



Renewal, Remembrance, and Resistance for Decolonizing People of European Heritage

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We offer gratitude to our Iladurak asabak as well as our Lakota, Anishinabek, Chichimec - Comanche, and Ch'orti' Maya family who have shared their love, homes, and understanding with us along bizibideak - the path of life. We look to Amalur and the ahaikoak of our European home places and Turtle Island whose freedom and resilience inspire us to carry on...

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Openings

As a small family of decolonizing white settlers on the Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, our stories are full of evolving contradictions.

Our direct ancestors were early colonizers of Turtle Island or the Island Hill, known to most by its colonial name of North America. As adventurers, profiteers, or refugees from religious or political persecution, they left Europe to join the overlapping waves of settlement that blanketed the Atlantic shoreline in the 1600s. Regardless of their reasons for coming to Turtle Island, our immediate families directly participated in, and continue to profit from, the ethnic cleansing of Atlantic coast and eastern woodland Native peoples including the Haudenosaunee, Lenape, Reuckowacky, Merockes, Matinecock, Massapeguas, Quinnipiac, Matinecock, Pequot, Wompanoag, Massachusetts, Nottoway, and Powhatan nations, as well as the forced labor of Indigenous African peoples removed from their homelands.

To reconcile the complex, inter-generational stories that shape who we are, we have committed to movements of decolonization and ancestral recovery. By growing deep togetherness with our ancestors and relatives, we are remembering and revitalizing our common cultural roots from the Indigenous Aquitanian peoples of southern France, survived today in Euzko Herria. We also recognize our diverse heritage from other peoples such as Gaelic Celts, Pictish Scots, and Germanic Suebians. What was dormant in us is renewing itself again.

As a consequence of our commitment to decolonizing movements, we find ourselves an invited part of Indigenous resistance with the Tetuan Lakota Strong Heart Warrior Society known as the Cante Tenza Okolakiciye. We have become family to members of this society. In togetherness with our Strong Heart family, we share the dream of returning wholesome lifeways that reflect the sacredness of creation and allow all beings to thrive in their natural embodiment as relatives enriching the interconnected web of life in a place.

With our own stories in mind and with encouragement from our Strong Heart family to, “hold white people accountable” we would be grateful if the following article can invite real and lasting conversations among white settlers of European heritage regarding the role of resistance within movements of ancestral remembrance and decolonization.

While we believe Indigenous peoples have clearly communicated their needs to decolonizing white settlers, we find a shortage of supporting settler narratives that are strong, thoughtful and originating from direct experience. With these thoughts we hope to share clear, heart-felt, and provocative perspectives that may aid healthy integration of resistance into movements of decolonization by people of European heritage.

While this particular conversation centers settler relationships with Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and Abya Yala (the American continents), we acknowledge the tangled web of settler relationships that include displaced people of African descent and other Peoples of Color who have been coercively brought inside of the colonial settler-state as a consequence of its militarism, economic desires, and nation building. This is just one decolonizing conversation of many that settlers must face in order to clearly see the consequences of Euro-centric colonialism and grow deep understanding that allows collective resistance against colonial assaults on life.

Note: We have included provocative quotes from Native people regarding decolonization and resistance. These quotes are separated out from the main body of the article to respect their sovereign voice. Links to the original source have been provided when possible (at article end) and readers are encouraged to center these and other Native perspectives in this conversation.

Renewal

For most people of European heritage, decolonization begins as tentative steps towards healing the impacts of colonization within the individual self, rather than collective resistance against colonization undertaken by a family, clan, community, society, tribe, or nation.



These personal movements often originate as efforts to identify ancestors and ancestral places of origin, reconnect in nature, understand the spiritual nature of life, examine one's white privilege, or create change through activism. There are many reasons for this initial focus on individual experience, but the absence of an indigenous, place-based cultural identity is perhaps the most significant reason why decolonization usually begins as an individual pursuit by people of European heritage.

