



# Indigenous Resurgence: Global Connection and Kinship

## An Introduction to the Special Issue

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The authors of this essay and guest editors for the special issue first met at the University of Montana as graduate student (M. J. DesRosier, Blackfeet, Gros Ventre) and professor (Paul Guernsey, white-European) in the Environmental Studies Program. We were both inspired by the Indigenous-led movements happening around us in Montana, and how those efforts were creating connectivity across settler-made boundaries and on the global stage. M. J. kept seeing his relatives and other members of his tribes winning Emmys, Golden Globe Awards, and music awards, taking note that Indigenous people, in general, were receiving greater representation on the world stage absent of tokenism. Together, we also worked on a large conference, the Stolen Waters Summit, which gathered leading voices of Indigenous resistance and culture in the Missouri, Columbia, Colorado, and Rio Grande river basins.

Organizing the event involved a long but necessary process of building trust and accountability among many nations and allies from many backgrounds. Participants shared the sentiment that protecting Native water was good for everybody because it meant protecting the basis of life on earth. They reached a consensus that the only path to that goal was Indigenous philosophy, sovereignty, and treaty rights. The nations present at the event were too many to list, but included Blackfeet, Crow, Diné, Salish, Kalispel, Spokane, Kootenai, Little Shell Chippewa, Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Nez Perce, Mandan, Hidatsa, Cree, Walatowa, Pueblo, and Shoshone-Bannock. Many of those tribal nations have a deep historical connection to the Missoula area, home of the University of Montana, yet were forced off the land in various ways.<sup>1</sup>

The international collaboration spoke to the growing ability of Indigenous action to create solidarity, connection, and kinship across boundaries. In this introductory essay, we discuss our own collaborative process of thinking about Indigenous resurgence,

taking time to introduce and celebrate the work of this inspiring group of authors who have found pathways for hope, action, healing, and well-being in the struggle to renew their worlds. The current special issue of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, titled *Indigenous Resurgence: Global Connection and Kinship*, honors a diversity of approaches to the resurgence as it spans across the histories, genres, disciplines, cultures, practices, and actions of Indigenous peoples around the world.

We chose these essays specifically because they not only embodied the spirit of this resurgence, they did so unapologetically in the face of colonial powers, histories, and borders. Though they span a range of topics, from fire and seed rematriation to data sovereignty, from border securitization to erasure from academic institutions, at their core is the overall theme of resurgence and growing solidarity. This issue, this collaboration among these authors, was three years in the making, and in that time we have been encouraged to see others producing works with similar arguments and ideas about global Indigenous awakening to dismantle colonial destruction.<sup>2</sup> These works indicate that many others have also noticed this phenomenon taking shape.

The Native studies literature has seen the use of terms such as *radical resurgence*, *collective continuance*, *world renewal*, *survivance*, *Indigenous renaissance*, and *perpetuation and regeneration*.<sup>3</sup> All of these terms align with the theme of this issue in some way. However, the terms that Indigenous peoples use to describe their actions, movements, and growing political agency is up to them as sovereigns of their own voices and national identities. Here we opt for the use of *Indigenous resurgence* to denote a global movement to which even colonial governments are taking notice.<sup>4</sup> There is a rise in popular culture regarding such peoples' epistemologies, culture, languages, curation, and arts everywhere, from Aotearoa (New Zealand) to the Americas, Africa, Australia, and other parts of the world.

Historical fascinations with these systems have often been by and for the perspective of non-Natives who exploited and romanticized Indigenous cultures to form their own national identities, write popular books, or make popular movies about their brief time with a tribe.<sup>5</sup> The appropriation of Native cultural and aesthetic motifs extended to Europe, with philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke and literary figures such as Karl May and Dylan Thomas.

