



## *Commentary*

### *Indigenous Genocide and Reanimation, Settler Apocalypse and Hope*

Kim TallBear  
*Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta*

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# Indigenous Genocide and Reanimation, Settler Apocalypse and Hope<sup>1</sup>

Kim TallBear

*Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta*

I gave a keynote in October 2022 at the University of Southern California at the “Mass Violence and Its Lasting Impact on Indigenous Peoples: The Case of the Americas and Australia Pacific Region” symposium.<sup>2</sup> Talks at the symposium unflinchingly documented the systematic application of diverse UN-defined genocidal techniques on Indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Pacific. As a reminder, Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.” The five broad techniques include:

1. Literal killing;
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm;
3. Inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births; and
5. Forcibly transferring children to another group.

These techniques focus on eliminating entire groups, while individuals from within a group may survive physically as individual human beings. Indigenous nations were targeted for extermination via physical, social, economic, and regulatory engineering. A nineteenth-century soundbite encapsulates the ability to simultaneously exterminate Native peoples as Peoples while facilitating the survival of a select and relatively few individuals who could then be assimilated by the settler body politic: *Kill the Indian and Save the Man*.

The USC symposium discussed genocidal techniques used against Indigenous nations of the Americas that included massacres, the genocidal technique of forced sterilization of Indigenous women, seizure of our children, and missing and murdered Indigenous women. My research and media commentary of late and my talk at the USC symposium (an earlier iteration of this one) focus on an aspect of the North American colonial project that has been under-treated *as genocide*: self-Indigenization, also sometimes called “race

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<sup>1</sup> This slightly revised essay was given as a keynote at the gender studies conference *Feminist Matterings: Indigenous and Artic Engagements*, University of Oulu, Finland, on December 1, 2022. A small portion of this talk was previously published in TallBear (2019).

<sup>2</sup> <https://sfi.usc.edu/events/international-conference-mass-violence-and-its-lasting-impact-indigenous-peoples>.

shifting,” “pretendianism,” or “playing Indian.” In this talk, I hope to convince you that self-Indigenization is a significant contributor in the 21st century to the project of Indigenous elimination and concomitant settler thriving upon the spoils of Indigenous death.

### **Self-Indigenization as a Technique of Indigenous Elimination, Reanimation, and Replacement**

In addition to belonging to Dakota people who faced a genocidal settler assault that began in the mid-nineteenth century, I am a horror film aficionado with a macabre sense of humour. In this talk, I am informed by the concept of Indigenous elimination, most notably written about by the late Patrick Wolfe in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, but I combine it with the idea of “reanimation” of the dead (Gordon 1985; Wolfe 2006). A troubling image that guides my work is that of the settler who would banish most Indigenous people to the land of the dead, while retaining, freezing, reanimating, and controlling Indigenous flesh, blood, and bones, both literally as valuable bio-property and figuratively, as I have written about in my book *Native American DNA* and elsewhere (TallBear 2013; also see TallBear 2017). Adding to the ghoulishness of settler scientific and bureaucratic control, reanimation, and capitalization on our actual bio-matter, the settler sometimes drapes his (or often her) ontological skeleton in the vanished metaphorical Native’s skin in a final assumption of our “identities” as their own (Simpson 2022). How clever. Settler state citizens can retain the benefits of our disappearance but deny those benefits when they don “red skin.”

Dressing up in Indian flesh and costume in order to emotionally and morally manage settler state complicity in Indigenous genocide has 300-year-old roots in settler law, politics, and self-understandings. In *Playing Indian*, Philip J. Deloria, historian and member of a well-known Dakota family, traces the origins of dressing up and performing Indianness in the United States (Deloria 1998). His historical account begins in the eighteenth century and winds through the late twentieth century as he recounts incidents of playing Indian from the Boston Tea Party, in scouting and fraternal order rituals, and romanticized literature that eventually informed anthropology. Finally, he discusses New Age appropriation of Indigenous spirituality that ramped up in the 1980s. While Deloria barely touched on false claims to Native ancestry and identity, his historical investigation provides us an analytical scaffolding by which to understand more literal forms of playing Indian: making false or tenuous claims to Indigenous “identity” via alleged, often distant, ancestry. In 21st century acts of playing Indian, the players probably do not recognize their role in this dog-eared yet evolving nationalist script. Neither do the viewers necessarily understand the centuries-long national play they are watching.