As a person moves deeper into authentic acts of decolonization, the emphasis on individual movements will be called into question. These questions will rise internally as one grapples with a growing awareness of being deeply interconnected with other life. These questions will also arise externally from Indigenous people and their allies who are wary of Euro-centric acts of "self-improvement" that do not actually challenge the colonial mindset and its destructive behaviors inflicted upon Indigenous life.

Authentic decolonization will so profoundly provoke an awakening understanding of *who you are* and *where you come from* that it radically transforms one's relationship to self, people, place, and all life. The renewal and rebalancing of these relationships breaks the greedy cycle of disassociation, desperation, and destruction that fuels the colonial disorder within an individual.

When this renewal of relationships is presently active within groups of related people, then decolonization can grow into collective actions to resist and dismantle colonialism at multiple levels in order to return Indigenous lands and lifeway. This is the realization that fully healing one's inner relationships of self is impossible without renewing relationships of love and togetherness with other peoples and life forms.

Remembrance

Authentic acts of decolonization provoke unsettling questions that go to the heart of white and settler privilege, and confront settlers with our uncertain futures on the stolen Indigenous lands we inhabit. As we feel the anxiety of surrendering our privilege, it is tempting to look for ways to preserve our comforts. Concepts that look similar to decolonization become more attractive even though they may not create fundamental change to our relationships with life. These diversions are traps that simply insert us back into colonial systems of privilege, consumption, and denial.

"Decolonization is the intelligent & active resistance to the forces & the impacts of colonization & it's working towards liberation of indigenous peoples.... So if you are not actively working toward the liberation of indigenous people, as indigenous people or as settler people, then you're not doing decolonizing work."

Waziyatawin

Pezihutazizi Otunwe Dakota



The simple truth is: we cannot avoid facing our uneasy and unsettled relationships to the Indigenous peoples and Indigenous lands that we occupy. If we do not relinquish our settler privilege and grow healthier relationships with Indigenous peoples, life, and lands *on their terms*, then we will only be skimming across the surface of decolonizing movements, creating the appearance of transformative change, but actually cementing our occupation and theft of Indigenous lands and cultures even more firmly into the continent's already bloodied ground.

Turtle Island is beautiful but bloodied land, under siege since 1492 and still in active resistance to euro-centric colonization and settlement. She continues to yield the bounty of riches we live on today, derived from the continued thieving and pillaging of Indigenous life forms. And she is ever the storyteller of the genocide begun by our ancestors.

While settlers claim to love this beautiful land - without the vital presence and consent of its Indigenous human peoples, such love is racist and self-serving. If one is going to truly love the land, then that love will embody Indigenous peoples thriving on that land as an integral and inseparable aspect of the cultural and ecological landscape.

But too often, our so-called love is the possessive adoration of "wilderness" and natural places violently emptied of Indigenous peoples through ethnic cleansing. We embrace the racist fabrication of "pristine" nature - the erasure of the natural Indigenous human being from the land we claim to love. We're content with this human aspect of the land being invisible, relegated to the nostalgic past, being oppressed, being destroyed. Our love reveals itself as selfish and insecure.

Because of this insecurity, it is very difficult for us to accept Native peoples as presently alive and inseparable from the land itself, let alone surrender our entitled claims of presence and authority that would further their natural reintegration into their home places and relationships of freedom.

In making Indigenous human people invisible, we reveal our fear of displacement, denial of shame, and the ignorance of our own stories from a time when we were peoples integral to places. For our grotesque convenience, we disavow our continuing role in ongoing genocidal warfare.

"So let's toss out a different kind of 'progression' to all you...liberals and occupiers out there. You join us in liberating our land and lives. Lose the privilege you acquire at our expense by occupying our land. Make that your first priority for as long as it takes to make it happen...but if you're not willing to do that then don't presume to tell us how we should go about our own liberation, what priorities and values we should have. Since you're standing on our land, we've got to view you as another oppressor trying to hang onto what's ours."

