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INFRASTRUCTURES OF CARE IN NDN SPACES: MUTUAL AID AS A FORM OF RADICAL RELATIONALITY

Nicholet Deschine-Parkhurst
Arizona State University

Alaina Sarah George
Arizona State University

Introduction

There is a growing field of research on Native American and Indigenous peoples contemporary uses of social media platforms for justice and liberation. The Internet and social media platforms afford Native Americans in the United States the ability to connect with others, organize, and mobilize for social justice beyond geographical boundaries and across the Native diaspora. These causes are related to land, culture, and self-determination, as observed through Idle No More (Raynauld, Richez, & Boudreau Morris, 2018; Barker, 2015), the #NoDAPL resistance (Risling Baldy, 2021; Deschine Parkhurst, 2021), the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit (MMIWG2S) movement (Moeke-Pickering, Cote-Meek, & Pegoraro, 2018), and mutual aid, the focus of our study. The ability to amplify and disseminate information for causes is uniquely important for Native Americans in the U.S. because Native peoples are highly dispersed living both on reservation lands and in the Native diaspora while maintaining deep cultural ties.

Decolonizing Methodologies

Decolonizing methodologies are a fundamental centering of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledges (Smith, 2012). Decolonizing methodologies are political in nature because it involves a “knowing-ness of the colonizer’ and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination” (Smith, 2012, p. 40). We are reminded that, “decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (2012, p.35). At its core, decolonization is interested in the “repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.1). Settler colonialism in the U.S. is also gendered, and decolonizing work must also address the heteropatriarchy (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill,

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2013). And so, decolonizing work should inherently be approached from an Indigenous feminist perspective.

Indigenous Feminist Approach

In Internet and social media studies, decolonizing research that takes an Indigenous feminist research approach unsettles the dominant theories of social media use and helps center our focus on the possibilities that Indigenous peoples already imagine for themselves whether it be to strengthen their communities and culture, to work towards resistance and decolonization, or to move them towards resurgence and beyond (Carlson & Frazer, 2020; Duarte & Vigil-Hayes, 2021; Deschine Parkhurst, 2021). Duarte and Vigil-Hayes describe that a practice of digital Indigenous feminist approach “is about leveraging a decolonial or anticolonial critique of ICTs toward creating alternative structures – both tangible and intangible – that allows for the rapid and secure dissemination of information and knowledge for the benefit of marginalized peoples, centering the goals of Indigenous women and girls” (2021, p.93). To further illustrate, when researchers practice decolonial Indigenous feminist ethics of care the relationality and deep work they’re engaging in can help to build research teams with domain experts, develop thorough research methods, curate rich and robust datasets, and interpret otherwise seemingly non-relevant results.

Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón

We are two Diné scholars, and approach this research with the Diné emphasis on K'é and Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón. Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón is Diné epistemology, a complex system of knowledge encompassing two paradigms: Beauty Way (Hózhóójii-female) and Protection Way (Naayée' k'egho-male), with hózhó at its core. (Nez, 2018). It is important to understand these concepts as the heart of the matter is the ability of the Diné to act in ways that respect the concepts of Diné epistemologies despite the capitalist-hetopatriarchal society in which they find themselves today. And the ability of Diné to continue those traditions forward to a Future which remains Indigenous. Within the Diné ways of knowing, knowledge is an iterative, collective process. Traditionally there was social knowledge sharing and confirmation of knowledge. That is what this process is here, it's taking information and asking questions to make sure that what is written is faithful to what happened.

Infrastructure and Radical Relationality

The development of infrastructure (both physical and non-physical) on tribal reservation lands is costly and complicated by the trust status of the lands and Federal Indian Law/Federal Indian Policy. This translates to official progress being slow going. Outside companies and entities at times offer to assist but fail to take the time to understand the complicated history between tribes and the US, and the federal, state, and tribal policies which create complex conditions to implement new initiatives. This creates spaces where people can fall through gaps trying to exist in a world that was thrust upon them. This is where the Internet and radical relationality (Estes, Yazzie, Denetdale, & Correia,

2021) become extremely important to both individuals and communities who are struggling.

Diné, and members of other tribes, have extensive knowledge of the areas from which they come, the needs, and the people. They are extremely capable of utilizing all of this knowledge to pursue meaningful and useful interventions in their communities. The Internet and social media platforms are sites whereby Native communities are advocating for the known needs of the people in their communities and implementing efforts of mutual aid. Within Navajo communities, social media is used as an infrastructure of care to facilitate mutual aid, a form of radical relationality. This is observed as grassroots organizations fundraising for resources to be directly distributed to Native peoples.

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