Let us sit for another minute with these clever settler nationalist manoeuvres and their relatively deep historical foundations. In *Playing Indian*, Deloria quotes early twentieth-century British writer D.H. Lawrence’s description of an “essentially ‘unfinished’ and incomplete” U.S. American consciousness that produced “an unparalleled national identity crisis.” Lawrence saw the Indian as “at the heart of American ambivalence... Savage Indians

served Americans as oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national Self. Coded as freedom, however, wild Indianness proved equally attractive, setting up a...dialectic of simultaneous desire and repulsion” (Deloria 1998, 3). Deloria summarized:

The indeterminacy of American identities stems, in part, from the nation’s inability to deal with Indian people. Americans wanted to feel natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness. Yet, in order to control the landscape they had to destroy the original inhabitants... half-articulated Indianness continually lurk[s] behind various efforts at American self-imagination. (Deloria 1998, 5)

According to settler state nationalist ideology, it is inevitable that Indigenous peoples are always dying in the face of Western civilization, yet Indigenous existence is crucial for US American (and Canadian?) nationalist coherence (Reardon and TallBear 2012), and for the production of the multicultural citizen subject. This produces a conundrum for the settler-colonial state.

It has found a clever if convoluted solution. The settler state must bring Indigenous peoples to the point of death while preserving or resurrecting us within the colonial state’s nationalist body, its institutions, and in the bodies and lives of individual non-Indigenous citizens. Indigeneity must be made to *live* in the settler body politic even while the settler nationalist project simultaneously narrates and works to produce Indigenous *death*.<sup>3</sup>

The settler state has worked hard for centuries to make Indigenous people die via massacre, in the deathly conditions of forced relocations and residential schools, via forced sterilization, and the theft of our children both historically and today. It continues to subject our peoples to explicit physical violence of police profiling and disproportionate incarceration. We have so many missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit relatives that there is an acronym for the phenomenon, “MMIWG2S.” Settler society also works actively to counter living Indigenous communities’ efforts to sustain our own lives by violating treaties and diminishing laws that are more rather than less protective of our sovereignty, thus enabling them to continue stealing our land and our children.

Simultaneously, multiple tactics are used within scientific and government institutions to make Indigeneity live within the settler body. As I wrote about in *Native American DNA*, Indigenous blood, bones, and DNA are disembodied from collective Indigenous governance by settler legal and disciplinary traditions, then used as a proxy for the Indigenous collectives and lives that colonial agents would disappear. The settler disingenuously laments that Indigenous death is so far along that it is inevitable and ethical to appropriate and reanimate in their own bodies and institutions remaining Indigenous biological and cultural resources. Gaining control over our biological resources and the

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<sup>3</sup> It will be obvious to some that I am influenced in my reading of the relationship between Indigenous life and death in a settler-colonial society by Michel Foucault’s reading of biopower. However, for the benefit of flow and to reach a wider audience, I do not wish to insert an explicit Foucauldian focus into the main text.

laws and narratives governing those resources and their meanings enable the “playing Indian” process as well as appropriative “identity” claims.<sup>4</sup>

*Eight Stages of White Settler-Colonial Denial*

The visual on this slide, “Eight Stages of White Settler-Colonial Denial,” shows the phenomenon of self-Indigenization as the final act of colonial theft and attempt at Indigenous replacement. I originally saw the “Eight Stages of White Settler-Colonial Denial” posted in 2020 by a now-deleted Twitter account.<sup>5</sup> I never knew who the account-holder was, but the eight stages have resonated with other researchers schooled across multiple disciplines—history, anti-colonial political theory, Indian/Indigenous law, Native studies, and other fields. I use the Eight Stages visual to remind myself and others of how interconnected are the techniques of the white supremacist settler state and its citizens (not all of them white) designed to eliminate actual Indigenous people.

We can readily see where UN-described genocidal techniques intersect with the eight stages of denial: 19th century physical exterminations through massacres and bounties were justified by concepts such as the “great chain of being” and doctrine of discovery, which place Indigenous peoples lower in the hierarchy of life on this planet. Outright physical extermination justifies and is justified by terra nullius and the right of conquest. Forced sterilizations of especially Indigenous women and the forcible removal of children from Indigenous families and collectives—whether through adoption, state custody, or incarceration in residential schools—is also justified by racial-hierarchy thinking facilitated by the great chain of being concept that is foundational not only to settler-colonial religious thought but also to its scientific and bureaucratic thought. Efforts to extinguish Indigenous languages, kinship and governance systems, and gender and sexual relations are also rooted in race hierarchy thinking. All of these historical and ongoing assaults on our individual lives and collective Indigenous nations are justified and barely redressed by settler legal systems *founded* on those core principles. Settler societies advocate “moving on” or “getting over it” while pursuing yet further extinguishment of Indigenous collective governance as they water down Indigenous claims with their liberal multiculturalist doctrines.

