a volatile area of archaeological investigation, in part because

35 Brugge 1968; Brugge 1983; Kelley and Francis 1998.

36 Reichard 1928; Hodge 1895; Matthews 1897; Towner 2003; Wheelwright 1949; Zolbrod 1984.

37 Hoijer 1956; Young 1983, 393.

38 Hovezak and Sesler 2009; Wilshusen 2010.

39 Hester 1962; Hester and Shiner 1963; Fetterman 1996; Hovezak and Sesler 2009; Towner 1996.

40 Towner 1996; Wilshusen 2010.

the Navajo and the Hopi have a bitter history of struggles over land use and territory.<sup>41</sup> When the U.S. government established the Navajo reservation in 1868, the Navajo were predominantly pastoralists whose territory ranged over most of northwest New Mexico and adjacent areas. The U.S. allotted approximately 3.3 million acres to the Navajo. This area has been expanded several times, so that today, the Navajo Nation covers over 15 million acres in northwest New Mexico, northeast Arizona, and southeast Utah – an area approximately the size of the state of West Virginia.

When the government established the Hopi reservation in 1882, the Hopi were sedentary farmers living in villages such as Walpi and Oraibi atop the Hopi Mesas in northeast Arizona. The Hopi reservation covers only 1.6 million acres. Its boundaries reflect where Hopi and Navajo were living in 1882, not where Pueblo farmers lived for the preceding two millennia. The U.S. did not take into account non-farming Hopi land use practices, such as gathering salt or eagle feathers for ceremonial uses, or religious pilgrimages to peaks, shrines, petroglyphs, and other archaeological sites. Furthermore, the U.S. government designated one district of the 1882 reservation for exclusive Hopi settlement, but 17 others were considered “joint use areas” with the Navajo.<sup>42</sup>

The situation was exacerbated in the mid-20th century when lucrative mineral resources were discovered in the joint use area. In 1958, the Hopi sued unsuccessfully for title to all of the 1882 reservation lands – the court ruling resulted in an unwieldy compromise involving continued joint use.<sup>43</sup> In 1966, legal contestation resulted in the ‘Bennett Freeze’ – a moratorium on any new building or home repairs in the joint use area until the situation could be resolved. In 1974, the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act divided the joint use area in two and required Navajo families living on the Hopi side to relocate, and vice versa. But many traditional Navajo families refused to be displaced from their familial homes of several generations. In 1996, the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act required those Navajo who refused to move to lease their homes from the Hopi by 2000 or be forcibly evicted.<sup>44</sup> This led to a United Nations human rights investigation in 1998, and in the end some Navajo have remained. The Bennett Freeze was finally lifted in May 2009 by President Obama.<sup>45</sup>

When we take this bitter history into account, it should be clear why archaeological sites – the tangible proof of ancient land tenure – acquire potent political power. Although Southwest archaeologists and anthropologists certainly recognize that ethnic and tribal identities are dynamic, permeable, and fluid, indigenous rights within the U.S. legal system rest upon tracing static groups back through time into the archaeological past. Contemporary indigenous rights to water, plants, minerals, and sacred landforms must legally be grounded in claims of *a priori* ancient use or occupation.

41 Aberle 1993; Brugge 1994.

42 Arthur 1904.

43 Shepardson 1983.

44 Congressional Record 1996.

45 Congressional Record 2009.

As discussed more extensively below, both archaeologists and indigenous peoples are drawn into legal situations where they must attempt to trace peoples, as groups, into the past, regardless of the anthropological problems this raises.<sup>46</sup>

## 5 Chaco Canyon – the site and the stake of struggle

If Chaco is a memory anchor, to what ships is she tied? It is of vital interest to both the Navajo and the Hopi to claim a relationship with the Chacoan past. The stakes include mineral, water, and landuse rights that have monetary value within a capitalist economy; they also include physical and ideological access to Chacoan sites for religious reasons. But perhaps most importantly, at stake here is the legitimacy of each group's oral histories – each group's conflicting stories about their own pasts. The struggle over Chaco has been escalating over the past 20 years, during a period when Southwest archaeologists have sought to build constructive and collaborative relationships with Native Americans, and Native Americans have gained considerable voice and control over the archaeological past.

