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# Human-Bison Relations as Sites of Settler Colonial Violence and Decolonial Resurgence

**Introduction.** This article emerges from the claim that animals and other-than-human beings are implicated agents in settler colonial processes. More specifically, colonialism in North America has operated and continues to operate through the disruption and re-ordering of relations between humans, land, and lively beings. Transformations of land and water into property, the commodification of animals and plants, and the ordering of each are vital elements in the ongoing reproduction of settler colonial claims, institutions, and lifeways.[1] This claim has been articulated by several Indigenous scholars.[2] Drawing on these insights, I argue that a broader context for considering colonialism and its dismantling ought to include animals and human-animal relations. Conceptualizing colonization as extending beyond human lives presents opportunities for intervening in discourses of reconciliation that are still rooted in colonial logics and frameworks of understanding. Articulating harms done to human and animal bodies, the relationships between them, and the lands that support them, opens up different material entry points for thinking about reconciliation and, necessarily, decolonization. The extermination of the free-ranging bison herds is a significant example of such colonial harm. In this article, I assess both the 19th century extermination and contemporary conservation policies as sites in which settler colonization has radically altered human-animal relations in North America. While a profound example of colonial harm, I further argue that human-bison relations offer important spaces for imagining and enacting decolonial possibilities.

Bison are not the only animals involved in colonial processes, nor are human-bison relations the only relations violently re-ordered by settler projects. My attention to bison is inspired by the methods of Anishinaabe legal theorist John Borrows, who practices the Anishinaabe philosophical process of analogically reasoning from the observed interrelation of land, animals, and humans to develop legal and political principles. "Drawing out law" from land offers a way to think ecologically about and through relationships (x-xii). Bison and the relationships between Indigenous nations and bison herds is a case study for observing the materiality of colonial harms, but also relations that exceed and disrupt settler attempts to order land and life. As Elspeth Probyn argues, case studies are neither generalities nor exclusively local in meaning, but instead their specificities "are made to travel" (52). The role of bison in colonial

processes on the plains does not explain the place of all animals in colonial relations. However, the specificities of the bison case offer a place from which relationships can be observed and critical insights drawn.

Animal studies and other posthuman strains of scholarship furnish resources that might also be deployed in the critical analysis of the narrower view of human-animal relations as shaped exclusively by processes of commodification. The hunting that led to bison extermination, for example, might be rendered as an instance of the "anthropological machine's" reproduction of White European hierarchies (Agamben 33-38) or as a particularly brutal site of "embodied cross-species sociality" (Haraway 4). Rather than importing the critical resources of Euro-Western theorists to the site of bison relations, I center Indigenous scholarship that emerges from the particularity of human-bison relations in the west. This body of work reveals the lingering dimensions of settler colonialism in historical and contemporary conservation work. I take as a point of departure Unangax theorist Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's insistence that colonization be examined through the particularities of techniques and practices used to impose colonial relations in specific times and places. To investigate colonization with specificity, they write, requires "attention to the colonial apparatus that is assembled to order the relationships between particular peoples, lands, the 'natural world', and 'civilization'" (21). Applying the insights of several Indigenous theorists, I demonstrate how defining, ordering, and regulating "nature" are key techniques of settler colonialism, evident in the violation and transformation of human-bison relations in the place now referred to as the North American prairies.

As a citizen and resident of one settler society (Canada) engaged in research particular to one region (the North American prairie), I situate myself to be dually in conversation with, on the one hand, Anglo-European political theory, and on the other hand, and the disruptive responses of Indigenous scholarship that resist the political conditions of settler colonization in Canada (and to a lesser extent, the United States). I consider confronting the implications of colonialism and the settler logics that linger in critical spaces, like the animal studies discipline, a political responsibility. This work requires the centering of Indigenous scholarship, as well as humility in the face of multiple ontologies beyond that on which Euro-modernity depends. From my position as a settler researcher who has lived in primarily urban settings, I do not claim to fully understand how buffalo[3] are experienced and known as relations to Indigenous peoples on the prairie. My understanding of land and life is refracted through Anglo-European ontological frameworks and critiques largely emanating from within these frames. This

ontological limitation is an effect of settler colonial privilege: my political and methodological commitments have motivated my engagement with Indigenous scholarship and the expansive worlds it theorizes, but colonial education and other assimilationist policies and institutions have forced many Indigenous peoples to move between Anglo-European and Indigenous ontologies. The failure to grasp that another community — with a different intellectual history, values, political and social structure, and knowledge system — could experience a different mode of knowing and relating to the world and its nonhuman beings is not just a failure of imagination, but a pillar of colonial thought. This article reflects some of my attempts to expand my own thinking in ways that are not premised on the naturalized erasure of multiple, co-present ontologies, and to do so in ways that are attentive to the harm such erasures can inflict.

Reading bison extermination and conservation through Indigenous scholarship clarifies how the historical horror of settler colonization has always been a multispecies endeavor and demonstrates why decolonial projects ought to consider an expansive notion of life, harm, and human-animal relations. I make this intervention in three parts. In part one, I outline colonization and decolonization as multispecies endeavors and introduce how several Indigenous scholars have articulated human-animal relations. Part two analyzes how narratives of 19th century bison extermination by non-Indigenous environmental historians and by Indigenous scholars have generated different accounts of human-bison relations and, as a result, different senses of what is lost in the wake of bison extermination. In part three, I compare the contemporary policies for bison restoration that emerge from these differing conceptions of human-bison relations, tracking the lingering presence of settler colonial logics and identifying decolonial opportunities.

**Part One: Colonization is Multispecies.** Métis scholar Zoe Todd's study of fishes as critical to colonial processes is instructive for thinking about human-animal relations. In her archival and field research, Todd investigates plural ways of knowing, defining, and being in relation with fishes in the North West Territories community of Paulutuuq. More than just a food source, she observes, "human-fish relations present a whole host of social, cultural, and legal-governance principles that underpin life in Paulatuuq" ("Fish Pluralities" 28). Fishing in this community involves a constellation of knowledge and activities tied to the physical endeavor of fishing, as well as to cultural, legal, and political practices that engage broader land- and water-scapes with community members. In the 1920s to 1950s, fish played a role in mediating relationships between Hudson's Bay Company clerks, Oblate Missionaries, and the Inuvialuit peoples in the region. Through the process of teaching Oblate missionaries to fish, for example,

Inuvialuit men also educated the missionaries in reciprocity, fairness, and land relations. Fish did more than feed in this context, but were also "a 'micro-site' across which Indigenous legal orders were consciously applied to resist colonial authority" ("Classroom to River's Edge" 91). Both the fish and the Inuvialuit were implicated agents in experiencing this colonial interaction, Todd argues, thus approaches to dismantling colonial processes must extend beyond human redress to include other-than-human agents.

