

# More Than Talking Animals: Charles Alexander Eastman's Animal Peoples and Their Kinship Critiques of United States Colonialism

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IN THE LAST TALE OF *RED HUNTERS AND THE ANIMAL PEOPLE* (1904)—the earliest published collection of tales from Dakota oral tradition, by Charles Alexander Eastman, an Isanti (Santee Dakota or “Sioux”)<sup>1</sup> author and physician—a trio of young men go to visit their brother-in-law, Sheyaka, who is “a renowned hunter [among] the Sioux.” As Sheyaka regales them with stories of talking animals, his audience begins to voice doubt about the veracity of his account, and their dialogue reads like a Platonic interrogation of animal language, intelligence, presence, and, finally, collective presence or peoplehood. Near the start of their conversation, though, one of the three young men, Kangee, insists, on the basis of his observations of a mother doe and her fawn, that “there is good ground for saying that the wild animals have a language to which we have not the key.” But Katola, “the doubter,” counters: “[Kangee] has made the doe and fawn real people. They can neither speak nor reason . . . and the fawn hides [from hunters] because it is its nature to hide, not because the mother has instructed it.”

Katola's doubt, in its ascribing to “nature” essential differences between human beings and animals, forms an analogue to categories of race by which Euro-Americans historically viewed indigenous peoples as savage, less than human. Through Katola's doubt, Eastman ironically maps a genealogy of racial difference onto the animals whom (or which) human beings, enfranchised by their ability to ponder the ontological status of nonhuman others, sit around and leisurely discuss. But instead of carrying the analogy of Dakota human being to Euro-American colonizer to its full extent, Eastman's story ultimately refuses any absolute ontological distinction between human beings and animals, instead asserting across boundaries of difference the ways in which human beings are like animals

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in behaviors they have learned from them. Roving from one animal example to another, recounting the bear's "drunken" ferocity and vanity, the wolf's cunning, and so on, Sheyaka concludes that "we Red people" have learned mimetically from the actions of all the different animals. "We Red people have followed their example," says Sheyaka: "we teach our children to respect and obey their elders." This summing up by the "old storyteller" effectively forecloses the prior debates about animal language and intentionality, declaring instead that not only are animals exemplary peoples but also that their peoplehood, as with that of human beings, inheres in maintaining kinship norms of intergenerational respect and obedience.

Recalling that Eastman's animal stories began to appear in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1893, the same year Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* tales were published, we might imagine an Eastman whose aesthetics reproduced, or in some sense apologized for, a colonial status quo. Robert Warrior, in *Tribal Secrets*, reads Eastman's oeuvre as an attempt to gain "sympathy from white audiences for the difficult . . . process [for Native Americans] of being American citizens," adding that Eastman's memoirs are "highly sentimental accounts of his childhood in which he portrays Natives as needy for, worthy of, and ready for inclusion in mainstream civilization" (8). Such a view captures the mediating aspects of Eastman's life and work but unfortunately ascribes an assimilationist motive to both. The positionality of Eastman is complex: born into a Wahpeton Dakota family in 1858, a graduate of Carlisle Indian School and Beloit College, a star football player for Dartmouth, and trained at Boston University as a physician, he also was one of a small group of Native American intellectuals constituting the leadership of the Society of American Indians, a Progressive Era organization that worked to air Native grievances and lobbied for the passage of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act.

Given his cosmopolitan career, Eastman was often described by his contemporaries as both representing Native tradition and validating the success of United States policies of allotment and assimilation. One Chautauqua brochure for a 1904 Eastman lecture touted, "This strong and interesting Sioux American . . . has come to be regarded as the literary spokesman of his race," and emphasized his position at the brink of both the "natural" world of his "tribal" boyhood and the "artificial" one he encountered at Dartmouth College and Boston University ("Dr. Charles Alexander Eastman"). Such reception, typical of Eastman's white audiences, reproduced the colonial binaries of savage/civilized, nature/culture, and tribal/liberal—binaries that, I argue in this essay, Eastman's work deconstructs even as it repeats their constitutive terms. Such binaries are ostensibly captured in the title of what may be his best-known autobiographical work, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916), where Eastman himself often seems to avow the irreconcilable differences between his indigenous upbringing and the white "civilization" in which he served as a lobbyist and popularizer of Dakota politics, culture, and philosophy. But more often than not, his writings suggest the complexity of multiple identifications—and of how they relate to national belonging—without offering any such easy division into worlds or selves. As Mark Rifkin asserts about the Mahican sachem Hendrick Aupaumut, indigenous political resistance in the context of legal and cultural colonialisms may be less an effort to reconcile "worlds" than to "make modes of indigenous peoplehood intelligible within the legal and political discourses of the settler state" ("Remapping" 5).

