An Operational Paradigm of Cultural Sovereignty at Taos Pueblo

by

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DEDICATION

We have lived upon this land from days beyond history’s records, far past any living memory, deep into the time of legend. The story of my people and the story of this place are one single story. No man can think of us without thinking of this place. We are always joined together.

- Taos Pueblo elder and Tribal Manifesto

I dedicate this dissertation to the red willow children of the past, present, and future.
I would like to acknowledge the various people who have journeyed with me in recent years as I have worked toward completing this dissertation. First, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to un-tdahm-wapu-ee pien-pah hut un-kah-wapu-ee uub-uuw-tsemah (my late father mountain cloud and my late mother new chokecherry) who brought me into this world and made me who I am today. Throughout the struggles and trials of this dissertation, I thought about them daily and missed them dearly. I hope they are walking with the spirits of our ancestors. Secondly, I would like to thank my loving wife Arvella, my darling Missy, and my sweetheart Nick who have each inspired me along this journey from the place of the red willows to the setting sun’s house in the west. Thirdly, I wish to convey special thanks to my family and relations at Taos and Tesuque Pueblos whom also inspired me to expand my personal and professional horizons. I am proud to introduce myself as a relation to each of these villages. Fourthly, I want to thank the Pueblo Leadership Institute, the Santa Fe Indian School, the Pueblo People, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, Elizabeth Sumida Huaman, K. Tsianina Lomawaima, Myla Vicenti Carpio, Rebecca Tsosie, Jessica Solyom, Arizona State University, the Kellogg Foundation, the Chamiza Foundation, and our relatives who paved the way for us through their foresight in making this opportunity available to our people. I am humbled by this gift and it is my desire to reciprocate in any appropriate manner that is available. Ha-wahu! Lastly, and most of all, I would like to thank the spirits of our ancestors, the mountains, the waters, the earth, the winds, the fires, the four-legged ones, the universe, and each of their manifestations for the strength imbued me and our new family.
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INTRODUCTION

In 1996, I attended law school to become a legally trained advocate in my community of Taos Pueblo. I come from a long line of fighters and leaders. My ancestors used their wits and brawn to protect our peoples and lands and taught younger generations the importance of resistance. When the federal government was threatening to whittle our lands away and assign it to the purview of the U.S. Forest Service for “multiple use” our community took action. I grew up hearing my father, who served as war chief, governor, and council man for our Pueblo, recall how the elders, upon hearing about this activity pooled their resources, paying for airline tickets with collective pocket change, to stand before Congress and assert our right to live unmolested on our lands. As time passed, it became clear that wits and courage were important but perhaps it was also time to get our own people on the “inside” – to prepare a cadre of fighters who understood this dangerous model of justice and law we had not helped create and that threatened our very existence. These warriors could warn us of coming danger and work to offset it. This way our peoples could preempt threats, mobilizing an offensive strategy to protect us from the selfish intentions of interlopers, rather than relying solely on defensive tactics. My father supported the decision for me to become one of these fighters. As a law trained leader, I could better understand the ways of the non-Indian attorneys who advocated for and against us, so that I/we could continue our tradition of resistance and fight to defend/protect our unique way of life.

The worldview I was taught now translates into my work for mine and other communities. Now that I am in a position to serve as a tribal legal advocate I am called upon to help make informed policy decisions and to strategically advocate Indigenous
policy positions. This means I advocate for tribal clients but never against them. I listen and put forth a legal position that aligns with their ideas of sovereignty and self-determination. In doing so, I put their interests before that of the state, before that of the federal government, and before that of other non-Native opportunists. My intention is to help to preserve a future for their individual and collective legacy, as members of a unique Indigenous nation.

Tribal clients can have similar and different interests so whenever I work for a new client I try to learn as much as I can about the tribe and its people, culture, history, and way of life. This demonstrates my respect for the tribe and enables me to be a better advocate for them. This kind of training is not typically offered in law schools, although scholars such as Rebecca Tsosie, Robert Williams, James Anaya, and Robert Clinton, among others, are working to make it available. What connects their scholarship is an understanding that legal advocacy for Indian peoples has greatest impact when it is based on the preservation of their inherent rights, practices, and values. As an attorney, I try to utilize this approach as much as possible. However the more I practice the more I realize federal Indian law is inherently coercive in its effort to institute hegemony or dominance among Indian tribes (Tsosie, 2012, pp. 1155-1164). I decided in 2012 that in order to protect tribal rights and ways of life, I must return to graduate school and learn how to connect the philosophies, desires, values, and knowledge-based practices governing Indian peoples with an evaluative approach to legal practices. What I seek, and what I tried to accomplish in this dissertation, is to establish a foundation for a legal model that utilizes Indigenous definitions of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance to
make decisions that prioritize the integrity and well-being of the peoples in its decision-making practices.

**Research Study Focus**

Indigenous peoples have distinct ways of knowing and ways of being. Since the arrival of Europeans, Spanish, and other exploring colonizers, Euro-Americans have sought to impose a colonizing narrative of history that substantiates their own ways of being. These narratives, delivered and upheld through law, policy, and, in some cases religion, impose Eurocentric values and ideology, including limited definitions of sovereignty, onto Indigenous peoples. This active suppression represents a critical loss of centuries of knowledge (Anaya, 2003) and poses risk for future generations. If uncontested or unopposed, they could eventually displace Indigenous epistemologies (knowledge), pedagogies (methods of learning/teaching), and worldviews.

As we enter the 21st century we as Indigenous peoples are presented with an opportunity to engage in a process of introspection to better align our traditional beliefs and practices, including philosophies of sovereignty and self-determination, with contemporary decision-making practices and policy. This introspection can take place in a variety of settings, from council meetings to the dinner table, and requires the participation of all members, from kiva leaders to council members. Eventually, “a collective mind to move forward as one,” as is said in Taos, will emerge from the introspections at all levels and forums. Engaging in introspection is important as we envision our collective future in the new age.

I turn to the knowledge, history, and principles of my people of the Taos Pueblo for creating such a model. My hope is that the result can help our people imagine a...
collective future that balances modern/contemporary non-Taos practices and systems with our own rich traditions and heritage. Today our people have become accustomed to many modern conveniences such as plumbing and electricity, English-only conversation, electronic mediated forms of consumption and interaction, and to appropriating critical aspects of American popular culture. As we become increasingly comfortable in non-Taos ways of being, we become at greater risk of chipping away our way of life – a heritage that has served to guarantee our survival for millennia. Given this risk, we must re-assess the state, progress, and condition of our tribal sovereignty and self-determination, especially within the context of our epistemologies, and decide if we are content with its current manifestation and direction.

To be clear, I am not advocating for a wholesale return to a pre-European existence. Rather, I am advocating for the development of a culturally-grounded approach to evaluating the various aspects of modernity to determine what to embrace and/or continue to adapt. Such an analysis could examine many things but this study focuses specifically on the role of law, technology, medical care, and government as they impact the well-being and integrity of the Pueblo way of life. In the following chapters, I propose an operational paradigm of sovereignty, based on the philosophies and practices of Taos Pueblo as one lens for evaluating current pedagogy. I offer a method for re-visionsing a pedagogy of self-determination that is achievable and capable of replication among other Pueblos.

While there are many ways of experiencing the world and varying definitions and understandings of philosophies and practices across families and villages, what I offer here is but one model. I recognize this model reflects my personal experiences and
understandings as a Pueblo man who has not completed his life course. I share these experiences and understandings from the perspective of the values, principles, and teachings handed down to me from my father. I know knowledge is not finite and that things change over time. The context of today may not be the context of tomorrow. But by offering a reflection of the cultural knowledge and landscape of my time, I hope current and future generations can use it to develop a vision for the future. I offer these experiences and understandings with humility and invite the next generation of thinkers to build upon it, interrogate it, to infuse it with different elements that will preserve our way of life for the red willow children.

Research Questions and Key Terms

In order to begin to develop an example of what an evaluative model might look like in practice; this dissertation study is based on the following three central questions. First, what is Taos epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology (EOMA)? And, what does Taos EOMA mean for Taos sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance? Second, what is the Taos pedagogy of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance? And, third, what is the Taos praxis of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance?

Sovereignty, as I am using it, refers to the inherent right and ability of peoples to govern themselves and to determine their own needs and desires. Political sovereignty allows sovereign nations, such as tribal nations, to enter into agreements with other sovereign nations and to create and enforce laws and policies in pursuit of those desires. What I am calling for in this dissertation is an alignment of political and cultural sovereignty (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). An extension of political sovereignty, cultural
sovereignty is the continuation, repatriation, or reclamation of history, tradition, and cultural identity by Indigenous peoples and refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to control and protect their language, religion, art, and tradition (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). Self-determination is connected to these two terms as it is the enactment or operationalization of sovereignty (Deloria & Lytle, 1983). Finally, self-government/self-governance serves to preserve and enhance a tribal way of life and represents official actions taken by representatives of the people in conformance with sovereignty and self-determination. Self-governance can manifest in tribal law, tribal policy, or through other tribal practices (Deloria, 1970; Kalt & Singer, 2004). Together these three concepts – sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance – protect and define the boundaries of the nexus between Indigenous political and cultural existence.

The unique and specific ways tribal peoples and communities understand and animate the three S’s (sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance) necessitates an understanding of what I have collectively referred to as EOMA: epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology. According to Kovach (2005), epistemology refers to “the philosophy of knowledge” and its “relationship with language as the means for interpreting and communicating ideas” (p. 26). In other words, epistemology is the philosophy of how we come to acquire our worldviews or how we come to know what we know. Ontology refers to a particular theory or agreed upon concept about the nature of being or about what kinds of things exist in order to engage in a dialogue or exchange ideas or information. Thus ontology refers to ways of being in the world. Methodology is a system of methods to pass down or help acquire a particular knowledge or skill set. And axiology refers to the personal and collective values, ethics, and principles of a people.
According to Hart (2010) this may include a commitment to the following principles: respect for individuals and community, commitment and understanding of reciprocity and responsibility, attention to respect and safety of Indigenous peoples and lands, deep listening and hearing with more than the ears, reflective non-judgment, demonstrated intention to honor what is shared, an awareness and connection between the logic of the mind and the feelings of the heart, self-awareness, and subjectivity. Together EOMA reveals the life force of what makes up the Taos knowledge systems.

A paradigm consists of an EOMA and is the basis for an Indigenous worldview. The closest concept the Taos people have to an understanding of self-determination, sovereignty, or self-government is a paradigmatic approach to our collective efforts to preserve our way of life. Without understanding EOMA and ultimately the paradigm or way of life one cannot understand what the three S’s mean for Taos and how they are put into action.

**Taos Pueblo EOMA**

For the Taos people, epistemology and ontology are interrelated relationships because our knowledge is our reality and, vice versa, our reality shapes our knowledge base. Shawn Wilson (2008) likewise describes Indigenous ontology as the equivalent of Indigenous epistemology. Taos axiology reflects our concept of *ha-lem* or respect and is comparable to Wilson’s definition of relational accountability. According to Wilson (2008) relational accountability refers to a researcher’s relationship with the world around him or her, including all creations, and how they recognize and respectfully honor that relationship to achieve enlightenment. In this respect an Indigenous and Taos paradigm stems from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational and shared with
all creation. It is not just exchanged within interpersonal relationships but shared among the cosmos; with animals, with plants, and with the earth. Relational accountability goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge making you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research (Wilson, p. 177).

Finally, Taos methodology is a multi-layered, multi-faceted process that includes self-reflection, meditation, prayer, and spirituality as well as learning about these processes. Importantly, relational accountability is a constant theme connecting these concepts and processes. The effects of diverging from this model are a reflection of an imbalance in relational accountability. Taos people associate this to an imbalance in ha-lem. Consequences such as injury, natural catastrophe, illness, drought, flood, and other individual, community-wide, or environmental impact can result from imbalance.

Originally, my goal was to explain how EOMA influences tribal systems and how these systems possess inherent fairness as expressed through their way of life within a jurisprudential context. Unfortunately I will have to take up this question in a future research project. Suffice it to say this question is not completely unrelated to the present project. I believe there is relational accountability within existing tribal systems to protect individuals regardless of who they are from overreaching or corrupt government. And, although there is a widely held belief among non-Indians that Indian tribes cannot be fair, this is a legacy from colonization, historic fear, mistrust, and a general misunderstanding of Indians. The problem is that the federal government and mainstream society reify and perpetuate this fear through their reluctance to engage tribes in business, government, jurisdiction, and other means. It is easier for tribes in metro areas to overcome those fears
but tribes in rural areas have a high barrier to overcome because of the limited resources
that local and tribal government compete for, such as taxes, tourism, etc.

Many tribal systems are in varying stages of development from the non-Indian
perspective, which is more familiar with a written, representative democracy. In that case,
some tribes are more advanced than others in terms of written law, self-governing
infrastructure, i.e., three-branch government, and inclusion or enfranchisement, i.e.,
voting. Others are less developed, perhaps by choice. Taos is an example of a governing
system that may appear archaic and outdated because of its lack of comprehensive
written laws but it has served us for millennia. It is up to the sovereign (e.g., tribe) to
determine their system of government. This is an international principle.

Methodology

As you read through this dissertation it is important to note my methods and
methodology, or how I answered these guiding research questions. First and foremost, I
am what Williams (1997) refers to as a “story hearing fool.” This concept defines the act
of listening seriously to the stories that Indigenous people tell about a particular issue. It
involves listening to a variety of community members from, tribal elders to tribal
community members and workers, those who talk about family values, culture, traditional
beliefs and practices. It also involves listening to tribal legends and stories for the
purpose of receiving information about morals, values, and ethics. Another purpose is to
receive information about relationships, culture, events, occurrences, experiences, and to
bring the family together. Traditionally, storytellers took turns retelling other stories or
new stories. From there, a story hearing fool goes on to collect other relevant stories. The
philosophy behind such a practice is believed to prepare an effective advocate for
indigenous peoples, to figure out “how indigenous peoples’ stories matter, and to find ways to make them matter through community institution building” (Williams, 1997, p. 764).

Some of these stories are solicited and can be referred to as interviews. Other times they arise organically as a result of tribal community events and require observation and reflection which can be described as ethnography. I absolutely enjoy listening to stories from my elders about how they grew up at Taos. I observe, listen, and learn words, ceremonies, customs, and relations that I never knew or re-learn what I forgot. Williams (1997) defines stories as “an act of love in honor of the memory and wisdom of my elders” (p. 742). The love of stories comes from the love of a good storyteller that invites you to listen. Thus I listen and observe. At times I ask questions so I can try to repeat or better reflect upon the story, which as storytellers, we could begin to ask of our audience.