Colonial processes of extraction centrally involved animals and human-animal relations from the beginning. Fish, deer, and buffalo fed the fur traders; beaver, muskrat, and mink fed the trade itself. Analyzing the symbolic and material processes of settler colonization and their ongoing reproduction requires thinking more expansively about the other agents involved: this means including animals, along with other lively beings. Further, given the centrality of animal lives and communities to colonial endeavors, animal life and human-animal relations must also be a component to decolonial inquiry, theory, and practice. Todd's research is located in the particularities of the Paulutuuq community and not intended as a universal model of human-animal relations.[4] However, the potential that Todd sees for Inuvialuit-fish relations to disrupt narrow narrations of colonization and anthropocentric state discourses might also be found on the prairies in the complex relationships between Indigenous nations, non-Indigenous settlers and settler state representatives, and the plains bison. As I will articulate in part two, these human-buffalo relationship have been a site of colonial violence. But they can also be a site of justice and resurgence.

Research on the politics of human-animal relations often involves the critique of species classifications and the power relations they reproduce, as well as an attunement to the entanglements of lively worlds. Scholars working in the contemporary fields of critical animal studies and multispecies studies have advocated for styles of research and writing that are attentive to other-than-human lives and relations (Van Dooren et al; Tsing; Sundberg). While such work has, to rephrase Juanita Sundberg, helped scholars to think through the methodological challenges of accounting for nonhuman living beings as political actors in (eco)political processes, animal studies and other posthumanist discourses have tended towards universalizing the nature-culture dualism characteristic of Anglo-Eurocentric thought (35). Indigenous theorists have long articulated relations between humans, land, and other-than-human living beings as reciprocal and activated through responsibilities. As the call for papers for this special issue and other interventions outlining the need to decolonize the fields of

animal and environmental studies have made clear, historical and contemporary Indigenous scholarship has too frequently been marginalized in these disciplines (Johnson and Murton; Sundberg; Hovorka). Reflecting on posthumanism and the so-called Ontological Turn, Todd articulates how much of the Anglo-Eurocentric scholarship that considers the vibrancy of other-than-human entities tends to universalize Enlightenment logics of dualism, species, and "nature," and excludes Indigenous theories and worlds, "without being aware of competing or similar discourses happening outside of the rock-star arenas of Euro-Western thought" ("Ontological Turn" 9). The work of turning towards multispecies perspectives is indeed an important critical shift for Euro-Western scholars, but, as Kim TallBear reminds, "Indigenous peoples have never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives" (234).

A prominent feature of Indigenous research on the relationships between humans, land, and living beings is an emphasis on reciprocity. In addition to Todd's work, Kim TallBear, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Billy-Ray Belcourt, and Vanessa Watts are some of the many Indigenous scholars to have carefully articulated the role of species hierarchies and property logics in settler colonization. Working from the particularities of diverse political situations, specific places, and distinct histories and cosmologies, these theorists have each disrupted settler logics with accounts of relationships to non-human living beings characterized by responsibility, reciprocity, and learning. Such contemporary theorizations extend and build upon the work of N. Scott Momaday, Leroy Little Bear, Vine Deloria Jr., and many others, each of whom has articulated relationships of reciprocity. Momaday, for example, describes Kiowa knowledge of land and life as a "reciprocal appropriation," where humans invest themselves in the land in cultural, spiritual, and physical ways, and in turn receive from the land support for their lifeways (80). Rather than spaces and bodies to be dominated and subordinated within regimes of private property, land and animals are engaged as sources of knowledge and of life, and as agential beings to whom humans have reciprocal obligations (Kimmerer 4).

It is crucial to note that the relationships articulated by these theorists are embodied and are lived differently in different places. There is not a pan-Indigenous conception of the nature of the relationship between humans and the world of lively beings, nor is there a universal understanding of the responsibilities that emerge from this relationship. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson emphasizes the role of land, waterways, and lively beings in providing the context and consensual relations of reciprocity that animate Anishinaabe theory, practice, and lifeways. Nishnaabeg

worldviews, Simpson explains, are "concerned with embodied knowledge animated, collectively, and lived out in a way in which our reality, nationhood, and existence is continually reborn through time and space" (15). Moving west from Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territories into nêhiyaw, Niitsitapi, and Métis lands, the history of bison that I outline in the next section of this paper engages some of the distinct embodied knowledges that emerge from these Nations' relationships with buffalo, as documented by scholars from these communities. As Indigenous and settler historians have argued, a condition of the settlement of plains territories was the classification and treatment of bison as commodities, rather than as peoples (Jobin), nations (Hubbard, "Buffalo Genocide"), or teachers and older brother (Ladner).

To take seriously the claim that animals are also agents in the experience of colonialism requires shifting analyses of both colonization itself and possibilities of repair. Todd has articulated the scope of this required shift:

> Ultimately, it is imperative to expand political notions mobilized by the State, such as reconciliation, beyond concepts of human redress. Instead, we must acknowledge that people and fish, together, are important agents in both a) experiencing colonialism and b) dismantling colonialism. ("Fish Pluralities" 231)

This proposition intervenes directly into liberal discourses of reconciliation and redress. Reconciliation in Canada has largely focused on single-issue apologies for violent policies such as the Indian Residential School System, the Inuit High Arctic Relocation, and the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene. These official apologies have functioned as incorporative mechanisms that contain the experiences of injured parties within state narratives, bracket specific incidents from a broader system of colonization, and distract from demands for substantive restitution (Bonner and James; Corntassel and Holder; Henderson and Wakeham). While official apologies are of deep significance to individuals and communities, Kahnawà:ke Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson cautions that official apologies create affective circuits of survivor testimony and state contrition, emphasizing individual injury without situating the policies in question within a broader political context of settler colonization (20:00-23:00). Settler political theorist James Tully has also critiqued the scope of this policy-focused project that aims to reconcile Indigenous peoples to largely unchanged institutions as one that overlooks the harms colonial development and settler states have wrought on relationships to land and lively beings, as well as between peoples (2).

**Part Two: Narratives of Bison Extermination.** Reflecting on methods of attending to the interrelations of species and their environments, Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey, Ursula Münster note that "relationships also have histories" (2). This section examines two different perspectives on bison relationships and their histories. Environmental histories of the 19th century extermination of free-ranging bison herds written by settler scholars tend to emphasize economic relations when analyzing the causes and effects of bison destruction. To some degree, these works consider the colonial ends extermination served. But apprehending the extent of the impact of bison extermination requires attending to the nature of relations between plains Indigenous nations and their buffalo relations. When species loss is read through the work of Indigenous histories, a different sense of relation — one grounded in reciprocal responsibilities — emerges, rendering the impacts of bison extermination in political, cultural, and spiritual terms, not just the ecological and economic dimensions articulated by non-Indigenous environmental histories (although those impacts continue to be felt today). By emphasizing bison as living in complex relationship with prairie landscapes, other species, and human neighbors, Indigenous scholarship makes clear the unique centrality of bison life to the region. From this perspective, the colonial re-ordering of relations through bison extermination not only entailed adapting to the loss of an economic staple, but finding ways to live in a world with its center violently ripped away.