Yet-Si-Blue (Janet McCloud)
Coast Salish Tulalip



Only through the most dissociative forms of forgetting, can we innocently turn to the beautiful land for solace, pleasure, and connection without feeling some sense of unease. Otherwise, we would feel compelled to take conscious action to reconcile these feelings. But conscious actions upset our bliss. This makes us deeply invested to only see the land we want to see. We do not see what is really there.

The land has many more stories to tell than just the beautiful ones that indulge our innocent pleasure. If we only look around and listen with an open heart, we will see past our short-term love affair with a continent that doesn't belong to us, and consider all of the stories that may live in the mountains, waters, and wind.

Mountains, timeless and unforgetting. Their slow presence draws our thoughtful gaze, asking us to consider all they have seen over the course of their lives.

Elder peaks, they remember our people's first unfamiliar steps on the land, and the atrocities that followed – just a moment ago in their lifetime.

Weathered heights beckon our hearts to consider a time before we arrived on these shores, when our love was given to the elder mountains in our own places.

To recognize all that the mountains remember is to feel the gaping loss for all that we have forgotten. Perhaps that is why we are so intent to gore their insides out with machinery and dynamite their faces into dust.

Flowing waters remind us too. They whisper and roar in languages unknown to us, because our own languages were not born here.

Our ears strain to translate the ancient songs sung by trickling streams and falling rapids, but we can't hear past the groaning dam of our own obstructed spirits.

So we seek something tangible to grasp, a token to hold.

Never realizing when we take the mottled clamshell from the river's edge, we hold a shell grown with calcium bleeding from the bones of the land's Indigenous peoples.

In our hand we hold the love of a people who died fighting to remain free - from us.

Even the wind carries ghostly songs from seasons before.



Breath of the dead forever tousling our hair or biting cold our skin in mourning of the forced snowy marches and wintertime massacres.

Bare tree branches shiver in the brisk winter wind, like the elders and children who died exposed and shaking in the ice and snow at the hands of our own family members just two or three generations ago.

Grandmother wind, who once joyfully canted and wallowed with sixty million bison across this continent, now wails by concrete highways and factory farms with the lonely cries of slaughter for our ears.

For the settler, this kind of seeing is hard, and the questions it provokes are unsettling. Because these questions create uncertain futures for us on this land, we often unconsciously create ways to preserve colonial privileges and comforts. We twist our actions into something that has the look of radical transformation, but without the deeply profound changes to our ways of being and relating.

This is why so-called settler "back to the land" and "sustainability" projects like rewilding, homesteading, occupying the commons, new culture, eco-villages, and intentional communities are most often misguided attempts at reclaiming our lost innocence with the land. These projects typically use humanistic, non-violent language that conceals the further dispossession, domestication, and genocide of Indigenous life. And then when Indigenous objections to these acts of resettlement come, they are conveniently evaded with socially conscious labels like "liberating," "sustainable," and "organic". This privileged cycle of willfully ignorant destruction followed by evasion of responsibility has been going on for centuries. Our excuses have changed but the assault on Indigenous life remains.

Our past is inescapable, because it is alive in the present whether we acknowledge it or not. To question our present-day role in these ongoing atrocities - to see both the beauty and the blood is unsettling. But the land and her peoples remember and resist, and so must we.

"If these people [intentional community] want to do the exact same thing every other supposed "conscious minded, sympathetic, good hearted" colonist and colonial descendent have done and continue to do...If they want to practice group escapism from a society, country, and environment that they themselves have created and continue to aid, abet, and habituate, while monetarily sustaining themselves off of the enslavement, disruption, rape and monetization of an entire once natural ecology, then that is their prerogative. But I only ask they be honest with themselves as they do this, this is not too much to ask."

**Pohebits Quasho
Chichimec/Comanche**



Resistance

Authentic movements of decolonization involve healing and transforming relationships at their core. They will inevitably bring us to deeply considering, understanding, changing, and transforming relationships with ourselves, as well as our relationships to the stolen Indigenous lands we derive a nonconsensual existence from and the First Peoples of this place who, despite our most strident efforts at dispossession and removal, are inseparable from the land itself.

