

Article

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Be as Strong as the Land that Made You: An Indigenous Philosophy of Well-Being through the Land

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Abstract | This essay attempts to articulate an Indigenous concept of well-being as grounded in the concepts of being-from-the-land and being-in-the-land, which are attempts, in this essay, at describing a conceptualization of being in general and human being in particular that is both out in the land and at the same time arising from it. It is from this perspective of being that this essay tries to articulate a framework for understanding well-being that is both rooted in the land and in reciprocal kinship relationship with it. This essay examines *Diné*, *Lakota*, and *Jalagi* stories and language concepts for their rootedness in land in more than a material sense in order to provide a framework for a theory of well-being that sees land and human being as intertwining with the being of land as the generative kinship complex by which life is both generated and health and life are sustained.

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In 2016, College Horizons, a small organization based in New Mexico that works to increase Native student success in college and universities, had a summer retreat in Appleton, Wisconsin for Native high school students. After a week of advice and affirmation of identity and purpose, on the last day of the retreat, a group of students put up a poster that proclaimed in bold letters: “**Be as Strong as the Land that Made You.**” In my own thinking and worldview that is based in my upbringing in Jalagi (Cherokee), Diné (Navajo) and Lakota communities, these words represent a broad sense of the relationship of well-being and the land. The way that I have come to talk about the land, as my own interpretation of the meaning of very common ways of speaking in the Native communities of my upbringing, is to describe our being, as human beings, as extending out into the land but also as arising from it. To understand the depth of this kind of relationship between

being and the land, it is important to understand the depth of these notions of being: being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land. Understanding something of the depth of these concepts is necessary to begin to bring into clear view my own articulation of an Indigenous conceptualization of well-being. Speaking of the depth of this relationship is a significant challenge in the general context of Western notions of being and the land, where being and land represent an unbridgeable chasm—as seen in the ease by which the Puritans of England pack up and replant themselves upon the land of the Wampanoag in order to transform Pawtuxet into what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts. My own Indigenous understanding of what is broadly conceptualized in a Western context as the environment and more specifically as land, is a meaning or grounding of being and reality that does not even appear in the realm of possibilities in this Western context, much less in actual conversations.

Thus, my articulations of Indigenous being and Indigenous well-being in relation to being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land appear meaningless or irrelevant in a context where the illusion of being-apart-from-the-land has become normalized. This essay will attempt to provide some disruption to the normalness of the concepts of being that are constructed apart from the land, and, from within that resituated context, provide and reflect upon some examples of well-being as it might function within a framework of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land. To clarify the methodology of my articulation of Indigenous being and well-being, it should be noted that my articulation is from a first-person reflection of an Indigenous *Jalagi*, raised also with *Diné* and Lakota family and *Diné* and Lakota languages and ways of being. My reflection is not a third-person or anthropological articulation of some set of people, Indigenous or not, but rather an ordinary philosophical account of being and well-being from within my own experiential and linguistic framework. This is the common way that philosophy is done outside certain colonized contexts. Aristotle's philosophy is Greek, and William James' philosophy is American, and Confucius' philosophy is Chinese, not because of some objective account of those areas of philosophy or because those philosophers give an authoritative third-person or anthropological account of the areas of Greek, American, or Chinese philosophy. These philosophers are making Greek, American, and Chinese philosophy as they are reflecting and writing because of who they are, and the languages and contexts in which they are thinking and writing. This too is my purpose as an Indigenous philosopher: to contribute to the ongoing production of first-person articulations of Indigenous philosophy, and I offer the reflections here contained as a continuation of many generations of Indigenous philosophy so conceived.

Being-in-the-land and Being-from-the-land

Before the start of the academic school year, my university put on a day retreat for department chairs on the same day the solar eclipse of August 21, 2017 occurred. Just before the eclipse, they stopped the program and brought up faculty to talk about the science of the eclipse. They then passed out eclipse glasses and asked everyone to gather outside to watch it happen together. There was no conceptual space of possibility for them to even consider that anyone in the audience would have a relationship to the eclipse that would