But now, many aspects of this shift in consciousness comes directly from and for Indigenous peoples around the world expressing their *own* cultural values. For Indigenous peoples, those aspects were always part of the cultures, but are only now being taken seriously by the larger society. Like any resurgence, it is difficult to trace the precise genesis, but it only recently became a transcontinental phenomenon due in large part to the age of information making the world more connected in many ways.<sup>6</sup>

However, much of the mainstream attention continues to disregard the true potential that Indigenous peoples hold in terms of political power. In the era of global burning and mass extinction, it seems that modernity simply must adapt to change the course of ongoing catastrophe.<sup>7,8</sup>

Indigenous societies have an advantage in this regard because their cultural practices promote dynamic and reciprocal relationships based on communication, accountability, and consent that have been tested and adapted for millennia.<sup>9</sup> Many

Indigenous groups are using their sovereignty to enact legislative change that promotes sustainability on a large scale, the so-called politics of nature, demonstrating part of the potential of a global Indigenous resurgence.<sup>10</sup> This essay offers a theoretical and historical framework for understanding the current resurgence as a phenomenon of global significance and influence. We argue that the return of the buffalo to North America provides one such example of Indigenous cultures and their spiritual relatives overcoming colonial control and addressing the social ills of modernity by rebuilding relationships with each other and the earth.

## INDIGENOUS RENAISSANCE OR INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The current special issue emphasizes the recent phenomenon of Indigenous cultures connecting and collaborating at global scales to reassert their political sovereignty in ways that recover their precolonial levels of continental influence. While the globally connected resurgence of Indigenous peoples is a more recent phenomenon, the multitudinous histories that make up that resurgence have been, and will continue to be, geographically unique, based in relationships to ancestral homelands. As such, there is no singular “start date” of the resurgence. And, according to many authors, resurgence is not novel, but rather a continuation of healing and revitalization practices that extend back since time immemorial—as Leanne Simpson says, resurgence, in the sense of extending process and relationship, “is our original instruction.”<sup>11</sup>

The journey of producing this special issue took many twists and turns and offered many learning moments. Our original approach to the topic and the call for papers used the phrase *Indigenous renaissance* to capture the contemporary moment of rising global influence for Indigenous nations. We felt that the term *renaissance* captured the scale and extent of rising collaboration and power, especially after the #NoDAPL (Standing Rock protest) movement. Much like the Renaissance of Europe was seen as an era of enlightenment and resurgence that pulled society out of the dark ages through a rise in science, rationality, classical literature, and arts, so, too, does that apply to Indigenous people around the world in the twenty-first century.

The difference, though, is that as European empires used their new power to extend colonial reach to new continents, it was synonymous with the end of an era of autonomy for Indigenous people. At its core, settler colonialism produces environmental injustice and, of course, brutality through the theft of homelands and waters.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the Renaissance of Europe and the birth of modernity, which resulted in global suffering for non-Europeans, a resurgence for Indigenous people refers to the opposite: the application of traditional knowledge, science, community building, and wisdom in a process of liberation from colonial power and a rebuilding of Indigenous worlds in healthier ways.

The term *Native American renaissance* has been used in the United States since the mid-1980s. It was first coined to describe the proliferation of Indigenous literature produced by a generation of writers born during the World War II era. This first usage was limited to an aesthetic conception of renaissance, recycling old frontier notions

of Indigenous life as representing a lost authenticity of “the genuine, the natural, the real.”<sup>13</sup> Reformulations of the idea were broadened to include a surge in “economics, politics, and public presence, as well as literature and other arts.”<sup>14</sup> One prominent volume on the subject, *The Native American Renaissance: Literary Imagination and Achievement*, attributes this “economic and cultural rebirth” to the incorporation of a “modernist sensibility” into Indigenous art and the adoption of capitalist models for Indigenous economic development.<sup>15</sup>

However, these forms of survival based on assimilation into colonial systems, almost by definition, represent the opposite of what we discuss here. Further conceptual issues linked to the idea of renaissance are identified and discussed by Melinda Adams and her coauthors in this collection: specifically, the French root word *nais-sance* implies a process of rebirth. The need for a rebirth, or re-nais-sance, could imply that Indigenous culture as a whole is or was dead, dying, or somehow lost and gone, needing to be rediscovered. Again, this is the opposite of what’s argued here.

