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INTRODUCTION

Doing Storytelling as Epistemology

The Gift of Corn

Long ago, two Choctaw men were camping along the Alabama River when they heard a beautiful but sad sound. They followed the sound until they came upon Ohoyo Osh Chishba, Unknown Woman, standing on an earthen mound. The men asked how they could help her, and she answered, “I’m hungry.” The men gave her all their food, but the lady ate only a little and thanked them with a promise.

“Tell no one you saw me. I will ask the Great Spirit to give you a gift. Return here at the new moon,” she said. The Choctaw men went home and said nothing.

At the new moon, they returned to the river as instructed, but Ohoyo Osh Chishba was not there. In the place where they had seen her, though, stood a tall green plant. That plant is corn, and it is a great gift, indeed! (Nittak Hullo 2021)

I begin this chapter with a Chahta¹ story of the Unknown Woman, included in the Christmas card that was sent to members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma from the tribe’s chief, Gary Batton, and assistant chief, Jack Austin Jr., in December 2021. Annually, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, of which I am a member,² distributes Christmas cards that include a Choctaw

story and a Christmas tree ornament that represents the story. In this book, I have included a few of the stories from the Christmas cards, some from the *The Biskinik*, which is the Choctaw Nation's newspaper, as well as stories from my mother's small archive and from other Choctaw storytellers. As I have added these stories, I have preserved the original spellings and punctuation. The stories are interesting to me because they are my heritage but also because by closely reading them, it is possible to see the influence of Christian missionaries, the integration of settler education, and the creeping of modern culture on the tellings of these stories. The Choctaw were subsumed into settler colonialism early in the assimilation and genocide processes, by treaty and by the removal. In this text, I argue that the variations in these stories are an important part of Indigenous identity—that the stories are flexible enough to be teaching stories but also memory stories and history stories, and they are at their heart identity stories. As Thomas King writes, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (122). I argue here that the truth about stories is that they are everything we are: history, culture, identity, kinship, faith, resilience, sovereign peoples.

The woman in the story who gifts corn to the people is an important figure in Chahta culture as well as many Native American cultures across the United States. Across Indian Country, she is also called the Corn Goddess, or the Corn Maiden, or the Corn Lady. In different tellings of Chahta stories, she is considered herself the Great Spirit or the daughter of the Great Spirit. Later in this book, there is an expanded and older version of this story. In some ways this story has been condensed to fit on a Christmas card while retaining older details like that the call of the woman was beautiful but sad and that while she was offered all the food the men had, the woman only took a little. There are, however, significant differences, as I mentioned. A rhetorical question I have is, why does the identification of her as a deity vary across the stories? As a storyteller, I vary details to highlight the significance and purpose of the story. For example, if I wanted to downplay pre-Christian Chahta beliefs, I would not mention the fact that the woman represents our Great Spirit or the daughter of our Great Spirit, because that would not be consistent with the settler-colonial patriarchy the tribe, and popular culture, embodies now.

I am using the Chahta Corn Goddess as an example that there are stories that have been told the same way by different storytellers and told differently by the same storytellers to emphasize different aspects of her. These different stories are constructed by different storytellers, art, design, cultural affinity, and kinship. Such is the story of the Chahta Corn Goddess, beginning with

the two brothers. They might be impoverished, or not; or they might be sons of a chief; sometimes they're warriors, but two brothers went in search of food because they were hungry. Either in reality or sometimes in a dream, one of the brothers kills a hawk, or it could be a crow, and he roasts it. According to all the stories, it is delicious. One or both brothers are approached by a woman who is sometimes elderly but always starving. They give her food, and after she eats it, she transforms into a beautiful woman. She may have long dark hair or golden silken hair. She might wear pearls around her neck or all the way down to her feet. She rewards the brothers with a corn stalk or sometimes corn seeds.

Sometimes the brothers receive the gift right away from the hand of the woman, sometimes they are told to return in a week and find the stalk growing in the ground, sometimes it is a year of waiting. The brothers either remain hungry during this waiting time and are rewarded for their waiting, or not. Her golden hair could be the cornsilk and her pearls the corn kernels, or she could simply be a beautiful woman, or she is the daughter of the Father Sun and Mother Moon. Or not. In whatever way the story is told, it explains how the Chahta received corn, our most valuable and revered crop. A Native person can see an image of Corn Goddess and know that Corn Goddess holds those similarities, differences, nuances, and contradictions within her whole meaning—which is unlike western storytelling. I know the story of George Washington and how when he was a young boy, he cut a tree with his axe. When confronted by his father, Washington told the truth, and we are all to aspire to this virtue. That is the lesson. The legend has little variance because it has a single meaning. It is also a cultural rhetoric, reinforcing what in American thinking are great virtues, such as admitting to a lie. But Corn Goddess is a cultural knowing and a relational knowing. It is Indigenous knowing, shared, told, retold, described, historical, mythical, a teaching-learning story, and containing many more “thick” (Cottom 2019) layers of meaning about and around what is valued, what is meaningful, and what is collective identity. Corn Goddess tells us many things about our history, including the value of corn to Native Americans—a vital crop for farmers. Corn Goddess teaches gratitude, the gift of corn, the value of resilience and persistence, and more. And as I said before, Corn Goddess is not isolated to the Chahta, as corn goddess or corn maiden stories can be found across Turtle Island.³

But let me take a step back for a moment and talk about research, what it means to research, what methodology means, when and by whom it is applied, and for what reason. Scholars perform research to gain knowledge.

A research paradigm is the underlying beliefs and assumptions, agreed upon by scientists or researchers, as to how problems should be understood and therefore solved or addressed. As Shawn Wilson writes in *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, “as paradigms deal with beliefs and assumptions about reality, they are based upon theory and are thus intrinsically value laden” (2008, 33). Reality is subjective, and the study of what is knowledge is an interrogation of the agreed-upon reality. Once while in the countryside, my friend Daniel saw a fox. He posted to his Facebook friends the question of what it meant to see the fox cross his path. Daniel is not Indigenous, and neither are most of his friends. His friends responded cleverly, and some with quips about what the fox said, a cultural reference to “The Fox (What Does the Fox Say),” a Norwegian pop-electronica song from 2013, the video for which has been seen upwards of a billion times on YouTube. What the fox says is western cultural currency—a popular song. For the Chahta, the fox is associated with shadows and can be a creature who moves between shadows and worlds. In scientific classification, the fox is in the Canidae family. In biological study, foxes do not speak in human language. For Chahta, foxes may speak. What is the agreed-upon reality of the fox, then? This is an ontological question: what is the real fox? In science, the classification is a value-laden system, as to classify is to define, catalog, quantify, and stabilize knowledge. It is the colonization of creatures to settle reality. For the Chahta, Fox has thicker, perhaps the thickest of meanings; Fox delves into the dark things that Chahta know about life, afterlife, souls, and the nature of good and bad. Fox is both frightening and reassuring that there is a deep and wide life—it is challenging and is not comfortably contained in one idea—Fox strains at the boundaries of meaning. Fox is definitely not settled, and it does not matter to the Shadows if Fox is classified by westerners as canine. I bring up the fox story as a storyteller here in discussing the purpose of research as to explain that there is a quantifiable, definable, catalogable, settled reality that is effectively described by western knowledge production. But this western fox is not the fixed reality we agree upon, because in Chahta cultural knowledge production, Canidae is not Fox. There is not one reality nor one way to know Fox, but if I am writing in an Indigenous research paradigm, I am writing about the cohesive tension of stories and meanings that is Fox.