***Environmental Histories of Bison Extermination.*** The dramatic extirpation of free-ranging bison herds from the North American prairies in the late 19th century has been the subject of environmental histories and conservation research. At the close of the 18th century, there were between 30 and 60 million bison on the continent. These herds were a keystone species that influenced all aspects of life in the region. For example, depressions formed from bison wallowing collect spring rains, creating temporary micro-ponds in which frogs and other insects lay eggs. With more than 300 species of insects living in their uniquely soft dung, bison create stores of food for turtles, bats, and birds. Bison also shape plant relations. Selectively grazing on fast-growing grasses, bison presence takes pressure off of slower-growing woody plants and encourages vegetation diversity. With adults weighing between 900 and 2000 pounds, bison bodies are a considerable food source to coyotes, wolves, bears, cougars, and humans. These interventions in the land are just a few of the multispecies relations to which bison life is central.

By 1890, less than a thousand buffalo remained on the continent. It is crucial to note that the vast majority of the herds were exterminated between 1850 and the late 1870s. The killing was not only radical in its scope, but also in its speed. In extermination's wake, environmental historians, conservationists, and other settler researchers have explored a variety of factors that contributed to the extermination of the bison populations. Extermination happened both in overt ways — through direct killing by Indigenous and non-Indigenous hunters, tourists, and settler militias — and in systematic ways — via the development of transportation infrastructure, increased range competition from domesticated animals, and the transformation of bison habitat into farms and settlements. Dan Flores (466-67) and Pekka Hämäläinen (287-99) each argue that the arrival of horses on the prairies critically contributed to bison loss by increasing competition for food and water and intensifying hunting capacities. Further investigating the role of new technologies, Andrew Isenberg identifies the introduction of more powerful guns, the construction and completion of the transcontinental railroad in the United States, and the large number of non-Indigenous skin hunters who arrived on the prairie in the 1860s as accelerants in herd destruction (93-110).

Settler colonial economies were a significant factor in driving the intensification of bison hunting from the 1870s to the disappearance of the last herds in the mid-1880s. Isenberg identifies the successful experimentation with higher-volume chemical tanning and the start of using bison leather to produce industrial conveyor belts in 1870 as a key amplification of hunting in the United States (130-1). Because conveyor belt production required thinner leather, the hide trade expanded into a year-round hunt, as preparing thinner summer hides did not require the specialized skills needed for preparing winter robes (A. Klein 151; Carter 88). The fixing of hide prices in European markets, as Scott Taylor observes (3191-93), also increased pressure on the already dwindling herds.[5] In the Canadian context, the movement of fur traders northwest into the food-scarce Athabasca and Mackenzie River regions created a demand for preserved meat, which transformed the bison into the principal item of exchange in the region (Colpitts 19-20; Daschuk 31). The emergence of these commercial demands reordered human-bison relations: rather than a means of subsistence, bison hides and meat became a commoditized good invested with exchange value that reflected the demands of colonial markets.

Colonial politicians and policy makers were aware of the impact of bison commodification and population decline on Indigenous communities. The disappearance of free-ranging bison herds was repeatedly framed by settler colonial

agents as inevitable, desirable, or both. American lawmakers in the 1870s "embraced the idea that the destruction of the bison was an inevitable part of the advance of civilization" and, Isenberg observes, "were particularly attracted to the notion that domestic cattle made a higher use of the range than bison" (155). Similarly, then Prime Minister John A. MacDonald addressed the issue of bison extermination in the Canadian House of Commons 1883: "I am not at all sorry that this has happened. So long as there was a hope that buffalo would come into the country, there was no means of inducing Indians to settle down on their reserves" (qtd. in Locke 34). While bison extermination was not an explicit policy of either the Canadian or United States governments, the loss of the species so central to the economies, kinship systems, political relations, and cosmologies of plains Indigenous nations radically destabilized life in these communities, creating the conditions under which both governments were able to secure often-unfair treaties, impose reserve and reservation systems, and secure access to vast tracts of the prairies (Milloy 51-52; Daschuk 91-98; Smalley 228).

Ultimately, these histories each emphasize dimensions of the colonial process: settler efforts to get hold of land and to order the life on that land in ways aligned only with visions of colonial expansion, cultivation, and industrialization. In addition to identifying how bison were exterminated, the environmental histories surveyed here each trace the transformation of bison from a key means of subsistence for the land's Indigenous inhabitants to a commodity resource for the unlimited expansion of colonial capital.[6] This transformation, along with the acquisition of land it enabled, was a key tactic in the broader strategy of eliminating Indigenous claims to territory and, further, Indigenous nations' ability to defend those claims within the legal and political frameworks of settler states. The North American prairie, then, is a place cultivated and settled amongst buffalo bones. It is a world made possible through the elimination of the species in its wild, free-ranging form.

***Indigenous Histories of Buffalo Loss.*** In addition to the emergence of commercial hunting, environmental histories of bison extermination emphasize subsistence as the primary dimension of Indigenous-bison relations. The plenty of the buffalo resource simultaneously facilitated the social formations of an extended community, united by a flexible kinship network and rhythm of mobility punctuated by frequent large gatherings, clear community boundaries regulating resources access and allegiances, and a shared cosmology (Milloy 57-64). Bison play a significant role in the cosmologies and legal orders of several plains Indigenous nations, often serving as a model of matriarchal leadership and non-hierarchical community organization. Just as the bison herds and their seemingly boundless numbers supported large, politically and socially

complex communities across the prairies, their extermination over less than a century devastated the economic and social foundation of the Plains nations.[7]

Though histories such as those discussed in the previous section offer valuable insight into bison as both a means of subsistence and a commodity, nêhiyaw scholar and filmmaker Tasha Hubbard argues that this focus "overlooks their other important roles as guide, teacher, and relative" (Call of the Buffalo 21). Indigenous scholarship on buffalo articulates human-animal relations as more expansive and intimate, and as a result, the stakes of species loss carry a different resonance. Indigenous writing from the prairies tends to reflect an orientation towards experience that Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. has described as "a fabric of life in which everything has the possibility of intimate knowing relationships, because, ultimately everything was related" (Deloria and Wildcat 2). Here, interrelatedness is not a metaphor, but rather a reflection of the reciprocities, obligations, and responsibilities that weave together land, humans, and nonhuman beings. Buffalo relations, then, not only encompass relations with humans, but also include relations with the landscape, plants, insects, birds, and predators. Examining the destruction of the plains bison herds through Indigenous scholarship, I suggest, generates a more nuanced account of human-animal relations, as such scholarship captures the ways in which the presence of bison on the land makes worlds possible. These worlds extend beyond subsistence to encompass the sustenance of politics, spirituality, and knowledge.