Popular use of the term *resurgence* has a slightly more recent history in Native studies and movements, yet perhaps with a deeper connection to Indigenous philosophies and practices. Resurgence is highlighted by a diversity of Indigenous authors, seeing a dramatic rise in usage since the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> In a speech, Taiaiake Alfred traces the history of Indigenous movements from 1968 to 2018. He offers the following framework: “To describe this history of struggle and the vision going forward I’m going to talk about ‘the Four Rs’—*revolution* and *resistance*, which are more historical; *reconciliation*, which is the contemporary condition; and *Indigenous resurgence*, which is the future.”<sup>17</sup> For him, *resurgence* “harkens back” to the revolutionary spirit of Native movements, in that it is community-based, land-based, and relationship-based. But it also learns from the past, and focuses less on confrontation and more on living indigenously. Considering Indigenous histories in a manner that rejects a linear sense of time requires acknowledgment that the phases of resistance and resurgence are not distinct. Each phase pervades the next, extending into past, present, and future in a manner that forms a circle.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, resurgence emphasizes reconnection to ancestors without risking the connotations of death or decline contained in the concept of renaissance.

Recent scholarship has also complicated the term *resurgence*, as it is in no way perfect or immune to misuse. Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark writes that she is “intrigued and maybe even troubled” by how readily the term has been taken up in the academy.<sup>19</sup> She identifies three main issues: 1) that resurgence is often too narrowly focused on feasibility or associated with utopian movements; 2) that resurgence is often overintellectualized, and associated only with academic authors rather than community and collective action; and 3) that some conceptions of resurgence can lead to isolationism, separatism, or lack of relationship. The first two issues seem definitional in nature, often the result of settler misconceptions about resurgence as a cultural practice. Indeed, academic disconnections from Indigenous lifeways present a context ready-made for such misconstrual. The third issue, originally identified by John Borrows and James Tully, is perhaps more imminent, presenting a tactical choice for practitioners

about when the focus of resurgence should be inwardly directed at specific cultural practices or whether it should seek to build relationships with other forces.<sup>20</sup>

We feel the essays in this collection address these concerns in fundamental ways, demonstrating the following: 1) resurgence, in practice, is not obsessed with feasibility or utopia, but rather much more directly focused on building connectivity and power; 2) resurgence is not only a philosophical or academic idea but is, by necessity, land-based and culture-based; and 3) resurgence, while often strengthened by revitalizing internal practices, also requires international collaboration to become a more holistic and successful political strategy. As Borrows and Tully note, “While measured separation may be very appropriate in some settings, it cannot be regarded as a comprehensive strategy that is healthy in all circumstances.”<sup>21</sup> Authors in this volume show that spiritual and cultural practices such as fire, bison, and seed rematriation not only revitalize cultural practices, which are often shared or connected in some ways, but also form communal and collective power that must be wielded responsibly.

The idea of a contemporary Indigenous resurgence honors the ancestral acts of resistance, survivance, and cultural creativity that allowed for their lifeways to continue into the present and along into the future, as we are the ancestors of the youth of tomorrow. It celebrates the success of Indigenous ancestors in the fulfillment of their original intention for thriving relationality, giving individuals and nations the opportunity to fully identify with their culture in the absence of the shame, guilt, and the assimilation of colonialism. Nick Tilsen (Oglala Lakota) of the NDN Collective, speaking of his hope for the Land Back movement, has asked the question, “What if our best days are not behind us, but ahead?”<sup>22</sup> At its brightest, Indigenous resurgence holds hope for such a promise and acts with that goal in mind.

## UNITED IN SOLIDARITY

The strategic uniformity with which colonization has spread across the globe is remarkable. The laws enabling colonial settlement were written for the nations of Europe, yet, through a strange deviation from typical notions of legal jurisdiction, sought to apply themselves to the rest of the world. The Doctrine of Discovery promised the Christian kings of Europe dominion and legal control over all lands that could be discovered by their subjects. Shawnee legal scholar Robert J. Miller writes, “If one understands the international law, the Doctrine of Discovery, it makes perfect sense that Spain, Portugal, and England and their colonists applied the international legal principles against Indigenous peoples in nearly identical fashions.”<sup>23</sup> In the words of King Phillip II of Spain, the Doctrine of Discovery established a supposedly “universal Jurisdiction that we have over the Indies.”<sup>24</sup> This legal structure laid the groundwork for political, ecological, spiritual, and racial supremacy—and it is precisely because colonialism has become a global power structure that resistance to it has also become a global effort.

