Disability and Indigenous resistance: mapping value politics during the time of COVID-19

Sandra Yellowhorse (Diné Nation)

Abstract
This article is about value politics and Indigenous resistance in the time of COVID-19. The effects of the pandemic on our global community have fuelled rhetoric of productivity—advancing collective lamentations of losing our normal lives within wider socio-political dialogue. This article examines how global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the visibility of settler-colonial histories in union with capitalist discourses to form value politics that impact Indigenous and disabled communities. Mapping wider social dialogue through time, I focus on current economy-based solutions in the call to return to a social normal at the risk of disabled communities. Such global responses are premised on capitalist logics of productivity and ableism which continue to disproportionately impact marginalised communities. By mapping rubrics of value within two settler nation states—the United States and Aotearoa New Zealand—I offer another rubric of value predicated on Diné (Navajo) practices of relationship and resistance.

Keywords
COVID-19, Diné, disability, Indigenous, settler-colonial capitalism, value politics

Introduction
This article is a critical personal reflection about occupying several margins. I share the intimacy of these margins as a Diné (Navajo) international doctoral student in Aotearoa New Zealand. Being part of the small Diné diaspora from the southwest corner of the United States and moving from one settler nation-state to another at the precipice of a global pandemic illuminated a prevailing discourse known all too well to the disability community. I argue that global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the visibility of settler-colonial capitalism through value politics in relation to disability discourse. I read these value politics and the rubrics of value that accompany them, against the framework of the “economic model” of disability described by Māori scholar Huhana Hickey (2015, p. 73). The economic model of disability establishes notions of productivity and labour entwined with narratives of ableism focused on the ability to produce (Hickey, 2015).

By examining the union of settler colonialism and capitalism as both power relations and systems of value, I argue that the visibility of settler-colonial capitalism during the pandemic is a provocation for generative wider discussions of disability justice. After all, these value politics unfolded before us in many of the socio-political responses we witnessed as the world encountered this global challenge. The crisis offered an opportunity to lay bare these relations and open a space for dialogue of how relations shape value politics. Such a politics is formed through ideological, structural processes that construct and normalise who society views as valuable. Rubrics of value, in turn, ultimately translate into who is expendable to the nation-state and the wider communities in these spaces. Rather than productive dialogue, however, ableist and eugenic discourses have continued during the time of COVID-19 preserving the trajectory of a value politics that arises from settler colonialism and capitalism.

My intention here is to draw on my own story as the basis for mapping connections that contribute to a broader critical analysis of how rubrics of value emerge across multiple spaces including within my life. As someone engaged in critical auto-ethnographic research (Jones, 2016), I have been faced with the question of why I share personal stories in academic spaces. As Diné scholar Cheryl Bennett (2022) reminds us, sometimes our stories just need to be shared. Our stories offer an opportunity to find resonance and a glimpse of the lived experience of people who live within these spaces, spoken by themselves and on their terms.
I speak as a parent who journeys alongside someone who experiences the complex, intersectional space of disability and Indigeneity. Intersectionality unravels how “experiential reality [is] dynamically shaped by multiple, complex, intersecting, and interdependent systems, structures, and axes of power, privilege and oppression” (Jones et al., 2020, p. 72). In connecting multiple spaces in the commentary below, I begin with my direct experience and tie it to historical contexts which anchor notions of value in the everyday within the educational realm of the United States. I link this analysis to wider global experiences of the pandemic, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand and the subsequent impacts on people with disabilities. I then re-focus and consider these experiences in relation to my Diné community to examine the extent of how value politics continue to play a significant role in the oppression of Indigenous peoples in the United States. It is through this intersectional approach that I both locate myself and the threads of how oppression is extended, re-crafted and socially justified within international economic discourse during the pandemic.