Considering the millennia of sacred, spiritual interdependence between Indigenous peoples and their home places, we must embody the realization that honest relationship with Indigenous people is the only way to find wholeness, balance and freedom on these lands. We cannot bypass them to create our own settler ideals, violently disrupting ancient relationship, and then say we are engaged in genuine movements of healing with the land.

While relationships with the land's Indigenous peoples may take many forms, one fact is unavoidable: *all*

Indigenous peoples are under fire from colonial forces, and those that have not been neutralized are engaged in some kind of urgent resistance to these forces. Because of this, there is *no way* that settlers can create deep and meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples without becoming a part of that resistance *in some form*. What these forms look like will likely depend on one's gifts, privileges, and the needs of Indigenous peoples one is relating with. Regardless of the form, acts of resistance cannot be avoided and should be considered a part of an authentic and honorable path back to healing one's balanced relationships with life.

If we are truly working to create more balanced relationships with life, then we will turn away from superficial acts of individual self-improvement and consciousness raising that leaves the self-serving ego of colonialism intact. Instead, we will find the courage necessary to recover the innate gifts and roles of our own spirit so we may honor our clan, tribe, or nation as well as all life in both our ancestral homes and on the Indigenous lands we occupy now.

We of European descent, as all peoples, originally come from beautiful peoples, alive places and sacred lifeways of love, togetherness, and vibrant creation. This is who we are. Each step we take in the remembrance of this understanding nourishes our spirits and restores our natural function. We often forget this or see these lifeways as "lost". They are not lost. They are held in the Earth, and with other living beings who still live in freedom. The knowledge and love in our original

"If you're not aware of your location in relation to the indigenous peoples liberation struggles of whose lands you're on then any liberation that you're fighting for is still gonna be colonization. We have to come to terms with that and understand that. That's the first step to be able to articulate this."

Klee Benally
Black Mesa Navajo



lifeways lives on deep within our selves, and awakens in relationship with these beings, including our ancestors and unseen beings. These place-based cultures call to us to be seen, held, and embodied in us, to be present in our moments of new creation in our modern relationships. They are a web stretching through past, through story, through the Earth, through our hearts, and through the future generations to come. They are a possibility of deep healing, of life-enriching movement, and of wholesome freedom. This is possible.

While recovering these lifeways may sound quite exciting, let us remember *all places*, and the life within, face immediate and ongoing colonial control, domestication, and enforcement. There is no safe refuge we can hide in. The colonial capitalist project marches on intent on domesticating, controlling, commodifying, and destroying all life in its path. Decolonizing settlers on Indigenous lands have no honorable choice but resistance with Indigenous peoples.

Even if we choose to return to our ancestral lands across the ocean, there are few scenarios that allow for us to avoid acts of resistance.

The Basque, Sami, Sorbians, and many other Indigenous and ethnic minorities in Europe are facing their own forms of colonization. Language is constantly under threat of assimilation, and culture is being homogenized and commodified by neo-liberal capitalism, modernism, and the European Union project. Resistance is a fact of life here as well.

If we don't consciously and actively define who and what we are, the world will define who we are for us - using all of its distorted projections and colonial value systems to keep us domesticated and impotent. Without resistance, colonialism will continue to steal the real lives, identities, gifts, roles, and cultural lifeways of Indigenous peoples, as well as the Indigenous spirit that still lives inside of us. To bring this spirit out of dormancy, we must be prepared to do whatever is asked of us by our ancestors and the land itself to create the conditions that allow for our original languages and cultures to revitalize and reawaken in the present day and for future generations.

Finally, colonialism and capitalism have created the space for a host of unhealthy relationship dynamics to exist between settlers and Indigenous people. Cultural appropriation, spiritual materialism, and fantasized "adoptions" *complete with an Indian name!!* are just a few examples of unhealthy relationships settlers create with Native people.