To this end, Hubbard's study of kinship between Indigenous peoples and buffalo demonstrates the multiple, literal relationships that structured life on the plains and the extent of the damage endured in the wake of species loss. Beyond physical subsistence, Hubbard documents the ways plains Indigenous peoples "took the buffalo way of life as a foundation for living in a good way, both for themselves and for their children and grandchildren" (*Call of the Buffalo* 9). Hubbard's analysis of kinship and the role of Indigenous creative expression in maintaining and renewing kin ties is grounded in knowledge imparted by Blackfoot, Crow, and Lakota elders, whose teachings emphasize buffalo as sources of guidance. To demonstrate this guiding relationship, Hubbard invokes both Wilton Goodstriker's explanation of how Blackfoot kin- and alliance-making processes are modeled on bison herd organization, and draws upon Crow elder Joseph Medicine Crow's description of buffalo as older brothers to humans and the Crow relationship with buffalo as closer and more proximate than with other animal beings (*Call of the Buffalo* 13-14). Such proximity is conveyed in the Lakota word for buffalo: tatanka, or "he who owns us" (*Call of the Buffalo* 14).

Through her research with Blackfoot elders and observation of buffalo, nêhiyaw political theorist Keira Ladner learned that the internal social structure of buffalo herds is one of non-coercive collectivity, held together by kinship and mutual responsibility rather than domination, and with a sense of balance between the male and female animals (137). These lessons from the buffalo are reflected in the non-hierarchical organization of Blackfoot communities, the absence of claims to coercive power over people and territories, and a model of leadership that emphasizes collective and collaborative decision-making (138-40). Buffalo live in smaller herds through the fall and winter, converging into massive collectivities on the plains in the spring and summer. Mirroring their older brothers, Blackfoot clans that had wintered in smaller camps would come together as larger nations in summer months where more abundant resources supported large gatherings (146). Discerned through careful observation of relationships to land, other living beings, and natural forces, Ladner explains that Blackfoot governance is not exclusively the domain of human agents, but exists as and is enacted through relationships with "all beings within a territory, and it is about people establishing a relationship with a territory and learning from that relationship" (125).

The centrality of buffalo relations to Indigenous ways of life on the plains meant that the extermination of the free-ranging had spiritual and psychological dimensions. Siksika, nêhiyaw, and Métis stories about this time, Hubbard explains, mourn the deep, generational trauma of losing buffalo relatives ("Buffalo Genocide" 300-302). The devastation of the herds introduced a time of confinement, wherein small numbers of surviving animals — such as the Pablo herd which will be discussed in the next section — were confined to state-run parks and zoos, and weakened Indigenous nations were sequestered to reserves and reservations that were fractions of their territories. Crow leader Chief Plenty Coups's description of life for his people after confinement illustrates this loss: "But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened" (qtd. in Lear 2). For Plenty Coups and his people the radical disruption of their relationship with buffalo caused deep grief and an unnatural shift in the entwined histories of the Crow and buffalo nations. The suffering of this loss and confinement did not completely nor permanently sever the relationship between buffalo and Indigenous peoples. Rather, Hubbard observes, "the relationship was altered by colonialism to one of mutual hardship" (*Call of the Buffalo* 84).

Indigenous histories do not necessarily contest the technology- and commodity-focused narratives of environmental historians; rather, they demonstrate the extent of human-bison relations and the stakes of bison loss as reaching beyond a settler capitalist economic framework. Thinking about human-animal relations through the lens of Indigenous experience and knowledge of interrelatedness — land and lively beings as literal relatives, as fellow nations — necessitates ways of approaching bison loss that more fully articulate the damage inflicted by the expansion of colonial capital in this region. The destruction of land and habitat is a loss of relations, of one's relatives. To convey the scope of loss, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains: "If a river is threatened, it's the end of the world for those fish. It's been the end of the world for somebody all along" (qtd. in N. Klein). The transformation of prairie grasslands into sectioned, owned, and ploughed farms that facilitated the emergence of a settler world in the west was the end of the world for plains bison herds. Further, as Plenty Coups's reflection illustrates, this was also the end of a shared world of human-bison relations.

**Part Three: Recovering Bison, Restoring Relations.** In the wake of their near extinction, bison became symbols of the need for conservation and of the stakes of failures to respond to precipitous declines in wild species. William Temple Hornaday's Extermination of the American Bison (1889) was crucial in placing bison at the fore of an emergent conservation movement. Under Hornaday's leadership, the New York-based American Bison Society formed in 1905 with the objective of "the permanent preservation and increase of the American bison" (*Annual Report* 1905 1). A critical moment for species survival was Michel Pablo's maintenance of a private herd of 800 bison on the Flathead Reservation in western Montana, the largest in North America.[8] When the United States government dispossessed a significant proportion of the Blackfoot territory under the Dawes Act in 1887 and again 1906, little range remained and Pablo was forced to sell his herd, which the Canadian government purchased for $245 per animal (Brower 38-42; Locke 16-21). The purchase and relocation of the Pablo herd to Canadian national parks was celebrated by many conservation activists, including the American Bison Society, which passed a resolution in recognizing the Canadian acquisition of the herd as the "most important acts in the interest of conservation of the noblest of our quadrupeds" (*Annual Report* 1911 36).

Despite the collapse of commercial hunting, the game management strategies that emerged in the early 20th century remained immersed in a mode of commodity thinking focused on balancing the accumulation and loss of game populations (Yarbrough 121). Herds placed within the boundaries of lands designated as public

parks or preserves were given a liminal status that Andrea Smalley describes as "not domesticated, but not fully free to roam" (Smalley 229). Laws drawn up to demarcate wild lives and spaces as common property — held by the state — had the effect of securing and fixing Indigenous life within a rationalized colonial order. Rationalization intensified in a post-WWII productivist policy climate, where ecological and agricultural management techniques were applied to public herds and an emerging commercial bison industry (Brower 51-84; Loo 139-47). Raised in a landscape carved into parcels of private property and intersected by roads and highways, commercial bison make up approximately 93% of the some 400,000 bison in North America today (Gates et al 57).

The approaches to conservation that emerged throughout the 20th century conserved not only bison themselves, but also a particular human-animal relation characterized by extraction and control. Settler methods for conservation reflect the limited articulation of human-animal relations evident in environmental histories of bison extermination. Just as an expansive account of interrelation and responsibilities emerges from Indigenous histories of bison loss, Indigenous approaches to conservation have, at their core, different perspectives on the role of relationships in restoration and, crucially, on the necessary focus of restoration work. A critical challenge for both animal studies and conservation policy is to develop methods of thought and practice that take seriously the reality of multiple worlds, as well as the many forms of relationships with and knowledge of living beings that circulate within these worlds and communities. How can theory and policy meaningfully articulate the multiple statuses bison hold within the intersecting and coinciding worlds of nêhiyaw, Siksika, Kainai, Salish, and settler peoples? If the processes of colonization not only disrupted subsistence relations, but also political, cultural, and spiritual relations between Indigenous and buffalo nations, then how might conservation practices be oriented towards restoring these more expansive human-animal relations in addition to the physical presence of bison on prairie landscapes?