This article is bound to a specific time and place. It was the start of the pandemic, and I was separated by the border from my homeland. While Aotearoa New Zealand locked in its borders and people, my gaze returned out to my Native community and the unimaginable chaos of the Trump administration’s response to COVID-19 in early 2020. In assessing the extent of structural oppression now made visible during the pandemic, I draw attention to the ever-present underbelly of settler-colonial capitalism anchored in colonised nation-states. While COVID-19 case numbers in Aotearoa New Zealand were low during this time, my Native community faced indescribable loss. The article speaks to those spaces and offers a response inspired by how I found respite as a Diné person through Diné knowledge of caretaking, relationship and love.

This work is not an exhaustive analysis of the pandemic conditions of Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand or the United States. Rather, it is a story that opens space for dialogue that is imperative for ongoing global discussions of disability and the value politics entangled with it. The overarching critique I have of this historical moment we find ourselves in is that we are missing a relational lens crucial to disability justice. Of concern also is that “little attention has been given so far to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous Peoples with lived experience of disability and their communities” (Jones et al., 2020, p. 71). To engage with these challenges, I touch on a range of themes including education, economic disparities, health inequalities, socio-political responses and silence. My aim is to illuminate how these and other elements relate and resound against the margins within the spaces of disability and Indigeneity.

At the heart of my efforts here, however, are the enduring responses from my Diné community and the ancestral knowledge that rises to meet it. Their knowledge extends across time, space, water and memory. The extent of their love is vast. This article is a starting point to acknowledge these connections, both difficult and beautiful, during a time of global peril.

**COVID-19 and the rubrics of value**

When I packed my bags and moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in the spring of 2019, I had no idea what was in store for the world as I moved abroad. It was hard to imagine that the world I left in the United States would be drastically changed forever by COVID-19. As Aotearoa New Zealand entered its first country-wide lockdown, I sat in my home shaken with fear and uncertainty. After weeks of isolation, I struggled like many other students across the country. Is my research important during a moment such as this? What did it matter now when the world was brought to its knees by a virus? It was a numbing moment where I felt despondent about the materiality of my work. Then I begin to think deeply. I realised that the events unfolding around me were illuminating the ongoing discourse of value politics. I had encountered this discourse countless times across numerous academic fields of inquiry, yet we were now in a time where it was quite visible to everyone regardless of whether they were part of the academy. It was a moment where people around the world could glimpse value politics in a way that touched them personally. It was a time when I felt it was vital to advance the push for disability justice in alliance with Indigenous resistance and draw attention to those linkages. I believed this was a time that the public could finally make those connections whether or not they knew about the histories of Indigenous social movements for liberation or the ongoing fight for disability justice. We were in a historical moment that offered a space for resonance, and reflection, and perhaps also for a glimpse into the past to understand how this crisis is an extension of a violent core of invisible value politics rampant in our world.

COVID-19 amplified an array of ongoing injustices embedded in our society through colonialism and capitalism. These injustices are particularly felt by systemically marginalised and oppressed communities. Today, the waves of colonialism can still be observed in public responses across the globe, indicating that indeed colonialism is alive and not an evil of the past that society has transcended. Colonialism remains structurally ingrained and embedded throughout numerous institutions, ideologies and policies that propel our world forward. In relation to settler-colonial capitalism—a distinct facet of colonialism—we must also understand its ingrained structural existence. As such, fighting structural violence requires more than just a few superficial changes to wording in already racist and oppressive policies, and certainly must refuse inclusion by means of absorption into these structures that are designed to fail us (Coulthard, 2014; Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, 2013). We, as a society, require systemic change. The need for systemic change has never been more apparent than in the worlds of disability justice and Indigenous resistance. Both have much to teach us in the face of this global pandemic.

Essential to any change processes is an understanding of how our current moment is situated within the broader historical context. An interrogation of the past lays bare, among other systemic injustices, found within connections between United States Disability Law and the history of Indigenous genocide in what would become the nation-state.
of United States. Emerging scholarship in the fields of Critical Indigenous Studies and Critical Disability Studies has drawn links between capitalism, empire, and settler colonialism with the rubrics of value ascribed to certain bodies (Jaffee & John, 2018; Puur, 2017). In the current pandemic, western models of disability and its ideologies are now magnified in our current crisis of COVID-19.