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4 I prefer and insist on the collectivist concept of “relations” over the individualistic notion of “identities.” For more on this idea, see my essay “Identity is a Poor Substitute for Relating: Genetic Ancestry, Critical Polyamory, Property, and Relations” in Hokowhitu et al. (2021, 467-78).

5 See my original tweet here at <https://twitter.com/KimTallBear/status/1339956410545795072>. The account was @pazuzumycete.

<b>Eight Stages of White Settler-Colonial Denial</b>	
1.	<p><b>“They didn't exist”</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(terra nullius)</b></span>            Complete denial of Indigenous presence in a given area (country, province, etc). Includes denial of Indigeneity, e.g. “Indigenous Peoples are Settlers too”.</p>
2.	<p><b>“If they did, they weren't here”</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(terra nullius)</b></span>            Denial that Indigenous People inhabit/travel/harvest/exist in a specific area. Often based on euro-centric definitions of evidence of occupation.</p>
3.	<p><b>“If they were, they didn't use the land”</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(doctrine of discovery)</b></span>            Denial that Indigenous People have a connection with the Land. Often based on euro-centric worldviews of the land as something to be owned and extracted.</p>
4.	<p><b>“If they did, they didn't deserve it”</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(great chain of being)</b></span>            Denial that Indigenous People have rights to their Lands. Often based on euro-centric value judgements of “primitive vs. civilized”, “nomadic vs. sedentary”.</p>
5.	<p><b>“If they did, they lost it”</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(right of conquest)</b></span>             Denial that Indigenous People retain their rights to their Lands. Often based on colonially imposed European systems of law / “might makes right” worldviews.</p>
6.	<p><b>“If they didn't, it doesn't matter any more”</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(Westphalian sovereignty)</b></span>            Denial that Indigenous Rights are still binding and take precedence. Often based on false claims of supremacy of colonial legal institutions and systems.</p>
7.	<p><b>“If it does, we need to move on”.</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(liberalism)</b></span>            Denial that violations of Indigenous Rights requires redress. Often based on claims redress is “disruptive/unfair/reverse racism” &amp; false calls for “equality”.</p>
8.	<p><b>“If we can't, we are you”</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>(self-indigenization)</b></span>            Denial of separateness of Indigenous Peoples and Rights. Often based on attempts to reduce Indigenous Rights to Human Rights, claim Indigeneity, etc.</p>

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“Eight Stages of Settler Denial”, Revision 1

### *Co-constitutive, Not Ranked, Techniques of Indigenous Elimination*

It is all too common for attention police to rank Indigenous elimination techniques in a hierarchy of importance instead of understanding them as co-constitutive and simultaneously occurring to varying degrees over time and space. Attention police accuse thinkers focused in one area of distracting from other areas (e.g., “Why are you focused on representations of Indigenous people in media or sports when we have an epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women?”). However, strategies of Indigenous physical and symbolic extermination come all together in a package and are mutually reinforcing. It takes diversely situated activists and other experts focused in their particular areas to tackle the many diverse techniques of elimination. We will be aided in our *collective* resistance by understanding the clever entanglements of the settler state’s eliminatory and reanimating strategies and the equally clever ways in which individual citizens aid the project. We as individuals, organizations, and movements can focus in the areas where we are drawn and

most qualified to address. We can do that without dismissing the attentions of other thinkers and doers. We can be mindful of each other's work, learning from each other about how our priorities and skills are complementary.

I admit that I have a particularly good vantage point from which to observe the varied topographies of Indigenous elimination over time and place, having experienced diverse strategies of elimination in my now five-plus decades of life. I have lived through both explicit reservation border town anti-Native violence and the fetishization and erasure of Native people as actually living communities in east and west coast metropolitan centres. I no longer rank these forms of elimination but understand them as mutually reinforcing and as tools available to the settler state depending on local (in time and place) circumstances. The settler state can kill us quickly and harshly, or slowly over time. We must respond accordingly with diverse defensive and counter-offensive strategies along their multiple lines of attack.