Colonialism’s phases of attempted elimination and assimilation contained within them moments of hope, resistance, survivance, and the perpetuation of Indigenous life. Phases of cultural and political restoration still occur against a backdrop of incredible

violence and cultural oppression. For example, Patrick Wolfe parses genocide, assimilation, termination, and other strategies of colonialism within the general rubric of elimination, showing structural continuity between historical epochs that at first appear distinct from a settler point of view.<sup>25</sup> As Nick Estes (Lower Brule Lakota) reminds us, the brutal tactics used against water protectors reveals the existence of an “Indian War that never ends.”<sup>26</sup> Hence, phases of Indigenous power and resurgence should not be seen as *separating* distinct historical movements but, rather, *connecting* Indigenous existence across time and space. Because colonialism operates by maintaining a continuity of oppressive social structures through many historical cycles, so too does Indigenous resurgence perpetuate life throughout those phases in its own right. It arrives in contemporary times as the fulfillment of the dreams that Indigenous ancestors kept for their descendants.

Despite these phases of violence, Indigenous groups have set the terms for their own periods of regrowth and reconnection, and contemporary references to the resurgence have two major threads in common: Indigenous groups around the world seem to be united in solidarity, and the information age brought those groups’ plight into the mainstream zeitgeist. As scholar Angela Kay Parker (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Cree) writes, “More recently, the historiography has also moved toward tracing the links between tribal activism and the creation of a global indigenous consciousness.”<sup>27</sup> To be clear, this isn’t the so-called pan-Indianism often ridiculed by contemporary Indigenous scholars: each and every tribe is unique and place-based in their own right. However, there is a growing sense of unity and solidarity among those groups that don’t quite fit into an industrial society. It’s also important to note that the term “Indigenous” here is used rather loosely, and spans a range of groups who aren’t homogeneous on all topics. What’s essentially meant are place-based, traditional societies with contiguous cultures that predate colonialism and industrialism.<sup>28</sup>

Certainly, one of the more notable events to unite Indigenous groups, at least from a North American perspective, was the #NoDAPL movement. Water protectors came from around the world to represent 280 nations in peaceful opposition to the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline under the Missouri River from Canada into the United States between 2016 to 2017.<sup>29</sup> Many of these groups historically rivaled each other, yet unified under a common cause, peacefully, for environmental justice and Indigenous rights. The event was such a landmark, receiving international attention, that even the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples forum (UNDRIP) put out an official statement declaring that “the Standing Rock Sioux must have a say in the project.”<sup>30</sup> UNDRIP itself was a huge precedent for Indigenous people globally, but ironically the only four nations to vote against the declaration initially were the United States, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa, all of which have very complicated relationships with their Indigenous populations; and largely did nothing to end the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.<sup>31</sup>

The exposure of culture at Standing Rock highlights beliefs shared by many Indigenous groups around the globe. Ontologically, many Indigenous nations feel that nature and, subsequently, rivers like the Missouri are living ancestors of theirs and are a “more-than-human-person.”<sup>32</sup> The views of land and water are fundamentally

different from settler societies that feel that water is simply a resource to be managed by humans, and that colonialism knows no bounds in the ecosphere.<sup>33</sup> This dichotomy was the case, for example, in Aotearoa when the Whanganui Iwi (the local Māori group) successfully passed legislation from the crown to formally recognize the Whanganui River to be a living ancestor of theirs and to formally grant the Iwi legal rights that can be represented in court.<sup>34</sup> The river now has legal guardians who can sue anyone who harms or pollutes it.<sup>35</sup> Such a case exemplifies how some cultural views and practices are inherently more sustainable and reciprocal than a laissez faire approach to infinite growth on finite resources, and implementing those cultural views is what Indigenous groups can do and are doing to help build a better future in their respective countries.

When Indigenous groups create novel legislation, it sets a precedent for other groups to follow suit. When tribal groups engage in litigation in other countries, they often cite cases such as the Whanganui River case or others like it in their own, similar fight.<sup>36</sup> In places such as the United States, the federal government after the #NoDAPL movement now acknowledges the role that traditional knowledge—or its more academic term, *traditional ecological knowledge*—plays in intergovernmental relations as well as the sustainability of the ecosystem.<sup>37</sup> The US Office of Science and Technology Policy along with the Council on Environmental Quality jointly issued a memorandum of agreement to all of the federal departments to promote the benefits of traditional knowledge.<sup>38</sup> This in no way implies that the federal government now has the Indigenous groups' best interests in mind just yet, but it does show how such groups are exercising their sovereignty and culture at federal and international levels. A true resurgence would see governments deliver on their promises, and cases such as the #NoDAPL movement would have resounding support, as reciprocity to the more-than-human world would be completely obvious in the wake of such destruction.