I want to say here that this book is written from an Indigenous worldview of good relations. “Good relations” is the practice of coming to a collaboration with openness, good faith, sincerity, reciprocity, and a respect for others as relatives with each other, the land, and its ecologies. I write here in a

good-faith effort, with respect for and openness with all my relations, including the readers of this text. I commit to telling the stories here carefully and with concern for the representation of Indigenous peoples found within. I also write with equal care and respect for those mentors and colleagues whose advice and experiences I discuss that have shaped how I research, write, and think. In this book, I instantiate this worldview as I tell these stories, pairing my methodologies with explicative text on how the methods and analysis do research work as I write about them. I theorize and apply Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies to case studies and reflect on what can be learned about ourselves and our world through these practices. In this book, I offer four case studies describing and doing Indigenous and digital rhetorics. This book is conceived as co-construction of knowledge between these projects, their participants, these words, and the reader. I invite the reader to walk with me as I explore both what it means to experience being Indigenous in digital spaces and the possibilities that open by applying Indigenous methods and practices to non-Indigenous contexts.

First let me tell the story of how I arrived at my Indigenous scholarly identity and began doing Indigenous-oriented digital rhetorical work. I am telling this story to situate myself as an Indigenous woman, daughter, technologist, and rhetorician. Here, I explain and describe my journey, identifying myself as a professional technologist, and then as an academic, and then as an Indigenous academic. My hope here is to do several things. First, I want to discuss and demonstrate how it is possible to shift thinking from a western worldview to an Indigenous one, and to shift from a western worldview to an Indigenous life-world. My recounting of how I arrived here is not about bringing Indigenous peoples and their cultures into the digital present, for we are already here and not relegated to an analog past, or worse, the distant past. As Elena Ortiz of *The Red Nation* podcast reminds us, even relegated as our peoples are to wings of natural history museums, we are in fact not dinosaurs (Ortiz 2023). No, my recounting is about how to break away from western ways of knowing by doing self-reflective and self-interrogative identity work within digital research frameworks. I want to talk a bit about our teaching and learning and how western practices are replicated in students, at times writing over valuable, existing cultural ways of being. I want to demonstrate doing cultural rhetorics, as I situate how I do knowings and meanings within my own culture(s), digital, Indigenous, feminist, and otherwise. Finally, I want to demonstrate writing research as story, building on the work of other Indigenous scholars and the kinds of thick and robust meanings Indigenous methods have to offer.

I did not set out to write my first monograph about indigeneity, or being Indigenous, online. In fact, my first several scholarly projects, including my dissertation, examined gender online, through a feminist lens trained on my software industry experience. As a graduate student and in my first few years as junior faculty, I thought my first book would be a feminist theory text about gender and technology. For me, with more than a decade spent in the technology industry, both writing code and managing software development projects, I thought what I had to offer to research conversations was my uniquely gendered experience with the technology industry and its master narratives encoded in its design processes. I saw “project manager” as my identity because I had been making computer programs since childhood, beginning with BASIC and then following with spreadsheet macros and finally database design. You can get a lot done with a little bit of knowledge about how Microsoft products work. You can get even more done with some platform-specific classes, which my employer at the time paid for. “Project manager” is how I knew myself for a long time. This way of knowing myself was largely settler-colonial, and here I will explain how. As a child, I was the daughter of a Chahta woman,⁴ but that had little to no meaning in a settler-capitalist world, other than its cultural associations with alcohol, poverty, casinos, and violence, which are stereotypical and racist settler-colonial narratives of Native American lives. But in general, in the capitalist paradigm, children are not fully participating members of the settler-capitalist society until they finish their educations and assume an employed role in that same society. Children grow to become lawyers, doctors, truck drivers, software developers, teachers, and service workers. You do not *become* in settler capitalism until you are a wage earner and product consumer. I started working in technology at sixteen and *became* a software development project manager as an adult.

As a technologist, I have been a part of both public- and private-sector development teams and implementation projects. I have worked with large numbers of coworkers in lumbering enterprise environments, and I have pulled my weight on a small start-up team. Although it has been many years since I did this kind of work to earn money, I can still play with databases, I can write some code, I can design and administrate websites, and I can maybe help you fix your email. I am a technologist, or so, as I said, my settler-colonial, capitalist worldview I had been programmed into tells me. Then, after my time in the technology sector, I enrolled in graduate school, and my identity began to change. Over time, my perception shifted as feminist research methods and feminist theory courses had me thinking more

deeply about myself and reflecting on my role as a researcher. Maybe having some knowledge about technology was not the only thing I was bringing to the field, or maybe not even the most important thing. What I brought, upon much feminist reflection, was myself, and myself was many things. Yes, I identified by my job, as most people simmering in settler-colonial economies do. But graduate school, with its practice of self-identification and feminist self-reflection, helped me disentangle myself from the neoliberalization of identity and discover myself as a complex, thinking, learning, growing person. Graduate school helped me recover from being only a capitalist production entity and reminded me that I was also a Native person, whose heritage had never been surrendered to the settler-colonial machine.

One of these emergent discoveries was my realization that my Chahta cultural identity and cultural practices greatly informed how I thought, communicated, and made and negotiated meaning(s) and knowing(s). In the past, I may have identified myself by my role in the economy, because that is how we identify people in the West (“And what do you do?” being the relevant conversational question), but once I started demonstrating thought processes and collaborative processes in a graduate cohort, my Indianness⁵ emerged. You can meet me in person and see a person of mixed heritage, but once we start collaborating, I cannot, even if I wanted to, hide my Indigenous ways of being in the world, because they are how I make knowledge. Through my courses in rhetoric and composition, I came to understand the importance of situatedness, space and place. And I began to see, when working so closely and deeply with my colleagues and professors, that many things about how I think and how I speak are different. My Native-Americanness was no longer relegated to my personal and family life; it was drawn into the forefront, because it is long established in the humanities that we negotiate knowledge practices and knowing through our many and varied positionalities. The field of cultural rhetorics, specifically, speaks to our constellated cultural constructions, through which we know, identify, and make meaning (Powell et al. 2014). We are our stories, particularly in Indian Country, where stories hold together in tellings, retellings, and sometimes contradictory tellings, in a kind of communal knowing, which challenges the “rugged individualism” of white, western realism and neoliberalism. I wanted, then, to unlink my job from my identity and return to the collective identity, a layered and complex identity, by which I always knew my private self. In other words, I wanted to reconfigure and unify myself, not as a consumer-worker in the technology industry but as a relative to

others, for whom value comes not from industry but from living and learning in my Indigenous lifeways, as well as the natural world.

