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Keith Basso. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. 171p.

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Ethnographer and linguist Keith Basso spent over thirty years working with the White Mountain Apache Tribe in an effort to understand their ceremonial symbolism, linguistic structures, and social interactions. During one of his many trips to the Cibecue region, Ronnie Lupe, one of the tribal leaders suggested that he embark on a study of the landscape in order to create Apache-style maps of the various locations. This idea involved traveling through the region, discussions with consultants, and analysis of the ways place names are used in conversation. The result of this intensive study gave rise to the book titled *Wisdom sits in places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*, published in 1996. The book received the J.I. Staley Prize awarded to Keith Basso at the campus of the School of American Research in New Mexico in 2001. The book describes some of the features of the landscape of the Cibecue region, a part of the White Mountain Western Apache Tribe situated about 114 miles northeast of Phoenix, Arizona. The name "Cibecue" literally means "my house" and pertains to a remote area of the Fort Apache Reservation, which still maintained many of its traditional ways of life during the years 1979-84 when Basso was researching the landscape.

The book describes the relations between individuals in the community, punctuated by narrative stories pertaining to specific and detailed locations of the landscape. The close connection between the Apache and their land is revealed in the deep respect for nature often exemplified in narratives about various past events meant to teach moral behavior and maintain the integrity and dignity of the group. Landscape intertwines with history and ecological approaches to nature, thereby defining the Apache way of life and their understanding of themselves. The important role played by the ancestors in these narratives exemplifies their wisdom and traditions emphasizing historical continuity and deep respect for the past. Place-names are distinguished through their brevity and expressiveness but are thoroughly descriptive of the landscape, including specific physical details arranged in complete sentences. Yet the place-names are also symbolic, revealing the personal relationships individuals have with the land, providing ideas of wisdom, politeness, and moral behavior. The places are linked with events from an undetermined time recurring in *illo tempore*, the beginning of tribal history, and thus they provide means of imagining and interpreting the Apache tribal past. The place-names' use in daily conversation is connected to historical narrative revealing the Apache mode of thinking, their conception of

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life, and the connection between the land, society, and work. These place-names are used to criticize and warn individuals of their transgressions and thereby offer role models for proper behavior, forcing individuals to engage in self-reflexive exercises. The stories work on their minds “stalking” them and continuously reminding them of the right path. Place-names allow individuals to use their own imagination to envision the stories associated with them and draw the desired conclusions, since often they are used as a form of shorthand in discourse. Evoking the place-names also allows for discourse to retain tactfulness and politeness closely observing proper relations between individuals and refraining from insults or embarrassment. The ancestral wisdom these place-names divulge provides comfort and solace during difficult and trying times. Thus, place-making is a means of constructing and re-constructing the past, providing a form of narrative art in which remembering of past events becomes the basis for imagining those events from long ago and discovering their wisdom. These historical narratives enable empathy and admiration for the ancestors encouraging their emulation while also providing warnings when immoral or unacceptable behavior was exhibited. The use of place-names in speech provokes the individual thus targeted to reflect upon the historical narrative seeing the similarities between one’s present transgressions and those of the foolish ancestor described, with the intent to change current behavior and return to the proper moral tradition. The consequence of these narratives creates a strong bond between the audience and the place where the narrative occurred, and evoking the place-name allows the individual to mentally travel to the place and reflect upon the story, thus enabling the desired change in behavior.

One of the most significant aspects of the book is that it provides an insightful analysis on the Apache conception of wisdom viewed as a “heightened mental capacity” used to avoid potential harmful events through caution and prescient thinking. According to Basso’s Apache informants and consultants, there are three major components to the cultivation of wisdom: smoothness, resilience, and steadiness of mind. Resilience of mind, which enables calm and focused thought by combating external distractions and guarding against panic and anxiety, helps one reason clearly, and combines with steadiness of mind which combats internal distractions of anger and conceit to produce calm and measured thinking. These two attributes lead to smoothness of mind which is unobstructed and unfettered allowing for clarity of reason. The long and arduous road to such wisdom develops from “knowledge of places and their cultural significance” and thus, the Apaches are encouraged to “drink from places” since wisdom, like water is deemed essential to survival. The title “Wisdom Sits in Places” is most appropriate since it amply describes the necessity

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of place-name knowledge and the reflection upon the narratives closely tied with the landscape for the development of wisdom.

Cibecue, like many traditional places, is turning into a town, and the many changes of the modern world are prominently visible there as well. And yet, Basso concludes that amidst the modern changes, many traditional ideas and place-naming acts remain in use to further teach their wisdom and even create new ideas. In our modern world the wisdom defined and analyzed in this book is most valuable not only for an understanding of the Western Apache way of life, but also for comparison with our own uses of places and the metaphors of our speech. The Apache conception of wisdom is most relevant today in the hurried environment of modern life as a thought-provoking example of the necessity for self-reflection and a role model to the development of a steady, resilient, and smooth mind. ✱