In addition to listening to stories, I incorporate academic forms of research to my work. I combine oral stories, historical accounts, and traditional lessons with written archives and records. For the present study I engaged in introspection to recall stories and experiences from my childhood and also researched Taos stories recorded by ethnographers, which represented secondary resources. In order to analyze these rich sources of data, I had to first contextualize the setting for the storyteller. Was the story told during the right time of the year? Who was the storyteller? Who was the audience? What was the story? What was the storyteller’s purpose in telling the story? Second, I tried to recall if I heard the story and if it was the same or how it was different. Is the moral or theme the same as the original story or the version I had previously heard? Was
it from the same storyteller? Who were characters? Where did the story take place? Was it an original story or offshoot of a contemporary story; in other words, was it an Indian version of Cinderella? Was the storyteller’s purpose to confuse the audience, i.e., ethnographer? Third, how did the story relate to my life? What were the lessons in the story? Was I supposed to apply these lessons to my life? Could I retell the story and, if so, could I tell it the exact same way or could I change it to suit my intentions?

In answering these questions I was able to identify recurrent themes and/or traditional motifs as well as learn what shaped Taos history and our current world. This process of analysis ultimately led me to identify core principles that should help guide future decision-making. For example, ha-lem was identified as a core evaluative unit of analysis. My experience as a Taos man uniquely positioned me to engage in this work with respect and knowledge of protocol. It also allowed me to access resources and peoples with distinct ability to help interpret information according to the Taos way of thinking.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized in three parts. The first chapter is written as a book chapter and examines the substantive quality of Indigenous self-determination in the early 21st century. I propose that the substantive quality of self-determination is the outcome of an Indigenous People engaging the process of developing their unique doctrine of cultural sovereignty. Coffey and Tsosie (2001) define cultural sovereignty as a self-constructed philosophy of sovereignty based on the alignment of tribal philosophies of sovereignty and an Indigenous way of life. Using Taos Pueblo as a case study, I construct a paradigm of cultural sovereignty against which I evaluate the practice
of self-governance. I conclude that an operational paradigm of cultural sovereignty is achievable and capable of replication among other Pueblos.

The second part consists of a journal article and examines a Pueblo Indian pedagogy of self-determination. I present a proposal for re-visioning federal health care programming to enhance the Taos way of life. I define a pedagogy of self-determination as a process of imparting intergenerational cultural knowledge about how to live a respectful coexistence with humanity and the environment based on the principle of ha-lem. I share personal stories to demonstrate this epistemology was identified and its application toward life experiences. I use this epistemology to structure a pedagogy for evaluating and restructuring federal health care programming to ensure it comports to our way of life. For example, training members of the community as first responders who can participate in hunting ceremonies as both hunters and caregivers in the event of injury or illness of other participants.

The third part is a policy brief focused on re-visioning federal healthcare. The purpose of the policy brief is to invite a dialogue with Taos leaders on how to evaluate and restructure federal health care programming in a manner that preserves and enhances our way of life. This brief represents a synthesis of the prior chapters and focuses on childbirth at home as an expression of ceremony and relationships. While access to contemporary health care increases, the Taos traditional ways of childbirth at home is increasingly diminished. I argue this represents an important loss of cultural knowledge and ceremony. This dissertation concludes by offering implications of this work on a larger scale and inviting Taos and other Pueblos to consider what an evaluative model of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance could mean for our peoples.
Conclusion

I began this introduction by sharing a bit of my personal, professional, and academic journey. Although I value my legal training, I was not taught in law school how to strategically identify, separate, and question the colonizing ways federal (Indian) law can serve as a hegemonic driving force. As a practitioner I questioned the role of the law in displacing tribal philosophies of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-government but until recently felt constricted in how to reconcile this displacement. Thus I embarked on this mission. In this dissertation I have tried to reframe, revise, and refocus existing discussions and concerns about the ways in which sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance impacts and gets exercised by Indigenous communities. I have also sought to propose and advocate for processes of introspection and conversations within Taos that are based on important tradition principles. The resulting evaluative model is intended to provide considerations for practices that can help to preserve a successful and proud way of life.

In the Taos way of life, there is no word for goodbye or an otherwise abrupt conclusion to interpersonal communication. Instead, we say, “until we see one another.” The sense is that we will meet again in this life or the next, as life is an unending cycle of relationships. To the red willow children, I pray that you will have strength, a bountiful basket, a long, healthy life, a home full of life, and my deepest respect. May it always rain upon you.
CHAPTER 1

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the substantive quality of Indigenous self-determination in the early 21st century. Through archival research, introspection, and conversations with community leaders and members, I outline core principles and practices of governance for Taos peoples prior to and after contact with colonizing forces. I also examine how tribal principles and values have changed over time to reveal how modern day Taos peoples, engaging the process of developing their own doctrine, understand and embody cultural sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance.
The chapter begins by defining key terms including: Indigenous peoples, self-determination, sovereignty, and self-governance. Next, using Taos Pueblo, a federally recognized tribe in the southwestern United States (U.S.), I introduce the doctrine of cultural sovereignty as a starting point to analyze the interaction between cultural and political sovereignty. I will examine how Indigenous epistemology (the process of how we come to acquire our worldviews or how we come to know what we know) and pedagogy (the process of imbuing values and lessons) inform these key terms. In order to better understand how Indigenous ways of thinking inform key concepts, I offer an overview of Taos Pueblo’s self-governance model as one example of how tribes incorporate practices to assert their cultural sovereignty and protect their political rights. I present Taos’ notions of ha-lem and relationships as a potential operational paradigm for cultural sovereignty and tribal self-governance. I conclude by suggesting ways an operational paradigm of Taos cultural sovereignty could inform other future models for Pueblo community’s decision-making practices.

**Indigenous People, Sovereignty, Self-Determination, and Self-Governance**

The term “Indigenous people” has been used to refer to members of sovereign nations who share a distinct culture, history, and connection to a particular land base and to each other. These groups may share a common language, spiritualism, and worldview and may be the original inhabitants of a land whose collective cosmology and origin story anchors them to that particular geographic location. Although the United Nations (U.N.) has not adopted a definition of Indigenous people (Cobo, 1983), it defers to Indigenous people to self-identity but relies on a working definition for policy development based on
common historical experiences of colonization, genocide, and recognized acceptance by a group.

The domestic context is similar in that it does not define nor use the term Indigenous people. Instead, the U.S. uses the term “Indian” to describe Indigenous people who are members of federally-recognized Indian tribes, although federal law is deferential to tribal control of the conditions of membership (25 U.S.C. §479) (2015). The overriding domestic focus thus lies on emphasizing a recognized legal relationship between the U.S. and an Indian tribe. For the purposes of this chapter, the definition of Indigenous peoples I use incorporates aspects of the international and domestic definitions. Indigenous peoples are defined by a common land base, history of colonization and genocide, are members of federally recognized tribes, share a language and unique worldview, and have cosmologies and/or origin stories that connect them to particular geographic areas.

Indigenous peoples under international law are said to possess the right to self-determination. That is, they have the right to determine their political status, cultural preservation, and the right to autonomy or self-government over matters concerning internal and local affairs (U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007). Self-determination under this framework is a universal human right (Anaya, 2004). Pragmatically, self-determination does not promise an absolute right to independent nation-statehood so Indigenous people must negotiate their political status with the nation-state where they reside or claim aboriginal origin or rights thereunder.

On the domestic front, when the U.S. Congress enacted the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (ISDEAA), it declared as a matter
of federal policy that self-determination included an educational process by which a tribe could internally develop leadership that was responsive to the needs of their members (Public Law 93-638). Implicit in this declaration is the notion that Congress supports tribal self-determination and that the manifestation of self-determination is local tribal control of federal programming. The Act describes self-determination as a necessary educational process to develop leadership. Upon reviewing the federal government’s historical and legal relationship, as well as their resulting responsibilities, the authors of the Act determined,

The prolonged Federal domination of Indian service programs has served to retard rather than enhance the progress of Indian people and their communities by depriving Indians of the full opportunity to develop leadership skills crucial to the realization of self-government, and has denied to the Indian people an effective voice in the planning and implementation of programs for the benefit of Indians which are responsive to the true needs of Indian communities (ISDEAA of 1975).

The Act further recognizes Indigenous peoples’ desire for self-determination when it states, “Indian people will never surrender their desire to control their relationships both among themselves and with non-Indian governments, organizations, and persons” and calls for an educational process that ensures the development of “qualified people to fulfill meaningful leadership roles (ISDEAA of 1975).”

Therefore it can be said the ISDEAA serves two purposes: one is to recognize the tribe’s desires to self-manage federal programs while the other is to empower tribes to produce their own leaders. In other words, this Act purported to empower tribal governments to control federal programming by training leadership but kept stringent regulations in place to monitor performance. Under this framework leadership is seen as integral to building self-determination and guiding self-governance processes.
I have referred to Indigenous peoples as members of sovereign nations. In order to understand what I mean, it is important to understand sovereignty under an international nation-state model. Under the *Montevideo Convention* (1969), an accord among nation-states outlining an agreed upon framework for determining sovereignty, a nation-state is said to possess sovereignty if it meets the following criteria: (1) it possesses a permanent population; (2) it has a defined territory; (3) it has a government; and, (4) it possesses capacity to enter into relations with the other states. Article 8 further provides that “No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another,” while Article 2 provides “The federal state shall constitute a sole person in the eyes of international law” (*Montevideo Convention*, 1969). Although only fourteen countries, including the U.S., signed the original treaty, it now operates as a basic rule of international law.

In spite of the fact there is no mention of Indian tribes or Indigenous people in the Montevideo Convention, I refer to it here because it is the guiding international principle for defining sovereignty. While it does not mention tribes, it informs how nation-states like the U.S. view Indigenous sovereignty. Under this lens, tribes do not have the capacity to conduct relations with other nation-states although it is increasingly arguable where tribes directly transact business internationally. Indigenous sovereignty, thus, reflects the parameters set forth by domestic law in that the federal government recognizes limited sovereignty for Indian tribes.

**A Federal Construct of Tribal Sovereignty**

Through a series of court decisions, the U.S., beginning in 1823, created a concept of tribal sovereignty (or an inherent right to govern). *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823) (doctrine of discovery extinguished aboriginal title), *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831)
(tribes were dependent domestic nations), and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) (federal law was exclusive over Indian affairs), collectively establish the U.S. doctrine of tribal sovereignty in three principles. First, Indian tribes possess inherent powers of sovereignty that predate and exist outside of the U.S. constitution. Second, the U.S. government has plenary power over tribal sovereignty to limit or extinguish it. Third, U.S. control of the exercise of tribal sovereignty and tribal dependency on the U.S. for protection gives rise to a trust responsibility. In other words, the U.S. Congress possesses exclusive authority over Indian tribal sovereignty. Sovereignty for Indigenous peoples from the perspective of the U.S. then refers to the limited right to act independently and to make decisions without interference from foreign persons or entities.

Prior to the arrival of colonizers, Indian tribes in the U.S. could act independently without anyone or entity telling them what to do. Today they are limited. For example, they can make certain decisions for themselves but are restricted from making decisions about selling lands owned by the U.S. for an Indian tribe (i.e. lands held in trust), making treaties with governments other than the U.S., and any other decision the U.S. determines tribes cannot make on their own as a “domestic-dependent” nation. In other words, Indian tribes cannot take actions that are inconsistent with their dependent status upon being incorporated into the U.S. (*Montana v. United States*, 450 U.S. 544, 1981). The incorporation rationale is that the U.S. took a protective role or guardianship over Indian tribes who the U.S. considered to be in a state of tutelage or wards; therefore, Indian tribes as wards cannot theoretically exercise any powers greater than those their guardian can exercise (*Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, 435 U.S. 191, 1978). The U.S. asserts exclusive, plenary power over Indian tribes (*Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. 515, 1832)
which means the U.S. can and does limit sovereignty for Indian tribes and has the potential to completely revoke it at times.

**The Doctrine of Cultural Sovereignty**

Because there are so many federal restrictions placed upon domestic political tribal sovereignty, Coffey and Tsosie (2001) argue that instead of looking outside of the tribe for a definition of sovereignty, tribes should look within to find the core meaning. They describe this as a process of defining cultural sovereignty, “[as] premised on the central components of sovereignty as it is exercised and understood within tribal communities” (p. 191). They call for recognition of cultural sovereignty defined as “the effort of Indian nations and Indian people to [inherently] exercise their own norms and values in structuring their collective futures” (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001, p. 196). Cultural sovereignty is a self-constructed philosophy of sovereignty and based on the alignment of tribal philosophies of sovereignty with an Indigenous way of life. As a concept, it calls for legal protections for the repatriation or reclamation of history, tradition, and cultural identity by Indigenous peoples. Cultural sovereignty differs from political sovereignty, which refers to the inherent right and ability of peoples to govern themselves and to determine their own needs and desires, by calling for recognition of the right of Indigenous peoples to control and protect their language, religion, art, and tradition (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). What I am calling for in this chapter is an alignment of political and cultural sovereignty or a “reconceptualized and integrated notion of political and cultural sovereignty” (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001, pp. 191). I believe an alignment between political and cultural forms of sovereignty can help inform self-governance principles
that protect the heritage and traditions of tribal societies and their governance practices from the usurpation of federal or state hegemony.

Cultural and political sovereignty can interact and serve to influence and bolster recognition of the other. One example of this interaction can be seen in the high profile Blue Lake Watershed controversy at Taos Pueblo in 1906. Prior to the arrival of European colonizers in the Taos valley, the people of Taos Pueblo had unrestricted access to the mountains behind their village. These lands were used for religious ceremonies, subsistence, and passage purposes and access remained unrestricted until 1906 when then-president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, withdrew these lands from the public domain and placed them under federal protection and administration by the Forest Service division of the federal department of agriculture (Gordon-McCutchan, 1991). This decision immediately sent panic throughout the Pueblo as it meant the peoples’ access was no longer exclusive, that anyone could potentially view their private spiritual practices. I discuss the importance of secrecy/exclusivity of traditional knowledge in detail in a later section. Suffice it to say, Taos peoples were concerned unlimited access by non-community members could threaten the life and power of their traditional access and ceremonial practices. This federal decision set the stage for a 65-year battle to regain exclusive access by means of gaining legal title to 48,000 acres of the watershed (Gordon-McCutchan, 1991).

In this example, the Taos people leveraged political sovereignty to protect cultural sovereignty. The Taos leaders did this by pleading their case to each branch of the federal government. They argued the federal decision to open the lands to the public created oppressive access regulations, hampering their cultural patrimony with the universe. It
was the first time an Indian tribe asserted aboriginal title to lands strictly on the basis of religious freedom. It was an unprecedented claim that unconventionally asserted group rights within the framework of individual rights guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution. According to the first amendment, Congress cannot prohibit the free exercise of religious practices. But this right is not absolute. Taos leadership succeeded in getting the federal government to acknowledge their collective rights by appealing to their cultural and political sovereignty. Taos Pueblo believed in the conviction of their religious claim and their perseverance paid off.

Nearly sixty-five years later, resolution and right to exclusive domain was restored to Taos peoples in 1970. This case inspired the Pueblo to exercise foresight in hopes of preempting the likelihood this could happen again. In cases where they were unable to secure ownership of federal lands adjoining their core reservation by legislative means, the tribe purchased title to neighboring and available lands, then transferred them into trust status. The Pueblo historically employed a strategy of obtaining legal title to lands that adjoin the core reservation in order to create a natural buffer against encroachment and trespass. Historic examples include the acquisition of the Tenorio Tract in 1818, acquisition of non-contiguous Tracts in 1941, and Karavas Tract in 1942 (Taos Pueblo Warchief’s Office, 1998).

