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INTRODUCTION

Reinvigorating Ancestral Practices: Honoring Land and Water Defenders, Indigenous Internationalisms, and Community Protocols

Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel *

For Indigenous peoples, boundaries on homelands and waterways often denote places for family, clan and/or community responsibilities regarding stewardship or protection and are not merely lines of exclusion on a map. In this essay I begin by reflecting on the teachings of the late master carver and artist TEMOSENTET (Dr. Charles Elliott from Tsartlip First Nation) and discuss how his artistry embodies Indigenous internationalism and intimate relationships to W̱SÁNEĆ lands and waters. Indigenous internationalism is practiced through diplomacies, activism, trade relations, treaties, solidarities, and other forms of Indigenous international relations which precede the formation of states. In this essay—introducing the Special Section: Honouring Indigenous Land and Water Defenders—I look at the deeper meaning behind the Cherokee word for nation, ayetli, and discuss how Indigenous internationalism and land/water defense are expressed through stories, activism, and everyday actions that renew relational responsibilities to lands, waters, and more-than-human kin.

First Words

Osiyo nigada. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel dagwado'a. Tsalagi ayetli agwenasv'i. Echota galsgisgo'i. Jean agitsi nole Gary agidoda. Dagwaltina'i Westville, Ogalahoma nole Huntington Beach, California aneha. Agwetsi ageyutsa Leila Victoria otseha. Nigohily tsigesvi anehe'i Ani Lekwungen nole Ani W̱SÁNEĆ ahani tsitsinela'i nogwu. Hello. My name is Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel. I'm a citizen of the Cherokee nation and a member of the Echota ceremonial grounds in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. My parents, Jean and Gary, live in California. I live with my family on the unceded territories of the Lekwungen and

W̱SÁNEĆ nations and peoples, whose relationships with these lands and waters shape their political thought, governance, and self-determining authority that should inform how we all relate to this place. As I share this critical self-location, I pose two interrelated questions to promote accountability as a visitor to Salish lands and waters: how will the lands, waters, and communities benefit from my time here? And how do we go beyond land acknowledgements to take actions that make space for Indigenous protections of lands, waters, and more-than-human relationships?

* **Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel** (PhD), Cherokee Nation citizen, Professor, Indigenous Studies, University of Victoria, Canada, Turtle Island. Email: ctassel@uvic.ca

The Art of Resurgence

The January 2023 passing of my friend and colleague, master carver TEMOSEN̄TET (Dr. Charles Elliott from Tsartlip First Nation), had such a major impact on me and so many others. We would sit for hours in TEMOSEN̄TET's carving studio and share food, drink tea (or his favorite, ginger ale), and talk story. So many of TEMOSEN̄TET's stories were prompted by the photos and carvings in the room. He would often talk about his time on the Cowichan Tribes' canoe racing team and the intense rivalries and battles that took place on the water between teams. This was where he met Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and was introduced to Cicero August, who was on the same canoe team and also a well-known carver.

TEMOSEN̄TET would tell me about his days protecting the lands and waters as part of his family's involvement in Indigenous activist movements. TEMOSEN̄TET's artwork reflects those struggles and his support for Indigenous-led resurgence. In particular, he was very proud of the talking stick he carved for the late Nelson Mandela, who was an anti-apartheid activist and former president of South Africa. Mandela's leadership and lifelong fight against racism was an inspiration to TEMOSEN̄TET, and the talking stick he carved for Mandela was adorned with both a thunderbird and an orca to honor the balance of spiritual and physical relationships. At one point, TEMOSEN̄TET told me that the poles he carved, which are located throughout Victoria, are "silent ambassadors". What did he mean by that? I think for him they represented guardians of the land, WSÁNEĆ warriors who represent the community, the stories, the language and relationships to the lands and waters. They are there to remind others whose land they are on and to respect the communities and relationships they represent. I think of that every time I see TEMOSEN̄TET's poles at the airport and other places around Mətúliyə (aka Victoria, BC). What have these silent ambassadors and protectors witnessed over the years as they continue to hold space as guardians of WSÁNEĆ landscapes and waterways?