Such a challenge requires openness to the ethical and spiritual dimensions of Indigenous knowledge as constitutive of truth, rather than their marginalization as "belief" or "culture" (Nadasdy 26; Watson and Huntington 259). To be sure, Indigenous scientists are interested in the ecological dimensions of bison restoration and the impact of herds' return on grassland biodiversity. However, Indigenous relations with buffalo nations extend beyond physical co-presence on the landscape. In this section, I compare two policy documents that outline contemporary visions for bison restoration: one grounded in contemporary ecological thinking, the other in Indigenous knowledge and

resurgence. Informed by the attentiveness to human-buffalo relations in Indigenous scholarship, I examine the conceptions of relations in each conservation vision. This analysis demonstrates how settler colonial logics of defining, ordering, and regulating land and life linger in much conservation work, as well as how these persistent logics are disrupted by Indigenous-led initiatives and scholarship.

***The Vermejo Statement: A Vision for Ecological Recovery of Bison.*** Developments in ecological science in the latter decades of the 20th century has led to the articulation of bison as a keystone species, situated as a central member of a broad network of land, plants, and animals in grassland environments. Recent research has examined the ecological functions of bison on the North American prairie and identified several key roles played by herds, such as encouraging landscape heterogeneity through grazing, wallowing, rubbing, and migrating (Coppedge et al; Coppedge and Shaw); converting vegetation into protein (Haines; Smith et al); and habitat creation for small mammals and nesting birds (Johnsgard). Contemporary approaches to bison conservation, such as those advocated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the recently revitalized American Bison Association, emphasize the importance of preserving the wild character of bison, who are best able fulfill these ecological functions "as an evolving, ecologically interactive species in large populations occupying extensive native landscapes where human influence is minimal and a full suite of natural limiting factors is present" (Gates et al 2). The challenge inherent in this more complex ecological vision of restoration is the lack of such natural, unoccupied landscapes on a continent fully mapped by private property lines and rendered intelligible through settler colonial logics of ownership.

Ecological restoration principles have begun to recognize human-bison relations as a tenet of restoration, albeit in a limited way. Many aspects of this emergent approach to bison conservation are formalized in the Vermejo Statement, the outcome of a meeting about the ecological future of the North American bison hosted by the Wildlife Conservation Society in 2006.[9] Jointly authored by members of conservation organizations, Indigenous groups, commercial bison producers, and land managers, the Vermejo Statement advocates a shift in focus from the marginal survival of bison to the restoration of bison in ways which reintroduce as fully as possible original bison interactions with the landscape, other animals, and with humans (emphasis added). This vision for ecological recovery of the bison is described as:

> multiple large herds move freely across extensive landscapes within all major habitats of their historic range, interacting in ecologically significant ways with the fullest possible set of other native species, and inspiring, sustaining, and connecting human cultures. (Sanderson et al 254)

Ecological recovery, then, is a project that will play out on a larger scale than the display of animals in public parks, zoos, and private holdings. As a result, the work of restoration is not just a question of science — agricultural or ecological — but also of ethics, politics, and culture (Sanderson et al 254). As Harvey Locke notes, Indigenous representatives in attendance insisted upon the inclusion of connection to human cultures in the statement (44).

Mapping the vision articulated in the Vermejo Statement prompted the collaboratively authored article "The Ecological Future of the North American Bison," which outlines the conditions for its realization (Sanderson et al). To ground the Vermejo Statement vision in more concrete detail, the authors develop a scorecard to measure seven major factors and 18 subfactors contributing to the ecological recovery of bison populations. "Indigenous cultural uses" is the only reference to Indigenous peoples or participation in the scorecard, which defines cultural uses as "hunting and use of bison parts for shelter, clothing, food, and tools" (260). This vision of Indigenous interaction with bison herds is articulated as a subsistence relation based on the consumption of hunted animals and is measured in terms of access, ranging from privately owned but inaccessible herds to bison living within traditional territories that are accessible without limitations (260). While the material use of bison was and continues to be an important dimension of Indigenous-buffalo relations, this is only one dimension of that relationship, as I have argued based on the insights of Indigenous scholars. The scorecard does not apprehend the spiritual, political, and social dimensions of the expansive relationships between plains Indigenous nations and their buffalo relatives. Framing Indigenous engagement with bison exclusively through hunting reflects a narrow view of human-bison relations.

While the scorecard includes Indigenous cultural use, none of its factors include references to Indigenous knowledge, science, or leadership. For example, the scorecard measures substantive capacity to manage herds as the "substantive scientific capacity to manage bison for ecological recovery" carried out by professional managers (262). While this measurement does not explicitly exclude Indigenous herd managers or Indigenous science, the fact that Indigenous management is not actively included is worrying. Paul Nadasdy has observed that wildlife co-management projects have

tended to selectively appropriate Indigenous knowledge and to marginalize Indigenous authority in developing and implementing policy (Nadasdy 37). The sole reference to Indigenous peoples as engaging with bison-via-consumption, and a notable lack of reference to Indigenous peoples as engaged in matters of management and knowledge, mirrors tendencies in Euro-Western social science and policy to delimit Indigenous knowledge to questions of culture, narrowly-rendered. Further, the characterization of cultural use as hunting or material consumption effaces the dimensions of economic, political, and spiritual responsibility that are also crucial aspects of Indigenous relationships to their buffalo. Buffalo as older brother, for example, is not intelligible in the Vermejo Statement scorecard.

The Vermejo Statement's broad, pragmatic approach to ecological recovery also has the effect of depoliticizing the status of Indigenous nations. The Vermejo Statement recognizes the many competing, high-stakes interests in bison conservation, including inter-national politics of transborder regions, perceived competition with ranched cattle for range, and concerns about diseases and genetic purity. While the statement identifies "the prerogatives of tribal nations versus government authorities in setting bison policy" (255) as one of the controversies challenging bison conservation, these concerns of Indigenous peoples appear akin to those of an interest group, like ranchers or sport hunters. Analogous to liberal democratic practices of "minoritization" that seek to represent Indigenous peoples as ethno-cultural minority groups rather than sovereign nations, the recognition of Indigenous interests in the statement does not meaningfully identify Indigenous authority (Schulte-Tenckhoff 68-71; Tuck and Yang 22-23).