I offer here a simple example of remaking myself by discussing here a bit about confronting my name. During my doctoral program, I realized I heard my last name from students many times a day, when they called me “Professor Cowles” or “Ms. Cowles.” At the time, I was using my husband’s last name—a choice I made in my early twenties to defer to the traditions of my in-laws’ patriarchal family and practice. But hearing his family name when I was being addressed every day by dozens of people did not seem to align with my self-identification as a Native teacher, learner, and community member. It did not reflect my own matrilineal family structure either. Up to that point, I had been in industry all my adult life, and my name was not something I thought about. I was always known by my first name or my user ID or handle or email address, or variations of both. A user handle is its own kind of identity; it is who you are within a delimited context of a system. It is created for the system, along with those of all the other members of the system (or a network), who have their own system-specific identities. It ties your name together with your competencies, your coworkers, and your specific space, place, and time. When I am working, and I am being called by my user handle, I know what is expected of me, I know I am one person in a specific network, and I know I am assessed for my abilities and contributions in the context of that network. This is another form of self-identity—myself as part of a larger group—yet only within the context of the network am I known. In this context, nothing else about me matters, especially not the personal. This applies in many ways to everyone, whether they come through industry or not. We have, as we joined networked society, adapted to a digital ID and a networked identity, across the platforms we use, like Twitter and Instagram, but also Blackboard and other learning management systems (LMSs), and even our e-commerce practices. But as Galloway and Thacker write about Geert Lovink’s work, “informatic networks are important, but at the end of the day, sovereign powers matter more” (2007, 1). After reading these scholars in coursework and considering my own position, I was beginning to see myself beyond networked identities, my digital life, and my keyboard.

My graduate-school (re)emerging identity of being a Native teacher, scholar, thinker, and knower raised personal feelings for me about my Indigenous identity, which had never been reflected in my industry jobs. I had occasionally referred to my indigeneity in passing, mostly in terms of why I could not work extra hours on a particular weekend. Here, I offer a side story

to understand the rare moments in industry when my indigeneity became visible. Even though I worked many hours a day, most days of the week, at the start, I occasionally had family obligations, like cooking for a party for my sister, Cathy. I once told an executive that I could not work on a weekend because it was my sister's birthday and I was cooking for the family. He said he would hire a caterer for me so I could still work the weekend and just take a break to pop in and enjoy the party, and then come back to work. In one view (if you squint, maybe) this offer is kindness, and from another view it is an appalling instance of neoliberalism. But I am Indigenous, and expressions of commitment and connection to family cannot be farmed out to a third party, no matter the intention. The point was not that there was food for the family dinner, the point was that I made and provided the food with my own hands and skills, food that was taught to me by my mother, handed down from her extended family network. So, a few times, my personal identity clashed with my industry identity. And my Indigenous identity was read as inconvenient, and I was viewed as too "stubborn" to set aside culture for the good of the project or the company. I was not seen in industry as a cohesive person, because I was a worker in a capitalist, technolibertarian context where culture is devalued and even rejected as an impediment to globalism.

Now that I was becoming a fully constellated Indigenous person in graduate school, I found myself questioning my identity and its connection to my work. As I have described here, I have always thought of myself in relation to my technology career. The technology industry and its culture, a toxic mix of neoliberalism, technolibertarianism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism, reinforced my identity as tech worker. By contrast, my identity of Native teacher-student-thinker-learner is not an Indigenous career; rather, it is a significant role situated within family and culture. Knowledge is not the books and empirical processes of a scholar, or the stored data bytes of a technologist; it is an amassed knowing, a constellation of collected experience through the sharing of stories, the details of the lives of the community, and a kind of collaborative building (Powell et al. 2014). Indigenous knowing is taught and constructed across generations in cooperation with the land, the community, and the extended family. Here, as a graduate student, I know myself as Helen's daughter, Esther Belle's granddaughter, a sister to Cathy, and a cousin to many. I am a Native teacher-student-thinker-learner, like the people in my extended network before me.

As I write this nonlinear narrative, I thank my mentors who introduced me to feminist theory and feminist scholarly practice. I thank those who taught

me network theory, kinship knowings, and postmodern theory. I thank my mother, who taught me how to garden, sew, and refinish and repair old things; how to cook together as carework; how and why to tell stories; and how to be in the network of our extended family. When I grew into my role of Native teacher-student-thinker-learner, I did so by working through feminist meta-cognition and feminist self-reflexivity. My own cultural practices of relating to others and situating myself within the context of my identity and my work, given the western framework of single-scholar knowledge-making, caused me both joy and conflict. I wanted to be a scholar, but I also wanted to be myself. This moment reminded me of the lunch party celebrating my completion of my master's degree, where my mother gave a brief speech. She said she wished me all the success in my plans to enter a doctoral program, and then she reminded me never to forget my family or what they had taught me. I often thought back to that moment while completing my doctoral coursework, especially when I was feeling isolated. It was in this period that I resolved the issue of my name, with support and encouragement from Dr. Karen Adams, with whom I studied sociolinguistics, and with a consultation with my mother. Dr. Adams reminded me that names matter, and we talked about matrilineal names and their power. I asked Mom what she thought about using Tekobbe as my name, and she said she thought it would "be an honor to remember the family." Needing her permission, or at least her approval, is an example of how I do not make major decisions for myself without considering their impact on my family and community. Mom loved the idea, so I went to court and changed my last name from my husband's last name to my family's name, Tekobbe, a name that dates to before the Dawes Rolls.⁶ My thinking was that if I were to be a Native teacher-student-thinker-learner-grower, I would be so as Indigenous, making visible my own voice. I would foreground my Indigenous identity and therefore my Indigenous ways of being and knowing, even as I continued thinking about and writing about the digital and the social. This is where the slow shift in my scholarship began, in a moment where my identity tacked in from multiple waypoints, from technologist, scholar, Indigenous woman, and teacher, and I built myself an authentic place to stand (Royster and Kirsch 2012).

This self-identification that prioritizes my indigeneity is important, because while I emerge as a more authentic version of myself and my ways of knowing, I find myself negotiating race in new and challenging ways, in terms of phenotype, of discursive practices, of collaborative practices, and of meanings and definitions of family, to name a few. Here is a fact about myself: I am Cindy Tekobbe, and I have blood quantum "evidence" that I am a member of

the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Blood quantum is a tangle in itself, because blood quantum is one of the genocidal processes inflicted on Indian Country by the settler state. Blood quantum is a colonial technology designed to mark off and then set apart Indian folks onto federal reservations. While all historical efforts to define people by drops of blood are racist, of the racialized identities in our nation, Native American is the only one quantified by both tribal rules and federal law and policies relating to who one's parents and grandparents are—by “blood.”

I often present this citizenship-membership status when I introduce myself as an Indigenous scholar—not the colonial blood quantum, only that I am a member of a sovereign Native nation, the Choctaw Nation. When I meet other (white) scholars, generally their first response is to assess my appearance to determine my Indianness. Often, I am told that I do not look very Indian, that they “never would have known” without my making a point of it. Or sometimes when I self-identify, they look at my face and ponder that there is a shadow of Indianness in the flare of my nose or the prominence of my cheekbones. These are supposedly concrete phenotypical markers that I must meet in order to be accepted as Indian (Arola 2017). What does it mean to “look” Indian, anyway? What does that look like? As Michele Leonard (2023) writes in “You Don’t Look Indian” from the *Unpapered* collection edited by Diane Glancy and Linda Rodriguez, Hollywood has for generations perpetuated ethnic stereotypes about Indianness, and those are the most familiar faces to us, the audience. Recently, *Reservation Dogs* (2021–2023), a program about Native Americans that has the participation of Indigenous people in its writing and production, has challenged the Hollywood stereotypes about what Indians are like (Leonard 2023, 126). Still, stereotypes persist, and I am sensitive to the perceptions of others that I am less (or not at all) Indian because of my appearance.

