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Photographers Without Borders

Contributors

Founder & Executive Director
Danielle Khan Da Silva

Editor & Journalist
Katrina Kirsch

Marketing Director
Damari McBride

Curator
Jonathan Lovett

Designer
Steven Boyle

Journalist
Darshel Diaz

Journalist
Christine Alexiou

Journalist
Paula Dicu

Journalist
Jessica Czarnecki

Director of Operations and Communications
Mia Fatrdla / Nicole Cyhelka

Director of Production
Alicia Yee / Yohan Mohammed

Storytellers
Nayla Azmi
Rasha Al Jundi
Tara Kerzhner
Elke Scholiers

Our Mission

We are a diverse, ethically literate community of storytellers (photographers and filmmakers) uniting to support our frontlines community partners (NGOs, community-led initiatives, and change makers in the areas of social and environmental justice) where it's needed most. We do this through our Assignments, and inspire new generations of storytellers through Storytelling School, Storytelling for Change Series & Podcast (coming soon), our Storytelling for Change Summit, and our other initiatives and resources. Our mission is to make storytelling more accessible for communities around the world who are contributing to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Our Vision

We envision a future where storytelling inspires action and drives meaningful change towards a decolonized, united world. Change the story, change everything.

About the Cover

Documented by Rasha al Jundi in Tozeur, Tunisia

A self portrait of Rasha while travelling through the desert on a journey of self-discovery. This image was created as part of the series "A State of Mind," her assignment for Storytelling School with Photographers Without Borders.

Photography helped Rasha reconnect with her creativity and inner light after a period of darkness.

Read the full story on page 22.

Our Values

We are committed to:

- **Ethics:** We strive to be leaders in ethical literacy. See our code of ethics.
- **Impact:** Striving to achieve tangible and regenerative change based on community wants and needs.
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Indigeneity:** Respecting and celebrating what makes us all unique and creating environments that are inclusive of those with diverse lived experience.
- **Collaboration:** We believe developing healthy, reciprocal relationships with everyone we work with is an integral part of the work we do. Facilitating collaboration also facilitates accountability.
- **Accessibility:** Making our programs and initiatives accessible to communities in need and to our Members through our own fundraising platform and other initiatives.
- **Anti-Oppression/Decolonization:** We seek to decolonize mindsets, including our own. We acknowledge that the work we do comes with great responsibility. Acknowledging that systemic colonialism and oppression exist is the first step in seeking to dismantle systems of colonialism and oppression as they are expressed in our work, internally and externally.

Code of Ethics

- People have voices; we amplify them and strive to decolonize the storytelling process. Why? Because nearly every problem we seek to address today was in some way caused by unchecked colonialism and capitalist frameworks.
- Decolonization is a lifelong process of learning, unlearning, and dismantling white supremacy and the system some of us benefit from or are oppressed by, in order to seek justice.
- Strive to be a good ally and collaborator at all times. Be aware of your positionality and privilege, while learning and listening as much as possible.
- Being an "ally" is not something we can claim or wear like a badge; it is not a destination we arrive at; instead it is something that is earned through showing up however and whenever it is asked of (if not every day) by the communities affected, and doing the hard work involved. More resources here.
- Do no harm to collaborators directly or indirectly (mental, physical or emotional). Treat collaborators with respect and dignity, forming real relationships. Relationships involve vulnerability and work from both parties, and involve mutual benefits and collaboration. Strongly consider not revealing identities of those who may be harmed by your images.
- Represent people and communities accurately as possible while avoiding stereotypes, "white saviour"/colonial/centring/oppressive narratives, shaming, romanticism, cultural appropriation, anti-Blackness, cultural fetishism/exoticism, and limiting personal biases. Some frames, narratives and language that are widely accepted need to be challenged and changed.
- Obtain explicit consent especially for photographing the likeness of equity-seeking populations. Remember that consent is fluid and should be accurately informed (please see below for more on consent).
- Retain integrity of the image, story and subject matter during the editing and culling process.
- Do not accept compensation, favours or gifts that might influence the outcome of the project, please. Please do not make promises you can't keep. Only give or accept gifts if it is culturally-appropriate or relationship-based.
- No selfies or photographs with wildlife, please. The harm has outweighed the benefits of encouraging close contact with animals, whether they are wild or in a sanctuary. The values and narratives we promote or don't promote make a difference.