Disability as a social and political construct is deeply rooted in histories of Indigenous death and dispossession. As Anishinaabe scholar Nicole Ineese-Nash (2020) states, “within the context of settler colonialism, disability becomes one of many factors which depress Indigenous futurity and self-determination” (p. 30). This assault on futurity has historical roots in the construction of thriving and productive nation-states, carefully crafted through ideological mechanisms, which would naturalise notions of ability and value through processes of colonialism. The historical and ongoing connections between settler-colonial capitalism and the rubrics of value placed upon certain bodies and minds are on full display in our political and social responses as a global community in this time of crisis.

First and foremost, the ways in which disability is taken up in law and in educational planning have continually been conceptualised through western thinking (Hickey, 2015). As an identity formation, disability is formulated through settler-colonial capitalism. It is the normalisation of a singular way of being that is enacted through the violence of erasure of other ways of being. In turn, this process ascribes logics of value predicated upon notions of productivity, such as those found within the economic model of disability. Settler colonialism is both a process and a power relation, which took hundreds of Indigenous nations, languages, philosophies and practices, and imposed singular understandings of the world predicated on western ways of knowing such as Christianity, ideas of private property and hetero-patriarchy (Coulthard, 2014; Denetdale, 2006).

As a power relation, settler colonialism is visible through everyday structures we encounter, such as our education systems, and through our laws. It is a process of normalising western thought and practices. I argue that this power relation in the context of disability discourse is the normalisation of singular conceptions of value as they relate to the mind and body. Capitalism works in tandem with colonialism as a power relation. It instils value on things, or in this case, on people. In relation to disability, this value is understood through the economy of the mind and body to anchor ideas of labour through productivity. Value is understood as the ability to produce.

Multiple links exist between ableist discourses of disability and discourses of Indigenous people. Both are framed through ongoing and naturalised frameworks of a deficit model (Yellowhorse, 2018a, 2018b). I argue that a fundamental instrument of settler-colonial violence underpinning these discourses was the doctrine of discovery (Deloria & Lytle, 1983). It sought to justify land theft and the removal of Indigenous people from their places of belonging. In examining the doctrine of discovery, what becomes apparent is the structural rubrics not only for normalising singular conceptions of being, but also for placing value on certain ways of being deemed as “superior,” which were prized by the dominating forces of the evolving US nation-state (Marshall & Supreme Court of the United States, 1823, p. 573). Land dispossession was also sanctioned, fuelled by notions of productivity in developing lands for profit and private use as demonstrated through the famous Marshall Trilogy in US law: Johnson v. M’Intosh, Cherokee Nation v. Georgia and Worcester v. Georgia (Marshall & Supreme Court of the United States, 1823; Marshall & Supreme Court of the United States, 1831; Marshall & Supreme Court of the United States, 1832). Viewed as barriers to settler land development and futurity, Native nations were not recognised as having productive value. Value meant assimilation to produce in the ways that were legible to the emerging nation-state to replicate the system of settler-colonial capitalism. Ideas of ability within settler-colonial capitalism are, therefore, understood as possessing and demonstrating a range of attributes that are necessary to uphold this system. These attributes are embodied through the language of development, competition, notions of achievement, self-advancement and domination. Viewed as freedom, all are written through the sanitised discourse of success. Value becomes ascribed to those who can uphold and replicate the violent system of capitalism (Yellowhorse, 2018a).

The profound links between settler-colonial histories of devaluation entwined with current disability politics collide in the moment of COVID-19. The normative, descriptive frameworks of value outlined above not only carry rubrics that determine quality of life within settler society, but also have effects within wider contexts of life or death. As disability scholar and activist Alice Wong (2020) states, “Even before the coronavirus pandemic, systems have always tried to kill and oppress marginalized people” (para. 2). Through the modes of value in relation to this lethal intent, disability activist Finn Gardiner (2020) states, “devaluation of marginalized bodies and minds leads people in power to treat our lives as expendable” (para. 7). The concept of expendability is entrenched within the discourse of value, and the discourse of value is embedded in wider social disability discourse. The intersection of Indigeneity and disability remains a valuable space to continue the interrogation of history and how it meets our current moment.