I did not set out to study "pretendianism" as a focus of my research. However, the media have frequently called on me since 2012, when I first commented on Senator Elizabeth Warren's mythological Cherokee identity claims (BBC 2018; Boston.com n.d.; Johnson 2018; Kessler 2018; Schilling 2018; Smith 2018; TallBear 2018; Uyehara 2018). My book *Native American DNA* was finished and in press that year (TallBear 2013). I have by now done dozens of interviews for print, radio, and television on various Native race shifting cases that include politicians, academics, actors, and film directors in both the United States and Canada. Thus, I have followed such stories closely for a decade. In October 2022, we witnessed breaking stories about three high profile cases of self-Indigenization in the United States and Canada: 1) a legal scholar and suggested nominee to the Supreme Court of Canada (Leo 2022); 2) a former high-profile Hollywood icon, albeit minor actress (Keeler 2022); and 3) a food sovereignty scholar at a top US university (Indianz.com 2022; also see Agoyo 2022; Chen 2022). As demonstrated by investigative reports and community complaints years in the making, these three individuals made their claims absent credible evidence to support them. In November 2022, the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) broke a story about Premier of Alberta Danielle Smith's unsupportable claims to be "mixed-race" and descended from the Cherokee Nation (Amato 2022; Paradis 2022).

Those who reject or downplay self-Indigenization as a significant technique of Indigenous elimination may not be aware of its deep history. They may not know, as Philip Deloria documents, that playing Indian in various forms has been a tactic to assert belonging in these lands, that it began with early colonists in the eighteenth century. They may not know, as anthropologist Circe Sturm shows in her 2011 book *Becoming Indian* that there are dozens of fabricated Cherokee "tribes" in the United States (Sturm 2011). Many non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, too, seem not to grasp that playing Indian is co-produced with more obvious techniques of elimination such as the alienation of Native people from our lands, children, ceremonial practices, governance systems, and kinship structures. Indeed, individuals and groups have self-Indigenized in order to gain control of land, hunting rights, Native children, human remains and cultural patrimony,

and educational and professional opportunities (Leroux 2019). In addition to the high-profile race shifting cases of late in academia and the arts, a 2019 *LA Times* investigative report documented false claimants to Cherokee identity being awarded hundreds of millions in business contracts that were designated to support minority businesses systematically excluded from business development opportunities. In such cases, white people appropriate opportunities, not only from Native nations and their citizens, but from other people of colour in the United States.

*Some Narrative Strategies of Self-Indigenizers: Blood Quantum, Indians in Hiding, Indian Preserves*

When prominent self-Indigenizers (who are most often white people) are challenged on their claims, tribal “blood quantum” rules are often blamed, and accusations of biological essentialism or “reverse racism” abound. This is an ironic accusation from people who customarily point to one long ago (actual or mythological) ancestor—their Indian needle in the settler haystack. Blood quantum rules are not at play in these situations; the individuals who make such claims are not excluded from any form of tribal belonging by blood rules but rather because their claims to ancestry are either baseless or so archaic that they do not map onto actual and living Indigenous nations. Their situations are nothing like the exclusions some of our relatives suffer for not meeting certain blood rules of the tribes within which they have close biological kin.

However, stealing actual Indigenous people’s stories of trauma and disconnection is a chief strategy that self-Indigenizers use to gain authority. They conflate their exaggerated and fabricated claims with the struggles of actual Indigenous people, such as those with parents who are tribal citizens but whose offspring do not meet blood quantum requirements. Self-Indigenizers conflate their stories with those of actual Indigenous people who were kidnapped as children, adopted out to white families, or forced into residential schools and who sometimes did not return to their Indigenous families for decades, if ever. Self-Indigenizers build their authoritative voices by grabbing the mic and speaking from false historical foundations about actual Indigenous people’s lives and what should be done to and about us.

Another strategy that self-Indigenizers use to boost their authority is to claim to be less colonized and sometimes more culturally authentic than actual Indigenous people and communities. Race shifters commonly claim that they and their ancestors have been Indians in “hiding” for generations (Sturm 2011), a sort of Indian preserve stored in a hidden cellar away from the eroding forces of the colonial state. It is true that Indigenous people have been forced to reckon daily for generations with settler state racial laws, policies, and institutions. Instead of preserving authentic Indian-ness, however, the race shifter with the very long-ago or mythological ancestor has most often lived as white for generations with all of the attendant privileges and lack of exposure to institutions meant to kill the Indian (Keeler 2022). Romanticized narratives of hiding in plain sight are used by race shifters to discredit and further dislocate Indigenous collectives from the landscape

of the living, whereas actual Indigenous collectives who have managed to survive these vicious colonial nation states must articulate our relational rules and laws as best we can within the compromised spaces available to us. Race shifters, in good colonizer fashion, denigrate our efforts as they seek to replace us as Indigenous upon the land.