Land Acknowledgment

Photographers Without Borders acknowledges that we operate on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Tkaronto (the Mohawk origin of the toponym Toronto) is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We are all treaty people. The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequent Indigenous Nations, Europeans and all newcomers, have been invited into this treaty. We all eat out of a dish with only one spoon, which means that we all share the responsibility of ensuring our dish is never empty.

For more than five hundred years, Indigenous communities across the Americas have demonstrated resilience and resistance in the face of violent efforts to separate them from their land, culture, and each other. They remain at the forefront of movements to protect Mother Earth and the life it sustains. Today, corporate greed and federal policy push agendas to extract wealth from the earth, degrading sacred land in blatant disregard of treaty rights. Acknowledgment is a critical public intervention, a necessary step toward honoring Indigenous communities and enacting the much larger project of decolonization and reconciliation. PWB also acknowledges and fully supports UNDRIP.

Navajo Nation

Weathering the Impact of Climate Change

Words by Christine Alexiou

Images by Tara Kerzhner and Elke Scholiers

Within the United States, there is more than a single nation. Many are hidden in plain sight, in the shadow of colonization that changed the trajectory of their collective history. One is Diné Bikéyah, or Navajo Nation – the largest Native American reservation in the United States.

Sprawling over about 27,000 square miles of land now known as Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, the Navajo Nation has a population of over 300,000 Indigenous people who bear the scars of forced resettlement, exploitation of land resources, human labour, insufficient compensation and unmet promises.

Their story isn't often accurately portrayed in the media, a point that Tara Kerzhner – a Nez Perce, award-winning adventure photographer and accomplished rock climber – sought to change.

In early 2020, Tara became frustrated with the mainstream media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic on the Navajo Nation. In May 2020, it surpassed New York and New Jersey for the highest per capita number of coronavirus cases in the United States. “Almost every article I saw [in mainstream publications] had a photo with this beautiful landscape and a shack," said Tara. "I felt like, once again, here we go with the poverty porn of Native communities. It doesn’t represent the people or the deeper story."

Tara and Dr. Len Necefer, a Navajo and the Founder and CEO of Natives Outdoors, applied and received a National Geographic Relief Grant for Journalists to document stories of the Navajo people across the reservation. “We really wanted to tell stories of people doing good stuff for each other on the rez,” said Len.

Tara recounts, "We went to places where people were collecting water. We went to a hospital, and we saw a medicine man. We went to a community centre where a guy was feeding an entire community because they didn't have food at the time. And we saw this strong connection between people.”

Still, the COVID crisis continued to exacerbate the long-standing effects of colonialism on the Navajo people. With the virus spreading at a devastating pace, strict lockdowns were put in place. People were forced to stay in their homes – a vast number without access to running water.

According to an April 2021 Report prepared by the Water & Tribes Initiative | Colorado River Basin, Native American households are more likely to lack piped water services than any other racial group. In the Navajo Nation specifically, residents are 67 times more likely than other Americans to live without access to running water.

Plumbing poverty has its roots in colonization and broken promises by the US government. Historically, in exchange for the cession of millions of acres of land to white settlers, Native American tribes were promised a permanent homeland, a livable reservation, and a home conducive to health and prosperity. That still hasn't happened.

Not only do Navajo families have to travel miles to access and haul water back to their homes, but much of the water is contaminated.

In 1944, at the height of the atomic age, uranium mining under the US military began on Navajo lands. According to the United Nations Environmental Protection Agency, nearly 30 million tons of uranium ore were extracted between 1944 and 1986. Many Navajo people worked in the mines, living and raising families in close proximity to the mines.

Today, there are over 500 abandoned uranium mines and water sources with elevated levels of radiation. But very few water sources have been officially tested leading to health effects impacting multiple generations. “The only way that folks found out if their water sources were contaminated was they were getting sick or their animals were getting sick and so still to this day there's some places where we don't know if the water is contaminated or not,” said Len who has a PhD in Engineering and Public Policy.

Many Navajo have died prematurely of kidney failure and cancer and developed diabetes – conditions linked to uranium contamination. Len's grandfather was a miner and lost a lung to radiation exposure. New research from the Centre for Disease Control shows babies are still being born to Navajo parents with traces of uranium in their urine. “It was a Chernobyl in the United States on the Navajo Nation,” said Tara.

Although the mines are closed, “they’re still protected by the government,” says Tara. She recounts the experience of photographing one such abandoned uranium mine site and “fifteen minutes in, a little security car appears and slowly starts driving towards us like hey get out of here. Don’t take photos of this.”