The most recent example of the purchase approach is the Moreno Ranch purchase in 1995 when Taos used gaming revenue to purchase fee title to lands on their southeastern reservation boundary (Taos Pueblo Warchief’s Office, 1998). Taos utilized the purchase approach while still employing the legislative approach when possible. A fairly recent example of utilizing a legislative approach/appeal is the restoration of the
bottleneck lands, approved in 1996, which contain key shrines in and around the Blue Lake Watershed and which were inadvertently left out of the original Blue Lake claim (Taos Pueblo Warchief, 1998). Since the late 20th century, Taos has employed either the purchase or federal legislative approach to protect remote shrines or culturally significant sites. Additionally, Taos has historically negotiated access agreements, such as rights-of-way or permits, to conduct pilgrimages to remote shrines off-reservation, as well as first rights of refusal to purchase or negotiate intermittent exclusive use of remote lands containing shrines or cultural significance like the Ponce de Leon Hot Springs in Llano Quemado, New Mexico (van Buren, 2012). These foregoing are examples of Taos’ strategic self-determined approach to exercise political sovereignty toward protecting cultural sovereignty and vice-versa.

**Taos Pueblo: A Case Study of Cultural Sovereignty**

I have alluded to the principles guiding Taos ways of thinking but before I go on to explicitly outline them, it is important to offer a background of the Taos Pueblo as peoples of the southwest. As Indigenous peoples, Pueblo Indians in the Southwestern U.S. possess a rich cultural history that has persisted since time immemorial. Many trace their heritage to the emergence of the first people made by the Creator into this world in which we live. Once living in numerous agricultural villages along either side of the Rio Grande, over time, their villages dwindled to nineteen permanent villages.

The Pueblo Indians are agricultural communities with highly complex religious cultural government and social institutions. They are well-known for their style of earthen multi-story architecture, pottery, weaving, jewelry, and art. The word “pueblo” itself is Spanish for village or community and also describes the earthen architecture and
Indigenous people who live in these agricultural communities. Today, though external pressure to assimilate remains omnipresent, they have held steadfast to their ways of life.

Taos Pueblo is one of the nineteen Pueblos in New Mexico. Taos’ historic inhabitation of the Taos valley dates back to 900 A.D. or the Pueblo I Era (900 A.D. to 1150 A.D.) (Ellis & Brody, 1964). Taos is known for its two multi-storied adobe apartment buildings that straddle the Rio Pueblo, a tributary of the Rio Grande. The main village sits at 7,500 feet above sea level and experiences all four seasons. The mountain ma-wha-luna is a backdrop to the main village and rises to over 12,000 feet above sea level. While Taos is considered an anomaly among the Pueblos because of its historic trade and military alliances with surrounding Indian Tribes such as the Jicarilla Apache and Utes, which influenced its culture, it retains key Pueblo cultural features, such as clan systems, language, creation and migration, architecture, and kivas (Parsons, 1936).

A tribal council governs a U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs estimated 2,443 enrolled Taos people. This council has the exclusive authority to define who is Indian, Indigenous, or a tribal member, but does not have the authority to define who is a person or tdaihnah (which is only for the Creator to determine). Consistent with the international approach to the U.N. extending deference to Indigenous people to engage in self-identification, the Council sets membership criteria based on blood quantum, descent, residence, and participation in religious activities. In contrast, domestic law defines who is Indian to determine eligibility for federal services provided by the U.S., although there is arguably deference to tribes to define membership as a purely intramural matter. The Taos council has adopted a definition of membership consistent with both the U.S. definition and the deferential nature of international law. Under these circumstances, it appears that existing
advocacy for the rights of Indigenous people to self-identify is consistent with the approach followed domestically.

In order to develop an example of an evaluative model of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance that is not based on a constitutional structure it is important to consider the following questions: what is Taos epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology (EOMA)? And, what does Taos EOMA mean for Taos sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance? A paradigm consists of an EOMA and is the basis for an Indigenous worldview. The closest manner of identifying the Taos understanding of self-determination, sovereignty, or self-government is to analyze the paradigmatic approach to collective efforts to preserve the Taos way of life. Without understanding EOMA, and ultimately the paradigm or way of life, one cannot understand what the three S’s mean for Taos and how they are put into action.

The unique and specific ways tribal peoples and communities understand and animate the three S’s (sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance) necessitates an understanding of what I have collectively referred to as EOMA. According to Kovach (2005), epistemology refers to “the philosophy of knowledge” and its “relationship with language as the means for interpreting and communicating ideas” (p. 26). In other words, epistemology is the process of how we come to acquire our worldviews or how we come to know what we know. Ontology refers to a particular theory or agreed upon concept about the nature of being or about what kinds of things exist in order to engage in a dialogue or exchange ideas or information. Thus ontology refers to ways of being in the world. Methodology is a system of methods to pass down or help acquire a particular knowledge or skill set. And axiology refers to the personal and collective values, ethics,
and principles of a people. According to Hart (2010) this may include a commitment to
the following principles: respect for individuals and community, commitment and
understanding of reciprocity and responsibility, attention to respect and safety of
Indigenous peoples and lands, deep listening and hearing with more than the ears,
reflective non-judgment, demonstrated intention to honor what is shared, an awareness
and connection between the logic of the mind and the feelings of the heart, self-
awareness, and subjectivity. Together EOMA reveals the life force of what makes the
Indigenous knowledge systems.

For the Taos people, epistemology and ontology are interrelated relationships
because our knowledge is our reality and, vice versa, our reality shapes our knowledge
base. Shawn Wilson (2008) likewise describes Indigenous ontology as the equivalent of
Indigenous epistemology. Taos axiology reflects our concept of *ha-lem* and is
comparable to Wilson’s definition of relational accountability. According to Wilson
(2008), relational accountability refers to a researcher’s relationship with the world
around him or her, including all creations, and how they recognize and respectfully honor
that relationship to achieve enlightenment. In this respect an Indigenous and Taos
paradigm stems from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational and shared with
all creation. It is not just exchanged within interpersonal relationships but shared among
the cosmos; with animals, with plants, and with the earth. It is important to understand
that relational accountability goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge making – you
are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research or engaged in decision-
making practices (Wilson, 2008).
Taos methodology is a multi-layered, multi-faceted process that includes self-reflection, meditation, prayer, and spirituality as well as learning about these processes. Relational accountability is a constant theme connecting these concepts and processes. The effects of diverging from this model are a reflection of an imbalance in relational accountability. Taos people associate this to an imbalance in ha-lem. Consequences such as injury, natural catastrophe, illness, drought, flood, and other individual, community-wide, or environmental impact can result from imbalance.

**Taos EOMA, Sovereignty, Self-Determination, and Self-Governance**

To review, sovereignty as I use it refers to the inherent right and ability of peoples to govern themselves and to determine their own needs and desires. Political sovereignty allows sovereign nations, such as tribal nations, to enter into agreements with other sovereign nations and to create and enforce laws and policies in pursuit of those desires. An extension of political sovereignty, cultural sovereignty is the continuation, repatriation, or reclamation of history, tradition, and cultural identity by Indigenous peoples and refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to control and protect their language, religion, art, and tradition (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). What I am calling for is an alignment of political and cultural sovereignty. Finally, self-government/self-governance serves to preserve and enhance a tribal way of life and represents official actions taken by representatives of the people in conformance with sovereignty and self-determination. Self-governance can manifest in tribal law, tribal policy, or through other tribal practices. Together these three concepts – sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance – protect and define the boundaries of the nexus between Indigenous political and cultural existence.
The closest concept the Taos people have to an understanding of self-determination, sovereignty, or self-government is an epistemic, ontological, methodological, and axiological approach to our collective efforts to preserve our way of life. From the Taos perspective, the self-determination of the tribe is inherent, which informs the resulting governance paradigm.

According to the Taos governance paradigm, all initiated males are eligible to serve council appointments as leaders in the governor’s or warchief’s office. Leadership turns over annually as both a methodological and pedagogical approach to empowerment and shared leadership experience. There is natural succession within the kiva religious structure as well in order to prepare future leaders. This custom is the same practice followed since time immemorial. There is divergence between pedagogy and praxis, however. I use the term “praxis” to describe the actual practice of enacting EOMA or pedagogy. In the case of governance, praxis reflects custom and tradition though animation. For example, the pedagogy of governance provides the qualifications for appointment to either office consist of: (1) not having been born out of wedlock; (2) not having been divorced or separated or living with someone out of wedlock; (3) not having killed someone; (4) actively participating in the community and ceremonies; (5) fluently speaking the Taos language; and, (5) possessing some measure of experience relevant to a position (Bodine, n.d.). Nowadays single men or those without language fluency receive appointments to either office. Thus, the praxis diverges from the pedagogy in eligibility criteria. I invite the next the next generation of thinkers to build upon this divergence, interrogate it, to infuse it with different elements that will preserve our way of life.
Women are noticeably absent in the governing praxis but their roles are not a result of sexist subjugation since they are the life givers. According to Taos epistemology men cannot function without women. Women are essential to growing men in the religious context for the preservation of our way of life. In the same manner that a corn plant possesses female and male functions, men and women are one. Women participate in virtually all aspects of Taos life in a quiet position of strength. Collectively, we move forward as one. This is a constant theme in Taos spiritual and religious oration advising the people on how to live. Self-determination, therefore, is not an individual endeavor but is a paradigmatic collective conscience.

In order to fully understand the Indigenous concept of what animates sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance, one must understand the history of the community as well as its epistemological commitments. Indigenous epistemology and ontology are the beliefs held by a community including its unique culture, tradition, norms, values, and ways of being (Hart, 2010). The community has ways of theorizing about their knowledge and way of being through discourse in their language and thought processes.

In general, Indigenous knowledge and way of being is vibrant, dynamic, flexible, beautiful, and holistic from production to validation to transmission to theory. Knowledge about relationships is created through a culturally constructed process. Knowledge and ways of being are also informed through ceremony, lived experiences, and environment (Battiste, 2002). Knowledge and ways of being are understood to be a relational process with relational accountability (Wilson, 2009). Given this stance, whenever an unrelated third person records the knowledge of an Indigenous people their
recording may not constitute genuine, holistic, or reliable community knowledge because community knowledge comes from the people to whom it belongs. In some sense, only the Indigenous community, acting through its members, can properly theorize about the knowledge and ways of being. This is important to note considering, “Indigenous people thinking in their own cultural references leads to conceptualizing in their own worldview, which naturally leads to opposition of dominant ideology” (Trask, 1999, p. 54-56).

An Indigenous worldview thus is transcendent, timeless, and relational. It is both a foundation and lens through which people interpret their reality or existence within their environment. Perhaps one of the most commonly shared foundational principles found across various unique Indigenous worldviews is the frequency in which communities describe a relational worldview with clear emphasis on spirit and spirituality as well as a sense of communitism and respectful individualism. Hart (2010) defines communitism as “a sense of community that is held together by familial relationships and commitment to family” (p. 3). Hart (2010) further defines respectful individualism as a way of being whereby an individual “possesses freedom of self-expression that is recognized by the community but the individual recognizes they owe a duty of care to act on the needs of the community as opposed to self-interest alone” (p. 3). The underlying premise is on accountability and consideration in maintaining relationships.

Secrecy, Ha-lem, and the Principle of Reciprocal Trust

Taos Pueblo epistemology thus is relational. It is also centered on the importance of secrecy/protection of sacred knowledge (Brandt, 1980) and on ha-lem and the principle of reciprocal trust. Taos people possess an unwritten knowledge about their way
of life that expresses veneration for their spiritual relationship with humanity and their environment. As the people of the red willows, the place name defines the people as part of an ecosystem. The following is a general description of the Taos way of life, which is taken from a U.S. Court of Indian Claims Commission Order dated September 8, 1965,

The native religion of the Taos Indians is to this day very much involved with the daily life of the people. This religion does not and has for centuries tied them closely to the land. The land and the people “are so closely tied together that it is what might be technically called a symbiotic relationship—the people, by their prayers and their religious functions, keep the land producing; and the land keeps the people. (Pueblo of Taos v. U.S., 15 Ind. Cl. Comm. 666, 682 (1965) (Order).

One of the basic precepts of Pueblo philosophy and religion is that a way of life was established in the beginning by Mother Nature and the Pueblo’s forefathers, and that things should be done as they were in the past.

John J. Bodine, an anthropologist who studied Taos culture, in a letter of support to the U.S. Congress explained the religious significance of exclusive access to sacred environmental shrines, including the Watershed at Blue Lake. Bodine described Taos’ religious leaders as reluctant to disclose tribal religious knowledge.

Taos religion is like a mosaic composed of bits and pieces of knowledge with each part known only to a restricted number of individuals. For Taos religion to survive however each part of the whole must function properly and do its share, otherwise imbalance will occur and, as they fervently believe, disaster will ensue. Their culture will be destroyed. If an individual’s religious duties are not properly performed and transmitted to his successor, which is done in absolute secrecy, then the religion cannot function…. This is why the Taos say in council meetings on even purely secular matters, “We must move evenly together.”(Pueblo of Taos v. U.S., 33 Ind. Cl. Comm. 82 (1974)).

This passage outlines the importance of protecting the sanctity of the Taos way of life. Access to sacred knowledge, which includes worldview, customs and traditions, ceremonies, life ways, and the proper use of that knowledge are subject to selective
transmission, not only toward outsiders (i.e., all non-members and non-initiated members) but also insiders as well (e.g., information is disclosed based on a level of initiation among members) (Brandt, 1980). Secrecy as a cultural value is designed to protect the integrity of cultural knowledge.

The sacred knowledge Taos people possess about their way of life is pedagogically transmitted to younger generations through language, observation, experience, participation, listening, repetition, oration, memory, stories, songs, and ceremonies. In the Taos way of life, learning, and knowledge go hand in hand. Learning at Taos requires a good heart and thoughts to master a particular knowledge and to transmit it in the appropriate way. The people hold knowledge for the people, and no one person can sell or give it away. All knowledge is sacred to the people. The Taos way of life teaches about caring for each other and our environment; it is about relationships and maintaining those relationships.