Building on Rifkin's insight, this essay argues that Eastman's manner of playing Indian for white audiences reads as a complexly ambivalent but nonetheless sustained act of resistance to what Patrick Wolfe identifies as settler colonialism's logic of eliminating

indigenous peoples for the sake of greater access to territory (388). More specifically, Eastman's children's stories invoke traditional Dakota stories and knowledge, and the literary representations of *tiospaye* (literally "camp circle," meaning "extended family") kinship networks embedded in them, as political frameworks with which to analyze and criticize the United States' dispossession of Dakota lands. Instead of positioning Eastman along an axis defined by the poles of either traditionalism or assimilation to settler civilization, I examine how his talking animals recover and rearticulate Dakota peoplehood, and the kinship-based ethical relations of gift giving and receiving at its core, as an imaginative act of decolonization. His idealizations of Dakota modes of sociality are, to put my argument somewhat differently, a means for him to rework and reinvigorate what were and remain historically sovereign forms of Dakota relation based in Dakota cosmology. Neither purely traditional nor assimilated, his fictional remakings of Dakota kinship demonstrate the flexible adaptiveness that Scott Richard Lyons describes when he asserts "the reality of Indian time on the move" (13).

In finding Eastman's fiction to be grounded in a Dakota relationality where power appears as something to be shared among human beings and nonhuman beings and where the political is mediated by kinship norms of economic sufficiency and reciprocal giving, we may enrich existing tribal-nationalist approaches (Ortiz; Warrior; Weaver; Weaver et al.; Womack) to the reading of Native American literatures in their relevant intellectual, cultural, and political contexts. We may also further develop Penelope Myrtle Kelsey's view of Eastman as a "resistance writer" who drew on and affirmed "Dakota cultural practices, identity, and *tiospaye* to a presumably misinformed audience." While Kelsey orients us through her readings of "tribal genres" toward meanings that, all told, loosely signify Dakota nation-

hood (55), her analysis does not explicate the relational logics underlying those genres. Nor does her reading reveal how the tribal nation form—and its provocative extensions of kinship to and with nonhuman beings—works effectively to narrate nonstatist possibilities while also producing a clearly anticolonial imaginary. In this essay I draw out such linkages between the political resistance and the relational logics that both underpin Dakota nationhood and motivate Eastman's anticolonial criticism.

More than an expression of sovereignty rooted in structures of federal recognition or in mimicking the narrations of Nativeness enacted in federal law, Eastman's political critiques through animal peoples attempt to defederalize Dakota peoplehood. That is, his animal tales do precisely what Joanne Barker has called for in Native Americans' present-day decolonization struggles—namely, "to get outside the political legacies of plenary power doctrines, colonialism, and racism and to reimagine the possibilities for Native governance and social relationships" (155). Such a reimagining demands, at least from a dominant-culture perspective, something of a temporal shift, in that the peoplehood imaginary of Eastman allows him to remember forms of sociality and diplomacy that existed before the colonial creation of reservations, when human beings and animal people inhabited a complex network of nations whose boundaries were continually made, transgressed, and reasserted. Instead of simply giving voice to wolves and bears, the voicing of political critiques and demands for the recognition of rights for animal persons acts as a decolonizing gesture and a reclamation of kinship practices that were quite literally outlawed under federal Indian law.<sup>2</sup> Just as Hohay does in the closing story of *Red Hunters*, Eastman's cast of both human and nonhuman characters in the rest of that collection dramatize kinship ties, or their abrogation, as the result of diplomatic accords upheld or failed. They also implicitly

argue for a form of peoplehood that, because it claims not just equality but also ethical superiority for nonwhites, contests United States legal definitions of Native Americans as being constitutively inferior.<sup>3</sup>

