

Whitney White

Contemp. Native Am Issues B

Schwarz and Sturm Paper

11/13/06

The Navajo, originally directed to live within the geographical area demarcated by the four sacred mountains by Changing Woman, the most highly revered of all Navajo Holy People, reside in the Southwestern part of the United States. The common elements for understanding Navajo personhood are the importance of the principles of synecdoche, homology, and complementarity. Whereas the Cherokee, who mostly live in Oklahoma now after their forced removal from Georgia; rely on the importance of the symbol of blood for their identity politics.

“The common elements in the Navajo oral histories combine to form a core worldview, a paradigm for ritual action and use of space, structured on homology, complementarity, and synecdoche” (Schwarz, p.11). The Homology element says that parts share similar structure; people are like a microcosm of the whole world. The complementarity element shows that wholes are made up of dual integrated components, like male and female or life and death. Whereas the synecdoche element is that every part is equivalent to the whole, so that anything done to or by means of a part is held to have influence upon the whole.

These three common elements hold great significance for contemporary Navajo people in the understanding of problems they are faced with. “In their explanations of contemporary issues such as the hantavirus outbreak of 1993, the forced relocation of Navajo people off land partitioned to the Hopi tribe, a prophetic visit by Navajo

supernaturals in 1996, inappropriate contact with snakes in 1994, the perils of uranium mining, and the loss of relatives to the seductive powers of alcohol, Navajo people make implicit or explicit reference to various elements and versions of Navajo oral tradition. This indicates that when faced with modern concerns, Navajo people seek insight in the stories that make up their oral history, the Navajo origin and emergence narratives” (Schwarz, pg. 181).

The first is the mystery illness of 1993, Navajo people had flu like symptoms, and scientists themselves didn’t know what the illness was from. So the Navajo turned to their origin stories and history to interpret what was going on. The elders said the illness was from disharmony, the upset of Hozho among the Navajo, and that they needed to go back to Navajo ways, the covenant, and to do ceremonies and sing the songs. The elders were particularly concerned because the preserving of Navajo ways and culture was supposed to be by the young people.

All six of the contemporary issues involving Navajo people described earlier is caused by what the Navajo say is a disharmony, an unsteadiness of Hozho, not living the ways of Navajo culture and beliefs, and the neglect of the three common elements that make up Navajo personhood. Synecdoche is tied in with the forced relocation because of the upset of balance, the ties the Navajo have with the land, in the burying of their umbilical cords is lost. This all could cause them to be physically and spiritually ill. Also the activism involving the uranium mining and the emotional expression by crying has an effect on the “whole” of synecdoche. With the holy visit of 1996, the Navajo are again not living the Navajo way of life; they are neglecting spirituality and cultural relations with other people and natural world. The drought is told them they weren’t

doing the ceremonies, etc so the holy people are keeping the rain. Again the problem with alcoholism can be said it was caused by the disruption of synecdoche, homology, and complementarity.

For the Navajo people in the importance of the principles of the three common elements for understanding personhood, we see that they construct their identity by culture and cultural ways. Although for the Cherokee, the importance of blood and identity is by social and political means.

When living in Georgia, the Cherokee had a political and social structure, they had a courthouse, houses, schools, and took serious the United States government policies, but never the less, they were still faced with forced removal. Their removal is what we know today as the Trail of Tears, walking a distance of eight hundred miles to Oklahoma.

Cherokee identity was tied to the mother since it is matrilineal, and to the Cherokee's blood was connected to the reproductive process. Blood also defined who wasn't a Cherokee, and it was stronger than ethnicity since it was tied to land and creation stories. In intermarriage and interbreeding with non-Indians in citizenship didn't matter since the children belonged to clan of their mother. However that plays an important role in Cherokee men's involvement with their slaves because if they impregnated them, where would the children go since citizenship was matrilineal. This idea of blood quantum was a form of ethnic cleaning, and a way for the U.S. government to rid themselves of their Indian problem by literally making them white by breeding. Since the white Cherokee's were of the upper class because they were more assimilated and were the ones who held leadership roles the majority of the time.

The villages of Cherokee people were residential and subsistence, whereas towns were more political. There was also the development of tribal government, centralization were decisions on tribal level compared to the confederacy, where they acted strongly in various wars. Also the white Cherokee's didn't side with the confederacy because it had a lot of autonomy. Since "it was in the realm of politics that Cherokee identity was further created, expressed, and manipulated" (Sturm, pg. 36). There was also more diversity culturally and in racial make up among the Cherokee. "Where a Cherokee lived, worshipped, and weighed in on political matters was a fundamental aspect of his or her identity" (Sturm, pg. 36).

There is also the birth of a racial idea by a person's phenotype, you look more Cherokee by being $\frac{1}{4}$ Cherokee because it is seen as being a lot of Cherokee or even by just speaking the language you are. However for full blood Cherokee, they are considered to be traditional and marginalized, and are the poorest even though they are at the center of Cherokee nation in culture and values. We have that shift were blood quantum determines class status and cultural status is conflated. Also the leadership of the Cherokee nation is by someone who looks and seems more Cherokee to represent to the outside world rather than be culturally full or even speak Cherokee. There is a tension between national identity (sense of being a people) and social/political reality.

If a Cherokee person is less Cherokee then they have more social importance because they blend in more than a full blood or traditionalist. There is the "idea that blood is a quantifiable index of cultural and racial authenticity" that "shapes Cherokee endogamy" because it is enough to maintain and they don't want to be lower than like the

traditionalist and marginalized. They just want the advantages to being mixed because they have the option of choosing to be Cherokee or not or even having better access to leadership roles. “Racialized, quantifiable blood identity makes no distinction regarding lineal descent,” it doesn’t matter how your $\frac{1}{4}$, you just are. So White Cherokees have actively used ideologies of blood to wrestle power from other segments of the population.

For the Navajo, cultural aspects were more important for identity and in understanding of Navajo personhood. Throughout contemporary issues involving the Navajo, they resort to blaming themselves because they feel they were culturally exhausted, so the elders suggested returning to original Navajo lifeways. However for the Cherokee in the importance of the symbol of blood in Cherokee identity, the less culturally intact were preferred because their identity was based around social and political aspects.