Ha-lem or respect is a tenet of the culture that posits a trilateral system of trusts among self, community, and environment. The premise of the tenet is that these trusts must remain in balance and that such balance will maintain cultural harmony with the past, present, and future. A disturbance is believed to occur when one of the trusts is imbalanced. Disturbances can lead to negative consequences to the other corners of the trilateral system. For example, if an individual were to commit an action to cause imbalance, such as showing disrespect toward an elder, this could have adverse impacts not only on the person who committed the act but also on the community and environment. One immediate tragedy could be the shortening of one’s life span. The act could also cause disharmony within the community due to ill-feelings and such feelings
could be transposed to the environment through incomplete prayer, meditation, or
ceremony, with the reciprocal consequences of bad weather, poor crops, illness or death
in the community, or spiritual harm to the individual. While the system appears
complicated, knowing the basic tenet of *ha-lem* informs the values and norms of the
community.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1. Operationalization of *ha-lem*. This figure depicts the operationalization of the
tenet of *ha-lem* between the individual, community, and environment, and the balance of
harmony with the universe. An imbalance occurs when one of the three components of
the trilateral reciprocal trusts are impaired. This imbalance in *ha-lem* is believed to
produce an adverse outcome to the components and ultimately affects the universe.*

Under the Taos framework of *ha-lem* all relations, including the environment,
have an inherent right to self-determination. According to Taos’ ontology, this reality is
ture. If a river floods whose decision was it for the river to flood except the ecosystem?
The same rationale applies to a natural forest fire, a tsunami, tornado, hurricane, blizzard,
etc. Clearly, an imbalance exists in the ecosystem, which is trying to rebalance among
the community and individuals according to the tenet of *ha-lem*. 
Our connection with the environment imposes upon us an obligation to take caution when we make decisions. There is no denial that decisions must be made on a daily and moment-by-moment basis. The appeal is to *ha-lem* and the collective consciousness of our way of life. Since we do not live in isolation on mother earth if we make a decision it ripples throughout the universe to reach the sun, moon, stars, and other heavenly bodies. If this was not the case, why pray to these celestial bodies in the first place? The connection to *ha-lem* is well understood in prayer and epistemology. The spirits see the missteps in the example and so does the sun father and others. When we pray, we pray for the individual, the community, and the environment. Our prayers are inclusive so that all may thrive in their roles.

**Taos Pueblo: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, and Self-Governance**

The Taos governance paradigm suggests the tenet of *ha-lem*, through its inherent notion of fundamental fairness, does not require a written document because it is a lived experience. This way of thinking can mitigate the need for a written governing constitution. If a leader makes a decision or takes an action out of self-interest, they have already violated the tenet and brought harm to themselves, others, the environment, and the universe. In a system that requires constant balancing and restoration of *ha-lem* insofar as we are fallible as human beings, it is not unusual to make a mistake but the key is to learn from the mistake and to avoid the same in the future. Of course, there will always be consequences even for unintentional mistakes. Mistakes are not unforgivable, even those who stray from our way of life will be always helped to get back on the right path.
Thus, the Taos concept and process of governance and leadership is not guided by a written constitution. Governance and leadership derive from our sacred knowledge about order, respect, and responsibility. In turn, these serve as values that guide and inform how persons conduct themselves. Respect is an essential principle of our way of life and permeates our relations with humanity and our environment. Responsibility comes when the people show respect for our environment, and there is a natural order that keeps the people from exhausting natural resources. We rely upon one another to be conscious of the impacts of our decisions on others and our environment.

The concept and process of governance and leadership among the Taos people was not historically guided by a written constitution but derived instead from our sacred knowledge about order, respect, and responsibility. Elders have intentionally disallowed the culture or language to be documented in writing. However Taos does preserve information about our peoples through other forms of material culture that encode knowledge, such as artistic motifs, pottery, weaving, regalia, rock art, place names, shrines, architecture, village planning, trails and paths, and so on. This also includes environmental aspects such as springs, places, rock formations, mountains, and others.

The restriction on written documentation was placed in order to preserve sanctity except when necessary to defend aboriginal claims. Even then, written documentation is not a decision taken or made lightly, as there are cultural sanctions for doing so. Under this belief system, documenting sacred knowledge without engaging in proper protocol and receiving permission from elders and other leaders could lead to sanctions or consequences resulting from a violation *ha-lem*. This awareness of potential sanctions are intended to enforce values that guide and inform how persons conduct themselves.
In the past, governance traditionally emanated from the Creator who instructed the people about their role relative to their environment. These instructions addressed ceremonial cycles, religious and rite of passage indoctrination rituals, language, village site selection, agricultural and hunting practices, leadership, clan structure, social order, healing, childbirth and rearing, values, customs, songs, dances, prayer, cosmology, creation, relationships, and virtually every aspect of how to survive in harmony with the environment. The clan and kiva system was the traditional form of self-governance at Taos. Each took turns leading the people as they conducted their ceremonies for the greater good of humanity and environment. The Taos people knew and respected these structures. Eventually, the system underwent changes when the Taos people first encountered Europeans in the 16th century.

**Colonial Influence on Taos Governance**

When the Taos people encountered the Spanish in the 1500s, they did not understand governance outside of their traditional way of life. Pursuant to the *Recopilición de Leyes de los Reinos de las Indias* of 1680, the Spanish imposed a foreign system comprised of a cacique, a council, governor, magistrates, sacristan, and fiscales, which many Pueblos adopted, including Taos. The Spanish instituted a system to establish dominion, a system of land grants (in contemporary terms, federal reservations), and that sought to identify loyal liaisons to the provincial government. The Spanish had a governance system that placed the King of Spain as the head of state, followed by the Council of the Indies, Viceroy, Audiencias and finally local government.
Figure 2. Spanish Colonial Administration 17th Century. This organizational chart depicts Spanish Colonial Administration in the 17th century during the Spanish Inquisition into New Spain now the State of New Mexico. Retrieved from http://faculty.smu.edu/bakewell/BAKEWELL/thinksheets/admin.html. Copyright 1998 by Peter Blakewell.

In order to align local government with the hierarchy of colonial administration, the Spanish established a cacique in each Pueblo as a hereditary leader, which was a concept of unitary leadership lifted from their experience in the West Indies with the Arawak Indians whose self-governance structure centered on a hereditary cacique as the leader of the tribe. The Spanish established secular officers consisting of magistrates, a council (alcaldes or regidores), and governor (or alcalde, alcalde mayor or corregidor) to comport to the *Recopilación de Leyes de los Reinos de las Indias* of 1680. To facilitate the conversion of Pueblo people to Catholicism, the Spanish instituted a system of non-secular positions known as sacristans (or church keepers) and fiscales who were responsible for ensuring Pueblo people regularly attended mass. According to the *Recopilación de Leyes de los Reinos de las Indias* of 1680, the Spanish directed provincial governors to oversee annual elections of these positions.
Over time, Taos combined secular and non-secular positions under one umbrella of the governor’s office, composed of ten members. The names changed to reflect contemporary titles of positions while still retaining the essence of the Spanish influences. The governor’s office consists of the governor, a lieutenant governor, a secretary, sheriffs, and fiscales. Contemporaneously, the governor’s responsibility enlarged to include spring ditch cleaning, inter-governmental relations, tribal court, and chief executive functions (Parsons, 1936).

A traditional executive position existed—and persists—prior to the overlay of Spanish governance; the religious position of the warchief pre-dated the Spanish encounter and reflects the Taos way of life in that the office is conducted in our language and on our terms. The warchief was the original protector of the people and environment and held a ceremonial function during times of war and hunting. The warchief was also present during certain ceremonies but took a subordinate role to the clan and kiva leaders unless he was in that role. Selection of the warchief was the function of a man’s hunting prowess, military exploits, solid moral character, and living the Taos way of life. The warchief’s staff consisted of junior officials for a total of twelve, including the primary position. The warchief’s authority was outside the defensive wall that surrounds the village, including areas of the environment and military defense. Over time, the warchief’s authority grew to include some overlapping powers with the governor in regard to government relations but focused mainly on environmental issues such as watershed management, wildlife management, and trespass.

Today, the offices of the governor and warchief are considered dual executives of the Pueblos. The tribal council appoints eligible men to these positions for a calendar
year term. The tribal council consists of kiva and clan leaders, former governors and warchiefs, the cacique, and the current governor and warchief. Individual council members serve a lifetime position. The council is roughly 40 members at any single point in time. The council is the governing body of the Pueblo (Bodine, n.d.). The people incorporated the Spanish leadership positions into our way of life by delegating the selection and installation process, outlining certain clan responsibilities, and requiring these leaders to orate at ceremonies where they previously had no authority. Still, the people expected these leaders to adhere to and protect our way of life.

Figure 3. Taos Pueblo Tribal Council. This figure depicts the membership on the tribal council, and the overlapping trust responsibility of the collectives who serve lifetime positions as the governing body of Taos Pueblo. Kiva/clan leaders and the cacique have specific duties to all Pueblo peoples to help preserve the way of life through promoting and oversee community spiritual and cultural events. Governors and warchiefs are responsible for executing the will of the council while former representatives are responsible for serving as advisors to the current leaders. Together these collective bodies comprise the tribal council, which is responsible for maintaining and asserting the three S’s. In other words, they are expected to promote the will and needs of the people through preservation of the Taos legacy.
The men who serve in these leadership positions do so for one calendar year; although they can serve subsequent terms the terms are not typically consecutive. Young men who underwent religious indoctrination are eligible to serve on the warchief’s staff and can later serve an appointment to the governor’s staff. Each office historically conducted meetings in the native language, wearing native clothes, and held at sundown in the village homes of the respective leader. The opportunity to serve on either staff remains an honor as well as a training ground for future leaders. The governor and warchief work in tandem for the protection of the Taos way of life.

What the history of Taos governance shows is that the current system is not reflective of our traditional model of governance. We have adapted to our conditions while still maintaining our oral society. However, if we are to evaluate the current model by its ability to meet the needs of the people and preserve our traditional rights and values and find the system is not working, we can change it. For example, if the Catholic officers or the governor’s staff is not sufficiently working with the warchief or representing the needs and desires of the people, we can change the structure or process to be more in line with our traditions, values, and needs.

The Role of Self-Determination

Since self-determination is considered to be the embodiment or the catalyzing of sovereignty, the substantive process of self-determination requires that tribes first engage in introspection in order to locate cultural values that drive their understanding of sovereignty within their culture. Tribes must probe their philosophical core belief systems to define for themselves their notions of sovereignty and autonomy, including the rights and responsibilities thereunder. Next, tribes must determine their chosen relationship
between cultural and political sovereignty since a doctrine of cultural sovereignty is intended to produce an alignment of interests in the relationship between tribal government and cultural identity and can serve as the foundation to make federal appeals.

Introspection is a key part of this process. Introspection is innate to humans and involves the process of self-reflection into conscious thoughts and feelings (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.). Introspection is integral to self-development. The process can occur individually or within a group and is helpful for observing and evaluating individual or group behavior and responses to a particular situation (Witt, 2010). Introspection among a group creates healthy discourse and dynamic society. Concurrent introspection helps a society evolve and adapt.

**Engaging Citizenship and Introspection**

Following is an example of individual and group introspection within a family of tribal leaders. The purpose is to demonstrate how efficacy occurs in terms of citizenship engagement in an oral society. The discussion will be crucial to show why it is important to facilitate a process whereby people who live abroad must have access to the process to engage their citizenship as if they were resident at Taos Pueblo. There are essential requirements for meaningful engagement including language fluency, ceremonial participation, value inculcation, and familial relationship building.

As a child growing up in a family of tribal leaders at Taos Pueblo where my father and paternal uncles each had held positions as warchief, governor, and councilman, we frequently engaged in introspection about leadership styles and governance practices. Usually our conversations began with who was the governor and/or who was the warchief that calendar year. We then discussed current events within the village such as
marriages, divorces, new births, and deaths. Next we discussed issues made public by the governor at his Sunday morning updates wherein he reported on ongoing tribal activities or upcoming events. Occasionally we discussed contentious council issues that were previously presented to the public. Information on these issues were shared by my leaders/relatives only to the extent it was appropriate to share with non-council members, such as me and by brothers, as members of our nation and as potential future leaders. For example, they might share information on economic development initiatives, such as a proposed gaming facility site or planning initiatives for tribal lands within the Seventeenth Century Spanish Land Grant or Town of Taos proper.

My father cautioned us about sharing information outside of a privileged or executive session discussion among the leaders or council. Although he never disclosed privileged information, he would admonish us about the importance of maintaining confidentiality and not sharing village information with outsiders. Although not apparent on the surface, my father was socializing us to be informed and moral citizens and leaders of our nation. He was conveying important information about our government and way of life. What he offered was more than just idle gossip. We were practicing government participation. We shared our ideas and thoughts on the information we received through these conversations while ranching or farming or during an evening visit with other relatives and community members.

This is how we were enfranchised as members or citizens of our Pueblo. Although we did not hold official leadership positions and therefore could not vote on many of these matters we had direct access to our leaders. By the same token, our leaders had direct access to their constituents. In other words, there was unprecedented access in our
representative democracy. I had the ear of my governor, warchief, and council member. If my ideas were deemed useful, I was confident my relative/representative would convey them to the larger political office or council. After all, they had a reciprocal fiduciary trust responsibility to others and the environment under our traditional precept of *ha-lem*.

**Figure 4.** Taos Pueblo Citizenship Engagement. This figure depicts how individuals engage in introspection within their family units (shown here as two units on the right to represent the nuclear and extended families of the warchief and governor as well as other constituent citizenry) and their nuclear and extended families’ connections to family members who serve on the tribal council. Each member of the council has the ear of their family members, clan relations, extended family, and all the people. The tribal council through the governor and warchief exercise the sovereignty and self-determination of the Pueblo. The governor and warchief interact or interface with external entities, including federal, state, and local governments.

I could imagine the same scenario happening in other Pueblo homes and over the course of existence in our valley and other Pueblo lands. These have been Taos traditions and practices since time immemorial. As members of our Pueblo, we would repeat this introspection as a family unit whenever we went to visit our relatives where we exchanged ideas and transmitted vital information about the Pueblo. We essentially sought out the opinions of our relations in order to maintain balance and harmony within
our relationships. Therefore, engaging in introspection in a Pueblo Indian community is highly important as a means of exercising and expressing citizenship. While one can indirectly engage their citizenship by conventional means such as contacting their leadership through letter writing, telephone calls, or newspaper editorials, a direct engagement is personalized and occurs whenever there is interpersonal communication and/or interaction with a leader.

These discussions transpire throughout a member’s life, from childhood to adulthood. Any disruption to these communications necessarily means that the individual cannot appropriately engage their citizenship because they no longer have a vital link to critical information about their government. Under this model, the ability to speak our heritage tongue (or “Tiwa” as Western Anthropologists have referred to it) is important because so many of these conversations are conveyed through it. Engaging in personal communication also required us, as Pueblo peoples, to recognize and know our relations, to actively participate in community and in ceremony, and to actively connect with our leaders. As an oral society, like many Indigenous peoples, Taos people engaged in a collective enterprise of preserving knowledge, engaging citizenship, and expressing their way of life.

For those members who live abroad or grow up away from Taos, there lies a significant risk they will become disenfranchised if they do not maintain a living connection to their home community. These members may not possess the inculcated value system that a person growing up at Taos would receive from cultural immersion. Moreover, s/he may be at greater risk to not develop knowledge of the language, ceremonies, shrines, and material culture. While there is a belief among the people at
Taos that the parents of these persons are responsible for imparting this vital cultural information, the reality is that often these persons are victims of their circumstances. Various circumstances may explain impediments to gaining cultural knowledge or language fluency including but not limited to parents who are not fluent speakers, parents who may be one or two generations removed from growing up at Taos, having only one parent from Taos, having a legal guardian who may not be from Taos, or cost prohibitive limitations to making frequent trips back to Taos. This represents a critical loss in the continuum of the Taos way of life that jeopardizes not only the ha-lem accorded among residents in the community, but also respect for the red willow children who live abroad and the environment.