This whiteness-centric assessment of Indianness I will discuss in more detail in later chapters, but the takeaway here is that when I escaped one narrow box in my identification journey, I found myself in another. This time, a colonial, legislated box. Watanabe writes about the colonial and Indigenous tensions I am describing here, in “Critical Storying: Power through Survivance and Rhetorical Sovereignty” (2014). Our stories are not to be used to essentialize us through deficit narratives about poverty and underperforming students and blood quantum that is reduced with each subsequent generation until none of the Indian is left. This is why it is important to center Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies (CRIM), because the question of identity

is also a question of sovereignty (Brayboy 2005). Sovereignty is power, the power to define ourselves through our stories, and our stories are our theoretical practices and learning practices. It is through these stories that I know who I am, not by the flare of my nose or the color of my skin.

As I have explained, Native American identity is legislated, defined in various ways by law, both of the settler state and tribal governance. But we are our stories and our communities. A Native person when meeting another Native scholar will often ask for tribal affiliations and family names rather than discuss eye color or skin color. We do this to locate each other in the community of peoples and to determine if we share or overlap in those communities. Identity is not, then, what you look like but who your people are. An example of this can be read in the exchange in chapter 4 in my interview with Indigenous artist Jeffrey Veregge, when we exchange community locations and tribal affiliations. This practice is sustained by traditional collaborative identity work: we are who our people are, we are where we come from, and you belong to the community that claims you. Affiliate identity and family identity carry the tension between anti-colonialism and colonialism, where blood quantum is claimed as a valid identity practice in retaining tribal identities and is also legislated by the settler state in its genocidal practices of counting and controlling Native populations.

I am an enrolled Choctaw through my mother, who was also an enrolled Choctaw. My mother demonstrated this kinship when she enrolled my sister and me in her tribe with her genealogical records. Therefore, I have tribal identification to demonstrate my kinship, credentials that make me Choctaw for both my tribe and my university employer. When we fill out our equal employment paperwork, we, unlike other groups identified on the applications, have tangible “proof” that we are who we claim to be, if only for the settler state.⁷ I cannot count the number of times I have been told that I do not “look” Indian, as if (1) one’s Indianness can be determined by common appearance and (2) as if white folx are arbitrators of race, culture, and community. Why is my skin lighter than they expect? Why are my eyes blue-green? I say that I have been told that I am also of Irish, English, and Dutch ancestry, and then I become, by the assessment of some, not Indian enough. As my friend and colleague Amber Buck reminds me when I complain to her that I am caught in this racial-political tangle, “this is how whiteness works.” Whiteness is normative, whiteness is the default, whiteness subsumes and erases other identities—why else would I “claim” Native heritage, claim being the operative word, given that whiteness decides whether my claim is authentic, when

I clearly can also be white? On the other hand, the fact that I am of an identity other than white, one that has been subjected to centuries-long efforts of the settler state to remove, absorb, erase, and eliminate, also makes me inferior, because this is also how whiteness works. If you could be white (or presenting as white), why would you not?

For me, I reject the divisive and genocidal blood quantum. Instead, I know I am Chahta, because my mother was. My grandmother was. My aunt and uncles were, and their children are. I am of my family, again, of the people who claim me, and I speak, research, and write as an Indigenous woman not because of federal efforts to catalog and control Indians but because of these family relationships. In fact, these days, I often decline to answer questions about my Indianness when someone is speaking about how I look or other factors, like my education, that do not align with their notions of American Indian. I do not like to get into discussions with white-identifying folk of whether, with my mixed ancestry, I am Indian enough (in these types of discussions, where someone else assumes the right to define me, can I ever be enough?).

Another point of difference for Native scholars is that one's own community might censor a Native person for speaking a narrative in a way that is subsumed in, as Powell and coauthors write, a "prime" narrative (2014). In other words, because identities are raced, and racism stereotypes and condenses these identities into one nominal representative, sometimes when I speak for myself, what I say becomes what every Indian says and thinks. I feel this responsibility and risk acutely when I write, speak, or teach. Some of this feeling of precarity, of fear of my words carrying too much significance, for certain has to do with being raised to not draw attention to my Indianness, from parents who grew up under Jim Crow and my grandmother, who experienced various forms of racism and loss related to things like land and resource allotment and personal autonomy. I demonstrate some of this racial complexity and prime narrative in chapter 5 when I offer the case study of Payu Harris and his efforts to bring the first cryptocurrency to Indian Country. I will discuss more about Harris a little further down, but what is important here is that Harris is a self-identified Lakota, but this identity eventually led to the downfall of his cryptocurrency project, because he was at one time too Indigenous, not Indigenous enough, too white, not white enough, too outspoken, and not well-spoken enough. Knowing who we are is never enough for the settler-colonial authentication system, and Harris's case demonstrates the perils of this prime narrative of white supremacy.

I also want to say that more recently, as I was revising and preparing this book for publication, there has been an effort in academia and popular culture to root out “pretendians,” people who claim Indigenous ancestry but are not from Native communities—pretend Indians. Several prominent scholars have resigned or been removed from their positions in the United States and Canada. Sacheen Littlefeather, of notoriety from when she declined the Oscar for Marlon Brando in 1975, has been accused by researchers and journalists of being a pretendian. Their research on her genealogy, they argue, demonstrates that she is not Apache as she claimed. I will touch more on pretendians in my chapter on memes and my discussion of Elizabeth Warren, but I want to tread carefully. It is wrong for people who are not Native to assume positions, titles, scholarships, or other resources in academia that are intended for Native Americans. And I agree that many people may have family stories about Cherokee great-great-grandparents that cannot be verified or may not be true. I am deeply concerned about the efforts to disprove Native identity by journalists and some activists, though. I am concerned that these efforts disenfranchise many people who have Native ancestry and are engaged in Native activism and community carework but do not have blood quantum documentation or are not from federally recognized tribes. The search for pretendians should not, in my view, reinforce colonial expectations of our people. Earlier I mentioned the excellent collection of essays *Unpapered*, edited by Glancy and Rodriguez. This collection has a lot to say about what it means to contribute to and be a part of Native communities without the enrollment paperwork.

Returning to my story narrative of how this book came to be: my Indigenous identity, my personal life, and now my teaching and research lives are more authentic to me and how I see and know myself. And I was slowly making change as a scholar. In the earliest years of my studies and career, I wrote a few articles and chapters and I gave a number of conference talks on gender and technology. Then, in 2013, a friend and collaborator, John Carter McKnight, who was at the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom, found an international news blurb about an emerging cryptocurrency—a Bitcoin variant called MazaCoin—that was being implemented by an Indigenous tribe in North America, the implementation effort led by a Lakota man named Payu Harris. After following the press coverage and studying the way the technology industry media in particular were covering the story, John and I knew we were seeing something different about the reporting. It was less about the logistics and process of implementing the new cryptocurrency and more a story about the scrappy entrepreneur and his battle against the mighty federal

government. Harris was a lone Indian rising from the past to save the future with technology, except carried along on the story was the neoliberal and technolibertarian culture of the technology sector. In other words, it was very much a colonial retelling. McKnight and I were not the first to discover that news media and mass media objectify and appropriate Indigenous histories and identities, but we were seeing it in the technocratic media we followed and studied, and that was new. McKnight suggested we submit a conference proposal to the Association of Internet Researchers, focused on MazaCoin, the Indigenous cryptocurrency an entrepreneur and tribal member was trying to launch on the Pine Ridge reservation.