## THE BUFFALO TREATY AS INTERNATIONAL TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE: KEYS TO SURVIVAL AND BELONGING

While the #NoDAPL movement united international Indigenous groups under a common cause, it was nevertheless reactionary. Proactive movements also tend to unite said groups and have far-reaching effects, drafted in such a way that governments must adhere to their demands. At the international level, even the UN is starting to see that, despite or perhaps as a result of experiencing the most negative effects of climate change, Indigenous communities and cultures possess some of the key solutions to coping with shifting climate.<sup>39</sup> Through traditional knowledge and living in place-based societies, these communities exercise creative solutions to mitigate the effects to varying degrees.<sup>40</sup> It's important to note that this is the way place-based groups have always lived and adapted.

The validity of traditional knowledge should be obvious, given that most of human history and evolution predates colonialism and industrial lifeways and all of its subsequent changes. Most of humanity up until colonialism and industrialism was, by definition, Indigenous—and, as such, societies had to adapt out of necessity and

survival. However, since place-based cultures are inherently relational and reciprocal, traditional knowledge also safeguards the survival of the groups' entire ecosystem. As Joan McGregor points out, Indigenous knowledge is just as prescriptive as it is descriptive.<sup>41</sup> Western science, on the other hand, is extremely valuable and, at times, seemingly miraculous; but it is strictly descriptive—and Western scientists often shy away from normative claims, much to the detriment of a modernity still reeling from the effects of colonialism and anthropogenic climate change.

The benefits of traditional knowledge are even written into the fossil records. Geologists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin note the morbid reality that by the year 1610, the destruction of Indigenous populations created a mild dip (approximately seven parts per million) in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels, a phenomenon they named the Orbis spike.<sup>42</sup> They theorize that the change was due to a reduction of traditional land-management practices, including agriculture, animal kinship, and the use of cultural fire. The rapid increase in carbon dioxide following the replacement of place-based cultures “implies that colonialism, global trade, and coal brought about the Anthropocene.” Indeed, Kyle Keeler has suggested that the Anthropocene itself be renamed “the Kleptocene” as a way to acknowledge the theft of Indigenous land, lives, and resources as the root cause of the current global ecological disaster.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most shining examples of traditional knowledge application in recent times, again from a North American perspective, is simply known as the Buffalo Treaty. The treaty was largely borne out of the efforts of Blackfoot member Paulette Fox's thesis, as well as the work of her adviser, respected elder, and scholar, Leroy Little Bear, and eventually the Intertribal Buffalo Council.<sup>44</sup> In 2014, ten tribal nations from both sides of the Medicine Line (the US-Canadian border) formally came together to create their own international treaty with the primary goal of returning both plains bison (*Bison bison bison*) and wood bison (*Bison bison athabasca*) back to their former status of a free-ranging ecosystem engineer.<sup>45</sup> Typically, treaties are thought to be agreements between the federal government and the tribes, whereas the Buffalo Treaty was led by the Blackfoot Confederacy and was created for the tribes and their respective governments. Indigenous nations have long histories of treaty-making that predate colonial powers drafting them, and were often agreements about how to best share the land with other beings.<sup>46</sup> As such, the Buffalo Treaty is a testament to Indigenous self-governance and ecological sovereignty.

Buffalo (often used interchangeably with their formal name, bison) were nearly driven to extinction through colonization and an unregulated market economy, despite their presence alone benefiting the entire ecosystem and other species in myriad ways.<sup>47</sup> Their history and survival are quite telling, as their existence in North America goes back to a period somewhere between 100,000 to 200,000 years.<sup>48</sup> Bison are so well adapted that they've survived the frigid Pleistocene, the warming Holocene, and into the burning Anthropocene while most other megafauna went extinct.<sup>49</sup> Yet in only a twenty-year period, millions were killed due to colonial pressures and a booming fur trade, clearing the way for an influx of European cattle.<sup>50</sup>