The arguments extend to the very language we use to talk about peoples in the past.<sup>47</sup> In the late 19th century, Richard Wetherill, who initiated the first excavations at Chaco Canyon, coined the term “Anasazi” to refer to the prehistoric inhabitants. Wetherill reputedly asked his local, Navajo workmen if they had a name for these people, and the Navajo replied, “Anasazi”. This term has been translated at times as “ancient enemies”. By the 1930s, A. V. Kidder had codified the term to refer to a prehistoric culture area on the Colorado Plateau characterized by pueblo architecture, maize agriculture, and black-on-white pottery, and thus several generations of Anglo-American archaeologists, as well as the general public, referred to Chacoans as Anasazi.<sup>48</sup> But in the 1990s, Pueblo groups, particularly the Hopi, voiced stringent objection to archaeologists' use of what they consider a pejorative, Navajo term to describe their Pueblo antecedents. The Hopi wanted archaeologists to adopt “Hisatsinom”, which is translatable as “ancient Hopi”.<sup>49</sup> In an attempt to be conciliatory, in 1996 the National Park Service adopted the rather generic “Ancestral Pueblo”. However, the Navajo object strongly to “Ancestral Pueblo”, because it effectively excises the Navajo from participation in the discussion. Navajo scholars such as Richard Begay contend that the concept of *ánaasázi* encompasses many past peoples, some of whom are ancestral to the Navajo.<sup>50</sup> It is important to clarify that Begay and his colleagues are not arguing that *all* Navajo came from *all*

46 See Ferguson 2004 for a good discussion.

47 Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2009.

48 Cordell 1984, 77–88.

49 Dongoske et al. 1997.

50 Begay 2003; Walters and Rogers 2001.

Anasazi, but rather that *some* Navajo are descended from *some* ánaasází.<sup>51</sup> So, Navajo archaeologists prefer to retain the term “Anasazi” to refer to these ancestors.

For contemporary archaeologists, any of these label choices for past peoples has political implications in the present. “Ancestral Pueblo” signals an alliance with Pueblo peoples against the Navajo. The use of “Anasazi” denotes an alliance with the Navajo, but therefore against Pueblo peoples. If one attempts to circumvent the entire issue by calling the ancient subjects of study “the people, the inhabitants, the Chacoans, etc.,” then both the Pueblo and the Navajo construe that because the archaeologist is not firmly in one camp s/he must clearly be in the other.

In Chaco Culture National Historic Park, park service archaeologists have struggled to negotiate a balance among these competing factions. The Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act – NAGPRA – required that the National Park Service consult with indigenous groups over the disposition of 282 burials and 725 funerary objects excavated from Chaco Canyon over the past century. Part of this consultation involves determining “cultural affiliation.”<sup>52</sup>

However, NAGPRA has imprecise and problematic language regarding cultural affiliation that has left the door open for a host of interpretive issues. Cultural affiliation rests upon shared identity between a present group and a past group. Cultural affiliation is to be determined using a preponderance of evidence from 10 categories: geography, kinship, biology, archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, folklore, oral tradition, history, and expert opinion. The law does not dictate exactly what a ‘preponderance’ of evidence looks like. Furthermore, social groups past and present are not bounded, homogenous, permanent units, but are comprised of smaller groups – such as clans – that have come together and moved apart over time. The Hopi, for example, do not themselves consider that they became Hopi until they gathered at Tuuwanasavi on the Hopi Mesas. Before this, their ancestors were organized into various clans that traveled, separately and together, across the Southwest. In short, the way the law is written allows for various factions to interpret cultural affiliation as more inclusive, or less.<sup>53</sup>