require not to watch the eclipse (to not go outside during the eclipse, to not eat or even sleep during the eclipse) because, to the university, it is a simple fact that the sun is nothing more than a giant ball of gas. In my own experience as an Indigenous person, the sun is not just a giant ball of gas that can be studied or properly spoken of in the abstract context of material science. The sun and the moon are, in fact, conceptualized as our father and mother, as are the sky (father) and the earth (mother) because our life and their life are inextricably intertwined in a more than material sense. The solar eclipse is often a particularly significant spiritual event for Indigenous people as it can be seen as representing a significant change in that more than material intertwining of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land. In the *Diné* view, the sun periodically dies (the death of the sun means the end of all life), but the moon comes to bring back life to the sun through an intimate and generative process. If this process is successful, the sun comes back to life on the other side of what we simply call a solar eclipse. In the *Diné* (Navajo) language, the word *Johanaa'èi* is not the name of the sun (the sun is too powerful and significant to be spoken of through a direct name) but a way of speaking indirectly about this most powerful life-giving and sustaining relative. The word *Johanaa'èi* means simply "those who watch over us in the day." The sense in which *Diné* might say *Johanaa'èi be lina* (the sun is life) is more than material; it is spiritual, moral, social and much more. In the *Jalagi* (Cherokee) story, there is a giant frog (*Walosi*) that periodically tries to swallow the sun. The solar eclipse is called *Nvdo walosi ugisgo* (Sun, the frog eats it). *Jalagi* medicine people know when this is going to happen and are prepared to protect the sun from the frog. If the frog succeeded, life would end for everything in the sky and on the earth. Once again, the eclipse is a spiritual event because it represents a radical change in the state of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land.

One way to begin to understand the more than material relationship to the land, including the sun and the moon, in the context of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land, is to try to really listen carefully to the articulations of this more than material relationship from the voices of Native people as they speak and have spoken on this matter. When I spoke to the organizers about feeling uncomfortable with the solar eclipse part of their event, they were perplexed. The sense of their confusion was in wondering how I could

imagine that any behavior of mine could have direct impact on the sun. They could understand the sun as a life-giver in a broad material sense but not the sun as intertwined with the being of life in a more than material sense. What they could not understand was my deeper, more than material relationship with the sun, where my being was in the sun (being-in-the-land) and the sun's being was in me (being-from-the-land). Bruce Wilshire reflects on the possibility of even commenting on these kinds of Native articulations—in particular, Black Elk's words as delivered by John Niehardt in *Black Elk Speaks* (1932). He notes that “late twentieth-century prose occupies a different realm of being and presencing,” as “it takes the division of the physical from the psychical completely for granted” (17). Here Wilshire reflections on the often-ridiculed Indigenous practice of singing up the sun at dawn. Wilshire gives the late twentieth-century critique of this practice as follows: “Simply experiment. Refuse to do the ceremony and see if the sun need our efforts to rise.” (ibid). But it was just these practices and this thinking, Wilshire notes, “that had so revolted and frightened Christianized Europeans who appeared in numbers on this continent in the sixteenth century” (18). Wilshire presents the sixteenth-century Christianized European critique as follows: “Only subhuman beings could believe such a thing, only they are so benighted as to know nothing of the metaphysical and moral gulf that divides human beings from the rest of creation, divides the favored few set down on the Sixth Day of Creation from the many and sundry created on the Fifth and preceding” (ibid).

In whatever century of Philosophy we are reflecting, we can begin to understand the more than material intertwining of the sun and human beings through the concept of kinship. Imagine the sun is your parent and you are its child who needs its protection and support in order to live. Your parent must face the challenge of rising from bed each day and beginning the task of providing for your life. Your parent might need your encouragement (singing up the sun) to be able face that challenge. Your parent might be able to rise without it on many occasions but that does not mean that on some occasions your encouragement might not be necessary, or that on all occasions that it does not, in fact, help your parent rise to face the challenges of the day. This analogy does not begin to express the depths of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land, but it does provide a starting point for speaking about this relationship, and its more than material intertwining

with well-being, as simultaneously the well-being of the land and the well-being of human beings, and to begin to speak about this relationship beyond the division of mere causality in the land and agency in humans or human-like organisms.