Self-Indigenization is an ultimate act of colonial appropriation whether self-Indigenizers intend it or not. Self-Indigenization co-evolves with recognized genocidal strategies. It is predicated on 200 years of racial science across disciplines co-constituted with settler state laws and policies designed to kill the Indian within the human. Individuals may survive, but actual Indigenous collectives must remain conquered, controlled, and sufficiently alive only to provide the bio- or cultural matter necessary for the vampiric thriving of a settler state.

### *Indigenous Collective Rights Help All of Us Live*

Suffice it to say, it matters that those who actually live *collectively* as Indigenous within post-apocalyptic history and who sustain relational (rather than great-chain-of-being) lifeways are not replaced by those who would self-Indigenize with their right-of-conquest and liberal thinking.

I will now contextualize Indigenous genocide and white settler-colonial denial in relation to what settler-colonialism and its violent extraction also produce for the planet beyond our human bodies. I have found that it is necessary to repeatedly remind audiences of the interconnectedness of not only the eliminatory techniques of the colonizer but also of the fates of Indigenous peoples, nonhuman relations, and, yes, even those humans it was thought would thrive because of or despite Indigenous genocide. Indigenous apocalypses lead to planetary apocalypse.

Therefore, we must be clear, as we articulate the phenomenon of genocide in the Americas, that it has been more-than-human all along. Indigenous nations or peoples are co-constituted with specific land, water, and nonhuman animal and plant bodies. The simultaneous decimation of human and more-than-human societies inflicts on Indigenous peoples “conditions of life calculated to bring about our physical destruction.” The elimination of nonhuman relatives, land, and water relationships continues to aid settlers and their institutions in their elimination of Indigenous presence across the land.

Indigenous land and water protectors understand this. We see that in their sophisticated and incisive analyses when they tie the defence of Indigenous treaty rights to the defence of the land and water for *all* peoples and nonhumans. Land and water defenders make clear to settlers and other non-Indigenous people that everyone should be invested in defending Indigenous treaty rights because those rights are one of the last lines of defence against some of the most devastating colonial policies, extractive practices, and climate crises. Rights-based language is not perfect, but Indigenous treaty rights are aimed at collectives rather than individuals only and therefore can be used to support *non*-rights based, more relational modes of living in the current context.

## Anthropocene and Apocalypse

The connections between colonialism and the present apocalyptic environmental crises facing the planet are made not only by Indigenous theorists in community—which is how I think of some of our most insightful land and water protectors—but also by theorists in the academy. Art, culture, and media scholar Heather Davis and Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd have written on the importance of decolonizing the Anthropocene and the need to “open...it up beyond its current Eurocentric framing.” Davis and Todd argue that, rather than dating the beginning of the “Anthropocene” to the birth of agriculture, the advent of the steam engine, or to the mid-twentieth century, the Anthropocene should be dated to the beginning of the colonial period, approximately 1610 (Davis and Todd 2017).

Davis and Todd follow geographers Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, who proposed 1610 for two historical reasons that are also reflected in the geologic layer:

1. 1610 marks the massive exchange of plants and animals between the Americas and Europe that “drastically re-shaped the ecosystems of both of these landmasses” (Davis and Todd 2017, 766); and
2. 1610 also marks a “drop in carbon dioxide levels...that correspond[s] to the genocide of the peoples of the Americas and subsequent re-growth of forests and other plants” (Davis and Todd 2017, 766). That is how extensively Indigenous peoples managed, and were not only managed by the land.

Heather Davis and Zoe Todd also “explicitly acknowledge the intertwined and interdependent violences of the Transatlantic slave trade and the genocidal dispossession of Indigenous peoples and territories” (Davis and Todd 2017, 772). Thus, 1610 also marks an era of a violent and massive transfer of human relatives and wealth from Africa to colonial overlords in the Americas and in Europe. Dating the inception of the Anthropocene to this era not only attends to the geological story but it pushes back against the assumption that humans en masse, rather than certain humans, direct anthropogenic change.

### *Powerful Entities*

More and more planetary populations are coming to experience the devastating effects of Indigenous genocide and dispossessions. For example, increasingly catastrophic fires on the west coast of North America result from Anthropogenic change that includes disappearing, displacing, and disempowering Indigenous peoples, thus suppressing many centuries of Indigenous knowledges of how to live carefully with the powerful entity that is fire.

Lightening aids fire, and humans are a weak match. I was in San Francisco for the week of the first lightning strikes in August 2020. It was shockingly warm. About 3 a.m. the morning of August 14, as I slept soundly with all of the windows open, a sudden gust of wind slammed like a poltergeist every open door in the apartment. I jumped out of bed to witness from the large west-facing window hundreds of gorgeous white hot lightning bolts striking down from the skies over the hills of San Francisco and out over the Pacific.