**Everyday life and global responses**

The settler-colonial capitalist framework of value bled into other structures over time, most notably, in the sphere of education. Notions of productivity continue to surface in educational law in the present US nation-state. In relation to education for learners with disabilities, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975 continued an arc of ableist language which entangled value and productivity. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975 was later amended in 2004 to the Individuals with Disability Education Act. However, the original narrative speaks to the ideological underpinning of economic value attached to
learners with disabilities. According to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975, public agencies and taxpayers will spend billions of dollars over the lifetimes of these individuals. . . . With proper education services, many would be able to become productive citizens, contributing to society instead of being forced to remain burdens. (as cited in Wright & Wright, 2002, p. 134, emphasis added)

This law normalised the social rhetoric of economic models of value whereby a productive citizen will not cost society anything, and that social perspectives should understand value through productivity. Nods to more progressive inclusive practices promoting justice, fostering equity and providing supports for diverse ways of being emerged in the coming years. Yet, these foundations still find themselves wrapped into wider social narratives of productivity related to perceptions of disability. It is a system that views people and their needs as part of an economy. The roots of this kind of ideology are deep and continue to surface in countless ways despite liberal movements which claim more progressive deviations from the troubled past. I see the intersection of liberal movements which claim more progressive inclusive practices promoting justice, understanding value through productivity. Nods to more productive, normal lives have been at the forefront of how we as a world are coping and trying to imagine a way forward. It is a discourse that upholds a global understanding of value, premised on capitalism. We, as a society, are witnessing capitalism’s violent struggle to continue to live and breathe, clawing its way through ideologies and rhetoric implanted in our thinking and responses as a global community. To prevail is to be productive.

This struggle illustrated how the world thought of value and what society considered the most important aspects of living a productive, normal life. The economic structuring of value was exposed before us all as a global community. Across nation-states, the calls to save the economy echoed among the reality that over 575,000 lives have been taken by the virus in the United States alone, and globally, we have lost over 3.2 million people (World Health Organization, 2021). Despite the immense scale of loss, we still hear rhetoric circulating within various countries that place the economy over human life. In the United States, former President Trump stated, “we cannot let the cure be worse than the problem itself,” justifying his inhumane attempts to keep economies “moving” (Haberman & Sanger, 2020, para. 2).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, COVID-19 was eradicated numerous times throughout 2020 and 2021 with strict national lockdowns. The country was noted for enacting one of the world’s toughest pandemic responses that resulted in its largest city Auckland being voted the “most liveable city” during the pandemic by the Global Economist Unit (Hunt, 2021, headline). This praise, in light of systemic health inequalities that disproportionately impacted Māori (Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand) (McLeod et al., 2020), still emerged framed within the context of economic prosperity. Both the praise and denouncement of national restrictions were continually located in terms of how impacted the economy was, evident in the assertions by National Party leader Judith Collins that “a panicked Government has caused enormous harm to the economy” as a result of the lockdowns. (1News, 2020, para. 13).

The continual assertion of placing economic value over human life is the epitome of violence and is a foundational, structurally enduring legacy of ableist violence within our global society. Prevailing economy-based rhetoric showcased the modes of violence that underwrite ableism in offering up those who are most vulnerable, most marginalised and systemically discriminated against to be harmed by the virus. The “at risk” populations for COVID-19 largely include people of colour, the elderly and people with disabilities who may have associated chronic conditions and those with limited access and resources to protect themselves (Pulrang, 2020, para. 3). People from my Native nation suffered disproportionately from the virus (#CNN #News, 2020; Curley & Ami, 2020) because of structural violence and racism that has been embedded through the continuing effects of colonialism. That situation back home resonated with what I later witnessed in Aotearoa New Zealand in relation to Māori and Pasifika (Pacific peoples including Sāmoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue and people of other Pacific nations who are now living in New Zealand) peoples’ experiences when the Omicron variant of COVID-19 found its way into the country. Māori scholars warned early on in the pandemic that Māori face higher levels of unmet health care needs, institutional racism and lower quality of care. COVID-19 epidemic and the actions to eliminate or mitigate it, have far-reaching social and economic consequences that are likely to disproportionately impact Māori whānau [extended family] and communities and exacerbate social and health inequities. (McLeod et al., 2020, p. 255)