Thus cultural sovereignty at Taos Pueblo depends upon critical interpersonal communications to sustain itself, the community, and the environment. In situations where family destabilization occurs due to the death of elders or disintegration of the family unit, e.g., adoption of Taos children by non-Taos parents, this vital link can become severely diminished or severed. Until the lines of communication are restored, the remaining family members who desire to engage their citizenship become disenfranchised. This occurs rather frequently and in cases where a family member loses their connection to the tribal council, they cannot meaningfully engage their citizenship. As a consequence, the governing system declines in vitality and can ultimately lose its legitimacy among the people. Later in this chapter, I present a policy recommendation for engaging citizenship for children who live abroad in an effort to reunite them with family, culture, spirituality, and their homeland. A summer resident program is critical to
avoid a decline in the vitality of Taos’ oral society, and hence, its legitimacy among the people.

Many leaders and elders have argued that Taos governance remains this way because if it were to shift to an impersonal representative democracy with characteristic voting, formal public hearings, and interactions with elected representatives by appointment only, the oral system would lose its integrity and connection to the people and environment. Essentially the system of governance becomes dehumanized or even de-spiritualized. To remain dynamic, Taos governance depends upon introspection at all levels and forums from family dinners, informal conversations, and ceremonial gatherings. Taos leadership incorporates information from these introspections into their decision-making within the tribal council, which in turn, gives direction to the warchief and governor. Taos people have governed themselves under this oral system since time immemorial. The Taos oral system facilitates an interpersonal hands-on approach to government as opposed to an impersonal, confidential, soulless paper ballot system.

Therefore the in-person interface required for Taos governance not only serves to strengthen relationships between community members, it forces community members and leaders to be accountable for their positions, words, and ideas. The governance system is a living entity that draws its essence and heartbeat from the people. If it skips a beat or stops beating, the system will malfunction which could compromise the balance between individuals, community, and the environment – or worse, it could cease to exist.

**Interactions between Cultural Sovereignty and Political Sovereignty**

Under international law, self-governance is synonymous with national sovereignty, signifying the right of a nation-state to exclusively and independently govern
internal matters without interference from other nation-states (U.N. Charter art. 1.). Nation-states typically operationalize self-governance through a governing document such as a constitution. However, at the international level, there is no mention of Indian tribes or Indigenous people as possessing the right of self-governance in the U.N. charter. This is quite different from the U.S. context. Perhaps the most well-known domestic articulation of self-governance is the U.S. Constitution, which actually contains two references to Indians not taxed and Indian tribes (Pommersheim, 2002).

The U.S. Constitution consists of three sections that establish the philosophy of government (or preamble), the structures and enumerated powers of government, and subsequent amendments to guarantee specific rights. Three main principles are embodied in the Constitution: (1) every person has the inherent right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; (2) the government is one of limited, enumerated powers delegated to it by consent of the people, and any powers not delegated are reserved to the states and people; and (3) three separate branches of government are constructed in order to create checks and balances on government. The first ten amendments to the Constitution are known as the Bill of Rights, which articulate the fundamental rights of U.S. citizens. In turn, each state of the union possesses a written constitution that sets forth its self-government and parallels the federal constitution.

As sovereigns, tribes have the prerogative to adopt a constitution. In 1934, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act which gave tribes the option to reorganize their government under a federally approved constitution (Indian Reorganization Act, ch. 576, 48 Stat. 984 (1934)). Among the Pueblos, most resisted in favor of their oral societies and did not adopt a constitution. However, some did including...
Santa Clara Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo, Laguna Pueblo, and Zuni Pueblo. Tribes do not have to adopt a constitution; they have the right of self-determination to adopt the means by which they will govern themselves.

Competing paradigms of self-governance are divergent between the Taos governance paradigm and the duality of United States’ national sovereignty under international law and its constitutional form of government under domestic law. In the international context, applying the doctrine of national sovereignty, there is clearly support for the domestic exercise of governance without interference from other nation-states. In the domestic context, the United States proclaims plenary authority over all governments despite being a government of enumerated powers and possessing only those powers delegated by the people and states (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001). For Taos, it is important to recognize this divergence when we advocate for self-government so we can structure our advocacy accordingly.

What I mean by this is that Taos should not argue nation-state sovereignty without supporting a rationale. Since we are not sovereign under international law and have limited sovereignty under domestic law, those arguing must come from a position of strength. Cultural sovereignty provides one potential area of strength. For example, arguing we need federal funding for a first responder program to train our members who attend ceremonial hunts. Another example might be arguing we need federal funding for a program to reinstitute childbirth at home to preserve our culture and way of life. Asking for dollars for healthcare alone does not seem to get at the ear of congress so grounding these claims in cultural rights and processes may bolster the strength of the argument as it served us well when we sought protection of the Blue Lake Watershed. Therefore,
structuring advocacy to reflect an integrated notion of cultural and political sovereignty is crucial to strategic positioning.

Based on the conflation of international legal concepts of self-determination and sovereignty, it would seem that, consistent with international law, the Taos paradigm could meaningfully exist without external interference from conflicting or limiting international or domestic laws. Unfortunately, the same sources of law that protect nation-states from external interference do not apply in their entirety to entities assigned the status “domestic dependent nations,” such as Indian tribes and specifically Taos. The United States exercises plenary power over Indian tribes and pronounces that tribal exercises of certain types of governmental powers are inconsistent with their status as dependent nations, or that Indian tribes are limited in their authority to purely intramural matters. Federal plenary power effectively leaves tribal self-determination in a state of ambiguity insofar as they can operate under their governance paradigms subject to federal law.

The lack of clarity for exclusive sovereignty versus limited sovereignty produces gaps in the implementation of proclamations such as the *U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and its United States counterparts. From a tribal perspective, in its current form this document is not necessarily helpful as it serves merely as a statement of policy. The same problem arises domestically with U.S. Presidential Executive Order 13175. Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments, issued by William Jefferson Clinton, which provides that the Order does not create any enforceable right, benefit, or trust responsibility. Given these circumstances, tribes have at least two options: try to advocate for enforcement or ignore these as unenforceable policy
pronouncements. However, tribes must continue to operate under at least the domestic policy while advocating for federal adherence to this policy. Based on the Blue Lake Watershed controversy and ensuing interactions with the federal government, Taos’ experience calls for using all available means to advocate their cultural sovereignty, including policies perceived as unenforceable.

One consequence is that because Taos epistemology does not define the rights that people or co-creations possess, the Taos governance paradigm does not require the express legislative protection of the rights of individuals or co-creations beyond the sacred tenet of respect. For example, enacting a law to proscribe chopping down a mature chokecherry tree to get to the fruit at the top is counter-intuitive to the concept of *ha-lem*, which establishes reverence for the environment. On the other hand, it is not intuitive under a Taos epistemological or paradigmatic perspective that international law contemplates that a tribal council is responsible for the internal protection of the rights of its members when there is existing infrastructure by way of epistemic and pedagogic value systems. A similar logic and analysis applies to federal laws that purport to extend citizenship and certain portions of the U.S. Bill of Rights to Indians and Indian tribes, which are designed to protect tribal members from their own councils or government in the absence of due process. This logic confounds the intersection of international, federal, and tribal law, as the former two seek to establish hegemony within the latter relative to due process.

Another consequence of the uninformed interaction of the U.S. with the Taos dual executive model is that the federal government tends to only recognize a single executive or point of contact (i.e. the governor). An example is the execution of federal grants or
contracts directed to the governor even if the subject pertains to an environmental matter within the exclusive purview of the warchief. This hegemonic preference effectively sidesteps the warchief and excludes him from exercising his oversight of environmental matters. Such an approach may further undermine any internal check and balance between the warchief and governor intended to reflect transparency and shared authority under Taos governance.

Those opposed to the dual executive approach have argued such an action creates confusion as to who speaks for the Pueblo. In response, the Pueblo has no choice but to concede to the federal hegemonic process, but this is slowly changing through an educational process from the tribal side of the relationship. The federal government’s preference/practice of engaging only the governor imbues a sense of authority in that office that is not consistent with traditional approaches to governance.

Considerations for Policy-Makers

Based on traditional principles, Taos leaders can craft a strategy for advocating for self-determination and political autonomy. An example of an approach based on these principles might include accounting for whether decisions observe ha-lem and whether the decision considers the following:

- Individuals. Tribal leaders are expected to not be biased but make decisions based on what will benefit the entire community and not just their immediate relations. If, however, a tribal leader does make a decision that is self-serving or otherwise biased and violates the tenet of ha-lem there are cultural consequences that could harm him, the community, and environment.
• Community. Leaders are expected to consider the potential impacts of any given decision on the community’s subsistence, culture, ceremonies, and way of life. They must consider how negative impacts could be mitigated or avoided. What risks and benefits are there to the community if a particular option is chosen? How might the decision affect our legacy? How might it affect the individual, the community, and the environment?

• Environment. Leaders must consider how the environment is affected by a particular proposal. For example, if a decision to reduce the in-stream flow of a body of water reduces it to the point of standing water how will this impact the aquifer, the fish, the plants, the birds, the deer, the elk, and all other creations that rely on the river flow? Are there health risks to the ecosystem, including the people, from low running or standing water? Who says we have to take such an action right now? What will happen when we have ceremonies that require resources we may be depleting? Is the ceremonial use a high priority use? Where do we go for relief if the proposal does not work? What are the spiritual risks of taking the action?

• Past, Present, Future. Leaders must consider why a decision is important now versus yesterday or tomorrow. If we knew about a particular consequence, what did we do or not do to prepare for this eventuality if it is one? How might this decision affect our children? How long will the proposal bind us to comply? What if we can no longer comply because to do so would hurt or harm our people or way of life?
If a leader is unable to provide a satisfactory answer to these questions, it is reasonable to request additional information in order to make an informed decision. Even if it requires breaking down the proposed action into smaller pieces for comprehension, this too is both reasonable and responsible. Ultimately, all the persons involved in making a decision will be responsible for the outcome and to each other individually, communally, and environmentally.

From a cultural sovereignty perspective, our sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance are inherent to our way of life. According to Taos EOMA we are one with our environment and our way of life celebrates this connection through ceremony. Our survival comes from our sacred knowledge about relationships, respect, and responsibility. These in turn serve as values that guide and inform how we should conduct ourselves. Over the course of our lifetime, we learn about these relationships, how to respect these relationships, and about our responsibility for these relationships. We are stewards of each other, the community, and environment.

Parents are responsible for reinforcing these teachings throughout a child’s life. Clans reinforce these teachings throughout a person’s life. Leadership rotates among the people and within clans because the people all work toward the common goal of survival of the Taos way of life. The role of governance then is to preserve the Taos way of life by keeping balance and harmony among the community and with the environment. One could also describe this as self-determination in the sense that each person bears a responsibility to conduct him or herself appropriately else their actions could harm not only the environment, but each other.
Language remains essential for maintaining and transmitting knowledge at Taos. Language, symbolism, body movements, inflections, tones, formal, and informal communications are essential features of a cultural language and an integrated notion of cultural and political sovereignty. Language is so highly sanctified that the council of elders have not sanctioned any writing, nor do they support the teaching of the language or learning outside the home or village. The rationale is that if they were to allow any outside teaching of the language it would lead to a decline in its sanctity and ultimately the sanctity of the ceremonies, which use the language. The importance of the ceremonial pedagogy of language immersion cannot be overstated toward the preservation of the Taos way of life. Taos’ language combined with its culture and ceremony are critical to maintaining and transmitting knowledge in order to preserve the Taos way of life.

Taos pedagogy, or the process of how knowledge is disseminated, is driven and animated by parents/adults and children, between elders and youth, between leaders and their audience, and enabled through ceremonies. The expectation is that everyone is responsible for this process, although some have more specialized knowledge than others (Brandt, 1980). For example, this process includes parents, relatives, elders, clan and kiva leaders, and government leaders.

The Taos governing system can also be considered a pedagogical institute as it serves as a training ground for future leaders. The typical progression is that council appoints an initiated male to the warchief’s staff. As a junior staff member (there are no titles for junior staff), they develop skills and knowledge to prepare them for leadership. They learn the language of leadership, oration style, interpersonal communication, religious and civic protocol, individual responsibility, caring for the community, and
caring for the environment. In other words, they learn and animate ha-lem. After one or more appointments to the warchief’s staff, they are likely to be appointed by the council to the governor’s staff in a junior role to a senior staff person like the head sheriff, head fiscale, or in the case of the secretary, he will report to the governor and lieutenant governor.

Like their prior role on the warchief’s staff, they will learn the language and protocol of the governor’s office. They will also begin to expand their interactions with external persons or entities. Within the governor’s office they will be privy to business transactions and daily management of tribal employees versus their exposure to environmental matters and religious functions in the warchief’s office. Of course, there are never any guaranties that they will learn everything in one year. Hence there is opportunity for multiple appointments to either staff but not consecutively.

A Proposal for Engaging Citizenship

In order to maintain the Taos way of life vis-à-vis a continuum of civic and cultural engagement among the Taos people, it is imperative that the Taos leadership prioritize participation of all Taos people regardless of their residency on or off the core reservation. While the Taos way of life binds the individual, community, and environment to specific geography, ha-lem is out of balance as it applies to Taos people who live abroad. Taos leadership has a trust responsibility to include these individuals in the cultural sovereignty paradigm. The trust responsibility of leadership does not terminate at the physical boundary of the core reservation any more than prayers for the universe remain at Taos Pueblo.
One approach to increasing participation from members who live abroad is to create social programming geared toward cultural immersion. As an oral society, there can be no other process that comports to the current cultural paradigm that prohibits the writing of the sacred language. Although the general population believes that such an approach is the exclusive responsibility of parents, there are numerous reasons why it does not occur, including, as I have stated earlier, lack of language fluency or cultural continuity among second and third generations who have lived abroad and are thus removed from the core reservation and culture. Nonetheless, without the benefit of physical access, the general population expects the off-spring of these parents to inculcate the building blocks that constitute the Taos way of live such values, language, culture, and ceremony so that when and if these children return they will be held to the same standards as a child who grew up immersed in the Taos way of life. The tenet of ha-lem requires leaders to craft solutions to this gap in knowledge and move together as one.

Creation of a summer cultural immersion is one solution. Taos leaders could engage their tribal administrators to develop a 30 to 60 day curriculum, housing, and funding for children on and off the reservation to learn their language and participate in the culture. Unfortunately, in some cases, many children do not know their relatives so this might be an opportunity to place them in the host home of a relative who can help teach the child about the Taos way of life. Children who live abroad can also interact with children who live on the reservation. This may also present an opportunity for participation in ceremonies as well as engaging citizenship. Due to the specificity of the Taos way of life, programming must focus exclusively on the Taos people.
The curriculum could be taught exclusively in the Taos language by Taos people. Traditional dress could be required for attendance. Cultural programming could include outdoor field trips to sacred sites, food gathering and processing, moccasin making, outdoor baking, deer hide tanning, hunting, running, singing, adobe making, wood collection, and any other daily activity that residents engage to survive. Additionally, the curriculum could incorporate hunter safety training, maintenance of a community garden, a summer employment component for the warchief or governor, environmental protection, and other meaningful projects to facilitate reunions with family and relatives. This could also serve as a mandatory requirement for children who were adopted by non-Taos parents or guardians. In this way, we could achieve and restore ha-lem.