Another place to mine the depths of well-being as a function of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land is in the Lakota phrase that came to represent a significant part of the meaning of the 2016-17 Standing Rock protest against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline on treaty land of the *Oceti Sakowin* (the Seven Council Fires, which make up the Lakota, Nakoda, and Dakota people) and across the sacred waters of the *Mni Soce* (the Missouri River): *Mni Wiconi* (Water is Life!)¹. In the Lakota language, *Wakḥáŋ Tháŋka*, which is usually translated as God or Great Spirit, is really a vessel that channels movement or energy (from the word *wakḥáŋ*) and is a part of everything (from word *tháŋka*). When the Lakota people say *Wi* is *wakḥáŋ* (the sun is sacred) or *Hanpewi* is *wakḥáŋ* (the moon is sacred) they are referencing the more than material sense in which the sun is the continual source of all life on earth. They are referencing the movement or energy that is *wakḥáŋ* as manifest in the sun and the moon, but also that the movement or energy is also the center of the spiritual strength that allows the *Oceti Sakowin* to stand against the overwhelming physical and legal power of the Dakota Access Pipeline as an agent of the settler state. It is the same for the words “*mni*” (water) and *wiconi*, (health or life continuing) which comes from the root word *ni*, which means life. Dr. Cheryl Crazy Bull describes the intersection of these terms in this way: “An origin story of the *Oceti Sakowin*, tells us that the blood of First Creation, *Inyan*, covers *Unci Maka*, our grandmother earth, and this blood, which is blue is *mni*, water, and *mahpiya*, the sky. *Mni Wiconi*, water is life.” A real understanding of this, she continues, gives the *Oceti Sakowin Oyate* (the people of the Seven Council Fires) “the tools they need to indeed manage all aspects of their lands, which is our lifeblood, and the source of our lives” (2016). Water is indeed life, then, and in a more than material sense. *Mni* is the life-blood of the earth and the sky, which is why the word “*mni*” (water) has the word “*ni*” (life) in it. It is also the life-blood and spiritual strength of the *Oceti Sakowin Oyate* as well. *Inyan Oyate* is the grandfather stone nation, whose sacrifice of life-blood spills forth the life-blood of the sky, earth, and people as *mni* (water). When the people go to the sweat cer-

emony or *inipi* (“*ini*” from “*Inyan*” and “*pi*” (lodge) as in “*tipi*”) and pour the *mni* back into the creators or the *Inyan* (back from where *mni* originates and where life began), they are recharging their *ni* or their life and strength through re-inhabiting this source of life in the water and the stones.

This is not a reenactment of the events of creation from time long past; this is a re-inhabiting of the intertwining of all of these creative elements (the water, the stones, the fire, which is a piece of the sun) that the ordinary and continual sources of life, including human life. *Mni* is *Wiconi* (water is life) because it is *mni* and the kinship intertwining with *mni* that provides the context for *wiconi* (life continuing), the strength (in all possible senses) for life continuing (in all possible senses). The regeneration of *wiconi* (life continuing) is facilitated by the actions of human beings and so is not unlike the singing up of the sun. When human beings put themselves back into relation with the ordinary and ongoing life-generating kinship complex, and they give the water from their body in the form of sweat back to the rocks from which this water originated, and when they sing the requested songs of gratitude and encouragement that were given to them by those elements, they are operating from and participating in that space of their being that is intertwined with the land, their being-from-the-land and their being-in-the-land.

Jalagi (Cherokee) Well-being through *elohi*

In the *Jalagi* (Cherokee) language, land is *elohi*. *elohi* is more than land though. It is the context for life and the flourishing of the intertwining of human, plant, animal life and otherwise. *elohi* is the *Jalagi* word that describes the context of life through being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land. The relationship of human well-being with the land and to the land in the context of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land functions through an intertwining life-sustaining relationship between the people and *Selu*, the corn-mother, as well as other plants, animals, mountains, valleys, and rivers. Human beings are not separated from *elohi* and do not have dominion over *elohi*. Plants and animals can never become property for human beings or objects over which human beings can have dominion because human beings depend on them in a complex of inextricable, intertwining kinship relationships between humans, plants, and animals (among others) in the context of *Elohi*. *elohi*

is both the context for life but also kinship, and life and kinship can never be separated. The particular relationship between humans and animals, though, is particularly complex and contentious in the context of *elohi*. In *elohi*, human beings are not superior or separable from the animals and animal spirits/powers who live in *Galvadi* (above everything) at *galagwogi* (the seventh height). In this way, human beings cannot simply direct their practical reflections regarding well-being to the shared space of nature with other human beings. Animals in the context of *elohi* are powerful and rational, and the complex and contentious human relationship to them is based in a spiritual as well as material intertwining kinship.