TEMOSEN̄TET's artwork exemplifies the principles of land and water defense from a WSÁNEĆ perspective. TEMOSEN̄TET also put his artwork into activism throughout his life. He was there in May, 2013, for the reclamation of PKOLS, which means "white head" or "white rock", known to the general public by its settler colonial name "Mount Douglas". One sunny afternoon on May 22, 2013, approximately 600 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people gathered at the base of PKOLS to show their solidarity for the reclaiming of this sacred relationship with the mountain. I was also there that day with my daughter to take part in the Indigenous-led reclamation of PKOLS. The PKOLS place name was being reasserted by WSÁNEĆ and Lekwungen leaders

based on their relationship to that place and their self-determining authority. TEMOSEN̄TET had created a sign with the name PKOLS adorned with an orca and thunderbird to explain why the name change was necessary:

Located in WSÁNEĆ territory and on the border of Lekwungen territory, this has been, and remains an important meeting place for many nations. The reclamation of PKOLS to replace the colonial name Mount Douglas recognizes the nation-to-nation agreements negotiated here and supports ongoing efforts of Indigenous and settler people to restore balanced relationships to the lands they call home.

According to TEMOSEN̄TET, previous signs for PKOLS had been placed at the top of the mountain throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Corntassel 2022, 27). Each time, these signs were taken down and/or destroyed. This time was different, however. There were over 600 people there to witness the PKOLS reclamation and TEMOSEN̄TET's sign has stood the test of time. Despite his passing, TEMOSEN̄TET's silent ambassadors stand guard throughout Mətúliyə. His artwork remains as a powerful expression of Indigenous internationalism and land/water defense.

Indigenous internationalisms are practiced in several different ways by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across Turtle Island and globally. Encompassing Indigenous trade relations, diplomatic protocols, treaty arrangements, acts of solidarity, and other assertions of self-determining authority, Indigenous internationalism is an emerging area of research that exposes tensions between Indigenous nations and states over border policies and highlights Indigenous relationships that transcend and predate state borders. This essay introduces some of the ways that Indigenous nations are expressing their relationships to lands and waters through complex diplomacies and forms of engagement, as well as their experiences with state border crossings. Through an Indigenous internationalism lens, Indigenous nations and peoples often foster new understandings of how Indigenous forms of diplomacy, activism and trade are "practiced and persist beyond state boundaries" (Corntassel, Ambers & Baker, forthcoming 2024). Land and water defense is at the heart of Indigenous nations' activism and Indigenous internationalism.

In her essay entitled "Kidnapped Water and Living Otherwise in a World of Drought, Fires, and Floods", Zapotec scholar Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez discusses the deeper meaning behind "water is life" as a "relational confluence of plural bodies". In doing so, she examines the actions of the United Front of Nahua



Communities of the Cholulteca and Volcano Regions as they halted production of a bottled water company in Puebla, Mexico, in 2021. Isabel's piece builds on her previous research to demonstrate how land and water defense is relational, and the connections between Indigenous lands and bodies run deep (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2023). The other essay in this special issue by 'Namgis First Nation scholar Andrew Ambers and Ahousaht and Ehattesaht First Nations' scholar Rachel yacaaʔaʔ George also focuses on water but from a different relational vantage point. According to Ambers and George, the ocean is "more than a physical or geographic space, and also emerges as an analytical, intellectual and critical space of and for engagement". Through their experiences in Tribal Journeys, Ambers and George are able to witness firsthand how these Indigenous internationalisms signify "(re)connection to our traditional practices embodies the resurgence of our nations, the continual practice of our self-determination, and the exploration of sovereign protocols across nations". Understanding the relationality of oceans and their role in creating Indigenous legal orders is vital to future avenues of land and water defense.

Nested within this special issue are critical and vital conversations with three Indigenous land and water defenders: WSÁNEĆ, Sk̓xwu7mesh, and Quw'utsun activist and knowledge-holder Tiffany Joseph; Songhees Nation knowledge-holder Loreisa Lepine, and Songhees Nation knowledge-holder Cheryl Bryce. Each of these speakers shares their own experiences around land and water defense along with their desires for the health and well-being of future generations. Poetry is the true language of resurgence and nationhood, and three Indigenous poets share their insights and powerful words for this special issue: Anishinaabe scholar Jana-Rae Yerxa, Kanaka Maoli scholar and activist Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, and Haʔzaqv parent, poet, leader, and land-based educator 'Cúagilákv (Jess Háustí). The beautiful Indigenous artwork that adorns each page is drawn by Métis artist and writer Braelynn Abercrombie. The amazing cover, by Kwakwaka'wakw artist and visionary Francis Dick, encapsulates Indigenous land and water defense through a relational lens. The salmon and bear nations are represented in terms of their interconnectedness and resiliency. Francis Dick's amazing work depicts the spirit of her ancestors and the return of the sockeye to the river Gwani (Nimpkish River) in Kwakwaka'wakw territory.