CONCLUSION

I began this chapter by calling for the development of a culturally grounded approach in evaluating the various aspects of modern governance in order to evaluate its utility in maintaining important traditional values and practices. This chapter has examined how the role of law and governance and the Taos way of life has been impacted by colonial influence (both by the Spanish and the U.S.). The purpose was to offer an operational paradigm of sovereignty and the practice of self-governance based on Taos traditional principles of governance.

Ha-lem permeates Taos relations with our environment. If we do not respect our environment, we would simply not be here today. While we could consume nature to extinction, it does not help us survive beyond those immediate desires. Thus, responsibility comes naturally when the people show respect for the environment and there is natural order that keeps the people from exhausting resources. Taos people rely
upon one another to be conscious of the impacts of their decisions on others and their environment.

If Taos people were to discontinue conducting ceremonies, they would risk losing their way of life. This is not to say that we maintain every ceremony we are taught. Members recognize that certain knowledge has been forgotten throughout our existence as a people, whether due to internal or external causes, yet we possess core ceremonies, customs, values, and norms. What Taos ultimately retains is our legacy to our children, which is why it is critical we preserve and celebrate the Taos way of life.
CHAPTER 2

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a cultural survival strategy for Pueblo Indian Tribes to use in protecting their ways of life by identifying a pedagogy of self-determination using Taos Pueblo as a case study. A pedagogy of self-determination refers to a process of imparting intergenerational tribal cultural knowledge about how to live a respectful coexistence with humanity and the environment. At Taos Pueblo, *ha-lem* serves as a fundamental concept which informs cultural values and ultimately a worldview. This paper first illustrates “pedagogy in practice” using the example of my father training me to participate in rabbit hunts; and then presents a proposal to re-vision federal healthcare programming through a Taos lens to enhance the Taos way of life. The hope is that this may lead to future benefits in structuring social and cultural programming in a manner that enriches our Pueblo ways of life.
Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies express a way of life, which has persisted from time immemorial. Certainly, Indigenous peoples and their ways of life have been the subjects of aggressive non-Indigenous efforts to assimilate them out of existence. To their credit, Indigenous peoples steadfastly held onto as many threads of their social fabric as was humanly possible in order to preserve their unique identities and to preserve a legacy for their children. Their identity cannot be abandoned unless they decide so. All focus is on their effort to rebuild, reinvigorate, and reengage their ways of life as an exercise of their sovereignty and self-determination. A pedagogy of Pueblo Indian self-determination is one approach to preserving and celebrating a way of life by reframing, revising, and refocusing federal healthcare programming to enrich a Pueblo Indian way of life.

This paper is organized into three parts. Part One presents an overview of extant literature on Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy with emphasis on development of a worldview. Part Two presents a Taos self-determination pedagogy based on personal conversations between the author and his late father about the fundamental concept of ha-lem or respect. Understanding ha-lem is essential to interpretation of the Taos worldview. Part Three introduces a proposal for re-visioning federal healthcare programming to enhance the Taos way of life. It will consist of a multi-phased approach to reframing, revising, and refocusing a federal program to reflect an alignment of self-determination pedagogy and cultural preservation. This paper concludes that the exercise of cultural sovereignty is achievable through an operational paradigm of Taos cultural sovereignty that is capable of replication at other Pueblos.
Pueblo Peoples of the Southwest

As an Indigenous People, Pueblo Indians in the Southwestern United States possess a rich cultural history that has persisted since time immemorial. Pueblo Indians trace their heritage to the emergence of the first people made by the creator into this world in which we live. Once living in numerous agricultural villages along either side of the Rio Grande, over time, their villages dwindled to nineteen (19) permanent villages. The Pueblo Indians are agricultural communities with highly complex religious, cultural, government, and social institutions. They are well-known for their style of earthen multi-story architecture, pottery, weaving, jewelry, and art. The word pueblo is Spanish for village or community, as well as describing earthen architecture and Indigenous people who live in these agricultural communities. Today, though external pressure to assimilate remains omnipresent, they have held steadfast to their ways of life and being Pueblo People.

Taos Pueblo

Taos Pueblo is one of nineteen (19) Pueblos in New Mexico. Taos’ historic inhabitance of the Taos Valley dates back to 900 A.D. or the Pueblo I Era (900 A.D. to 1150 A.D.) (Ellis & Brody, 1964). Taos is known for its two multi-storied adobe apartment buildings that straddle the Rio Pueblo, a tributary of the Rio Grande. The main village sits at 7,500 feet above sea level and experiences all four seasons. The mountain ma-wha-luna is a backdrop to the main village and rises to over 12,000 feet above sea level. While Taos is considered an anomaly among the Pueblos because of its historic trade and military alliances with nomadic Indian Tribes, which influenced its culture (Parsons, 1936), Taos
retains key Pueblo cultural features, such as clan systems, language, creation and migration, architecture, and kivas (Parsons, 1936).

**Literature Review**

Among Indigenous people, knowledge and ways of being are informed through ceremony, lived experiences, and environment (Battiste, 2002, pp. 14-19). Knowledge and ways of being are understood to be a relational process with relational accountability (Wilson, 2009, pp. 73-125). When Indigenous people think in their own cultural references, it leads to conceptualizing in our own worldview, which naturally leads to opposition of dominant ideology (Trask, 1999, p. 54-56). An Indigenous worldview is a lens through which people interpret their reality or existence within their environment.

A set of epistemological and ontological assumptions held by a person or group inform a worldview (Hart, 2010, pp. 1-11). In other words, these are collective beliefs held by a group about the nature and acquisition of knowledge as well as nature of reality and being. In the context of Indigenous worldviews, “knowledge is relational and shared among all creation (Wilson, 2001, pp. 91-92).” Shawn Wilson explains that the relationship is with all of creation or relational knowing. These relationships extend beyond an individual person and no one person owns knowledge; thus, there is relational accountability or an axiology in the handling of knowledge (Wilson, 2009, pp. 69-96). Michael Hart (2010) argues that worldviews are cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that we use to make sense of our social landscape (pp. 1-11). These worldviews are developed over a person’s lifetime through socialization and social interaction. They are encompassing and pervasive. While they rarely change, they can contain inconsistencies between beliefs and values (Hart, 2010, pp. 1-11).
An Indigenous worldview informs an Indigenous pedagogy. Sandy Grande (2004) argues that a red pedagogy is the demonstration of Indigenous sovereignty through development of community-based power in the interest of a responsible political, economic, and spiritual society (p. 175-176). She defines power in the context of living out active presences and survivances (Grande, 2004, pp. 175-176). Survivance signifies a state of being beyond survival, endurance, or a mere response to colonization toward an active presence and active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimization (Grande, 2004, pp. 175-176). In other words, survivance narratives articulate the active recovery, reimagination, and reinvestment of Indigenous ways of being. Red pedagogy is a process of reconnecting people through self-introspection and empowerment within a viable space for tradition rather than rupturing connections (Grande, 2004, pp. 175-176). Taiaiake Alfred (2009) describes the same process as self-conscious traditionalism, which is an intellectual, social, and political movement to reinvigorate Indigenous values, principles, and other cultural elements so that they inform contemporary political and economic reality (pp. 105-113). The goal of an Indigenous pedagogy is to engage in an ongoing self-reflexive process of reclaiming the inherent strength and power of Indigenous governance systems, and freeing our collective souls from divisive and destructive colonial politics (Grande, 2004, p. 176). Self-reflex will require an introspective process by individuals and groups within a tribal community. In this way, we can begin to privilege our traditions and culture as an exercise of our sovereignty and self-determination.
Taos Self-Determination Pedagogy

Over the centuries, Taos people have created a way of life that expressed veneration for their humble, peaceful existence within their environment while recognizing that theirs was a relationship with their surrounding and balance was critical to survival. The sacred knowledge they formed about survival they pedagogically transmitted to younger generations through language, observation, experience, participation, listening, repetition, oration, memory, stories, songs, ceremonies, and simply, trial and error. In the Taos way of life, learning and knowledge go hand in hand. The people hold knowledge for the people and no one person can sell or give it away. The Taos way of life is about caring for each other and our environment; it is about relationships and maintaining those relationships.

Parents reinforced these teachings throughout a child’s life. Clans reinforced these teachings throughout a person’s life. Leadership rotated among the people and within clans because we all worked toward the common goal of survival of our way of life. The role of governance was to preserve our way of life by keeping balance and harmony within our environment. One could also describe this as self-determination in the sense that we each bore a responsibility to conduct ourselves appropriately else our actions could harm not only the environment, but each other.

Language remains essential for maintaining and transmitting knowledge at Taos. Language, symbolism, body movements, inflections, tones, formal, and informal communications are key features of a cultural language. Language is so highly sanctified that the council of elders have not sanctioned any writing, nor do they support the teaching of the language or learning outside the home or village. The rationale is that if
they were to allow any outside teaching of the language it would lead to a decline in its sanctity and ultimately the sanctity of the ceremonies, which use the language. The importance of the ceremonial pedagogy of language immersion cannot be overstated toward preservation of our way of life. Taos’ language combined with its culture and ceremony are critical to maintaining and transmitting knowledge in order to preserve their way of life.

**Learning Ha-Lem or Respect**

The transfer and creation of epistemic knowledge about *ha-lem* is essential to understanding the Taos way of life. *Ha-lem* is a foundational concept that informs ways of knowing, context and culture, time and space, and personal meaning. The learning process begins at a young age and continues over person’s lifetime. Virtually any interpersonal interaction can serve as an opportunity for a learning experience. When I was a child, my father began teaching me about *ha-lem*. The most memorable lesson I recall was when he taught me about how to care for a horse. This life lesson taught me about self-respect, respect for others, and respect for the environment. Learning the fundamental concept of *ha-lem* brought me to a deeper understanding of our way of life.

*Ha-lem* is a tenet of the culture that posits a trilateral system of trusts as between self, community, and environment. The premise of the tenet is that these trusts must remain in balance and that such balance will maintain cultural harmony with the past, present, and future. A disturbance is believed to occur when one of the trusts is imbalanced, which can lead to negative consequences to the other corners of the trilateral system. For example, if an individual were to commit an action to cause imbalance such as showing disrespect toward an elder, this could have adverse impacts to not only the
person who committed the act but to the community and environment. One immediate tragedy was the shortening of one’s life span. The act could also cause disharmony within the community due to ill-feelings and such feelings could be transposed to the environment through incomplete prayer, meditation, or ceremony, with the reciprocal consequences of bad weather, poor crops, illness or death in the community, or spiritual harm to the individual. While the system appears complicated, knowing the basic tenet of *ha-lem* informs the values and norms of the community.

**Coming home from rabbit hunt.** The first time I ever recall riding a horse by myself was when I was about seven years old when my father came home from a ceremonial rabbit hunt late on a July summer evening. He was riding a horse named Freckles. Freckles was a white appaloosa stud with red spots all over his body, who stood about seventeen hands tall. He was extremely temperamental. I asked my father if I could ride Freckles around the yard while he rested before taking off the saddle and other gear. He told me to jump on the horse. Of course, he did not forewarn me that Freckles was still high-spirited from the energy of running all day at the hunt. As my father helped me climb up onto the saddle he did not mention a word to me. I could not reach the stirrups but I assumed that everything was fine. As soon as he handed me the reins, I started walking the horse around the yard. Within a matter of seconds, the horse started to kick and snort, then buck. The horse did not want me on his back. The next thing I recall is that I was lying on the ground crying.

After my father helped me get up from the ground, he dusted me off and told me to come help him unsaddle the horse. While he unsaddled the horse, we had the following conversation in our language.
Son, you need to pay attention. [I know. I know.] When you first see a horse, you need to make sure they see you. What I mean is that before you even touch the horse, you need to make eye contact. Then you slowly walk up to the horse and calmly introduce yourself in the traditional Indian way. [The horse doesn’t talk, Dad.] You still need to ask their permission before you touch them and tell them that you intend no harm. [Why?] You need to thank them for their presence and let them know that you will become part of them and they will become part of you. [Why does it matter?] Horses are still a gift to us from the creator and we are a gift to the horses so we must take care of each other as the creator would have it.

You must establish trust. [Why?] You cannot start off mean, condescending, or scared then expect them to treat you respectfully because you first have to show respect to gain respect. Keep in mind that this is an ongoing relationship and it will take time to develop. Let them smell your scent so they know who you are and will recognize you in the future. Do this every day and slowly work your way toward other parts of their body like their legs and tail. Slowly work toward picking up their feet so you can care for their hooves. If you get stuck, start over. [Who cares? I never see anyone else do this? Not on TV or in the movies, they just jump on the horse.] Always make sure they can see you and know where you are relative to their line of sight. Trust me if you they cannot see you they will try protect themselves from the unknown or fear by kicking—remember some horses kick straight out and others will cow kick or kick out and to the side of their bodies, either one is extremely dangerous if you do not pay attention.

It is okay to feed them grain out of your hand or to give them grass from your hand but make sure you can feel when they are trying to bite you because they have a sense of humor just like you and me, or they can be ornery or stubborn like you and me, or they can just be plain old scared. You can also tell a change in emotion by their ears moving, twitches in their skin, if their pupils get bigger, if they start scratching the earth with their hoof, or their nostrils flare or their breathing changes. The key is paying attention. You should take this approach each and every time you work with your horse. Get into a routine or ritual so you do not forget how to do it the next time or whenever you meet another horse. These are just the basics. I have not gotten to the part about telling you how to ride a horse. [At this rate, when am I ever gonna ride a horse!]

Deconstructing our conversation. First and foremost, my father emphasized and re-emphasized the tenet of ha-lem in how I approached the horse. I took the relationship between my father and his horse for granted by disrespectfully jumping into
the saddle without following the proper protocol for presenting myself to the horse. In my haste and naivety, I caused my own injury by ignoring these steps. While I may have been around the horse since it lived in our corral, I clearly did not interact with the horse in a manner that would establish a relationship between us. We had other horses in the family but I did not do much beyond occasionally throwing them a slice of dry alfalfa or chasing them out of the garden or alfalfa fields. This was definitely my first introduction to horses and would leave me with a lasting impression and life lesson.

Second, my father emphasized that getting to know and establishing a relationship with a horse was not instantaneous but a lifelong process. In fact, he described the process as a ritual that could occur daily. The relationship started with eye contact followed by introductions then touching the horse or massaging them. My father was clear that if I stopped at a certain point one day, I should not pick up where I left off; instead, I should start from the beginning. Establishing and maintaining respect and trust were a lifelong process. While unstated, persistence, flexibility and adaptability were certainly inferred in my father’s approach to caring for a horse. Indeed, he said that horses possessed personalities like humans so they could be mean, stubborn, happy, or somewhere in between. Above all, he conveyed the sense that patience was critical to caring for a horse.