In the *Jalagi* story of the origin of disease and medicine, human beings come into existence with an unresolvable tension and conflict with animals. Human beings must track and slay these most powerful spiritual elders in order to survive. But in the context of *elohi*, life-continuing or well-being is an intertwining of life and death, of the taking of life for life-continuing and the giving of life for life-continuing. When human beings take the life of an animal, they disrupt the life-force energy of the animals and the animal spirit/powers. This disruption of life-force energy brings anger and antagonism from the animals. The animals in turn disrupt the life-force energy of human beings who have taken the lives of animals by bringing sickness (physical, mental, or spiritual) upon those human beings.

In this story of the origin of disease, the animal spirit/powers brought the first illnesses to exist upon the human beings who first ate their flesh and wore their skin as clothing. The Bears, the Deer, the Fishes the Snakes, the Birds, the Insects, and many smaller animals each brought different punishments upon the humans for the offense of taking the lives of animals in order to sustain the lives of human beings. But when the plants of *elohi* heard about the suffering the animal spirit/powers placed upon human beings, they felt great compassion for them, as they understood that the human beings were simply trying to live and were ignorant of the larger intertwining of their lives with the lives of animals and even life itself in the context of *elohi*. They agreed to “help man when he calls upon [them] in his need” (Mooney 1891, 319-321). The plants, historically, became mediators for this unresolvable tension between human beings and animals that required humans to sometimes take the

life of animals and animals to take the life of humans. The plants took a leadership role in teaching the animals and human beings about how to understand and maintain the necessary life-continuing intertwining kinship between plants, animals, and human beings in the context of *elohi*. The plants took the mediator role between humans and animals to help both humans and animals understand how their life-continuing intertwining relationship required the giving and taking of life and health between humans and animals, and that this relationship was also one of kinship and so making it function positively for life-continuing was a matter of treating each other with respect and reciprocity in the necessary giving of taking of life and health. The human beings could then learn, for example, the proper way to acknowledge the sacrifice of the deer when it gives its life for the human being to live, but the deer and deer spirit/power could also learn the proper time to bring disease, such a rheumatism, upon the human hunter when he or she does not properly acknowledge the sacrifice of the deer. The deer and the deer spirit/power only bring rheumatism upon the human hunter when he or she does not acknowledge the giving of life by the deer for the life-continuing of the human beings.

The plants take up this leadership role because they have the greatest understanding of the value of giving life so that life will continue, and the greatest maturity in giving this sacrifice themselves. The plants have the deepest and most direct connection to the land in the nature of their being. Plants are literally in the land and literally come out of the land, and so the nature and depth of their being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land touches and frames the boundaries of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land itself or touches and frames *elohi*. Plants are not excused from the intertwining of life and death for life-continuing in the context of *elohi*. Plants too must sacrifice their flesh and bones in giving their life for animals and humans. In the *Jalagi* context, all *aniyvwi* (persons) have flesh and bones and plants, mountains, rivers, and more are persons (river, for example, is *yvwi gan-uhida*: long person). There are, in fact, four parts/spirits in any *aniyvwi*. There is one spirit in the head or throat that is a spirit of thought and speech. This spirit often materializes as saliva. There is another spirit in the liver that often materializes as bile, another spirit in the flesh that often materializes as blood, and finally a spirit in the bones that can materialize as semen. The story of Selu, the corn-mother, indicates

how her life-force is manifested through these four spirits and that she is just like all *aniyvwi*, flesh and bones. *Selu* is the corn-mother, but the word “*selu*” is also the ordinary word for the corn plant. In the story of *Selu*, the corn-mother sacrifices her flesh and bones for human life-continuing and teaches human beings how to receive this gift so that she can continue to live and so keep on giving life to them. This part of her story focuses on events surrounding her two sons, *Aniyvdagwalosgi* (The Thunder People). One of these Sons was born from *Selu* and *Kana'ti* (her husband, the Hunter) but the other son is Wild Boy who was spawned from the blood or the flesh spirits (from the parts of *aniyvwi*) of the animals that the family killed and cleaned in the River. It was from this very spot in the river, and the animal flesh spirits or blood, that Wild Boy came to be.