In 1990, the Chaco Culture National Historic Park began a consultation process regarding the burials and funerary objects in question with a meeting that involved representatives from five tribes: the Acoma, Zia, Zuni, Hopi and the Navajo.<sup>54</sup> Everyone agreed that the human remains should be reburied. But this process unfolded at the same time that the Navajo-Hopi land dispute was escalating, in the 1990s. In May 1994, the Hopi Tribal Council passed a resolution declaring Hopi affiliation with the Anasazi, as well as other ancient groups. In October 1995, the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department sent documentation to the park service outlining a basis for Navajo

51 Warburton and Begay 2005, 537.

52 Schillaci and Bustard 2010.

53 Ferguson 2004.

54 Schillaci and Bustard 2010.



cultural affiliation to Chaco. In September 1998, all four Pueblo groups (Hopi, Zuni, Zia, and Acoma) submitted an official request for repatriation and reburial of the Chaco human remains, and the Navajo said that they would not make a separate claim for repatriation. In March 1999, Chaco Culture National Historic Park archaeologists completed their cultural affiliation assessment, finding that 20 out of 25 possible Southwest Native American tribes are culturally affiliated with Chaco, including both the Hopi and the Navajo. In May 1999, the Hopi Tribe brought a formal complaint before the NAGPRA review committee, arguing that the park did not consult with the tribal groups one by one, nor did it assess sites on a case-by-case basis; the crux of this complaint seems to have been the inclusion of the Navajo as culturally affiliated. Senior Southwest archaeologists Linda Cordell and Keith Kintigh provided expert testimony against the inclusion of the Navajo. In 2000, the review committee found the Hopi complaint to have merit and asked the park to redo the cultural affiliation study. In 2006, the human remains were repatriated to the four Pueblo tribes and were buried within the park in a secret location under the supervision of Hopi and Acoma tribal elders. In 2010, park service archaeologists published a lengthy discussion explaining their reasoning for including the Navajo.<sup>55</sup> Circumventing the volatile and understudied issue of Navajo ethnogenesis, Schillaci and Bustard argue that Navajo peoples share group identity with Chacoans because of centuries of Navajo intermarriage and exchange of religious and other cultural ideas with Pueblo peoples. Cordell and Kintigh disagree, pointing out that contemporary Euro-Americans have also intermarried with Pueblo peoples and have exchanged cultural and religious ideas,<sup>56</sup> so by Schillaci and Bustard's logic, Euro-Americans would also be culturally affiliated with Chaco. Cordell and Kintigh contend that this interpretation renders the concept of cultural affiliation essentially meaningless and does not honor the spirit of the law.

In 2017, the cultural affiliation of human burials and associated materials from Chaco Canyon is again at the center of a conflict, this time involving materials housed at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York. A group of researchers led by Douglass Kennett published a study in *Nature and Communications* announcing that they had used DNA samples from burials kept at AMNH to demonstrate the presence of a "matrilineal dynasty" at Pueblo Bonito.<sup>57</sup> The researchers did not consult or discuss their work with Pueblo, Navajo, or other indigenous groups. They conducted and published their work even though Pueblo people generally do not support destructive analyses of ancient remains, and despite the potentially volatile nature of a DNA study in a climate where multiple indigenous groups claim descendant relationships with Chaco. A review committee from the AMNH gave the researchers permission to

55 Schillaci and Bustard 2010.

56 Cordell and Kintigh 2010.

57 Kennett et al. 2017.

conduct the work without consultation based on the AMNH's 2000 NAGPRA classification of the Pueblo Bonito burials as "culturally unidentifiable." The AMNH committee did this despite the lengthy controversy and uneasy 2006 resolution over the reburial and repatriation of Chacoan human remains held by the National Park Service. However, the issue has never been whether the burials are Pueblo, but rather, to what extent other groups such as the Navajo may also claim affiliation.<sup>58</sup> The technically legal, but ethically questionable, actions of the AMNH and Kennett et al. have violated the fragile trust between archaeologists and indigenous stakeholders. Tribal leaders are now calling for re-examination of the AMNH's "culturally unidentifiable" ruling.<sup>59</sup>