The decline of the bison is synonymous with the decline of Indigenous inhabitants, many of whose cultures were closely intertwined with bison and their role on

the land. By 1890 there were only a little over one thousand bison left on earth from these colonial efforts.<sup>51</sup> As far back as the nineteenth century, tribal leaders saw the declining bison and made efforts to repopulate their numbers, which fell upon deaf settler ears.<sup>52</sup>

But the resilient story of bison is emblematic of the current resurgence, as their return is also synonymous with the return of widespread cultural expression. Fortunately, the twenty-first century is seeing a more enlightening story of recovery for this majestic relative. Tribes are leading these efforts in multifaceted ways for reasons that go beyond repopulating bison. They seek cultural symbiosis, relationality, food sovereignty, climate resilience, and healthy ecosystems. Bison excel in all these areas and more, repairing the vibrancy of the economic and research opportunities that nations previously had with kin species.<sup>53</sup>

In short, bison are such effective ecological engineers that their rehabilitation is helping to reduce the impact of a rapidly changing climate on everything around them. In much the same way as bison ignore borders, so is the case with the Buffalo Treaty, as it now has more than seventy-one tribes as signatories from all over North America.<sup>54</sup> One often-overlooked country in bison history and recovery is Mexico. While historic herds didn't exceed too far into modern Mexico, the government has nevertheless done their part to begin rematriation, but haven't signed the treaty just yet.<sup>55</sup> These rematriation efforts have been so successful that there are now reintroduction efforts in Europe with the subspecies *Bovis bonansis*, inspired by North American tribes' efforts.<sup>56</sup>

The ten-year anniversary of the treaty signing saw Indigenous people from all around the world stating that they may not even have bison on their ancestral lands, but they nevertheless support the tribes of North America in their efforts to restore their kinship and ecosystems. One of the most notable aspects of the Buffalo Treaty is that it empowers bison for their own inherent existence. A dichotomy has emerged in their recovery in recent times, in which they are viewed either as cattle or as a free-ranging species.<sup>57</sup> The treaty explicitly states that they are completely free to be regarded as our relatives with shared land, history, and genetics.<sup>58</sup> Tribal and First Nations people overwhelmingly advocate for them to be free of corrals, ear tags, round-ups, and, eventually, all containments or fences.<sup>59</sup> Since drafting the treaty, the Blackfeet (part of the Blackfoot Confederacy) have created a first-ever guardianship between a US tribal nation and the federal government to restore bison to one of the tribe's most sacred areas adjacent to Glacier National Park.<sup>60</sup> These are the articles outlined in the Buffalo Treaty: conservation, culture, economics, health, education, research, adhesion, partnerships, and potential amendments.

When viewed from an even broader perspective, efforts such as the Buffalo Treaty may even mend hearts in unforeseen ways. Such a deviation from harmonious relationships has had profound effects on human society. The rise of industrialization brought with it an interesting phenomenon, well documented, that has unfortunately been growing increasingly worse: as a country's production and industrialization rise, so, too, does depression, anxiety, loneliness, substance abuse, and suicide.<sup>61</sup> This happens by way of the hypercompetitive, self-serving nature of colonialism and capitalism,

which forces people apart, away from community and kinship with nature (like bison). In fact, according to the World Health Organization, depression will soon be the second leading cause of disability in the world.<sup>62</sup> Modern society is simply counterintuitive to our evolutionary past, giving rise to levels of isolation and loneliness previously unseen by past societies.

Death by substance abuse and suicide are so common in the developed world that for the first time, the life expectancy in places such as the United States are actually decreasing.<sup>63</sup> Loneliness is characterized as “perceived isolation,” because for the first time in human history, people feel alone—even while typically surrounded by strangers who number sometimes in the millions.<sup>64</sup> Modern society has alleviated many of the physical ailments of the past, but in doing so has made it difficult for individuals to find meaning, connection, and healthy communal habits. Adapting to these disparities might help us find a solution that avoids such a tradeoff.