At one point the two mischievous boys set free all the animals from the trap of their father's (*Kana'ti*) traps, and so it came to be that they approached their mother, *Selu*, with great hunger. She told the boys that, while there was no meat, she could provide food for them if they were to simply wait for her to go somewhere and return to them. *Selu* took a *taluja* (basket) and went to the storehouse. The storehouse was high off the ground and so *Selu* had to climb up a great ladder to reach the storehouse. She climbed into the storehouse with an empty *taluja* and returned with a *taluja* full of *selu* (corn) and *tuya* (beans). Her two boys were puzzled when she returned with a *taluja* full of *selu* and *tuya* and wondered about the origin of this food. So the next day when *Selu* went to the storehouse, they followed her and watched through a hole in the log and clay wall. What they saw astounded them but also arose in them great fear. *Selu* stood in the middle of the room with her empty *taluja*. As she leaned over the empty basket, she rubbed her stomach. The *taluja* began to fill with *selu*. She then rubbed her armpits, and the *taluja* began to fill with *tuya*. The Boys were terrified. They decided that their Mother was a powerful *didabmesesgi* (witch) who was trying to poison them with this *ayelisgi* (imitation) food. They did not understand how one could produce food from within one's own body or, put another way, how one's own body could be food as the source and spirit of life. The two boys decided they must kill their mother because of this abomination and for their own safety. *Selu* could hear their thoughts and revealed to the boys her knowledge of their plans to kill her. She told them it was alright and to go ahead with their plans.

She said, “when you have killed me, clear a large piece of ground in front of the house and drag my body seven times around the circle. Then drag me seven times over the ground inside the circle, and stay up all night and watch, and in the morning you will have plenty of corn” (Mooney, 245). The boys killed their mother with their clubs and began to clear the ground in front of the house, but did not follow their mother’s instructions, and cleared only seven tiny spots rather than the whole ground. They dragged their mother’s body around the circle and, just as she had predicted, wherever her blood (the manifestation of her flesh spirit) spilled onto the ground, *selu* began to spring up. The boys sat and watched the *selu* through the night, and by morning, it was fully grown and ready to harvest.

Selu, in this story, teaches her two boys and all the human beings that follow, and who depend on killing her and eating part of her body (the corn) for life, the importance of giving life for life-continuing, the importance of receiving this gift in the proper way and giving back of your life as a gift for life-continuing, and the manner in which this framework is the framework of being as intertwined relatives in the context of *elohi*. *Selu* teaches that even though she gives her life for life, she requires a gift in return to continue giving that gift again and so on. In other words, she teaches human beings that their being depends on *Selu* but also that the being of *Selu* depends upon human beings. The relationship of human beings to *Selu* is a relationship of being-in-the-land but also a being-from-the-land. One of the lessons *Selu* teaches, then, is the meaning of land or *elohi* itself: *we are in the land, but the land is also in us and we are of the land, but the land is also of us*. This is part of the nature of our intertwining being with the land. *Selu* depends upon us as much as we depend upon *Selu*. But *Selu* also teaches that the manner in which people continue to kill her and drag her body across the earth determines when her blood pours onto the ground, and whether there is more corn and the people continue to live. As people continue to kill *Selu*, they take the ears of corn, they grind kernels and plant some kernels back in the ground so that *Selu* will come back each time that they kill her and eat her. The process of killing and eating *Selu* while returning some of her bones (the kernels) to the ground is hardly a simple material process, however. The *aniyvw̃wi* (humans, plants, animals, and others) in the context of *elohi* are not separated. They all exist in a social and spiritual relationship of being-in-the-

land and being-from-the-land. In the context of the *Jalagi* concept of *aniyvw̃wi* (persons), humans take the flesh and blood spirit of *Selu* and mix it with their saliva (which is the spirit of thinking and speaking) in the eating and digesting of the material flesh and blood as well as flesh and blood spirit of their mother. They also grind the kernels (the bones and bone spirit of *Selu*) and place other kernels (the bones and bone spirit of *Selu*) back in the ground which returns part of her bones and bones spirit, which is her regenerative power, to *elohi* so that *Selu* will regenerate in and through the regenerative power of *elohi* that is also in the land or the dirt. All of these particular modes in which the different spirits of the people and the spirits of *Selu* interact in the actions of planting, harvesting, grinding, storing and so on are not only necessary material processes that provide for the intertwining life-continuing kinship relationship, but are also normative and spiritual structures for the continuing of this kinship relationship, and for present and future *Jalagi* well-being in the context of *elohi*. Not paying proper attention to any part of this normative kinship dynamic can create illness and disrupt the deepest life-force context for humans, plants, animals, and others on the land as *elohi*.