This was the first time I had thought to bring my Indigenous perspective to scholarship. It was also the first time I considered that there might be a distinctive way of being or being-made-to-be Indigenous online. Through my examination of the buzz surrounding the rise and ultimate fall of MazaCoin, and the role Payu Harris may have had in this situation, I came to understand that digital coverage and reporting of Indigenous people in examples of online journalism has flattened Indigenous identity into gross settler-colonial and neoliberal stereotypes. I began to think about not just identity but decolonization, survivance, capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, and other ideologies that shape the Indigenous experience in personal, cultural, and political lives. I began to conceive of digital research from an Indigenous positionality where I could untangle the settler-colonial assumptions and tease out the complex and thick knowledge-making in Indigenous contexts. I would come to research in the spirit of good relations, I would write and speak my findings, not with western skepticism and hostility (a knowing is false until proven true), and as my people do, I would treat my work as ceremony, a system of honoring, respecting, and contributing to Indigenous community.

And I arrived here at my first research question: **How do Indigenous peoples construct themselves in digital spaces and places, as opposed to how digital medias construct them?**

And a second question followed immediately after: **Can I find other examples of where the stereotypical descriptions of the race of Indigenous peoples are complicated or subsumed in digital spaces?**

Indigenous Research Methods and Practices

These transformative experiences I describe are how I arrived at the writing of this book that applies Indigenous frameworks and epistemologies to online

cultural movements across four case studies. With the findings of these studies, I contend that Indigenous peoples employ social media and digital technologies to construct their identities as modern, engaged, and living peoples rather than allow themselves to be relegated to history. I also contend that these methods can be applied to additional cases of online research in order to break western paradigms of oppositional critique and participant objectification. I argue that, as I discussed in the opening of this chapter, Indianness is persistently assessed, and legitimization of that identity is a determination claimed by white audiences, both because this is how whiteness works and because there are settler-state laws and histories that make this possible.

I argue that western thought and western theory are too narrow, and too focused on individualism specifically, to investigate Indigenous identity construction. And the decolonial and survivance practices can be applied to uncover richer and more complex interpretations of Indigenous digital practices. With this book, I seek interventions into research problems created by mainstream critique and western theory, research practices that not only flatten meaning but reify singular authorship instead of valuing collaborative texts. These conventional approaches and frameworks tend to objectify research participants, co-opt participant experiences, and, with their insistence on an oppositional framework, undermine the research process by introducing skepticism and positioning the researcher, rather than the participant, as the arbitrator of truth. In chapter 3, which is about internet memes as collaborative identity construction, I build on the work of other scholars interrogating memes as identity-building in white-centric digital spaces, and I explore how the storytelling as identity practices bring both wider interpretations and thicker relationship ties.

This book offers Indigenous methodologies and new epistemological frames to explore digital communities and technologies. These approaches are designed to help solve the problems of conventional western critique and oppositional positioning by adopting storytelling as methodology, centering good relations and relationality between researcher and participant, and ethically positioning the participants' experiences as the measure of truth. In storytelling and stories, as Linda Tuwihai Smith writes, "each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place. For many Indigenous writers, stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The

story and the storytelling both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story” (145–46). In other words, stories are both fixed and fluid, adapting with details added by different storytellers, or different tellings by a storyteller.

With this text, I argue that Native Americans’ use of social media and digital platforms uniquely constructs Indigenous identities as living, producing, culture-making peoples, working against the commonplace narrative that Indigenous North Americans either live in isolation from everyone else or are simply a people resigned to the long-forgotten past. I argue that common forms of digital analytical research methodologies, for example, visual analysis, discourse analysis, quantitative coding, and so on, add to the flattening and confining of thick stories and narrow findings to single interpretations of collaboratively arrived-upon meanings. These thick stories and thick meanings I derive from the above-described practices of collaboratively told and retold stories, meanings, and identities. Within the layers of these artifacts are bound individual, generational, new, and old contributions to the thick meanings.

This book contributes to the field by injecting these frameworks and methodologies into digital rhetoric, which, as a field, is seeing researchers take up approaches from critical race and gender theory. This injection also impacts research ethics by expanding on the reflection and relationality from a perspective informed by feminist research ethics. Indigenous research methodology emphasizes the role of ceremony in both the daily practices of Native peoples as well as the research practices in Native communities and contexts. Ceremony, simply, is the practice and process of honoring the sacred. This notion of ceremony is tied to another Indigenous notion of good relations, meaning that knowledge is approached as created within the context of relationships between people, and those relations are grounded in trust and open-mindedness. This framing of good relations is largely unique to Indigenous research, but it is an ethical and holistic approach that would be of broad interest to cultural and digital researchers. The value of Indigenous research methodologies is that they are relational, subjective, personal, and emotional or intuitive, which has the potential to respond to the overarching concern that our research is so grounded in western notions of knowledge that we inadvertently reinscribe hegemonic structures over our research participants and their experiences. Social media is, above all things, social, and most of our digital methods do not have a way to account for the social (emotional, intuitive, personal) aspects of digital artifacts. Indigenous approaches are one possible antidote to this problem.

Indigeneity as Public Discourse

After I had begun the MazaCoin project in chapter 5, I did not have to look very far or very hard to find more journalism reporting Indigenous news using colonial constructions of Native peoples and their issues. In fact, the more I looked, the more I realized how deeply widespread beliefs and negative tropes about Indigenous peoples informed the political as well as societal landscapes. I also had thoughts and questions about the “neutrality” of digital journalism, if it was built upon settler-colonial knowledge. For example, in stories about Indigenous peoples and their political and cultural presence, I expected to see reporting of racism where it was obvious, but instead, I found that stories referencing Indigenous peoples and their issues were written with a kind of false neutrality. Rather than sharing a long and complex discussion about journalism and constructs of neutrality, I will simply say this: we live in a white supremacist, settler-colonial nation-state. We are a heteropatriarchy. Therefore, as Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, and other scholars, have reminded us, within this construct, everyone is racialized and gendered (2013). I would add that the settler-colonial nation-state runs on settler-colonial capitalism, where production is required for membership. There is no neutrality within this matrix, only the gloss thereof.

One obvious example of this practice I found in the reporting, beginning in 2016, of Trump’s racist attacks on Elizabeth Warren, who has asserted that her family stories describe a Cherokee ancestor, therefore making her a Cherokee descendent (Fonseca 2020). The issue of Warren’s Indigenous identity was a talking point in her 2012 campaign against Senator Scott Brown in the senatorial race in Massachusetts.⁸ It was widely reported and fact-checked, and in the end was settled with Warren apologizing and stating her Indigenous identity was based in family lore, and many experts agreeing that there is no historic evidence to demonstrate that Warren is of Cherokee descent. Experts also note that matters of Indigenous descent can be difficult to prove, with many Indigenous peoples not being included in the original rolls for a wide range of reasons (Lee 2016).⁹ Still, it was determined that Warren was not Cherokee, and her case stands as an example of the tensions around claiming Indigenous identity without connecting with communities and holding relationships with Indigenous people. Donald Trump resurrected this controversy in November 2017 when, in a meeting and award ceremony with surviving World War II Navajo code talkers, he referred to Warren as “Pocahontas” (Haltiwanger 2017).¹⁰ Yes, Mr. Trump made a negative crack about Pocahontas while honoring Native men. The racism and sexism of that moment are far

more complex than just surface offense, especially given the significance of code talkers in the Native communities they were members of. These people are highly revered as warriors, culture keepers, and role models to Native peoples. Their contributions of sacred language skills are incredibly important in Indian Country. They are also American heroes whose use of Native languages helped turn the tide of World War II. Not isolated to simply offending Native war heroes, Trump continued this practice of calling Warren “Pocahontas” through his single term as president, as well as while on the 2020 campaign trail. (I write about this in chapter 4 as well.)