In order to trace the place-based kinship ethics of Eastman's animal tales, I begin with a brief explication of the *tiospaye*, its main differences from liberal notions of the individual and of Christian citizenship, and its resistive possibilities. I then move to the criticism of United States civilization that appears in his *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, contrasting its renderings of United States temporality with a temporality of pausing that is implicit in the traditional Dakota storytelling genre of *hituŋkaŋkaŋpi* (literally, "long ago stories," but usually glossed as "myths"). I then briefly read his descriptions of Dakota philosophy in his autoethnography *The Soul of the Indian* (1911). In viewing his animal tales as criticisms of United States colonialism, criticisms that by the time Eastman writes *From the Deep Woods* become far less oblique, we see more clearly his innovative translation of Dakota politics into narratives that at once sentimentally appeal to and challenge colonial culture, and we see that these challenges come specifically in relation to Dakota conceptions of peoplehood, power, and gift.

### The Dakota *Tiospaye* as Critical Relationality

Throughout *Red Hunters*, Eastman's animals model good kinship behaviors that attest to their status as distinct tribes, nations, or peoples<sup>4</sup> that are inassimilable to other tribes, nations, or peoples. This modeling constitutes a Dakota formation of peoplehood that contests settler structures of the racialized, atomized family in the liberal nation-state. Such structures drove Indian policy in its adoptions of compulsory education programs for Native children, whose removal from their families into residential and day schools depended, as Beth Piatote asserts, "upon public

understandings of family and tribal-national domesticities as aberrant formations that were hostile to the settler states of the United States and Canada" (49).

In addition to breaking up Native families through educational reforms, the United States settler state attempted to transform kinship and property relations through the 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act, which granted landholdings, usually of 165 acres, to individual American Indians, replacing communal tribal holdings and extending United States federal law and protections to the new landholdings. The language of the act contained explicit provisions for the civilizing of the Indian, making adoption of "the habits of civilized life" a condition of the act's extension of United States citizenship ("Dawes General Allotment Act"). This construal of the bourgeois individual as not only the bearer of rights and citizenship but also as the locus for reckoning kinship is based broadly in the progressive rhetorics of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The conflation of civilizing, Christian, and individualistic discourses typified a heterosexual imaginary in which the nuclear family was enshrined as paradigmatic. As Lucy Maddox notes in *Citizen Indians*, this conflation was invoked by white Protestant reformers like Lyman Abbott and Merrill Gates, who saw "the reservation Indian" as a "generic figure, shaped—and limited—entirely by communal, tribal values and thus unfit for the kind of individualizing competition that characterized Christian citizenship" (80). Thomas Biolsi describes how the state constructed new kinds of Lakota individuals beginning in the 1880s through four main modes of subjection: property ownership, determination of competence (to own land), recording of blood quantum, and recording of genealogy. Although Biolsi places the beginning of the construction of the modern Lakota individual in the reservation period (after 1878), the colonial introduction of a modern subject began in earnest among Eastern Dakota as early as 1830, when

the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions established their Dakota Mission at Lac qui Parle, in what is now Minnesota, bringing with them a progressive rhetoric that wed Jesus with the plow (*First Fifty Years; Dakota Mission*).

Against such antitribal pressures of early missionization and later allotment policy, Eastman deployed *tiospaye* ethics and notions of peoplehood as assertions of tribal solidarity, persistence, and resilience. As Rifkin argues in *The Erotics of Sovereignty*, Native peoplehood discourses may describe “modes of indigeneity—knowledge, relations to place, and forms of collectivity—that defy state narratives and survive despite being targeted for eradication” (83–84). Other Native studies scholars have asserted important linkages among long-standing relations to land, kinship, and political resistance in their efforts to make more legible the political stakes of peoplehood discourses (Innes; Justice, “Go Away” and *Our Fire*; Moreton-Robinson; Stremmler). The issue of legibility is especially important in Eastman, since I read his children’s tales as criticizing United States colonialism on the basis of tribal epistemologies that were probably missed by his largely white audience and that are still relatively obscure in the secular academy—existing liminally, as Jodi Byrd writes, “in the ungrievable spaces of suspicion and unintelligibility” (xv).