In February of 1811, Anna Rosina Gambold, in her diary of the Springplace Mission to the *Jalagi*, reports the following story told by old Chief Koychezetel. Koychezetel told a story that he was told a few days earlier while he was at a talk in Oostanaula. The story was told to him by a man and a woman who were staying at a place near a mountain called Rocky Mountain. One night, “they heard a noise in the air and thought a storm was coming up.” When they went outside “they heard a whole host of Indians arrive on the mountain from the sky. They rode on small black horses and their leader beat a drum and came very close to them. They were afraid and wanted to go back into the house, but the leader called to them:

‘Don’t be afraid. We are your brothers and have been sent by God to speak with you. God is dissatisfied that you so indiscriminately lead the white people onto my land. You yourselves see that your game has gone. You plant the white people’s corn. Go and buy it (the land) back from them and plant Indian corn and pound it according to your ancestors’ ways. The mother of the nation has left you, because all her bones are being broken through the milling. She will re-

turn, however, if you get the white people out of the country and return to your former way of life. You yourselves can see that the white people are completely different from us. We are made from red earth, but they are made from white sand. You may always be good neighbors with them, but see to it that you get your old beloved towns back from them' (McClinton, 68-69).

The mother of the nation whose bones are being broken, in the rebuke from this *Jalagi* leader, is *Selu*. It is the mistreatment of their mother, he claims, that is the cause of their current suffering and misery, the disruption to their lifeways, and the encroachment on to their lands and territories—the millions of acres of *Jalagi* land that was being taken away under the European Doctrine of Discovery, which gave Europeans ownership of any land they discovered that was currently owned by *Jalagi* or other Native people. These words express an understanding of the nature of *Jalagi* being as intertwined with the land (“We are made from red earth”) but also the nature of *Jalagi* well-being through the particular relationship of the people to *Selu*. These words also express an understanding of *Jalagi* well-being through the land (“your game is gone”) but a well-being that is shaped by the people’s particular relationship to *Selu*: she “has left you” and “she will return” if you “return to your former way of life.” The concept of being made from red earth as opposed to white sand also describes an understanding of the strength of *Jalagi* people in the context of *elohi* as a strength that comes out of their land and as a *Jalagi* strength that goes back into that land (We are made of red earth and the earth is made of *Jalagi*, red people). The loss of land to European and Euro-American theft is also described here as a function of the people’s relationship to *Selu*. The beloved towns that must be reacquired and re-inhabited are themselves representations of *Selu* and her being-from-the-land and being-in-the-land that shapes the framework of *elohi* and the context for life and life-continuing. *Jalagi* places are named through *Selu* correlates—*Ajigvhnagesdhvyi* (Black Cedar Place) and *Gidhayohi* (Cherry Tree Place). Reacquiring and re-inhabiting these places of *Selu* and her sisters (the *Selu* correlates) will reshape the proper moral and spiritual relationship to *Selu* that will allow the people to thrive on that land and continue to exist there even against the intentions of the European colonizers. The protective force that these towns and places have and the protective strength that the *Jalagi* people need for

life-continuing, particularly in the most challenging of circumstances such as settler attempts at removal and genocide, arise from the kind of protective force and protective strength that *Selu* manifests in her most fundamental being. Her strength and her force come from her being-from-the-land and being-in-the-land and in so far as she brings strength and life-continuing to the *Jalagi* people is it through their being-from-the-land and being-in-the-land in the context of the life-generating and life-sustaining kinship complex that is *elohi*.

The *Diné*, *Oceti Sakowin*, and *Jalagi* stories of well-being as a function of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land resonate with the poster displayed by the Native students at the College Horizon’s summer retreat in 2016: “**Be as Strong as the Land that Made You.**” Being strong, in the context of these stories and languages, is clearly a function of the land, but the land not just as dirt. Land, in this poster, is something like *elohi*, or an ecological intertwining of material, spiritual, social, and moral being and well-being for humans, plants, animals, rivers, and so on. It is this land that made these students, and it is from this land that these students are made strong. Whether it is from the stories of *Inyan* and *mni*, from *Selu* and the beloved towns, from *Johanaa’ei* brought back to life by the moon, or some other story from some other landscape, land (*elohi*) as the context of being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land is what makes human beings. Whether grounded in the ceremonial and kinship relationships to *Inyan*, *mni*, *Selu*, *Johanaa’ei* or some other *aniywwi* (person) from some other landscape, it is truly the land (*elohi*) that made human beings that also gives them the strength for life. It is the land (*elohi*) that creates the context, the meaning, and the possibility of health and life-continuing (*wiconi*).

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Endnotes

- [1] <https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/standingrocksyllabus/>