The pragmatism that brackets localized interest groups also skirts the broader questions of private property, land title, and sovereignty at the heart of the 19th century bison extermination and retained in earlier conservation practices. Questions of land transfer or transformation in this vision are limited to the "stretch goal" of acquiring private property in sparsely developed tallgrass prairie regions for ecological restoration, contingent on the "consent of landowners and the political will to make it happen" (Sanderson et al, 257). The role of Indigenous nations is not mentioned. Given the history of exclusion of Indigenous peoples in practices of park-making and other modes of marking out land as "nature," there is reason to be apprehensive about the possibility that the acquisition of private property for ecological restoration would entail the recognition of Indigenous authority or reckon with colonial processes of dispossession (Spence 5). Further, the Canadian and United States governments have demonstrated

for centuries that the tide of "political will" flows in the direction of further dispossession rather than repatriation of Indigenous lands. At work in this kind of pragmatism, then, is the failure to identify the contingency of colonial logics, which naturalizes the conditions of marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

The vision for the recovery of the bison articulated in Indigenous approaches to resotration, and the argument that I am advancing, questions this state-led organization of land and life. By shifting the goal of recovery from "preventing absence" to creating "the presence of full, functioning nature that sustains itself and sustains humans as a unique part of that nature" (Sanderson et al 264), the bison recovery process mapped out in the Vermejo Statement recognizes and prioritizes human-bison connection, emphasizing in particular the connections of Indigenous peoples. This shift necessitates a re-thinking of human-animal relations within conservation policy and indicates the possibility of openness to including Indigenous knowledge in wildlife management. Just as the simultaneous inclusion of Indigenous cultural use and exclusion of Indigenous knowledge or science from the Vermejo scorecard demonstrates how a restricted vision for human-bison relations reproduces the limitations characterized in earlier conservation work, the re-imagining proposed in this article and by Indigenous scholars recenters human-bison relations in ways that interrupt, challenge, and rewrite these limits. By absenting Indigenous authority from discussions of land transfer and the representation of Indigenous nations as interest groups, the Vermejo Statement's pragmatism perpetuates the conditions of Indigenous erasure at work in broader settler colonial logics, knowledge, and policies. Ultimately, if these logics are not disturbed, possibilities for envisioning an approach to bison recovery that understands ecological and colonial damage as entwined will continue to be limited.

***The Buffalo Treaty: A Vision for Decolonial Buffalo Restoration.*** Indigenous scientists and scholars have continued to develop approaches to conservation and wildlife management that highlight human and non-human relationships. Centering Indigenous knowledge and authority, these approaches shift the emphasis of restoration work from the return of a species to a landscape, to the complete and meaningful restoration of relation. The work of restoring relations and responsibilities between humans, lands, and nonhuman living beings involves an attentiveness to context, history, and power that has the capacity to disrupt settler colonial logics and processes of defining, ordering, and governing land and life. *Conservation becomes a multispecies endeavor with decolonial possibilities.*

Boundaries enacted between Indigenous and Western spheres of knowledge tend to presume that Indigenous peoples are exclusively informed by Indigenous ways of knowing, thus are not properly "agents constituting scientific practice" (Watson and Huntington 275). This dynamic effaces the history of knowledge exchange between Indigenous peoples and settlers and denies the central role of coerced Western education in Canadian and American assimilation policies, which has forced Indigenous peoples to become conversant in Euro-Western ontologies and epistemologies in addition to their own. Both bodies of knowledge inform the work of many Indigenous people, including Indigenous environmental scientists such as Paulette Fox, who holds two degrees in Environmental Science from Canadian universities and is a recognized Kainai knowledge holder. Rather than replicate the stripping down of Indigenous knowledge to "data," Fox's species restoration work activates both Indigenous and Euro-Western sciences and incorporates spiritual and ethical dimensions of Kainai ontology. In a recent interview, Fox noted that her study of bison ecologies and advocacy for their return stems from a vision she had as a young child: "Out of nowhere they appeared, I could see shadows and I could see dark silhouettes — the buffalo. They were communicating with me" (qtd. in Segal 1:24).

The Buffalo Treaty is one contemporary example of an Indigenous-led, decolonial vision for species restoration. Cultural meaning and principles of conservation science come together in the Buffalo Treaty's recognition of interrelation as a truth discernible in visions and in ecology. For conservation and wildlife management policy, the Buffalo Treaty models the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, the recognition of Indigenous authority, and the integration of plural ways of knowing that is required for a full and meaningful bison herd recovery. Initially signed by eight Indigenous nations located both north and south of the 49th parallel in 2014, the Buffalo Treaty is an instance of collaboration and knowledge sharing among the signatories committed to restoring free-ranging bison herds in their historical trans-border homelands. Since 2014, more than 20 Indigenous nations and bands have signed the treaty. This inter-nation Indigenous initiative outlines responsibilities to regenerate cultural, social, political, spiritual relations with the buffalo; to use the gifts of the buffalo in responsible ways; and to align research and management practices with Indigenous principles of interrelation.

The Buffalo Treaty emerged out of several years of Indigenous organizing in Alberta, under the leadership of the Kainai First Nation. Kainai Elders gathered with youth to teach them about the importance of the buffalo in 2009, which inspired a series of

buffalo dialogues in the community and eventually developed into the Iinii Initiative (Little Bear, "Buffalo Treaty" 84). Named for the Niitsitapi word for buffalo, the Iinii Initiative's goals and methods have been guided by elders from the Kainai nation and include biologists, knowledge keepers, and political leaders from several Indigenous nations (84). Leroy Little Bear and Amethyst First Rider, both Kainai intellectuals and community leaders, and Paulette Fox, a Kainai environmental scientist and knowledge keeper, were key figures in drafting the treaty and building collaborative relationships across signatory communities, as well as with external conservation organizations and multiple state agencies.

The expansive conception of human-animal relations articulated in Indigenous histories and scholarship is at the heart of the Buffalo Treaty. The treaty opens by articulating the nature of the human-buffalo relationship:

> Since time immemorial […] Buffalo has been our relative. Buffalo is part of us and we are part of buffalo culturally, materially, and spiritually. Our on-going relationship is so close and so embodied in us that Buffalo is the essence of our holistic eco-cultural life-ways. (85)

Referring to buffalo as the relatives of the Treaty's human signatories, the agreement articulates relationships between the buffalo and Plains nations as mutually constitutive and based in reciprocal nurturing. The interrelation of Indigenous and buffalo nations here is not a metaphor, but the literal co-constitution of ways of knowing and being in the world. Articulating buffalo as relatives of Indigenous peoples does not, however, claim that these nations are the same. The human-animal relations described in Indigenous scholarship and activated in the Buffalo Treaty stem from an acknowledgement that there are different kinds of persons (Nadasdy 31). Muscogee scientist Daniel Wildcat explains that nonhuman beings have different experiences within the territories they share with humans and "know things that humans do not," thus relationships with nonhuman relatives open up plural ways of knowing and deriving meaning from the world (297). In this way, the relations of reciprocity and responsibility outlined in the treaty provide a model for nurturing non-coercive relationships across difference.