Because colonialism can be expressed in inverted ways, we benefit by being cautious of relationships with Indigenous people (or those claiming to be) that allow us to evade our roles and participation in authentic resistance movements. These relationships may develop within colonial settings or even on the reservation itself.



Relationships with Native people that derive from white settler spiritual seeking, "oneness" events, or white guilt should be considered critically if they do not stress our authentic resistance to the colonial forces affecting Indigenous lands and peoples. If money, sex, or image boosting (ex. I'm a healer, shaman, more spiritual, etc.) is used to commodify this relationship, then most certainly one is involved in an unhealthy act. We cannot afford to perpetuate these kinds of relationships.

We also benefit by looking critically at why and how we provide activist solidarity to Indigenous peoples and movements – being clear about what motivates us to be a “good ally.” Is it ego that motivates us? White guilt? Hoping Native wisdom will help us fill an empty feeling? Let’s consider what it will take for us to transform shallow motivation into intelligent, deeply understood acts of resistance that have significance for the wholeness and balance of all life. Let’s accept the responsibility to understand what our actions are creating in the world around us!

It's worth noting that activism or aid given in relationship to Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Governments i.e. collaborators and dependents of the U.S. Government, is often used to further marginalize the poor, traditional, and grassroots people in favor of non-traditional holders of power within a reservation. This is also true of certain organizations and non-profits. It is our responsibility to understand the nature of our relationships and their consequences on others. Superficial relationships do not allow for this level of cultural competency.

Lakota Cante Tenza warrior leader Canupa Gluha Mani advises, “Just because it looks indian and sounds indian, doesn’t mean its indian.”

Deep movements of decolonization allow for the self-knowledge and cultural competency to begin to discern more healthy relationships from those that perpetuate unhealthy and exploitative power dynamics created by colonialism. Knowing our own hearts and stories, as well as learning our own Indigenous language and reawakening our cultural lifeway in relationship to place creates the possibility of relating with Indigenous peoples in different ways than simply being a culturally ignorant settler on stolen land allows.

When we remember our ancestral ways of being and the place-based protocols of respect that grow and nurture healthier relationships with life, we regain the self-respect, deep love, and

“What we are trying to tell you America, and you American people, is to get your head out of your ass and really look at what you are doing... How does the white man replace my eastern people that once lived in paradise along that eastern shoreline. They’re gone. Their language is gone. They don’t exist any more. What did you do with them?”

Canupa Gluha Mani
Tetuwan Oglala Lakota



desire to be in honorable relationship with other beings. We can genuinely embody who we were meant to be as culturous peoples in a place, moving past white guilt, forgetfulness, and shame into radical acts of transformation that allow us to honor the gift of creating relations with other Indigenous peoples and life forms – including strong, loving acts of togetherness and resistance.

It may be a long, challenging path to grow these relationships. We have a lot of listening, self-reflecting, and trust building to do. But the conversations and new possibilities this path brings are vibrantly alive, deeply transformative, and create an intergenerational movement towards wholeness. This is our sacred responsibility.



For further consideration please check out these links as well as other writings, poetry, music, artwork, and videos of these decolonizing Native activists and artists:

Waziyatawin

[Colonialism is Alive & Well part 1: Full Show](#)

[Colonialism is Alive & Well part 2a: Full Show](#)

[Colonialism is Alive & Well part 2B: Full Show](#)

[Waziyatawin on Holocaust, Collapse & Despair: Full show](#)

Yet-Si-Blue (Janet McCloud)

[The Last Indian War](#)

[A Warning Message To all Indian Nations and Our Friends and Supporters](#)

Pohebits Quasho

[Symptoms VS Sovereignty - Root Problems and the Sacred Balance](#)

Klee Benally

[Klee Benally.com](#)

[Interview with Klee Benally for the Anarchist Library](#)

[Democracy Now- "A Slow Genocide of the People": Uranium Mining Leaves Toxic Nuclear Legacy on Indigenous Land](#)

Canupa Gluha Mani

[Divide and Conquer The Indian](#)

[America is a Bully](#)

[Red Cry Documentary](#)

