Book Review: No Spiritual Surrender

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Klee Benally, *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred* (Detritus Press, 2023).

The late Klee Benally (Diné Nation) was a force to be reckoned with who lived a life of resistance against capitalist extraction industries on his people's territories and the "conquer and divide, divide and conquer" machinations of the colonizing United States government, dedicated, in his words, to maintaining "the Navajo Reservation as a resource colony so golf courses could be watered and lights would come on in cities hundreds of miles away."[1] *No Spiritual Surrender* is an autobiography of sorts parsed out in three sections – "Defending the Sacred," "Expect Resistance" and "Indigenous Anarchy." In each, Benally combines firsthand experiences as an Indigenous organizer with sharp-edged, meticulously researched analyses probing the salient 'back-stories' of resistance and colonialism informing the issues at hand. Benally offers an education in the fullest sense of the word; that is, learning infused with rage rather than despair, propelling us towards "the specter of Indigenous anarchism, an unsettling and ungovernable spiritual force of nature that makes colonizers afraid again."[2]

On that score, *No Spiritual Surrender* is also a users' manual exposing ineffectual pathways through government regulatory labyrinths and "legally binding" U.N. declarations subsuming "Mother Earth" and Indigenous peoples into the structures of "civilization."[3] To take but one instance in this intensely engaging book, Benally goes to the heart of the matter referencing a protracted struggle to halt the ongoing desecration (a ski resort development) of the "San Franciso Peaks" (Dook'o'ooslííd in Diné Bizáad) near Flagstaff, Arizona which are sacred to more than thirteen Indigenous nations.[4] Over the objections of Indigenous peoples who organized, petitioned, appealed, protested, and litigated against it, the "Arizona Snowbowl" has grown ever larger since its initial construction in the 1970s, leading to 2011, when a pipeline was installed to pump 130 million gallons of treated sewage annually up the mountain for spraying, providing skiers with guaranteed 'snow' no matter what the weather.[5] Indigenous objections that the mountain was holy fell on deaf ears. "Why isn't it enough for Indigenous Peoples to state that a place is sacred and should be respected?" Benally asks.[6] Because "the order of the civilized is threatened by the sacred. It refuses to understand and offer any measure of thoughtfulness because it has killed its own spirit and spiritual practitioners in mass waves of femicide and genocide to feed its unending hunger."[7]

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[1] Klee Benally, *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred* (Detritus Press, 2023), 17.

[2] Benally, 396.

[3] Benally, 60–61.

[4] Benally, 63.

[5] Benally, 66–87.

[6] Benally, 88.

[7] Benally, 88.

Indigenous anarchy resides in the recognition that "no law can be above nature."[8] Hence, "the principles of anarchism are not at all unfamiliar to Indigenous ways of being: a harmonious life without coercion based upon mutual aid and direct action."[9] *No Spiritual Surrender's* closing section, "Indigenous Anarchy," provides an invaluable overview of Indigenous engagements with the anarchism/ anarchy axis, probing the limitations of historic anarchist tendencies in the United States, as well as the emergence of Indigenous anarchism(s) rooted in place and culture. "We view anarchism as a sort of dynamic bridge ... between anti-colonial struggle and Indigenous liberation," Benally concludes.[10] Anarchism is

> ... a practice that expresses and asserts autonomy with respect to the context in which it is located (place). It is an antagonistic connection between the point of where we are dispossessed and ruled over, to a point towards liberation and autonomy. As a rejection of all systems of domination and coercion, it is the utility anarchism has for Indigenous liberation of which we are interested in. And most specifically, it is in its indictment of the State and total rejection of it that we find the greatest use. Indigenous anarchism is a commitment to the destruction of domination and authority, which includes colonialism, white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, and the State.[11] Allan Antliff, University of Victoria

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[8] Benally, 343.
[9] Benally, 335.
[10] Benally, 344.
[11] Benally, 344.

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