It should come as no surprise that the resurgence and efforts like the Buffalo Treaty offer an antidote to the modern problem of loneliness as well. After all, Indigenous peoples have never been a welcomed part of modernity. As historian Jean O’Brien (White Earth Ojibwe) writes, Indigenous genocide is a necessary step in “the production of modernity through the purification of the landscape of Indians.”<sup>65</sup> The elimination of Indigenous peoples and kinship structures was intended to “make way” for the supposedly superior mode of life called “modern civil society,” in which communal and symbiotic forms of living have no place. Indeed, C. B. Macpherson termed the overriding human personality of modern existence *possessive individualism*, where rationality is consumed by the goal of unlimited accumulation.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, social critic Herbert Marcuse identifies a “technological rationality” that narrows human existence to the means-ends thinking necessary for social domination and control.<sup>67</sup>

Nonconforming ways of life are inherently threatening to this “one-dimensional” mode of existence, and are targeted for eradication. As Estes notes, in contemporary practice, this looks like “the mass incarceration of Natives and the violent suppression of political dissent.”<sup>68</sup>

As previously noted, Indigenous peoples overwhelmingly find themselves as part of the environment and not separate from it, as Western thought finds itself—meaning that a sense of belonging can extend even beyond human persons. Feeling a deep connection and reciprocity to the more-than-human world is more than just an ontological outlook—it can even bring about better health outcomes.<sup>69</sup> Reconnecting to one’s own place-based culture has been shown to dramatically reduce stress and depressive symptoms, and is the best way to heal historical trauma.<sup>70</sup>

Intensified social loneliness was unheard of in a tight-knit tribe, for example, as every member of the tribe was highly valued and necessary for the survival of the whole group and the maintenance of the ecosystem. This gave an individual an intense sense of meaning, belonging, and identity. These are also lessons embedded in movements like #NoDAPL or the Buffalo Treaty. That is precisely why one major component of the resurgence is reconnecting to each other and practicing a reciprocal loop with nature, creating complex and consensual social relationships.

The practice of building and maintaining connections to each other and to nature for current and future sustenance is sometimes referred to as *collective continuance*—moving forward together.<sup>71</sup> In contemporary contexts, these practices take many forms for Indigenous nations, including the assertion of treaty rights and the revival of ancestral land-management practices. However, as Estes notes again, “The protection of treaty rights, and by default Native sovereignty, protect everyone’s rights.”<sup>72</sup> The simple reason for this is that treaties are meant to preserve the integrity of the lands and waters that all human and nonhuman beings rely on for life. Traditional knowledge must be understood as always complementing the scientific method, not contradicting or competing with it, and that place-based practices are an applied science and philosophy the world is finally starting to recognize.

The observations that Indigenous societies possess some of the solutions to cope with a radically changing climate as a community have been documented for some time by government-based researchers.<sup>73</sup> Outlines exist on how to take those lessons seriously: for one, governments need to honor the obligations they have made with their local Native peoples. Globally, UNDRIP is one precedent that every nation has agreed to. Nationally, governments need to honor treaty rights and human rights such as the Buffalo Treaty. Governments also need to recognize not only the sovereignty that tribes exercise but also the ways Indigenous communities are adapting to environmental change, providing a model for larger societies to follow suit (provided those methods aren’t appropriated or denied proper credit).<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, there needs to be a clear way to legally protect traditional knowledge.

## CONCLUSIONS

Indigenous peoples around the world have fought for survival and recognition since the advent of the colonial era and the attempted erasure of people and their cultures. In the era of anthropogenic climate change driven by colonial processes, it seems that Western-trained researchers are starting to realize the benefits of cultures that have reciprocal and deep connections to their surroundings and to each other that showcase an alternative to exploitation of natural resources and labor. There is a growing understanding that (Indigenous) people are inseparable from the natural world, and protecting one protects the other.<sup>75</sup> This is especially pressing when species are going extinct at roughly a thousand times the natural rate from industrial activity, and extractive industries are polluting natural waterways on a large scale.<sup>76</sup> Many of the same tribes affected by these disturbances are seeing their cultural outlooks implemented through legislation to great effect.

Indigenous communities all over the world have been successful in protecting their local ecosystem in creative and cultural ways, which protects their rights, identity, and survival in the process.<sup>77</sup> It just so happens to be the case that in areas where Indigenous populations are highest, the loss of ecodiversity happens at much lower rates due to culturally embedded holistic practices and outlooks that are inherently adaptable.<sup>78</sup> It is, however, important not to romanticize Indigenous cultures, as we too are in a constant state of learning and growth. It just so happens that, in general,

groups who are considered Indigenous are from cultures that are overwhelmingly egalitarian and reciprocal, as discussed.