Such inequalities have always existed. The people who occupy the margins as subjects of value politics are continually disproportionately impacted by them (Gardiner, 2020; Wong, 2020). It is in this space that those in the margins bear the force of harm and the liberal justifications that rise to meet it. According to disability advocate and freelance writer Andrew Pulrang (2020),
The people most often cited as being at serious risk are largely, by some definition, people with disabilities . . . news reports and official statements go out of their way to reassure everyone by saying “only” elderly and chronically ill people are at serious risk. It feels awful to hear people reassure each other that coronavirus isn’t that scary because it will mainly hurt and kill “high risk” people. Remember, that’s us you are talking about, and we can hear you. (paras. 2–3)

COVID-19 presented a space for our wider global society to think through these everyday disparities with perhaps a new sense of relationality and understanding. As a global society, we were all witness to how certain “at risk” people (Pulrang, 2020, para. 3) were being offered up as borders and businesses opened, and how institutions and economies were moving to maintain their normal. Collective society was experiencing structural limits and people found themselves at breaking point within these new parameters of life. Lamentations echoed across social media around themes of impeded access, isolation and marginalisation. Yet, the prevailing ideologies of value politics have never been more apparent. The collective response has been deeply reinforced by policy and rhetoric of economy-based solutions premised on capitalist logics of productivity and ableism.

Within marginalised spaces, children with disabilities were particularly overlooked. In my Native community, educational planning has struggled to account for disabled children during the best of times (Lee, 2020). Now, at the worst of times, disabled children along with their families across nation-states faced another level of marginalisation, structural violence and disavowal. I witnessed the rhetoric of falling behind resulting in panicked educators who compensated by expanding workloads and establishing punitive measures to those who could not attend to everyday at-home learning. From my experience, we were expected to continue to perform although the world around us was mourning. The world was experiencing a mass death event, and yet we continued to keep ourselves busy because being productive is ingrained in our thinking as a society. Through being productive we were affirming our value to life within the logics of a violent system.

Despite these conditions, educational planning for distanced learning continued to be shaped by ableist logics and practices. Feeling the full weight of separation from my community in tandem with these realisations, cascading questions arose one after the other without a sign of relief on the horizon. I pondered, who has access? Who can be supported by family members who are already working from home and now making the in-moment accommodations and adaptations to curriculum while providing individual assistance? Children were sitting through hours of Zoom each day and parents, like myself, lamented that they had no support. Learners who received support services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and more were all cut off from their communities. They faced another level of marginalisation beyond the marginalisation they normally experienced. Living through that reality as a parent shook me to my core. We were just presumed to fall between the cracks as we absorbed the structural response that everyone is going through the same thing now and we are all in the same boat. However, we are not in the same boat. Some of us do not have a boat. We never had a boat. This is what it looks like to be offered up.

Structural inequality was blatantly evident as the reality of wealth disparities revealed themselves before us as a global society. Children on the Navajo Nation reservation did not have Internet access or computers to log onto expensive educational websites. Teachers continued to plan by downloading all the newest apps to facilitate online learning (Jopeck & Thomas, 2020). Meanwhile, chapterhouses on the Navajo Nation moved quickly to set up hand-washing stations through tribal communities because of the lack of infrastructure to even provide the human right of access to water (Church Rock Chapterhouse, 2020). Mutual aid efforts from grassroots organisations mobilised to provide food parcels, personal protective equipment and supplies for self-isolation to Navajo communities (K’É InfoShop, 2020). The Navajo Nation set up a public fund to attend to burial needs for tribal members because many did not have the means to care for their loved ones during a time of such profound loss (Yazzie, 2021). Every day on social media, I would see people from my community losing their jobs and without food. Basic needs were no longer being met on much larger scales, and the limits of neoliberalism’s promise that if we try harder we will prevail were never more obviously untrue. Planning for the pandemic only accounted for individuals who were able to operate in a capitalist system that was fighting and clawing to live. The system’s struggles required that it sacrifice whoever it could in order to thrive so that society could continue to be productive. All these issues say something about how society thinks about disability, People of Colour, the elderly and everyone else who exists on the margins. Most importantly, these issues show us what society upholds as valuable. This political moment has shown all of us how society views who is expendable and what value systems guide our collective movement for survival in a time of crisis.