Third, my father alluded to compassion and humility as values important to caring for a horse. He once said that horses will have good days and bad days just like humans. They will feel pain in their joints and feet. They will get tired just like us. Horses can show emotions. They can be happy, sad, or angry. As he said, the key is paying attention to the horse’s emotions as expressed through certain body movements and reactions. My
father once told me that sometimes you will see red flags and other times you will not have a clue until it is too late. When your horse is tired, thirsty, or hungry, you should not push them harder without food and rest. When your horse is older, you should be respectful of their age and performance. The same advice applies to the younger horse. Compassion and humility are important when working on a relationship with a horse. If you show them compassion and humility, they will show the same to you. It is a two-way relationship.

**Preparing for rabbit hunt.** Several days before or even the morning before the first hunt, we would go get our horses from summer pasture. We did not own a horse trailer so we would catch and ride the horses back to the house. As we prepared for hunting, we would discuss our plans in the mother tongue. My father had a keen eye for details and it seemed like he was a human checklist.

Son, when you go get the horses make sure that you follow what I taught you about establishing a relationship with your horse. [I know. I know.] I know we get in a rush sometimes but it is good to slow down for the important things in our life, especially when it can affect our safety and well-being.

When you get to the house or corral, make sure you brush them out. [I will.] Get the weeds out of their hair and massage them like you usually do. Check their feet, legs, and breathing. Walk them around to visually inspect them to make sure they are healthy. It is okay to give them attention and love because they will be working hard with you over the next day or so. Give them water or take them to the river to drink. Give them fresh hay or tie them out along the ditches where there is green grass for them to eat. [I will.]

While your horse is eating, you should start working on your saddle and rabbit sticks. Check the tree in your saddle to make sure it is still rigid and not cracked. Clean up your saddle with a moist rag and apply oil if the leather is dry. Always keep your leather oiled up and flexible. The worst thing that can happen from dry leather is that if your horse spooks and you try to pull the reins they will break and you could get hurt. Same applies to your saddle and cinch. Always make sure your tack is clean and in good
repair. If you need to replace something it is best to do it here at the house than out on a hunt or in the mountains.

As for your rabbit sticks, make sure that you have enough like four to five. Remember that you can’t use any old type of stick because it has to be mountain mahogany that grows along the arroyos. You have to dig out the roots because it grows in clumps. You have to pray and ask for permission before you start digging. When you prepare the stick, you have to pick one branch to serve as the handle and trim away the other branches then you peel the bark on the handle. You must paint the handle red, which is the color of strength and protection in war and hunting. If you want to use a long pole, it must either be willow or chokecherry. The same ritual applies, pray, peel and paint.

When you pack your lunch make sure you pack enough to share. We will eat with our relatives and we do not want anyone to go hungry because hunting is a lot of work and takes energy. You should never refuse food if someone asks you. You must always feed the spirits before you take a bite. If someone looks hungry or tired, you will offer them food or water. They will do the same for you, son. We take care of each other. No one is left behind. If someone forgets their lunch, we will feed them. If someone’s feet are too sore to walk, we will offer them a ride. If they need a prayer, we will pray for them. This is all about taking care of ourselves, the community, and mother earth. We are not doing this for our personal gain. This is always for someone else.

If your hair is long, you must roll it up and tie it with yarn. You must never go hunting with your long hair hanging down. You must look your best. Your life depends on it. You are asking the creator with your heart and soul that they take pity on you and feed you. It is also just a simple matter of keeping yourself clean and groomed. You are more likely to get bugs in your hair if it is loose, or get it caught in a tree and pulled off your horse. Also, if you lose hair, someone can pick it up and use it for bad against you. Your hair is like your fingerprint, son. It has all your information. What I tell you applies all the time not just for hunting. There are very few occasions when you can let your hair hang down and it is usually only during certain ceremonies or during the corn dance. Otherwise do not grow it out if you do not know what to do with it.

When you saddle your horse, approach it like a ritual. First take the saddle blankets and let the horse smell them and give you the okay. Then you slide the blankets along their side before you put it on their back. Remember always let them know where you are at all times. Do the same thing when you put on the saddle. When you walk around the horse, make sure they know where you are at all times. Touch them and talk to them as you saddle them. When you put in the bit or use a hackamore, you should
be gentle. When it is cold, you should warm the bit with your warm breath and rub it in your hands. There is nothing worse than putting a cold bit in your horse’s mouth. In the summer, if the bit is hot, then try to cool it down. Put your saddlebags on last. You should pack them with your lunch, extra sticks, and a jacket, before you put them on the horse unless you want to pack them while they are on the horse. Either way, you and your horse need to come to that understanding together.

When you get on your horse, make sure you double-check the front cinch and the stirrup lengths. If you need a lift, let me know or go to a stump or fence to help you get on. Be careful when you get on the horse because some do not stand still. When that happens, you need to be fast getting on. Try to turn your horse in a circle because it is harder to get on while it is walking away.

Deconstructing our conversation. First, there is ritual in repetition. My father’s dialogues began with a discussion on the topic of ha-lem, reifying this tenet. Moreover, establishing and re-establishing with every encounter a relationship was critical to both our safety and wellbeing. To bypass this ritual was effectively a warning that something could go wrong and that speed was not always the prudent approach to achieving the end goal of a successful ride or mission.

Second, attention to detail is highly important. In preparation for the hunt, my father saliently pointed out that I must check on the physical wellbeing of the horse, my saddle and tack, hunting tool of choice, lunch, personal grooming, riding attire, and religious items. If I were to miss any of the checklist items, it could result in a detriment to my health and wellbeing as well as the horse’s health and wellbeing. It could also put the health of the community and environment at risk due to an imbalance in ha-lem.

Third, hunting is a ceremony. The sheer level of preparation involved plus the manner in which one is to approach hunting is critical to the success of the hunt. My father clearly pointed out that there is a religious protocol for all aspects of preparation as evidenced by the process for gathering rabbit sticks, personal grooming, painting, the
types of tools used, and the sharing of food among hunters. The hunt is imbued with sanctity and ceremony.

Fourth, trust and respect are vital to the success of the hunt. The hunter must respect the ceremony and by doing so shows his respect for the four-legged ones, his community, and the earth. By the single act of not throwing rocks, a hunter has made a step toward honoring the ceremony. By the single act of following the ritual for gathering rabbit sticks, the hunter has made a step toward honoring the ceremony. Individually and collectively these acts are calculated to show respect and to maintain the integrity of the ceremony.

**Going to rabbit hunt.** My first horse was named Gonzo. I named him Gonzo because he made a noise with his nostrils that reminded me of the Sesame Street character by the same name. He was a sorrel gelding that my father traded from his younger brother. He was the very first horse I rode alone to rabbit hunt. Following is a conversation with my father about rabbit hunt.

Son, don’t pull the reins so hard. You act like you’ve never ridden a horse before. Now remember, when we get to the hunt area, you need to pray and let the hunt chief know you are on a horse so you can be called upon to lead a hunt. You make sure you know what to say so I don’t have to tell you.

I was ready to run the heck out of Gonzo, but my father immediately admonished me. Son, don’t run your horse into the ground. Be careful when you ride. Scan ahead of your path and watch out for rocks and cactus, keep in mind the creator is watching how you perform. Rocks can trip your horse or injure the soft underside of his hoof then you are walking all day, and cactus can poke and stick into your horse’s lower legs, with the same result of you walking.

Listen to where the hunt chief told you to go. You also have to keep order as you are an extension of the hunt chief since he will not always be on the horse behind you. If there are men who are going outside of the line or leaving gaps in the circle, you can tell them to get in line. As the hunt
leader, no matter your age, they must listen to you and follow your instructions because you are there to take care of them while you lead the hunt. The hunt chief selected you and you are on his orders like in the army. Whatever you say is like he is saying it to them. This is also practice for when you become a hunt chief and how you will lead your men.

**Deconstructing our conversation.** First, my father made it clear that hunting is a ceremony and that we were approaching the ceremony with reverence. As a ceremony, hunting is not taken lightly or foolishly because it is the survival of not only our physical sustenance but of our lifeway. He provided me with instruction on the protocol for introductions so that I could participate appropriately. If accepted, it meant that I created a bond with the hunt chief for the greater good of all that could be called upon at a moment’s notice to serve the community and environment. He also set forth expectations for my commitment in the form of physical activity, potential risk to me through injury, leadership on behalf of the hunt chief, and giving back to the community and environment. These expectations existed without regard to my age. He also explained what not to do or how not to live my life by emphasizing the ritual to be followed to ensure a bountiful ceremony.

Second, ceremony pervades all life. Ceremony exists not only in a single act at a single moment in time but is a state of being. A person can choose to accept or not accept that life is of divine origin. My father used to tell me that when a relative chose to no longer participate in our way of life, they could not just turn off the connection to our way of life like a light switch turns off a light. There were instances when the family still came together for such a relative who passed onto the next world. They were treated with the same care and respect as someone who was actively involved in our way of life. We are not to judge others because we are to live the sacred teachings. Ceremony was simple
in this way. Breathing, seeing, moving, hunting, loving, living, dying, is all a ceremony created by the creator.

**Harvesting Life Lessons**

This discussion on the tenet of *ha-lem* went beyond care of the horse and applied to my interpersonal interactions. If I met someone for the very first time, it would not be respectful let alone polite to talk to them with my back toward them or vice-versa. I needed to make eye contact and to let them know that I was present. My presence was not only a gift from the creator but a gift to the person whom I met and vice-versa. The process of introduction also established our relationship between each other and as to the community and environment. How we treated each other would determine the impact to the other parts of the reciprocal trust. This lesson was not limited to my new relationship with the horse.

Maintaining a lifelong relationship among and between humans requires constant work, too. A relationship does not become cemented on a first meeting. Even marriage is not static and is often described as give and take. Respect and trust can be in flux. One day an individual may hold the utmost respect of their peers then lose it over one incident. Likewise with trust, an otherwise trustworthy person could become untrusted in a matter of minutes. However, cultivating a relationship through patience, persistence, flexibility, adaptability, and understanding help establish a foundation that can be built upon so that when a minor or catastrophic challenge presents itself the relationship can bear the emotional weight of the challenge and together the individuals can overcome that challenge and hopefully become not only better persons but closer friends. This process of rebalancing is integral to the wellness of the community and environment.
Compassion and humility are also important among humans and to our environment. A baby is not born compassionate or with humility though they are close to the spirits. Parents are responsible for teaching these values and lessons. A baby can learn to be mean by mere observation of their parents, but they can also learn compassion and humility from observing their parents. Sometimes people do not learn these values until after undergoing an extraordinary experience. It is never too late to learn, however. We work to be better persons each and every day. You should never be arrogant or act like you are better than others so that you are mean to people when you talk to them because everyone has an opinion and a right to that opinion, from the lonely man on the street to the leader of a village. You should treat everyone the same while being compassionate and humble in your speech and how you conduct yourself. You are a reflection of how you were raised by your parents.

In the next section, I will extend and apply these life-lessons into a critical praxis using healthcare as a focal point. I will share my experience in ceremonial hunts to demonstrate how Taos leaders can actualize self-reflexivity to inform healthcare programming for the continuity of the ceremony and safety of participants. Due to the omnipresence of injury, a reasonable approach to risk mitigation and/or further injury is to train and include first responders in ceremonies.

Re-Visioning Federal Healthcare Programming

In order to stay adaptable, Taos people must at some level engage in Indigenous critical praxis. According to Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2001), Indigenous critical praxis refers to a people’s own critical reflection on their worldview, including underlying customs, values, and beliefs, and the ability to act on those critical reflections (p. 59).

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Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2001) argue that critical praxis already exists within Indigenous epistemology and by engaging in this praxis they are better able to make adjustments in order to sustain their ways of life (p. 59). Graham Smith (2003) explains that the Maori of New Zealand have accepted increased responsibility transforming their own condition and subsequently getting out from under the influence of the reproductive forces of dominant society in order to affect momentum towards positive change to preserve and celebrate their way of life. In other words, the Maori had to effectively engage critical praxis vis-à-vis confronting transformation on at least two broad fronts: a confrontation with the colonizer and a confrontation with themselves (Smith, 2003). By engaging in critical praxis, the Maori were able to develop a self-informed praxis known as Kaupapa Maori praxis based upon Kaupapa Maori Theory (Smith, 2003).

The next series of steps suggest an approach to reframing, revising, and refocusing federal programs to enhance our way of life as opposed to copying exactly how a federal agency would provide the same or similar service. Following is an example of how Taos might re-vision a common federal health program to align with its way of life as an expression of a pedagogy of self-determination.

**Reframing.** An approach for Taos does not require a wholesale change of epistemology or pedagogy. Rather, a more simplified approach can be undertaken that assesses the current delivery of federal health care programs—and eventually federal trust services, i.e., U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs programs—to determine if it aligns with our way of life. Using a story from the earlier discussion on epistemology and pedagogy regarding rabbit hunts, this section will introduce a situation involving access to
healthcare that can be improved upon for the benefit of all in a manner that is consistent with maintaining and preserving the Taos way of life.

Inevitably during the course of the rabbit hunt someone was hurt. Men often took green broke horses to the hunt to acclimate them to other horses and hunting activities. Many times men were thrown off their horses. Sometimes both the rider and horse were injured as a result of exposure to the chaos, snakebite, prickly pear poke, tripping, or the horse’s or rider’s failure to receive adequate training. On a few occasions I saw horses collapse from exhaustion. Even men would succumb to heat exhaustion especially after walking miles in the hot desert sun without staying hydrated. Injuries were minor and sometimes severe. Nosebleeds were frequent as were stickers from brush or shrubs. Sprained ankles and minor knife cuts were common. Elders could either stop the ceremony or excuse the injured person so that they could secure medical attention. Often times, men and boys continued despite injury as a show of their masculinity. This is why the warchief’s staff monitored hunter safety.

Another instance of potential injury occurred during community hunts for big game in the winter months. Horses, men, and boys were away from the village for hours at a time in mountainous terrain. Men and boys carried high-powered rifles, which could lead to a gunshot. If there was snow, there was certainly danger of hypothermia, frostbite, blisters, sunburn, windburn, dehydration, trenchfoot, or snowblindness. Men and boys often twisted ankles, suffered cuts, and other injuries. Horses were also susceptible to injury. A person could even suffer a catastrophic event like a heart attack, asthma attack, or stroke if they were not used to the altitude or not physically fit. Any medical condition could occur without notice that required immediate medical attention.

As mentioned in the above anecdote, injury was common even if it was minor. Given the possibility of these injuries to horse and people, it seems reasonable to prepare for these situations even if they do not arise during one hunting ceremony. The likelihood is that such an event could occur over a sustained period of time.