In the middle of Trump’s speech thanking the code talkers for their invaluable contributions to the United States during World War II, Trump pointed out that the Navajo code talkers were “real” Indians and Warren was a “fake.” Later, the Navajo Nation, when asked for a comment, was reported to say that they wished to not be involved in the president’s conflict with Warren over her questioned indigeneity. Trump continued referring to Warren as “Pocahontas” while she was on the campaign trail for the 2020 US Democratic presidential primary election. As I revise this chapter, days before the 2020 presidential election with Joe Biden and Kamala Harris on the ballot for Democrats, Trump is still referring to Warren as “Pocahontas.”

Ali Nahdee, feminist Indigenous critic, says of Indigenous female representations that Indigenous women deserve to have mass media representations they can admire and look up to, as opposed to what we have now (2020b). She argues that Disney’s Pocahontas is another sexualized and airbrushed version of a woman whose history was complex and deserves more respect than she has been given in media treatment. She speaks of her “Aila test,” which looks for Indigenous female characters in films who (1) are Indigenous and a main character, (2) do not fall in love with a white man, and (3) are not raped or murdered as part of the plot. She points out that with respect to expectations of media representations, it is important to bear in mind that many are complicated: perhaps the female main characters are Indigenous, but they might also be troubled characters with darker histories. That does not make their existence unimportant to Indigenous representations. She claims, “We don’t have to be perfect, but we don’t need to be killed all the time” (Nahdee 2020a). Sexualized and victimized representations of Indigenous women in media are complicated by the real-life vulnerabilities of Indigenous women. The movement for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, #MMIW, has worked to bring attention to violence against Indigenous women and the legislation that has followed (Whitebear 2020).

Trump, in his many racist attacks on Warren, makes it clear that he is referring to the 1995 Disney version of Pocahontas, the “good” version. However, in all the reporting surrounding Trump’s tweets and speeches where he calls Warren “Pocahontas,” there is very little written about why these attacks are racist. It is almost that because Warren has been identified as a “pretendian,” there is no other wrong here. So, here I argue that these attacks are racist, because they identify Warren with a highly westernized and sexualized version of a historic Native woman. In the digital media stories about Trump’s offensive nickname for Warren, I found that if racism is mentioned at all by journalists in those articles, it is couched in terms that only a few people find racist, or that only some find controversial. Here is another case where we find that media neutrality that distorts Indigenous people’s struggles and slaughter and colonizes the Indigenous history of the United States by equivocating about Indigenous representations and struggles.

To call Warren “Pocahontas” is to call her an airbrushed Indian. It mocks both Indigenous history and Warren, making both mere caricatures in Trump’s nationalist bluster. In particular, Trump’s reference to “the bad version” of Pocahontas speaks to his self-awareness that he is pointing to a caricature rather than a historic figure whose history is bound up in the colonization and Christianization of Indigenous peoples. And the crux of it is an extension of his nationalism, his ongoing campaign to “make” America in his own image, mocking marginalized identities generally and Indigenous identities specifically. There are more examples of Trump’s attacks on Native people, like his disrespecting Natives by declaring November’s Native American history month “National American History and Founders Month,” but again, they are beyond the scope of my claim here, even as they are worthy of attention (Armus 2019).

Turning to another recent event, during the run-up to the United States November 2018 midterm elections, a news story broke about voter suppression of Native Americans in North Dakota. There is a long history of voter suppression, which I discuss in some detail later in this book, but to provide a brief overview, the North Dakota law was one of many voter ID laws passing through state legislation that suppressed the Native vote. The US Supreme Court had ruled in favor of North Dakota to uphold a voter suppression law requiring the possession of state-issued identification that includes a physical address, for citizens to be able to vote (Hayoun 2018). On North Dakota reservations, like many rural reservations across the United States, many residents are given only PO boxes, to simplify the mail delivery process for the federal

government. In other words, the federal government allotted remote lands to people, lands that were too remote to easily access, so PO boxes were implemented for the convenience of federal services. Those same conveniences are suppressing Indigenous voters in North Dakota. This is institutional racism, but these issues have largely gone unreported.

In addition to not having physical addresses, some reservation residents might not have state-issued identification either and instead use only tribal identification cards that do not list a person's physical address. This is an issue of Indigenous sovereignty in the United States. Indigenous peoples are, by treaty, sovereign in their own lands, and their identification represents who they are as Native community. Yet, these identification cards are not "official" enough to satisfy the identification changes. This is a rejection to Indigenous sovereignty, which again was not widely covered or discussed.

In addition to the potential lack of physical addresses on ID cards, Native Americans are also overrepresented in unhoused populations, where they are also unlikely to have physical addresses (Domonoske 2018). Together, these factors (and others) disproportionately affect Indigenous populations and communities, and work together to actively suppress the Native American vote and political engagement. This context of suppression gives rise to questions of the use of social media as a nontraditional way of accessing political power, as marginalized identities' and groups' means of social support, and as the self-presentation of Native American groups online. I expected to see this racism called out and discussed, and largely, it was not. There are several well-known examples of Indigenous digital activism, such as the Idle No More movement emerging in 2012; the #NoDAPL campaign resisting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which crested in 2016; and the abovementioned work to raise awareness about MMIWC (missing and murdered Indigenous women), which notably took shape around 2016.

Thinking Further

Ultimately, this book is about being Indigenous and being digital, being Indigenous and being in media, and the ways colonialism, racism, white supremacy, and patriarchy complicate building an Indigenous identity in digital spaces and on digital platforms. But it is not just that Indigenous peoples are pressed in on all sides by multiple flavors of imperialism and supremacy, it is also about new ways for Indigenous peoples to use digital spaces and tools to actively speak their truths and be present in everyday digital interactions. It

is about how Indigenous peoples have been relegated to the past by colonialism, and by accessibility issues, as well as how Indigenous people are building their new digital presence. I theorize the thickness of Indigenous meaning-making to complicate the simple and one-dimensional stories of Indigenous peoples today. To get at these points, I use Indigenous rhetorics, intersectional feminisms, digital rhetorics, decolonial theory and practice, and other bodies of theory to excavate indigeneity from its oppressions.

I will also say what this book is for me. It is the culmination of work thinking about the world in networks and thinking about the world in all its relations. I make a note here about language that I think is important for a reading audience. I wrote this book thinking about ways to write myself, a digital Indian. I call myself Indigenous and Native American. Informally, I call myself an Indian, because my mother, auntie, and grandmother always had. I use *Tribal*, *NDN*, *rez*, and other Native words and phrases because my family always has. In this text, I use these labels interchangeably, and the words periodically. I would appreciate it if, when you cite this work, you would replace these identity-specific terms, because it is not OK, really, for white folx to use them (Riley Mukavetz and Tekobbe 2022). *Indigenous* is often associated with peoples south of the US-Mexico border, while *Native Americans* is often used for those in the United States, and *First Peoples* or *First Nations* is largely used in Canada. *Aboriginal* is used in Canada and other countries. And these are all fine terms to use. You will primarily hear me use *Indigenous* to describe us all, and that is because borders are colonial fictions. They are arbitrary and drawn across territories and through traditional homelands. There are differences in our experiences, in our interactions with different colonial entities, if not the same colonial enterprise. But we are all Indigenous to the same Turtle Island. Perhaps someday there will be better words to describe us all, words that do not play into a colonizer's game of who was here first. But I am working with what I have now.