Indigenous resistance: beyond survival

The grievous time of COVID-19 affirmed the necessity for me to continue with analyses that shed light upon the historical foundations of violence through analyses of rubrics of value. It compelled me to pick up the pen and commit now and forever not only to a mapping of the settler-colonial capitalist system, but also to advancing a vision forward. The pandemic has become a catalyst for imagining futures for those who refuse to lose hope and refuse to accept these conditions as unchangeable or too vast to fight. In a world that is on the verge of apocalypse, and certainly on the edge of the stinking death of capitalism, our visions to remake the world are here. Where do we go from here?

Pouring out collective visions for generative possibility is a response to the realities we are encountering. Amplifying and holding space for marginalised voices that hail from
both Indigenous and disabled communities is the first step. I have learned that understanding the history is necessary, but that formulating responses and re-imagining the future are essential. In my work as a PhD student, I continue to bridge academic fields where I find the beginnings of meaningful, intersectional engagement that speaks towards these issues. I believe now is the time to come together to unite the efforts of disability justice and Indigenous resistance. COVID-19 offers a socio-political moment to build momentum in a time where a broader audience can be exposed to a lens through which analyses of structural violence are presented in sharp relief. The context is before us as a global community. Furthermore, our time to collectively build, heal and hold one another can be met with actions that show how we move forward from here.

To heal and comfort myself during the waves of uncertainty that have washed over me the last 2 years, I turned to my Diné ancestral stories. Diné ancestral knowledge is filled with lessons on how to rebalance our worlds (K’è InfoShop, 2020). It is filled with stories of hardship, perseverance, resistance and endurance (L. Jim, personal communication, January 19, 2022). Through the concept of rebalancing worlds, the acknowledgement of suffering is met with love, and the conditions of marginalisation are met with relationship. These principles are written into the ontological fabric of Diné lifeways. This time of the pandemic is a story, and it contains the journey of hardship paired with the promise of reparation. In this is agency, and a rewriting of subjectivity that cultivates futurity, and a pathway forward.

Diné people are not just subjects of the harms of empire and capitalism. They are creators and designers of their lives. In the footsteps of our ancestors, we inherit the passion to fight for our people, advance and refuse to yield. Indigenous resistance during the pandemic has taught us that. The pandemic became the catalyst for Diné lifeways of building relationships and futures, regardless of apparent challenges. With the lockdowns and shelter in place orders throughout the Navajo Nation and State of New Mexico, Diné people formalised the emergence of virtual spaces. These hubs became the sites of cultural revival. Adapting from preferences for face-to-face and community-centric presence as sites for learning, Diné people mobilised on larger scales. The past barrier of travelling long distance across our Navajo Nation, which encompasses 27,000 square miles across three US states, and the time limitations of urban-based Diné returning to their home communities were now dissolved momentarily because of the safety parameters. Diné ingenuity prevailed as Diné teachers, scholars and community members set up cultural forums and began widespread virtual language classes. Saad Kidilye (2021), a Diné-led programme aimed at sustaining and strengthening the Diné language and culture, emerged during the time of the pandemic. Through this programme, “knowledge sharers” such as Diné educator Lorenzo Jim cultivated a space which he designated as a “virtual hogan [home]” (L. Jim, personal communication, January 19, 2022). It was indeed a hogan, a site of nurturing and love filled with our ancestral knowledge. At last, I felt like I was home again, and the cascading hardship of the lockdowns began to soften as I witnessed my community build in the face of profound hardship and loss. We connected and relied on relationship to hold us during this time. We advanced through our collective responses, both in these virtual spaces and through mutual aid efforts. I watched as Diné people built pathways where there were none.