The Buffalo Treaty shares the vision for returning free-ranging bison to prairie landscapes outlined in the Vermejo Statement. However, the Buffalo Treaty takes an expansive view of return, in which relationships are a central feature. For example, Article I of the treaty defines conservation as a practice learned from Buffalo, "a

practitioner of conservation" (Little Bear, "Buffalo Treaty" 85). As a keystone species, the presence of bison herds on the prairies supports a web of relations — between plants, insects, birds, amphibians, and the land itself. Life flourishes when bison return to the landscape. In some cases, bison restoration can bring other species back from the brink of extinction, like that of the endangered Karner blue butterflies, whose numbers increased fourteenfold after bison were restored to the Sandhill State Wildlife area in Wisconsin (National Parks Service).

In addition to recognizing the role of bison in supporting life, the Buffalo Treaty's method of conservation requires the perpetuation and continuation of "our spiritual ceremonies, sacred societies, sacred language, and sacred bundles to perpetuate and practice as a means to embody the thoughts and beliefs of ecological balance" (Little Bear, "Buffalo Treaty" 85). This dimension of the Treaty vision acknowledges the critical role of human-buffalo relations in the histories of plains Indigenous nations. It also recognizes that Indigenous peoples have tended to their relationships with the buffalo and the spirit of the buffalo nation through ceremonies, stories, and language in times when interactions with bison herds have been impossible due to extermination and confinement. What the Buffalo Treaty seeks to restore, then, is not just the individual bison animal-body emphasized in early 20th century conservation work, or the large herds identified in the contemporary ecological recovery work. The treaty focuses instead on the free-ranging herd *as a community fundamentally in relation* with Indigenous peoples and emphasizes safeguarding the ceremonies, sacred bundles, and languages through which human-buffalo relations are activated.

Cultural and spiritual relations figure prominently in the Buffalo Treaty, but the accord also addresses economic, health, education, and research dimensions of bison restoration. Article III articulates the economic relations as rooted in historical practices as well contemporary uses developed in "an environmentally responsible manner" (Little Bear, "Buffalo Treaty" 85). The economic dimension of the treaty recognizes bison as a crucial source of material sustenance for Indigenous peoples in the past and identifies this aspect of human-bison relations as critical to Indigenous visions for the future. However, this recognition of buffalo as central to historical and contemporary economies is not necessarily a reproduction of the commodity relations and property logics of colonial capital. Rather, the Buffalo Treaty asserts the existence of economies that precede and exceed colonial capital and refuses the logics that dominate bison as objects of private property. Similarly, the treaty objective of providing wild, free-ranging herds "a safe space and environment across our historic homelands, on either

side of the United States and Canadian border" (85) prioritizes Indigenous territories over the claims of settler states. In affirming a responsibility to the buffalo as "our brother," the orientation to human-animal relations disrupts the Euro-Western species hierarchy and relations of paternalistic control that often undergirds conservation policy. The Buffalo Treaty is not only a vision for the restoration of bison and the revitalization of an expanded notion of human-animal relations, but also an assertion of life-ways, economies, and sovereignty outside of settler colonial logics and institutions. As an agreement authored by Indigenous leadership, the Treaty centers Indigenous knowledge and perspectives only selectively included in approaches like the Vermejo Statement.

The Buffalo Treaty was the impetus for the repatriation of a 87 bison from Elk Island National Park (Alberta) to the Blackfeet Reservation (Montana) in April 2016 and the restoration of a free-ranging herd to Banff National Park in February 2017.[10] In these early implementations, the treaty can be read as a mode of reparation for the horrors of settler colonialism that seeks to restore the very relationship between Indigenous and buffalo life targeted by this violence. Written nearly a decade after the Vermejo Statement, the Buffalo Treaty responds to the former's limited vision for human-bison relations by centering Indigenous approaches to responsibility and reciprocity. Rather than an oppositional alternative to the Vermejo Statement, I interpret the Buffalo Treaty as an example of how the meaningful incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into conservation work can create contexts for restored human-animal relations, animal-land relations, and the potential for less violent Indigenous-settler relations.

The Buffalo Treaty does not just call for the transfer of animals or the protection of flagship species of megafauna. Rather, it is a foundational agreement that seeks to revitalize human-animal relations that extend beyond the relations intelligible within settler colonial ordering of land and life — a relation the very existence of which challenges colonial habits. Existing rewilding and conservation reintroduction projects recognize that humans have dramatically altered the structure and function of the natural world, and seek to restore missing elements to defaunated ecosystems. But these projects tend to place humans and non-humans as conflicting, opposite parties. Restoration under the Buffalo Treaty, on the other hand, focuses on restoring a political, spiritual, and cultural relationship between humans and bison. This includes restoring bison-bodies to a defaunated space, but crucially includes the explicit task of working to reaffirm Indigenous sovereignty in dispossessed lands through rejuvenating relations between Indigenous nations and their buffalo kin. These relations precede the invasion of colonial property and conservation logics and persist in spite of them. By insisting on

reciprocal, equitable relations with buffalo, centering Indigenous knowledge, and asserting Indigenous sovereignty, the Treaty provides a model of the kind of conservation policy that can disrupt the broader settler colonial logics that have imperiled bison.

**Conclusion.** Given the centrality of the bison to the colonization of Canada, the surviving herds and the relations between Indigenous nations and those herds is a key site for exploring the practical work of decolonization. The 2017 reintroduction of 16 bison to Alberta's Banff National Park has unfolded in ways that respond directly to the Buffalo Treaty's call to center human-animal relations. Along with Parks Canada wildlife biologists, elders, knowledge keepers, and scientists from the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Stoney Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina nations of Treaty Seven territory and the Métis Nation of Alberta have participated in the planning and implementation of the reintroduction project. Parks Canada has stated that they recognize the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of bison to Indigenous peoples in the region. In practice, this commitment has meant that ceremony has been woven together with procedure. At key points in the reintroduction process, representatives of Treaty Seven nations have performed ceremonies for the bison to prepare them for travel to Banff and to welcome them back to their ancestral territory in 2017. In the summer of 2018, on the occasion of expanding the herd's territory to 1200km$^2$, elders flew into the park's remote Panther Valley to perform ceremonies to reaffirm for the bison that these montane valleys are a space where they will be nurtured and will roam more freely than bison have on the continent in more than a century (Derworiz). An exhibit explaining the reintroduction at the Banff National Park Museum also provides a glimpse of the braiding together of Euro-Western and Indigenous knowledge for this project. To illustrate the process of moving 16 bison across the province and into Banff's Panther Valley, a series of necessary objects are displayed: radio transmitting collar, ear tag, tubes placed over horns to protect the bison, shoes to outfit the park rangers' horses, and a tobacco bowl used in the welcoming ceremonies. To me, the presentation of these objects speaks to the kinds of conservation work that the Buffalo Treaty makes possible: conservation that meaningfully weaves together Indigenous knowledge with Western conservation science and that takes an expansive view of human-bison relations.