The visions of relationality that Eastman’s talking animals invoke are political ones rooted in the Dakota *tiospaye* as historically lived through the unit of the band. As Alan Trachtenberg explains in his reading of Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota author, “the word *Tiyospaye* [sic] might be understood as meaning those ties of affection and obligation typical of Native families” (282). The obligations Trachtenberg refers to are the many social acts that constitute what Ella Cara Deloria simply calls honoring, which is both a precondition and an ongoing guarantee for social being: “To have standing, one must

have someone, or some persons, who *cared* for him; cared for him enough to honor him; to benefit others in his name.” As a social object that individuals realize through maintaining those ties, *tiospaye* also creates and reproduces communal values, or “the customs and expectations that gave the *Oyate* [the people] its distinctive character, what might be translated into Western terms as its *national* ideals” (“Dakota Ceremonies” 4). It is a shorthand for ethical intersubjectivity, the matrix of kinship relations that help bring about the good life or, in Standing Bear’s words in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933), “ease and comfort in equal measure to all” (123).

I view Eastman’s writing of Dakota ethics as a kind of reinscriptive performance, through which Eastman is able to engage the coloniality of United States nationhood and to imagine the nation form as emergent from the embodied, quotidian details of living in long-occupied lands. The conceptual and cosmological<sup>6</sup> implications of how people live moral codes inform how I read his depictions of Dakota kinship relationality. In practice, the extended family bridges cosmology and political action; it was the basic unit of Dakota territoriality because it provided the familial metaphors on which gifting, whose ritual sharing of power is at the heart of diplomacy, is founded. In the *tiospaye*, one sees the dynamic relation between Dakota and non-Dakota forms of land tenure and how the Dakota historically reproduced, through a broad constellation of social forms, including ceremony, myth, hunting and fishing, and household practices, the enduring, flexible networks of kin. Instead of being a static entity that was forced to continually retreat from the state, the Dakota reproduced *tiospaye* connections to their environment and to one another. *Tiospaye* and gifting ultimately suggest a view of cosmological plenitude, of the courage to adapt and endure as a people.

Deloria writes, in her popular ethnography *Speaking of Indians*, that observing the

dictates of a nonbiological kinship was “the ultimate aim of Dakota life” and that kinship held “all Dakota people . . . together in a great relationship that was theoretically all-inclusive and co-extensive with the Dakota domain” (25, 24). By “domain” she means not only ancestral lands but also the affective and ethical textures of lived experience and relationship with other Dakota persons. Her defining of kinship against the idea of the bourgeois individual thus refuses the liberal convergence of race, class, and gender around heterosexual, monogamous marriage and the nuclear family. By widening kinship to include animals, spirits, and the land, she troubles the distinction between nature and culture and so sets the stage to recover, as a site of resistance, a nature that federal Indian law has discredited by instrumentalizing it and regarding it only as property. Peoplehood, then, is a fluid sort of kinship: national or political but not statist, with communities rather than individuals as the bearers of rights. I gloss this articulation of kinship as critically relational: nonstatist norms of gifting, reciprocity, and material sufficiency mark the moral limits, if not the failures, of state capitalism.

### Competing Temporalities

The affable storytelling style of *Red Hunters* (one 1905 reviewer notes that “the book is simply and pleasantly written, with no affectation or mannerism”) earned Eastman a white readership that saw the animal stories as differing “not as widely as might be wished from the white man’s animal tales now so numerous” (“Charles Eastman”), yet the stories also cite Dakota oral traditions and their relational frameworks. They demonstrate what Kevin Bruyneel calls the refusal of “false choices” between political positions “framed by the imperial binary” (217) of savagery/civilization. Eastman’s citations of Dakota oral tradition, while couched in a capitalistic discursive field (Euro-Western publication)

and written mainly for a white audience, refuses any temporality in which boundaries exist “between an ‘advancing’ people and a ‘static’ people, locating the latter out of time” (Bruyneel 2).