The Chapters

INTRODUCTION: DOING STORYTELLING AS EPISTEMOLOGY

In this chapter, I introduce Indigenous storytelling through the example of the story Choctaw Corn Goddess and its many variations. I lay out my original research questions with which I began this project. I discuss Cottom's notion of thickness of meaning and identity and link this thinking with my theorizing about the cultural roles of storytelling. I describe and discuss settler

colonialism and settler capitalism and how those frameworks influence identity construction. I tell the story of my own journey from thinking of myself as a career technologist to becoming an Indigenous scholar and teacher. Through these stories, I establish the framework for all of the research stories that follow in this book.

CHAPTER 1: INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING AND WAYS OF THINKING AND BEING

In this chapter, I describe and locate key concepts in cultural rhetorics, digital rhetoric methods, and Indigenous frameworks and epistemologies. I do definitional work with discourse analysis, rhetorical analysis, theories of rhetorical listening, and rhetorical image analysis. I define Indigenous notions of good relations, storytelling, ceremony, intuition, and relationality. I explicate storytelling as an Indigenous research methodology and frame out the case studies as research stories. I work with my notions of layered thick identities, rich in context, which Indigenous methodologies are uniquely situated to uncover and value.

Thick Indigenous knowing is a phrase I am using to describe the way Indigenous folx make meaning by conceptualizing stories, art, music, words and terms, ideas, songs, and teachings not as one flat way of knowing but as thick layers of nuanced knowings. In this chapter, I write about thickness and thick knowing in conversation with Tressie McMillan Cottom's notion of thickness. Cottom, when writing about personal essays and personal storytelling, selects and then elaborates on ethnographic notions of thickness, describing thickness as contents that do not fit in the expected and designated spaces (2019, 25). For example, she calls herself thick, because the expectation is that she must conform to white standards of beauty that favor being thin (6). This claiming of thickness in the face of expected thinness here is a resistance to being reduced to a flat interpretation of a stereotypical Black woman. Ethnographer Clifford Geertz explained a "thick" description for sociologists and anthropologists as the ethnographic practice of retaining context when observing culture so that interpretations of culture retain their thickness of meaning and the layers through which meaning is constructed (Geertz 1973). But Cottom carries this idea further in claiming thickness for the speaker rather than the observer, writing, "By interrogating my social location with a careful eye on thick description that moves between empirics and narrative, I have . . . tried to explore what our selves say about our society. Along the way, I have shared parts of myself, my history, and my identity to make social theory

concrete” (26). In the theoretical framing of these case studies, I am combining culture, narrative, empirical data, and identity to describe Indigenous meaning-making.

Here, I use thickness to discuss the ways that Indigenous knowing does not squeeze itself into western knowing. In the chapter, I tell my story of the Chahta Fox as a character in storytelling, a relation, and a biological entity. Fox can be ascribed voice and motives just as easily as she can be classified into taxonomic ranks. Fox is both a creature and a cousin. Fox is all of these notions bound thickly together in the knowing of Fox. I argue that this thick knowing is a distinct difference between Indigenous knowledges and western knowledges, because a goal of western meaning-making is to settle knowledge, while, in Indigenous rhetorics, knowings are not settled but flexible and changeable—they do not simply fit one narrow way of knowing. In this chapter, I write the framework in which the other chapters grow and are scaffolded. I think here of the three sisters, the companion gardening of Natives where our core crops of corn, beans, and squash lift each other up.

CHAPTER 2: LISTEN: SURVIVANCE AND DECOLONIALISM AS METHOD IN THINKING ABOUT DIGITAL ACTIVISM

In this chapter, I take chapter 1 and apply that definitional work and rhetorical scaffolding as methodology. To accomplish this, I explicate a case study from the #MeToo movement and analyze it within the digital Indigenous framework as a working example of doing Indigenous digital rhetoric. The primary approach of storytelling as methodology serves to decentralize western ways of knowing and to subvert western styles of confrontational and oppositional argumentation and evidence. There is also feminist methodology in practice here. Thick meaning comes into play in a discussion of the many outcomes of #MeToo—positive, negative, supportive, purposeful, and otherwise—meaning that it is not necessary to know #MeToo one way, to settle the meaning and outcomes of the #MeToo movement. Rather #MeToo is complex and can be many things collected in a thick, Indigenous understanding of the storytelling of #MeToo and the surrounding responses.

I wrote chapter 2 as a demonstration of Indigenous rhetorics, and as such it is both an exhibit of how Indigenous and decolonial moves operate as well as a case study of how these moves and methods can be applied to an online protest movement. I approach this from storytelling practices, Indigenous identity practices, and collaborative meaning-making. My case study of the #MeToo movement is a practical demonstration of using Indigenous methods

to persuade an audience that #MeToo, at its core, is a failure to accept women's stories and storytelling as evidence. In some ways, #MeToo is a movement in which it is only possible for privileged people to participate. I also discuss this chapter's origins as a plenary panel talk that I gave to the 2017 Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) conference in Tartu, Estonia. The movement of this piece, from observation, to discussions, to analysis, to presentation, through more conversations, to methodological piece, to finally this book, is an example of how knowledge can be co-constructed across time and communities and be an inclusive kind of knowing with our relations. Finally, this chapter is practice rather than presentation, in that I practice what I am describing while I am describing it. It is my hope that the structure of this chapter is useful to students learning Indigenous methodologies.

CHAPTER 3: SKODEN: INDIGENOUS IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH FACEBOOK MEMES

I was introduced to the Facebook group Rezzy Red Proletariat Memes by an Indigenous friend who reposted several of their memes to his Facebook wall. I was immediately taken by the raw anger of the posts. In terms of Indigenous identity-making, I have seen a lot of sadness, grief, and trauma. Trauma is discussed among Native Americans as generational trauma, the product of hundreds of years of genocide in the dressing of assimilation, by removals, relocations, reeducation, erasure, and silence. Any anger I knew, I associated with the American Indian rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s; I tended to think, as I had been taught by a colonial education system, that the American Indian Movement (AIM) was a product of the greater era of civil unrest, somehow intimately bound up in student protests, Vietnam war protests, women's rights protests, civil rights protests, and so on. Of course, this makes no sense if you examine it with a lens of survivance: AIM is (because AIM still exists) a separate movement with specific issues to address against the long history of the United States government. It was not a war protest, or an anti-capitalist protest, and it has more in common with the "Long Civil Rights Movement" (Hall 2005) than it does with any 1960s civil unrest. Coming across this group was one of those moments of rupture for me, moments I continue to find as I attempt to decolonize myself. Western schools had taught me AIM was a footnote in an era rather than a movement of its own. RezzyRed Proletariat Memes caused me to confront my miseducation and dig into Indian Country history as having its own storytellers, with its own identity and resistance work.