Animal studies scholarship offers a wealth of resources for understanding how Euro-Western species hierarchies both mark animals as necessarily distinct from humans — as killable objects whose deaths reaffirm the unique, dominating power of human life

— and delimit the range of relations between humans and animals to one of property ownership. The bison addressed in this article are just one of the many species that agents and processes of colonial capital have rendered exclusively visible through commodity relations and property logics. The transformation of free-ranging bison herds into commodities was a critical factor in their extermination in the late 19th century. Clearing the plains of bison not only secured the material and political conditions for settler invasion of the prairies, it also radically disrupted the robust human-animal relations of reciprocity and responsibility between Indigenous nations and their buffalo relatives. To move from this multispecies site of colonization to multispecies practices of decolonization requires the withdrawal of those forms of epistemological violence that animate policies of dispossession and elimination. Specifically, such a withdrawal requires ceasing material violence: unfencing land, releasing animal-bodies from the biopolitical thrall of classification and enumeration.

The invocation of nature/culture or wilderness/civilization binaries cannot alone accomplish this work. Rather than attempting to somehow imagine the conditions under which bison herds might roam in an untouched, uninterrupted wild state, decolonizing bison life and human-bison relations means disrupting capitalist and colonial property relations to create space for the relations and knowledge that have shaped interactions between Indigenous nations and bison herds for generations. As Métis artist David Garneau reminds us, reason and science are not the inheritance of Euro-Western cultures alone; Indigenous relations with bison include the spiritual, but also the scientific. Generations of nêhiyaw, Kainai, Pikanii, Siksika, Dakota, Blackfoot, Métis, and other plains peoples have developed and passed on best practices for bison population management, hunting and tracking methods, and techniques for preparing and using bison bodies. These practices and techniques exist alongside language, legal orders, stories, ceremonies, and prayers. In asserting Indigenous authority and recognizing human-bison relations as exceeding commodity relations, the Buffalo Treaty activates Garneau's call for decolonial practice that is not exclusively a revival of traditional practices, but is also a "direct challenge to colonial habits."

Indigenous articulations of human-animal relations are critical contributions to the intellectual work of animal studies scholarship — a project invested in the development of critical and methodological resources for analyzing the ways in which our social, political, and cultural worlds are co-produced by a multiplicity of human and nonhuman lives. The co-production of some worlds can entail the end of other worlds. Bison extermination was world-ending for plains Indigenous nations and their buffalo relatives. As I have argued, Indigenous histories articulate a more expansive, material

account of the human-animal relations harmed by bison extermination and make more urgent the criticality of bison restoration. These same histories and the visions for restoration they inform also articulate human-animal relations in ways that imagine what decolonizing bison life might look like and reimagine that life beyond the strictures of settler colonial logics.

**Notes**

1. Settler colonialism is a structure of political relations where a settler population seeks to eliminate and replace native forms of life through the permanent invasion of settler communities. Settler colonialism is, as Patrick Wolfe observed, "a structure not an event" and involves an uneven, but continuous and ongoing process of dispossession and settlement (388). This structure involves the continued attempt to acquire and maintain access to territory through the elimination of the land's original inhabitants and their political and legal claims to authority (Coulthard; Simpson, "Mohawk"; Pasternak). The structure of settler colonialism and the techniques through which it is enacted are varied, made to mutate and adapt in response to the particular conditions of different socio-historical conditions and the particular characteristics of communities and territories.

2. Important formulations of this argument and contributions to knowledge about human-animal and multispecies relations have been made by Kim TallBear; Billy-Ray Belcourt; Zoe Todd, "Fish Pluralities"; Tasha Hubbard, *Call of the Buffalo*; John Borrows; Vine Deloria Jr.; Robin Kimmerer; Leanne Simpson; Leroy Little Bear, *The Last of the Buffalo*; N. Scott Momaday, Vanessa Watts and many others.

3. Bison and buffalo are used interchangeably in this article. Bison is the official and scientific name and there are two species North America: plains bison (*Bison bison bison*) and wood bison (*Bison bison athabascae*). This article is primarily concerned with the plains bison. Buffalo is the preferred term used by many Indigenous peoples. The name for buffalo in the Niitsitapi or Blackfoot language is iinii, which I also reference.

4. Todd explicitly warns that "to over-generalize local human-fish relations is a great disservice to the nuance and complexity of these personal stories" of fishing in Paulutuuq ("Fish Pluralities" 231).

5. In his study of the political economy of the buffalo hide trade, Alan M. Klein draws attention to the post-1870 shift in production towards white hunters: "Of the 1.2 million buffalo skins shipped east by various railroads during the years 1872 and 1873, only 350,000 (roughly 28 percent) were supplied by Indians. Simply put, Native Americas were no longer the sole, or even the primary providers of buffalo products in the hide trade" (155-6). Arthur J. Ray (212) and Frank Roe (485) have also demonstrated the significance of white hunters to both the hide trade and the ultimate decline of the bison in Canada.

6. Indigenous hunters were also actors in the provisions and hide markets, as indicated to varying degrees in each of these histories. However, existing analyses limit their scope to the extent of Indigenous participation in emergent capitalist markets, rendering human-bison relations primarily through the lenses of exchange- and subsistence-value.

7. While bison were the principal resources for the Indigenous nations of the west, gathering and preserving berries and root vegetables and hunting smaller prairie game were important supplementary activities. Sarah Carter observes that this work was usually carried out by women, thus is frequently overlooked by histories centered on the better-documented histories of masculine activities (60).

8. Along with belated state efforts, histories of early conservation emphasize the work of settlers, such Pablo's business partner Charles Allard, as well as C.J. "Buffalo" Jones, Charles Goodnight, and Charles Alloway and James Mackay, Fred Dupree, and Charles J. Jones (Locke 11-15; Smalley 225-27). While some histories note Pablo's mixed Blackfoot ancestry, Hubbard and Locke argue that the crucial contribution of Latatitsa, a young Pend d'Orielle man, is overlooked despite the robust tribal memories of this early Indigenous conservation work (Hubbard 89; Locke 11-15). Following a vision received by his father, Latatitsa brought six bison over the Rocky Mountains into Salish territories, beginning the herd Pablo and Allard would later acquire.

9. The statement was crafted at the eponymous Vermejo Park Ranch in New Mexico. Ted Turner, billionaire founder of CNN, owns the ranch, has established the Turner Endangered Species Fund and Turner Biodiversity Divisions, and is the largest single owner and manager of plains bison. The Vermejo ranch is home to a herd of 1,500 bison — larger than any single conservation herd in North America — and is one of 14 large ranches owned by Turner Enterprises (Gates et al 64).

10. These bison are direct descendants of the herd the Canadian government purchased from Michel Pablo in 1907, whose ancestors were first brought west of the Rocky Mountains by Latatista. More than just the transfer of a bison herd, Blackfoot peoples saw the 2016 restoration effort as a homecoming.

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