Historically, stories from Dakota oral tradition were heard with careful attention as they were passed down from grandparents to grandchildren. Waziyatawiñ (Angela Wilson), in “Grandmother to Granddaughter,” describes this ethic of careful listening as being “rooted in a deep sense of kinship responsibility, a responsibility that relays a culture, an identity, and a sense of belonging essential” to her life (9). Listening and remembering, both ways to uphold one’s kinship obligations, are also profoundly relational activities, grounding the audience “in the needs and concerns of the people whom these narrative actions ultimately benefit in terms of collective memory and social cohesion” (Martinez 42). Oral tradition, and the stories Eastman drew from it for his collection, consequently embody one significant mode of Native historicity.

In his foreword to *Red Hunters*, Eastman explains that “the main incidents in all of . . . [the tales], even those which are unusual and might appear incredible to the white man, are actually current among the Sioux and deemed by them worthy of belief.” The narrative genre he is working in is something like a fable but also quite different, in that it is more than fiction: “When the life-story of an animal is given, the experiences described are typical and characteristic of its kind. Here and there the fables, songs, and superstitious fancies of the Indian are brought in to suggest his habit of mind and manner of regarding the four-footed tribes.” If he is straining here to define genre in a realist-imaginary (or historical-mythic) dichotomy, his marking of the stories as belonging to a preexisting kind bypasses these dichotomies altogether. The Dakota genre of storytelling Eastman draws on is called *hituñkañkañpi*, which, as Waziyatawiñ notes,

refers in general to stories from the elders that teach about the past and often involve things of a mysterious nature, not easily explainable. . . . Some of the kinds of stories included in this category are the Uñktomi stories, those of the Oceti Šakowiŋ, or the Seven Council Fires, stories about animals (whether the rabbit, wolf, bear, eagle, or others) . . . and other “how they came to be stories” (*Remember* 63)

To this pedagogical list she adds that these stories are also a gift from ancestors to help ensure the survival of the people, and that they “have been passed down through the generations and should only be told in the winter when snow is on the ground” (64).

Waziyatawiŋ's mention of the seasonal specificity of *hituŋkaŋkaŋpi* is evocative of Dakota ways of reckoning time: the *hituŋkaŋkaŋpi*, and Eastman's retellings of them in *Red Hunters*, locate animal-human interactions in a Dakota time that is distinctive in several ways. First is the pedagogical pause in the telling of the tales, from one night to the next. Since *hituŋkaŋkaŋpi* are often didactic, having a moral, and since their audience is primarily children, the daily gaps are necessary for the listeners to digest the teachings. Second is the grand pause of winter itself, when the *tiospaye* encamps until hunting season begins, so the storytelling is framed by the seasons. Another of Eastman's early collection of *hituŋkaŋkaŋpi*, *Wigwam Evenings* (1909), describes the sadness of one of the fictional storytellers, Smoky Day, “when the village breaks up for the spring hunt, and story-telling is over for the season” (“Twenty-Sixth Evening”). Finally, in its political aspect, the pause interrupts the forward-moving time of the United States nation and its progressive, civilizing rhetorics.

In *From the Deep Woods*, Eastman's criticism of “the warfare of civilized life” focuses frequently on the failure of United States citizens to share wealth and on both the cause and symptom of this failure, the mechanistic or spiritually evacuated quality of American

society (165). A crucial part of what made up civilization's state of perpetual “warfare” for Eastman was the existence of social inequalities and what he came to view as a corrupt, corrosive relation to capital. Describing his travels across the western states and Canada as a representative of the YMCA, he relates his disappointment in seeing the religiosity of Native converts, or “white[s] and nominally Christian Indians” lead “often to such very small results.” Such colonial religiosity “was a machine-made religion” and, further, “was supported by money, and more money could only be asked for on the showing made; therefore too many of the workers were after quantity rather than quality of religious experience” (141). Eastman's disappointment with the failure of Christian civilization to live up to ideals of equality reads as a jeremiad against materialism, the wealth making and wealth keeping that stood against both Dakota and Christian ideals of generosity. Understanding the close ties between modern nationhood and domination, Eastman deployed the term *civilization* derisively to mock United States policies and political practices, reserving the term *nation* for Dakota, other Native tribes, and animals.