This chapter, then, is a case study of this Facebook page for Indigenous collectivists. To perform this research, I cataloged and collated screen captures, then sorted them, analyzed the types of posts, and then theorized how those posts construct a contemporary Indigenous political identity that is authentic in its anger as well as its grief, trauma, and silence. I rhetorically analyze the images through Indigenous methods of thickness and layering, discussing how they are uniquely Native American as well as anti-capitalist and anti-fascist. I argue that these memes are liberatory and are resistance work against current movements to suppress Indigenous votes, encroach on Indigenous lands, and violate Indigenous rights.

What strikes me about this case study, and what I want readers to take away from this chapter, is the emotion behind these political memes and posts. I want readers to experience Indigenous anger, and I hope that it breaks open the white supremacist paradigm of the crying Indian whose grief is overwhelming as their people fade into horrifying history. Indigenous people are alive and are making identities for themselves as political actors in digital spaces and on digital platforms—for example, on digital networks employing the hashtags #MMIW, #MMIWG, and #MMIWC (missing and murdered Indigenous women, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and children, respectively) to organize and share information to not only help find missing persons but also apply pressure to governing bodies to investigate and coordinate to save more lives. The activists using these hashtags demand governments take their concerns seriously and enact legislation to improve the investigations and prosecutions of these cases. The hashtag #IdleNoMore speaks to the resurgence in Indigenous activism, particularly the activism of Indigenous women. And the hashtags #NoDAPL and #StandingRock, among others, were deployed in order to organize and coordinate the protest to stop the installation of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) across sacred Indigenous lands and waterways. I hope to investigate more of these protest movements in the future, but for now, I focus on one Facebook group to explore one discrete example of digital identity work and activism. This case has been a test of my framework, and hopefully it opens up more research possibilities in digital indigeneity and activist movements.

CHAPTER 4: JEFFREY VEREGGE: A STORY OF RELATIONS

Jeffrey Veregge is a Native American artist whose work came to national and then international recognition when he began illustrating comic books. Comic

book art, nerd culture, and pop culture are not the totality of his work; he has produced many pieces for Native communities and programs, for public works, and for his own artistic drive. His art intersects pop-cultural images with Indigenous styles and methods. He is an activist whose work reminds us that Indigenous peoples are engaged in modern life while they also maintain traditional values, beliefs, and arts. Our conversation follows an unsurprising (to me) traditional Indigenous introduction, one where we exchange family, tribal, and linear identities in our opening to our interview, something Veregge and I slipped into by habit, history, and traditional practice, that decolonial and survivance scholars explain and describe in their own works. In an “*Inception*” moment, we were living and being in the means described by the theory and practice of research this book collects and constructs in a holistic theory of digital indigeneity. This interview also discusses how Veregge negotiates a space for himself where he has appeal to wide and varied audiences while still being true to his own people and history. There is discussion about his process and his development, as well as how Veregge uses social media to build community with his audience and disseminate his activist message. We also discuss downsides to social media, some that we all experience and some that are uniquely related to making and representing in Indian Country.

I have wanted to interview Veregge for quite some time, ever since I first saw his Native American interpretations of comic book characters, Batman specifically, which were posted in *Gizmodo*'s popular-culture website *io9.com* in 2013. Veregge's work takes the present and relocates it on the continuum of Indigenous artistry. This is important, because his blend of pop culture and traditional culture makes visible to a wider audience that Indigenous peoples are alive and making art in the present. I follow Veregge on social media, and through his work, I see his efforts to promote Indigenous causes like education, clean water, respect for the environment, and support for young people. I thought Veregge would be a good choice to fill in the gaps between the case studies I found, with Veregge in his own words explaining how his work and his digital presence function as Indigenous survivance.

CHAPTER 5: MAZACOIN: DECOLONIZING A COLONIAL FANTASY

In this chapter, I describe the beginnings, successes, and ultimate failures of the first Indigenous cryptocurrency, MazaCoin, a Bitcoin variant launched for the benefit of the Oglala Lakota people. MazaCoin and its founder, Payu Harris, captured international digital media attention by attempting to integrate cryptocurrency and affect capitalism on the Pine Ridge Indian

reservation, arguably the most studied Native American population in North America. That digital media attention, with its virality and spreadability, reappropriated the implementation of MazaCoin into western colonial fantasies similar to the nation-making myths of the noble savage and his solitary battle to save his people. This media support, and then rejection, led to the ultimate failure of the project. Here, I examine the storytelling of an Indigenous person and the storytelling of western journalists as a way to demonstrate the distinct differences in approach and intention in Indigenous practices and western practices. The story is unique too in that when I tell it, I include the layers of Payu Harris and the questions surrounding his Indianness both by the problematic white western media and by the more skeptical and nuanced news-telling across Indian Country. In my chapter, Harris is an agent of his own intentions, both colonial and decolonial, when he comments on his own stereotypical Indianness and when he resists such stereotypes by seeking financial independence for his people. When Harris makes references to collectivism and communal strength and resilience, he does so in contrast to the introduction of neoliberal currencies in an already financially fraught space damaged by centuries of settler colonialism and capitalism. In the online media industry, Payu is either this or that: a fraud or a hero, a scam artist or a businessman, or an Oglala Lakota or an imposter. In Payu's own story, however, he can be any of these things together, with all the tension implied, without being forced into any one thing. The thickness of Indigenous stories is expansive and inclusive; Indigenous journalism is not about finding a single answer but existing in a plurality of knowings.

This chapter opens with the story of doing research across a sustained relationship with my collaborator and friend, John Carter McKnight, who at the time was in a postdoc position at University of Leicester studying alt-currencies. My interest in alt-currencies was, I thought, a personal one—I'm interested in culturally situated technologies, and I have been since I was a child playing video games in my family room. It never occurred to me that there might be wide research possibilities in Bitcoin, cryptocurrencies, and peer-to-peer banking back in 2016. I am writing this chapter as a pandemic is emerging, COVID-19, and there are many global digital media stories of small communities using peer-to-peer banking to keep their communities afloat at this time. These stories lack the same romantic overtones that the stories about Payu Harris and his Indigenous MazaCoin have. I think there is room for further study than I offer here, particularly after the full force of the pandemic is measured in terms of its permanent shifts in our society. What

will local economies look like after we declare COVID-19 “over”? Since a version of this work was published in 2016, it has been cited multiple times in alt-finance and Bitcoin-specific scholarly papers. When I cowrote the piece that this chapter is adapted from, I did not at the time realize we were writing one of the earlier scholarly works on cryptocurrencies. I am still learning what that means for my own story as I see my work resonating across multiple scholarly fields.

CONCLUSION

This chapter finalizes the findings related to my research questions as well as identifies additional questions I would like to explore in the future. It discusses the relationship between methodology, theory, and practice that is uniquely Indigenous, as applied to digital contexts. It reinstantiates storytelling as methodology and summarizes the book as a collection of research stories. It affirms the vocabulary I have been finding, theorizing, and writing. It discusses potential for further research in Indigenous digital practices.

Taken together, these chapters capture a picture of how Indigenous folk interact with digital technologies. They also document my journey as a scholar shifting from a feminist who researches marginalization and objectification in digital and networked space to an Indigenous scholar addressing a much broader scope of what it means to be othered, what it means to be written out of narratives, and how marginalized folk can and do interrupt these othering and erasing narratives.