Nowadays it is more critical than ever to prepare for medical emergencies with the increased risk and prevalence of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and other diseases that exist among Indigenous people; Taos is no exception to these health issues. In fact, I can recall a story about an uncle who had a cardiac event during a
religious pilgrimage that required my father to lead his horse back to the village so they could transport him to the local hospital: the doctor told my father that the only thing that saved my uncle’s life was the bumpy horse ride that helped moved blood through his circulatory system. This is not to say that all caution is tossed in the wind. As much as possible, elders advise young men of the physical and spiritual preparation necessary to participate in hunting and other ceremonies that take place outdoors.

Revising. One way to mitigate risk is to prepare participants through proactive health and safety programming. For example, a mandatory hunter safety course will teach young men and boys about gun safety. Another example is providing members with a basic first aid course along with first aid kits. To take these a step further, as an act of self-determination, Taos might consider training members as first responders who are also fluent in the language and fully initiated into the culture and familiar with these ceremonies. These emergency medical technicians could participate in the ceremonies and be available to other participants in the event of a medical emergency to stabilize patients and possibly arrange for transportation to advanced medical care if needed. These technician-participants could take packhorses with medical equipment and defibrillators. This demonstrates self-sufficiency and self-reliance in much the same way that our ancestors conducted themselves when they hunted. In other words, they were fully able to address medical issues without interrupting or stopping a ceremony. Our ancestors were healers and healed themselves without external intervention.

Moreover, Taos might consider the incorporation of veterinary technicians as technician-participants in ceremonies. This is an important service for injured horses, dogs, or even our four-legged, winged, or furry relations who might need veterinary
medical attention. Even before participants go out hunting, they could contact a technician in advance to check on the health condition of their horse or dogs to make sure they are at optimal performance. A companion service might be farriers who are responsible for shoeing horses. They would also possess the knowledge of horse anatomy to advise participants if their horses are safe to shoe and endure the daylong activities of a rabbit or big game hunt. This might preclude unnecessary risk exposure by taking green broke horses or sick horses out in the fields only to potentially harm the horse and a participant or other participants or their horses. These approaches are consistent with acting for the greater good and in furtherance of our self-determination. These are also consistent with maintaining and preserving our way of life. Recall that we must have respect for ourselves, community, and environment, which include our four-legged relations. A natural duty of care arises in our epistemology and pedagogy.

Refocusing. To act selfishly exposes a person, community, and environment to the potential for disharmony and negative consequences as a result of such action. Recall that the premise of the tenet is that these trusts must remain in balance and that such balance will maintain cultural harmony with the past, present, and future. A disturbance is believed to occur when one of the trusts is imbalanced, which can lead to negative consequences to the other corners of the trilateral system. One immediate tragedy is the shortening of one’s life span, which could turn into a domino-effect that leads to incomplete prayer, meditation, or ceremony, with the reciprocal consequences of bad weather, poor crops, illness or death in the community, or spiritual harm to the individual. While these consequences may seem implausible, the basic tenet of ha-lem informs the values and norms of the community based on our epistemology and pedagogy.
The rationale for refocusing is to look at federal healthcare programming through a Taos self-determination pedagogy rather than duplicating how a federal agency might operate the program, which does not deal with ceremonies like rabbit hunting. Taos was able to adapt an external resource in the form of a Spanish government in order to preserve its way of life. This is a similar approach to adapting federal programs to suit our needs, which is the goal of self-determination. It is not enough to merely take over operation of a program only to change the personnel. Taos must look at a comprehensive strategy to maintain and preserve its way of life. In so doing, Taos needs to assess the basic functions it needs to support its way of life then overlay federal programs on top to determine how to restructure or refocus the program to reflect congruency with their underlying way of life. To do otherwise is a disservice to the epistemology and pedagogy of the Taos way of life.

**Conclusion**

Our people are accustomed to many modern conveniences, English-only conversation, and American popular culture. As we become more comfortable in non-Taos ways of being, we are at a greater risk of losing our way of life. Given this risk, it is an opportune time to re-assess the state, progress, or condition of our sovereignty and self-determination and look toward a cultural sovereignty model (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). We need to make sure that there is continuous alignment between these political ideas and our way of life. This is not meant as a critique of tribal government. Rather, the purpose is to recommend viewing federal programs within a cultural sovereignty context expressed through a Taos self-determination pedagogy so that we can determine if we are maximizing these resources in a manner that enriches our way of life.
CHAPTER 3

**Audience:**

For Taos Tribal leadership, including Taos Tribal Council and to the attention of Governor Luis Romero, Taos Pueblo

**Summary:**

Our people are accustomed to many modern conveniences, English-only conversation, and American popular culture. As we become more comfortable in non-Taos ways of being, we are at a greater risk of losing our way of life. Given this risk, it is an opportune time to re-assess the state, progress, and condition of our tribal sovereignty and self-determination. As a community, we are tasked with ensuring a continuous alignment between these political ideas and our Taos way of life. This proposal is not a critique of tribal government. Rather, the purpose here is to recommend a strategy for viewing federal programs within a Taos and Pueblo cultural sovereignty context so that we can determine if we are maximizing these resources in a manner that enriches our way of life.

**Discussion:**

*Non-Taos Definitions of Sovereignty and Self-Determination*

The concepts and terms of sovereignty and self-determination are actually foreign to our people, introduced through the process of colonization. Yet, we use these concepts and terms to engage federal, state, and other tribal governments as well as international forums. Therefore, it is important to understand these concepts and terms so we can use them to most effectively reflect our customs, norms, and values, and in order to effectively advocate for our sovereignty and self-determination.
• According to international and domestic law, the concept of sovereignty generally refers to an absolute right and authority of a country to govern over a people and defined territory without interference from the outside. Self-determination is the right of a nation-state to freely enact its sovereignty and international political status, including the right to advocate for itself or its way of life. These concepts operate as basic rules of international law to protect the rights of nation-states to assert their sovereignty and exercise their self-determination domestically.

• In the United States, through a series of court decisions, the federal government constructed a concept of diminished tribal sovereignty (or an inherent right to govern). *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823) held that the doctrine of discovery extinguished aboriginal title so that tribes could not convey legal title to aboriginal lands to private parties without federal consent. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) Justice Marshall created the categorization of tribes as dependent domestic nations rather than foreign nations under the federal constitution. *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) held that federal law was exclusive over Indian affairs. These cases establish the following federal doctrines of tribal sovereignty; in other words, a diminished sovereignty ascribed only to Indian tribes.

  – Indian tribes possess inherent powers of sovereignty that predate and exist outside of the federal constitution;

  – The federal government asserts plenary power over tribal sovereignty to limit or extinguish it;
Federal limitations on the exercise of tribal sovereignty and tribal dependency on the federal government for protection give rise to a federal trust responsibility.

When Congress enacted the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, it declared that self-determination was a process by which a tribe could internally develop leadership responsive to the needs of their members. The Act afforded legal authority to federal agencies to enter into contracts with tribes to allow tribes to take over administration of programs, functions, services, or activities. The Act resulted from tribal leaders’ lobbying efforts to bring attention to “the strong expression of the Indian people for self-determination by assuring maximum Indian participation in the direction of educational as well as other Federal services to Indian communities.”

*Viewing Sovereignty and Self-Determination through a Taos Lens*

One model to express tribal sovereignty and self-determination is called the doctrine of “cultural sovereignty” (Coffey and Tsosie, 2001, pp. 196). Coffey and Tsosie, scholars of Indigenous law, define cultural sovereignty as a self-constructed philosophy of sovereignty based on tribal philosophies of social organization, customs and traditions, religion, language, arts and expression, government, and economic systems, which serve as components of a tribal way of life. They encourage tribes to locate the source of cultural sovereignty within existing social structures and order. Tribes should determine how to best link the relationship between political and cultural sovereignty. Coffey & Tsosie suggest that tribes use their core belief systems to define their sovereignty.
From a cultural sovereignty perspective, our sovereignty and self-determination are inherent in our way of life. According to our religion, we are one with our environment and our way of life celebrates this connection through ceremony. Our way of life is rooted in our sacred knowledge about relationships, respect, and responsibility. These values guide and inform how we conduct ourselves. Over the course of our lifetimes, we learn about life-sustaining relationships, how to respect these relationships, and our responsibility for these relationships. We are stewards of each other, our community, and our environment.

For example, respect permeates our relations with our environment. If we did not respect our environment, we would simply not be here today. We could consume nature to extinction but it does not help us survive beyond those immediate desires. Thus, responsibility comes naturally when the people show respect for our environment and there is natural order that keeps the people from exhausting resources. We rely upon one another to be conscious of the impacts of our decisions on others and our environment. If we were to discontinue our ceremonies, we would risk losing our way of life. This is not to say that we maintain every ceremony we were taught. We recognize that we have forgotten certain knowledge throughout our existence as a people, whether due to internal or external causes, yet we possess core ceremonies, customs, values, and norms. What we ultimately retain is our legacy to our children, which is why it is critical that we preserve and celebrate our way of life.
**Recommended Actions:**

**Improving Federal Programs to enrich our Way of Life**

As a successful contractor of federal programs, Taos has negotiated two compacts with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service, which provide greater flexibility to assume full funding and broader control over federal programs with minimal reporting requirements. Previously, Taos administered contracts for specific programs with smaller funding amounts, minimal discretion, and more federal oversight. Progressing from single program contracts to a bundled compact was a positive first step in the right direction for enhancing the Taos way of life.

The next series of steps suggest an approach to reframe, revise, and refocus federal programs to enhance our way of life as opposed to copying how a federal agency would provide the service. Following is an example of how Taos might re-vision a common federal health program, with a focus on childbirth, to align with its way of life as an expression of its cultural sovereignty.

*Natural Childbirth at Home*

- **Reframing**

While Taos parents may opt for a sterile hospital environment to deliver a baby, this was not always an option for our people, particularly before they had access to modern medical care. In those days, healers and midwives delivered children at home. This gave parents access to ceremony, family, and a connection to their home. Ceremonies were available for newborns, their afterbirth, and their umbilical cords. In my family, I am one generation removed from natural childbirth at home. Redefining the childbirth process as
ceremony and reviving this ceremony is important not only for our spiritual well-being but because research shows that home-based maternal care and delivery produces healthier babies (Tewa Women United (2010). Tewa Birthing Project Maternal Health Survey, Final Report. Retrieved from http://tewawomenunited.org/programs/reproductive-justice-program/community-doula-program).

- **Revising**

The Indian Health Service pioneered using federal funds to establish a midwifery program to provide services to tribes in remote locations such as Alaska, the Navajo Indian Reservation, and the Sioux Indian Reservation. Indian Health Service continues to fund a maternal health and child program that includes a midwifery component and, in fact, continues to recruit for open positions. As recently as 2010, the Santa Fe Indian Hospital staffed at least three certified nurse midwives.

In light of these circumstances, Taos could create its own midwifery program. The proposal here is to not only look at the health benefits of home-based maternal health care, but to also revive the accompanying ceremonies. While women can use the services of a professional midwife, the experience may not be the same because of the absence of a family relationship and ceremony. Put simply, there is a disconnect here between a federal program or private service and tribal ceremony.

- **Refocusing**

Taos can use existing resources to develop its own midwifery program, as New Mexico is the home of several national leading midwifery programs.
- Tewa Women United, Community Doula Program  
  www.tewawomenunited.org

- Northern New Mexico Birth Center  
  www.nnmbirthcenter.org

- New Mexico Midwives Association  
  www.newmexicomidwifery.org

- University of New Mexico, Nurse-Midwifery Program  
  nursing.unm.edu/prospective-students/Masters-in-Nursing/nurse-midwifery.html

- New Mexico Department of Health, Nurse Midwives Roster  
  archive.nmhealth.org/phd/midwife_roster.shtml

While these resources can provide valuable information on access to professional medical programs and best practices, we must train our own midwives; create a path for women to acquire, retain, and teach this knowledge; and combine the midwifery program with learning ceremony so ceremony is available for future generations.

Through reviving the ceremony of childbirth, we can create a midwife program that expresses our sovereignty and self-determination. This will strengthen our self-identity, breathe life back into our village homes, and bring families together. I hope you will agree that this approach is more consistent with maximizing resources in a manner that enriches our way of life.
CONCLUSION

Although I have tried to be comprehensive, space and time limitations have not allowed me the adequate opportunity to answer emerging questions. This exercise in research and thought has raised important questions about the evolution of knowledge and whether there exist tensions or fissures between old knowledge and new in contemporary Taos. It has also led to many asking how the sacred knowledge could be used to meet new goals? How do adaptations connect to, disrupt, or flow from a notion of tradition? What do current conversations within Taos about the tensions or fissures sound like? How are forums for internal conversations at Taos/introspection changing or destabilizing? And what might future, effective forums for conversation and introspection look like?

These are all important questions and necessitate engagement from various stakeholders and community leaders including kiva leaders, tribal council, youth, parents, and many others. I am only one person and I cannot speak for Taos Pueblo or the Taos People. Recall that these are my observations based on my experience as a Pueblo man who has not lived out his entire life. My father imparted his knowledge and the knowledge of his forefathers to give me direction on how to live as a Taos man. I want to do the same for my son and any future grandchildren. Ultimately, we are all working toward the same goal of preserving our ways of life. My father once told me that his mother taught him to give complete attention to a speaker regardless of their position in life from the homeless individual to leader. This makes complete sense to me now as I engage in introspection using the principle of *ha-lem.*
This dissertation attempted to convey a foundation for the Taos way of life by identifying the necessary components to transmit a legacy. These were language, ceremony, land base, and a functioning community. As an oral society, the Taos does not currently possess an official written language so it is critical that language fluency occur to preserve the society. Taos leaders know this fact and constantly advise the people to teach their children how to speak and understand the language. I agree with the leaders and elders that a substitute means and method does not exist, except cultural immersion. However, leaders must consider alternative means and methods to bring the red willow children to red willow place if the culture is not portable. Likewise, our ceremonies are geographically specific and clearly not portable beyond the local and surrounding environment at Taos. This again calls for bringing the children home to learn, but it is not only the responsibility of the parents to facilitate this reunion because we must move together as one to find a solution that works. We are fighting for our cultural survival as we did during the Blue Lake Watershed controversy. Equally important is the Taos land base, which leaders have done an outstanding job of protecting for our legacy. Without a functioning community, our legacy will not be able to fully appreciate the importance of the land base protected by the elders. The call to action is now.

As I reflect on my childhood at Taos, I recall fishing in the rivers, going to see my grandparents and relatives in the village, attending ceremonies, collecting wood, camping in the mountains, farming, playing, and living in a warm, safe, and culturally rich place. When I was ready to graduate from high school I did not want to leave Taos but decided to move to Albuquerque to attend college. Attending college was an opportunity for me to get away from home to live in the big city and start becoming an adult. I thought I
would return home after college but the Creator has had other plans for me. I moved to Tempe to attend law school. After I graduated, I moved back to Albuquerque to be closer to Taos. My circumstances changed so I moved back to Tempe for work. I stayed in Arizona and raised my family, grew my career, and returned to college. When I think I am done with Arizona, I end up at home in Mesa dreaming about Taos. I miss Taos, my family, my childhood and our way of life. Someday I will return. For now, even if I am abroad, I am working on protecting our legacy. I want leaders to know that my heart and soul are in Taos.

To the red willow children, this is for you. May it always rain upon you.
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