Flash forward to the summer of 2021, the coronavirus pandemic is further exacerbated by worsening drought conditions that put the remaining safe water supplies at risk.

“Our people are right when they say that water is life....We are getting less and less moisture every year. Our lakes and ponds are drying up and our wells are depleting,” Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said in a press release.

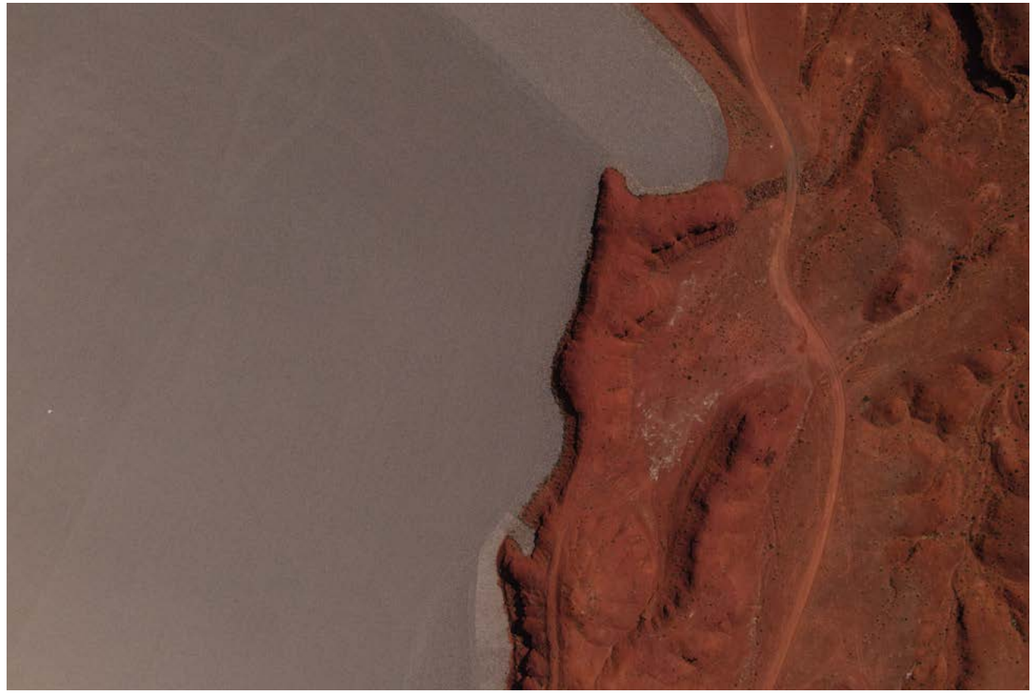
Increasingly, environmental studies find that the pandemic, alongside climate change, disproportionately impacts communities impacted by colonization. It particularly exposes BIPOC communities to health issues and economic hardship.

Belgian-born humanitarian photographer, Elke Scholiers, was interested in learning more about the communities hardest hit by climate change. Upon moving to the US in 2021, she travelled to the American Southwest.

Elke had been recently expelled from China, her home for nearly a decade. She and her partner were forced to leave everything behind when all American journalists working for certain newspapers had to leave the country within 10 days. The move cemented her desire to turn to photography full time and tell stories of contemporary resistance.

“We are always living in an age where people have to stand up for themselves. I want to document what resistance looks like today. Sometimes, it is invisible. But it's only invisible because we don’t look or don't have to think about things like access to water,” Elke said.

Elke spent several weeks travelling across New Mexico. She stopped in the Navajo Nation territory near Gallup, New Mexico and was welcomed by the local families. “As



a foreigner, I was curious about life on the reservation. I saw a family watering cattle, and I asked if I could chat with them," said Elke. "I told them that I was planning to do a story on climate change, and what would be, in their opinion, the most direct threats in their life. They said drought."

Elke documented the way the reservation residents accessed water. She explained how "the access to water is arbitrary. Some people have found a natural spring near their homes. But the way most people on the reservation get water, if they live close enough to the city of Gallup, is a water station. They have chip cards, but the system is broken sometimes so there is no water. This happened several times when I was visiting the water station. People would have to wait...they couldn't water their cattle."

Ongoing drought, on top of water and plumbing issues, threatened the Navajo Nation's agriculture and food security. Traditional crops like dry steam white corn became an even more vital commodity.