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

The situation at Chaco brings new poignancy to the shopworn phrase 'who owns the past'? In an ideal world, we could set aside the identity politics and simply work to foster respect for past and present peoples as fellow human beings. Archaeological pasts could be shared and appreciated by all groups as common human heritage. However, the legal and political realities of indigenous life in a post-colonial world preclude adopting such a perspective.<sup>60</sup> Pueblo and Navajo peoples have lost, gained, adapted and changed as a result of half a millennium of colonialist domination. Today they are minority populations on a landscape that was once entirely theirs. Tangible resources such as water, oil, gas, timber, and pasture offer economic benefits, but that is merely a small piece of what is at stake in the American Southwest. Not only have native peoples lost most of their lands, but they have been denigrated as savages, impoverished through destruction of traditional lifeways, and 're-educated' at boarding schools by Euro-Americans who sought to assimilate them, saving their lives but destroying their culture. This history has left deep scars upon peoples that have nonetheless remained culturally and demographically resilient.<sup>61</sup> Today, at *lieux de discorde* such as Chaco Canyon, it is the very legitimacy of indigenous history (and thus, the indigenous right to exist as self-determinant people) that is at stake.

Both anthropologists and indigenous scholars recognize that ethnicity is not static across time but is perhaps best modeled as braided streams in a wash, with subsets of groups coming together and moving apart, retaining some materials and ideas, and leaving others behind.<sup>62</sup> We recognize that NAGPRA's language of 'cultural affiliation' is deeply problematic. The idea of tracing static cultural entities through time is not only

58 Cordell and Kintigh 2010; Schillaci and Bustard 2010.

59 Balter 2017.

60 Clifford 2000; Clifford 2004; McGuire 1992.

61 Henson 2008.

62 Ferguson 2004.



Fig. 10 Navajo archaeologist Davina Two Bears at a Chacoan site.

theoretically untenable but archaeologically impossible. Nonetheless, this legal protection for bodies, places, resources, and archaeological sites is a great leap forward in legal rights for indigenous tribes, and they are not about to weaken or relinquish it for the sake of a better fit with anthropological models. The legal status of indigenous groups as sovereign entities under U.S. law is grounded in an essentialist view of tribal identity as longstanding and unchanging. The hard-won rights of indigenous peoples for self-determination are based in the argument that they were in the Americas first. But all indigenous groups are not the same – tribes such as the Navajo and the Hopi have variable histories, rights, and economic and political power within the U.S. social and legislative fabric. It should not be surprising that indigenous groups would employ arguments of essentialism and primogenesis against one another, when these are the tools of power that have been handed them by U.S. legislation.

What are the rights and responsibilities of archaeologists as stakeholders in this complex situation? There is no simple answer to this question. As memory anchors, archaeological sites link us through time with people who came before. When these sites are also *lieux de discorde*, it reminds us that relationships with multiple versions of the past are complex and contested. Ultimately archaeologists are engaged in a social and politi-

cal activity that occurs in the present. Our words, our choices of theoretical perspectives, our choices to listen to some voices and not others have real impacts for living people today. In my view, it is time in the Southwest to respect and investigate Navajo views on their origins and their relationships with the Anasazi (Fig. 10). We should be treating the prospect of Navajo cultural affiliations with Chaco as a research question, not as a foregone conclusion. But most importantly, as anthropologists we should assume the responsibility to use our positions, voices, and resources to foster mutual respect and consideration for all.

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O'Halloran, after Ortiz 1972. 4–10 Photos by Ruth M. Van Dyke.

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