I lived in Santa Cruz, Mendocino County, and Berkeley on and off from 2001 to 2012. I have never seen anything like the 44-degree Celsius heat we endured that week nor lightning of that intensity. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth of August, over 2,500 lightning strikes were recorded in Northern California. Three massive wildfires burned nearly 1.5 million acres, turned the skies dark, then orange, and rained down ash.

My daughter and I were visiting the Bay Area before we dropped her off at a hilltop farm in Sonoma County for an internship. We delayed her arrival there; with fires nearby, the farm was ready to evacuate at any minute. Carmen and I decided to leave California and its Mars-orange skies, and return when it was safer. We crawled on four wheels with many others on I-80 through patches of roadside flames up into so-called “Tahoe National Forest” and descended into the desert of what is today called “Nevada.” As we left the densely built coastal cities behind, we sped toward my Dakota Oyate homelands in Minnesota to escape the ash, smoke, and fire.

### *Not Everyone’s First Apocalypse*

In 2015, I had a conversation on stage at the University of Alberta entitled “Matters of Life and Death.” I discussed “The Future in Question” with Sha LaBare, who is like myself a UCSC History of Consciousness graduate and a feminist science studies thinker, as well as our different individual histories. In response to Sha’s deep ecological grief and sense of urgency, I expressed feelings I still work to describe with clarity.

Dakota people’s apocalyptic grieving has a longer timeline; we are at a different stage of grief. The genocide over hundreds of years of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and the co-decimation of nonhuman relatives and their societies brings us and you to here. It is *this* world built out of *our* apocalypse that is now at risk. Dakota people grieve what this world still celebrates in its doctrines, anthems, explosions, and glorious accounts. Sha responded with a quotation from speculative fiction writer William Gibson: “The future is already here. It’s just not evenly distributed yet.”

Since at least 2015 and that conversation, I have been trying to figure what it means to live in the fiery end of US empire as a Dakota—as a great-great-great grandchild of a People who suffered their/our own apocalypse in 1862 as the US empire was ascendant. Long before Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Kuwait, my people and other Indigenous peoples from lands now absurdly claimed as US “Homeland” were casualties of US empire building.

The year 1862 was the year of the Dakota war against settlers in what became the state of Minnesota. Dakota peoples’ kinship systems, knowledges, and lands were partitioned into settlers’ ontological, legal, and geographic categories in order to eradicate Dakota social formations and to appropriate the material sustenance upon which Dakota people depended. The goal was Dakota elimination (TallBear 2016). Starvation, war, executions, imprisonment, and resettlement resulted in catastrophic population and land losses. We Dakota are now living in our eighth post-apocalypse generation. We and other Indigenous peoples globally still mourn and rebuild from the violent silencing of our ancestors’ worlds.

Nevertheless, here I am, a Dakota *individual* and aging intellectual with four reliable wheels, English as a first language, and a well-used US passport. I have a relatively high degree of privilege within the US and Canadian state settler-colonial structures. I continuously confront the question “where do I individually stand?” Where am I able to move? What do I have to lose in declining US empire versus what has been lost by my *collective*, the Dakota Oyate? Indigenous peoples have had US citizenship and systems forced onto us after our population decimation. Might we therefore see the settler state project and its non-negotiable costs more clearly than do many settler state citizens? And have we also developed coping or even flourishing strategies?

What I struggled to communicate to Sha LaBare and to our audience at the University of Alberta in 2015 is that I think that there is not a *novel sense of despair* among Indigenous communities that I come from and work with. We Indigenous people in lands occupied by the United States and Canada are also not *disconnected* from broader societies built upon our genocide, and that now mourn or disavow their own decline. We are not disconnected from settlers’ present day economic struggles, industry decline, mass shootings, suicides, addictions, and climate crisis, but it is striking to observe a new psychic grappling by settlers with end times. They seem surprised by events that disrupt their mythological narratives of liberal progress, the “moving on” from genocide they laughably think is possible. It turns out that Indigenous genocide sets the stage for global apocalypse.

When one has not inhabited to the same degree a settler-colonial progressive narrative, then the material suffering of climate crisis, of the Anthropocene, and of the sharp decline of US empire is not an *unknown* or *new order* of material deprivation. It is instead what Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz refers to as a “*sharpening of the already present*” (Tippett 2017). If one has not found shelter within a progressive colonial narrative, then one may not experience the same diminished ontological faith or crisis in worldview—even while one experiences *ongoing* or *increased material deprivation* with settler state decline. Not everyone is experiencing the same negative *intellectual, emotional, and moral* shift in the universe as settler empire falls.