Joe Ben, the director of Ben Farms, understood this better than anyone. A multi-generational, family business, Ben Farms specializes in neeshjizhii – Navajo white corn. In addition to having a shelf life of up to four years, the corn plant and pollen have been integral to the cultural and spiritual life among the Dine people for centuries. Elke met Joe Ben in Shiprock, New Mexico – a fertile sliver of farmland along the San Juan River on the Navajo Nation reservation.

The neeshjizhii produced by Ben Farms helped ensure that members of far-flung and often isolated rural communities across the Navajo Nation had access to food during the height of the pandemic lockdown. A local NGO bought up much of Ben Farms' supply to distribute to homes because "it was unsafe to leave the house" and supermarkets were miles away.

Joe Ben is committed to passing on knowledge to young Navajo interns. Over the past year, a growing number of people on the reservation started farming out of need. Others had always farmed and found their knowledge was in demand. But drought, torrential rain and flooding, remain a threat to growing crops.

Ben has ideas to help rejuvenate the soil but is frustrated by the lack of resources to implement a wide-scale plan. "He has the knowledge. He just needs infrastructure and a platform," said Elke.

Tara was frustrated that the stories she collected during her trip couldn't find a place with mainstream media. But she was surprised when she shared the stories on her personal social media sites. "I really felt like there was a hunger for it in my adventure sports community. People had no idea. There was just such an obvious lack of information."

"So much in my life has been people feeling bad for us and where we come from. While bad things do happen, on the flip side, there's just a lot of resilience. We're strong people and we have a lot to offer," said Len.

Storytelling For Change

As of April 2020, over 60 Storytelling For Change webinars have been produced featuring in-depth discussions with photographers from all over the world who are change makers, thought leaders, journalists, artists, community leaders, athletes, activists and momre. Hosted by PWB Founder Danielle Da Silva, the discussions always include an audience Q&A session and conclude with each guest answering the question "What is the greatest teaching you've ever received?" Here are some of those thought-provoking responses.

Andy Mann *Being a good storyteller is about listening well and paying attention to the edges of a story. If you don't see the beauty and the people around you, you're missing the story.*

Sofia Jaramillo *Trust that the work you love is going to take you where you're supposed to go. Do the work you love, and trust that it's going to take you where you're supposed to go. I definitely think that the work I cared the most about has done that for me.*

Tobi Shinobi *People think that progress is linear. They beat themselves up by thinking, "Oh, I had 20 followers last week, so I need 40 followers this week." But life isn't linear. We need to navigate it and go through it. So we need to be kinder to ourselves and to one another.*

Brian Hodges *Often, criticism can embody the most important lessons. We're all inclined to have people offer compliments, but at the end of the day, the hugely valuable lessons come when someone says, "Well, this is really not so great, and here's why."*

Lou Jones

Almost everything that we're taught is wrong. But as photographers, we can go and witness for ourselves and bring back a more enlightened point of view. So that people can see and understand better about cultures and what's really going on in the world.

Through Your Lens

Twice a year, PWB welcomes the community to submit their best photos to be featured in our print magazine. These four images were selected by our community of storytellers and tell a powerful tale about humanity and support PWB's vision of a future where storytelling inspires action and drives meaningful change towards a decolonized, united world. Change the story, change everything.

1 VEJEN, DENMARK

Amanda Magnani
@amandamagnani

Maya holds her mother Awatif. Syrian refugees living in Vejen, Denmark, Awatif and her husband's residence application has been denied while Maya and her siblings have been allowed to stay in the country. In March 2020, Denmark became the first country to declare the Damascus area in Syria safe enough for refugees to be sent back. Since then, many people's visas are being reviewed and they risk deportation. Denmark has no diplomatic relations with the Assad government in Syria, so individuals are being sent to deportation camps indefinitely. Many families like Maya and Awatif's are facing fears of separation and an uncertain future.

2 MUMBAI, INDIA

Aniket Gawade
@aniketgawadephoto

Fish lie dead on Marve beach in Mumbai because of increasingly untreated city and industrial waste being released into the water system which ultimately ends up in the Arabian Sea.

3 SUN RIVER, MONTANA

Alice Martin
@exposuresbyalice

Forest ranger Kevin Arnold works hard to load up all the hay bales on his ranch before dark as his beloved dog Laney supervises. It seems the chores on a ranch are never ending.

4 BUNDI, INDIA

Roxanne Engstrom
@hawaimages

The discipline and physicality of celebration. We were created to move our bodies, to dance with joy and to celebrate together.