Indigenous Nationhood and Land/Water Protection

The Cherokee word for nation, ayetli, provides some insights behind Indigenous internationalism and demonstrates how our knowledge systems, as well as connections to lands, waters, and communities are

so intricately intertwined. While the meaning of ayetli includes nationhood as "center" or "middle", it can also mean half. Half here means that the elected government officials (such as Chief and Council) are only one side to the Cherokee Nation. Relationships to land, water, fire, and plant and animal nations are part of the other, less public half of Cherokee nationhood. Atsila or fire is at the center of Cherokee nationhood, which is an important part of our relational responsibility to nurture and keep the ceremonial fires strong for future generations. As Cherokee scholar Chris Teuton (Teuton & Shade 2023, 21) points out, the goal for Cherokees is to "stand in the middle": ayetli tsidoga... holding this delicate balance is the key to a "good life". Ayetli encompasses the struggles to maintain balance between individuals and the nationhood, between the middle world, skyworld, and underworld. At the core of ayetli are the relationships that maintain our health and well-being as Indigenous peoples. Through the renewal and reciprocity of honoring relationships we express nationhood and acts of Indigenous internationalism.

To help illustrate how kinship and nationhood are interrelated, I will share a short story about my daughter and I returning to our homelands in the Cherokee Nation (previously published in *Langscape Magazine*):

A few summers ago, my daughter and I were visiting our homelands in the Cherokee Nation (Tahlequah, Oklahoma, so-called United States). As we were driving along the highway, we noticed that there was a ᎠᎹᎠᎵ (saligugi or snapping turtle) in the middle of the road. After taking my foot off the accelerator, I asked my daughter whether we should stop and help that ᎠᎹᎠᎵ out. She immediately said yes so we pulled over and slowly approached the ᎠᎹᎠᎵ, who eyed us suspiciously. We both assured the ᎠᎹᎠᎵ that we were going to help get her out of harm's way. I then showed my daughter how to pick up the ᎠᎹᎠᎵ from the back of the shell as they have very powerful jaws! My daughter proudly held ᎠᎹᎠᎵ and helped her into the creek safely on the other side of the road. Seemingly, that's the end of the story. So why share a story that appears to have little to do with rights or even Indigenous nationhood? I would contend that there is a lot more going on in this story than might first be perceived. The ᎠᎹᎠᎵ story actually teaches us about relationships and ways of protecting and honoring more-than-human kin. Most importantly, it teaches us about responsibility (Corntassel 2023, 15).

Dagasi or turtle has their own nationhood and kinship. By practicing this act of gadugi (working together; helping each other in a time of need), my daughter and I were engaging in diplomacy and Indigenous internationalism. The turtle nation has a special relationship with Cherokees as well as other Indigenous nations. Aside from the restorying of North America as Turtle Island, there are other ways that turtle has



helped us journey through worlds due to their ability to travel on both land and water. For example, when Cherokee women dance at our stomp grounds, they attach turtle shells to their ankles, which keep the rhythm of the dance. Turtle nations are an integral part of our ceremonies and literally signify the rhythm of our nationhood. By helping the snapping turtle across the road, we were practicing respectful relations with our kin. This is also an example of “everyday acts of resurgence”, which are forms of intimate connections with the lands, waters, and more-than-human relations. These actions are often unacknowledged and might entail having a conversation at the kitchen table, praying, visiting with kin, or speaking the language. While these may seem like ordinary actions, such as helping a turtle across the road, they are integral to protecting our relationships to lands, waters, and the natural worlds. Sharing stories like the one above helps us identify the everyday ways that we embody and activate our relational responsibilities. Indigenous internationalisms reflect a greater constellation of everyday actions and large-scale Indigenous-led movements motivated by love for the lands and waters and premised on the health and well-being of future generations. As spiritual beings, we are in a continuous process of being and becoming good ancestors.

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