Sha LaBare, my provocative co-thinker, has described me as displaying “hostile joy” in this historical moment. Indeed, I choose to be encouraged by the opportunity we currently have for a *sharpening of moral clarity* across these continents. The apocalypses that Indigenous and Black peoples have suffered for half a millennium are blossoming into settler state reckonings. That the violence and unsustainability of colonialism is now confronted by an ever-wider number of people feels to me productive and ethically clarifying. We are now more able to deny the genocide deniers, those who have denied our apocalypses while building their homes and farms, factories, institutions, and wealth upon stolen lands using stolen bodies and labour.

### **Hostile Joy, Post-Settler Apocalypse, and Biocultural Hope**

Another thinker sparks me to ponder opportunities in this moment of crisis. Anthropologist and activist Eben Kirksey writes about something he calls the “biocultural hope” that

amidst the ruins of what I would call settler society, we can go beyond apocalyptic thinking to find generative possibilities in disaster, novel ecological assemblages emerging as “opportunistic plants, animals, and microbes...flourishing in unexpected places” (Kirksey 2015). I cannot go into detail here on the distributive politics of Kirksey’s biocultural hope, but I like the idea of finding opportunity in this current moment of chaos. In addition to disruptions to violent human systems, there are also opportunities in earthly systems’ agitations against colonial, capitalist anthropogenic change.

Let me give you an example. In the late 1990s, we had devastating (to some) floods in northeastern South Dakota on the Minnesota border. They undermined settler agriculture. Over twenty years later, when I go home, I see new wetlands. I see large areas of field around previously abandoned farmhouses that will probably not be farmed again in our lifetimes. I see many more water birds and birds of prey. There is nothing more beautiful to my eyes than an abandoned farm. When I look at those wetlands, I see the rains’ disregard and planetary agitation against white settlement that holds in contempt planetary rhythms and Indigenous presence, again as evidenced in settler doctrines of terra nullius, discovery, the great chain of being, and right of conquest. My hostile joy flourishes when I witness blows to their world that has attempted to extinguish ours, and when I glimpse small regenerations of the prairie. I see the prairie’s possible return to itself, to the birds and other creatures. One day, some person (human or not) may gaze again upon the kinds of landscapes my ancestors looked upon and interacted with. Settler society ruins are profoundly beautiful.

While I grew up in that country, in a Dakota *oyate* (people or nation) and a *tiospaye* (extended family) who kept our history both pre-and post-Dakota apocalypse, I still did not emotionally grasp the devastation to the earth and to my ancestors’ world brought by white people’s agriculture and their religion of settlement and replacement. It was not until after 1997 that I began to see what the prairies *must* have looked like. I more understood the heartache of my ancestors when they saw tens, then hundreds and thousands of people flood in from the east with their ploughs, just after Christian missionaries who came first with crosses and robes and bibles as heavy weaponry.

I love imagining end-of-settler-world scenarios. We Dakota have already been there. What did those herds of Christian zombies look like coming in to force conversion, to punish tongues for speaking their first languages, to punish children and parents for ancient worldviews by severing their ties, tearing children from their families’ arms, kidnapping and forcing them into residential schools to be abused and malnourished, some of whom were intentionally killed or died of policy-guided neglect and disease that festered in cruel and overcrowded conditions? We have thousands of cases of unmarked graves of children in residential and boarding schools in both Canada and the United States (Austen 2021; also see Tasker 2015; and see Maass 2018; for the US, see The Associated Press 2022).

You will understand, why from my standpoint, abandoned farms, dying rural main streets that now look like ghost towns in old westerns and lands gone back to wetland are sites of what Eben Kirksey would call *biocultural hope*. What is not only foreclosed, but what is generative in the waning of settler-colonial empire?

However, I do not want to seem flippant. I and other Indigenous thinkers do not deny that we individually and our communities will suffer additionally, but Indigenous peoples globally have inhabited this apocalyptic future for centuries. In that longer view, there are nonetheless sites of unromantic flourishing amidst the devastation. Indigenous listeners and readers, you know those stories of profound meaning and flourishing amidst generations of theft, violence, and trauma, and, unlike so many self-Indigenizers, we do not stereotypically ground our worldviews in that trauma. While our individual bodies and families are certainly challenged by trauma, it is not defining of us like settlers seem to think. This is one of the red flags for me with self-Indigenizers—their overfocus on trauma as identity. Actual Indigenous peoples ground our collectives as well in the profound and heartening stories of lives lived in relation to one another, to relations across the generations, and to our lands, waters, and skies.