Over the years, I have come to realise that Diné knowledge is established on the practices of building community and caretaking relations. It offers ontological reframing of the concept of value from a Diné lens. As I attempted to write my PhD manuscript during the pandemic, there were days where the world seemed as if it would never get better. Yet, my ancestral narratives and histories held the foundations of resistance. They held the Diné principles to value our life, to value our people, collective community, the natural world, our land, and our language and teachings (Jim, 2022; Sandoval, 2022; Yonnie, 2016). These are the rubrics of value to us as Diné people. This is where I pour my efforts and I encourage other Indigenous writers, artists, scholars and people to reflect on how our Indigenous knowledge systems orient to solve the challenges we face.

The reclaimed lens of thinking about value from a Diné perspective has power to advance the lifeways of accountability and responsibility rooted in love and care, which propel transformative action. The critique of existing systems must be paired with the commitment to see our futures and pathways forward. Lakota scholar Kim TallBear reminds us that “theorising out of these constructs . . . of irredeemable hierarchies of life” is to challenge, unsettle and contest systems anchored in settler violence and capitalism, and to point us towards systems of caretaking and better relational practices. In this article, I have sought to draw out these “hierarchies of life” (TallBear, 2022, 8:08) in a way that connects the entrenchment of value politics across multiple spaces in two settler nations. In doing so, I pointed to both the disparity and consequently what I see as the solution: the remaking of value predicated on principles of reciprocity, caretaking and relationship. Such a position refutes the violent normalisation of value as economy that is so ingrained in our society and harmfully assigned to the most marginalised.

Diné relationality and caretaking are examples of lifeways we need so desperately in this moment. They are lifeways that offer sustenance and growth to continue the work of revolutionary change that goes beyond the mere superficial changes of systems that are harmful at their core. It is an intervention that seeks to transform how we live in accountability, care, reciprocity and compassion. It is an intervention that compels us to dig deep into our greatest senses of relationality and ancestral memory, to transform and liberate us from the deadlocked power of settler-colonial capitalism. It also affirms that Indigenous knowledge systems give us a lens to think through the waves of hardship that we have battled across the globe for centuries.
Indigenous knowledge systems offer us a pedagogy not only for survival, but for how to collectively thrive. It is through alliance with other movements to end oppression in all its forms that our moment has come. It is through our visions and stories that we move forward with courage to share these aspirations in a time of great uncertainty.

**Author's note**

Shí èi Sandra Yellowhorse-Kapeli yiníshi. Kinya’aaní nishí adóé Billígáána báshíchiin. Táchítini dashíchei adóé lín’ichíni dashínáí. Támákí Makaurau Aotearoa déé naasha. Kóčéego amá nishí. She is Towering House born for the French of the Diné Nation. She is a PhD Candidate at Te Puna Wānanga at the University of Auckland. Her work is rooted in Diné storytelling which examines philosophies of disability. Her research contributes to the revitalization of Diné land-based knowledge to advance teachings of relationality and belonging to care for our diverse relations.

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**ORCID iD**

Sandra Yellowhorse [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5112-1502](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5112-1502)

**Glossary**

- **Diné**: the People; the ancestral name of the tribe known as the Navajo Nation; Diné is the preferred name that people of this community call themselves based on their own language and stories.
- **hogan**: home; a one-room Diné dwelling or ceremonial structure.
- **Navajo**: Native American Nation whose ancestral territories and reservation expand across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah of the southwest of the United States; also known as Diné people; Navajo was the term given to Diné during colonisation of the southwest and was not what Diné traditionally called themselves; Navajo is the legal term used by the US government.
- **Pasiífika**: Pacific peoples including Sāmoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue and people of other Pacific nations who are now living in New Zealand.
- **Whānau**: extended family.

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