There is no doubt a rise in influence and interest in Indigenous cultures, philosophies, kinship, and their worldviews. This renewed interest is what we refer to as the Indigenous resurgence, in which place-based cultural views and practices are being implemented on a large scale, often with better outcomes than the status quo, in comparison to the ideology of colonialism, which paints Indigenous cultures as useless, primitive, and backwards. The resurgence enables Indigenous people to identify with their said group without the residual shame and demonization from the colonial era. In conclusion, Indigenous groups hold some of the keys to mitigate loss of species and ecodeiversity from anthropogenic climate change—like, for example, the Buffalo Treaty, which looks to reunite all of North America with bison in a socioecological and kincentric way.<sup>79</sup> Place-based cultural practices safeguard ecosystems; they are at the core of the resurgence that is regaining the relationships and processes sustaining life on earth.

## CONTRIBUTORS AND ESSAYS IN THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue gathers a wide array of Indigenous and allied researchers, authors, practitioners, elders, and knowledge-keepers who have also noticed a shift in consciousness and a uniting of Indigenous peoples around the world. “Fire Back: Rematriating Indigenous Cultural Fire and Sovereignty,” by Melinda Adams et al., brings together an expansive circle of scholars, community practitioners, and elders from diverse backgrounds to articulate a shared vision of fire sovereignty. The authors introduce *Fire Back* as a central framework, aligning Indigenous fire stewardship with the broader global movements of #LandBack and #WaterBack. Grounded in the concept of *rematriation*, their thesis argues that cultural fire is not merely a management tool but a living practice that sustains kinship among people, fire, and the planet. In the article, Indigenous scholars, practitioners, and allied researchers partner together in restoring cultural fire, advancing fire governance and fire sovereignty, and, overall, articulating experiences that support cultural and environmental resurgence.

Raymond Allen et al.’s “A 100-Year Bloom of Indigenous Limnology and Reconnection to Land through Field Stations” sheds light on the fact that, like the universities they are connected to, field research stations are on traditional homelands of many tribes who know these fresh waters best, yet most of that goes unacknowledged by the stations themselves. Anishinaabe members have created the Phenological Initiatives for Indigenous Peoples in Limnology project, or PhIN, at Trout Lake Station as part of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, to maintain their connection to, and to conduct, their own research. Now PhIN has become an international movement for place-based cultures around the world.

James Hundley’s “Border Securitization as Settler Colonialism” emphasizes how, particularly after the events of 9/11 in the United States, our borders have dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their homelands, some of whom, like the Coast Salish, straddle both sides of the US-Canada border. In that process, the settler states of

both countries have attempted to homogenize Indigenous groups and try to see us as racial minorities and not as sovereign nations. Still, Indigenous nations are using this as an opportunity to reform national identities and to reconnect with kin across colonial borders.

Jennifer R. O’Neal offers a powerful statement on the need for global collaboration in her essay, “Global Information Resurgence: Transforming Indigenous Archival Sovereignty through Trans-Indigenous Relationality.” She argues that while the development of policy, protocols, and guidelines for archives is foundational, there will always be a need for work at the local level that centers community knowledge and tribal elders, bringing life, context, and unique forms of knowledge to cultural heritage materials. Her story is told through her participation in developing Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (PNAAM). This document serves as a guide for caretaking Indigenous collections housed at non-Native repositories throughout the United States, kickstarting a transnational effort for data sovereignty, much like the resurgence argues.

“Tribal Seed Sovereignty and Rematriation: Fulfilling Our Responsibilities through Relational Work with Traditional Seeds of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation,” by Ruth Plenty Sweetgrass-She Kills, Claire Friedrichsen et al., promotes traditional seed sovereignty via the process of seed rematriation and genetic best practices. The essay is mainly from the perspective of the Mandan Hidatsa and Arikara (MHA) Nations, as well as partner groups and institutions who’ve carried sacred knowledge of cultivating the “four sisters”—corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers—and fighting corporate coopting of the seeds.

This special issue is also blessed by poetry and meditative thinking from Ammon Hāwea Apiata. Apiata (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Toarangatira, Ngāti Koata) offers his works in both Māori and English language, reflecting on the layering of life into the land:

We live and die on our mother’s body—  
we are the thickening of her skin,  
additions to the layers,  
soil and cells turned over,  
re-generation after re-generation

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