### **Radical and Relational Hope**

There is a second “hope” concept that I also think with, one that resists the norm of settler-state multiculturalism predicated on Indigenous elimination and reanimation in the settler-state body.

In 2018, I gave a keynote at a conference on *disasters, displacement, and human rights*. The symposium description explained that “moments of transition bring about crisis, uncertainty, and even opportunity.” Organizers posed the question, “What factors shape whether a transition is a crisis or an opportunity, and in whose eyes?” Junot Díaz essentially answered that question in a 2017 podcast interview; he explained two entangled ideas: 1) misalignment with the mainstream “emotional baseline” and 2) “radical hope.” Díaz considered the state of the world. He noted that “Trump is the latest, awful...turn” [we can add to that starkly visible climate emergencies], but “the world has been in an awful state for a long time.” Díaz asked rhetorically, “how are you conceptualizing this challenge?...The ability to do what our societies seem incapable and unwilling to do is important...[T]here is nothing,” he argued, “more critical than to be misaligned...with the *emotional baseline* of any mainstream society.” This applies as much to climate crisis as it does foreboding and entangled electoral politics (Tippett 2017).

In this present moment, there is a rare opportunity to build off surging momentum among those who are misaligned, to actually push that emotional baseline—to try to do what this society has seemed “incapable and unwilling to do.” The emotional baseline with which I suggest being misaligned is the incessant dreaming, in whatever political tone, of a successful settler state. We do not only face in this moment risk from Anthropogenic change, climate crisis, and the implosion of the Western colonial project. We can also constitute hope in the implosion of the liberal colonial narrative—not Barack Obama’s vacuous notion of multicultural “hope” but the *radical hope* that Junot Díaz names when he professes his “trust in the collective genius of all the people who have survived these wicked systems.” He thinks “from the bottom will the genius come that makes our ability to *live with each other* possible.”

This moment offers an opportunity to cease cultivating love for the state no matter the parties in power. This moment makes space, if we choose to take it up, to be misaligned with the emotional, intellectual, and (un)ethical baseline of those in power. Instead, we can radically and relationally hope, script a narrative that foregoes the paradoxical dream of making a colonial empire more inclusive and more relational with the Earth. Instead, we can take this opening to move into relational governance frameworks. We are seeing proposals for institutional, political, and material changes to enact different kinds of relations. We see them arise from “the collective genius of all of the people who have survived these wicked systems.” Where I now live in the northernmost American prairies, in lands currently called “Alberta,” we see these governance ideas arising from Nehiyaw and other Indigenous governance thinkers and practitioners.

This is why that last stage of settler-colonial denial, “If we can’t, we are you”, or self-Indigenization, is especially dangerous. It seeks to eliminate and supersede the governance authorities of the people with the deepest knowledge of apocalypse and the deepest experience of grief in that apocalypse, yet still the strongest cultural precepts for living relationally with the planet. In this moment of growing awareness of the role of self-Indigenization in ongoing colonization, we have an opportunity to grasp the co-constitutive nature of diverse genocidal techniques and to respond assertively. As we respond, I see five entangled predicaments before us:

1. We humans, both Indigenous and not, can choose anti-Indigenous settler multiculturalism, its eliminatory and appropriative kinship structures, and its non-radical definitions of “hope,” or we can seriously consider Indigenous and other anti-colonial concepts and governance of life and land. Surprisingly, there is no shortage of Indigenous people who also choose settler multiculturalist theories and frameworks that help uphold colonial structures and undermine Indigenous self-determination.
2. Privileging Indigenous anti-colonial and relational precepts and governance frameworks also requires trusting the firmest and sometimes most counter-intuitive (to settler worldviews) analysts and critics. Settler standards of multiculturalist respectability (not to mention more widely recognized forms of explicit settler violence) are a colossal hindrance to coming into right relation.
3. Choosing Indigenous frameworks in order to come into better relation with Indigenous peoples and lands means that non-Indigenous people abandon self-Indigenization and other tempting strategies to access yet more Indigenous resources.
4. Coming into relation rightly requires not only stopping the appropriation of more authorities and resources but also the return of already stolen resources. “Landback” is not only a contemporary anti-colonial slogan but also a core function of decolonization that the act of self-Indigenization resists. So-called “identity” and the material are connected and mutually reinforcing.
5. Finally, we face the reality of the most traumatized and unhealed among us. Where

do they fit into a better relational world? Many people are personally incapable in their present capacities of coming into mutually sustaining relations with anyone and will violently resist such a project. Not every individual can do the work in the present of engendering generative possibilities. The rest of us must make a start.

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