More recent critical articulations of nationhood reveal the implications of Eastman's machine metaphor to characterize the American Christian civilization as capitalistic. Benedict Anderson finds that the social space of modernity is distributed in “homogeneous, empty time,” which likens the nation both to the “old-fashioned” (French realist) novel and to a sociological organism (26, 25). This temporality, reified as calendrical simultaneity and born of print culture, forms one basis for imagining the nation, and is created through our participation in the reification of the nation's temporality. But for Partha Chatterjee this reification is capitalistic:

Empty homogenous time is the time of capital. . . . But by imagining capital (or moder-

nity) as an attribute of time itself, this view succeeds not only in branding the resistances to it as archaic and backward, but also in securing for capital and modernity their ultimate triumph, regardless of what some people believe or hope, because after all, as everyone knows, time does not stand still. (165)

By historicizing Anderson's notion of temporality—as Eastman historicizes American progressivism—Chatterjee lays the groundwork for his later claims that the time of modernity is utopian, constituting only one possible imagining of temporality. “Politics here,” he concludes, “does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian” (132). A utopian narration of the nation works to subdue alternative concepts of temporality and intersubjectivity. Chatterjee's resistance to Anderson's universalizing sense of temporality is quite portable to Eastman's literary resistance, on the basis of specificities of place, to the claimed universality of United States national time.

### Kinship's Locales

A pause, because it is created by and through exchanges—like the sharing of a story between family generations or the more tangible exchanging of gifts that accompanied treaty ceremonies—is time organized not by universally reified spaces but instead born of the embodied encounter with a specific place. As such, it is basically anticapitalistic. The story “The Gray Chieftain” from *Red Hunters* underscores the importance of gifting among the Dakota and also depicts gifting's place-based, relational contexts. The “gray chieftain” is a “spoonhorn” ram named Haykinshkah, who is surveying with his mate the sun setting over the “inner circle of the Bad Lands.” This landscape harbors the gray chieftain's “ancient castle,” a butte that “had been the peaceful home of the big spoonhorns for untold ages,” and becomes home for Haykinshkah's lamb,

who is born that night. This story, as many of Eastman's animal stories do, casts the spoonhorns as a people who define themselves by customs and a continuous history of occupying the land of their ancestors. These customs are revealed in the ewe's caring for her lamb:

She gave suck to the lamb and caressed it for some time before she reluctantly prepared its cradle, according to the custom of her people. She made a little pocket in the side of the cave and gently put her baby in. Then she covered him all up, save the nose and eyes, with dry soil. She put her nose to his little sensitive ear and breathed into it warm love and caution, and he felt and understood that he must keep his eyes closed and breathe gently, lest bear or wolf or man should spy him out when they had found her trail.

The ewe's breathing into the lamb's ear “warm love and caution” and the lamb's understanding, which involves both affect and intellect, recall Waziyatawin's remarks on Dakota oral tradition as something intimately familial, “the story of one family, one lineage, reflecting the ancient village structure and the community that united those with a collective identity and memory” (Wilson, “Grandmother” 12). It also reflects the power of *hituŋkaŋkaŋpi* to “mark” their listeners with knowledge or “leave an imprint on the listener,” as do habits of others carefully observed (Wilson, *Remember* 64). Likewise, the making of a cradle out of earth literalizes rootedness and performs an indigenous ontology of intimacy with homelands. The spoonhorns' continuous occupation of territory and their enduring customs describe a common temporality grounded in the bodily knowledge that the land imparts. When two “wild hunters” named Wacootay and Grayfoot appear, having set out for Cedar Butte to kill a ram, we overhear them debating the location of their prey. “I think, friend, you have mistaken the haunts of the spoonhorn,” says Wacootay, “to test his friend.” In reply,



Grayfoot stresses the similarities between human beings and nonhuman beings in matters of attachment to certain places: “‘This is his home—I know it,’ replied Grayfoot. ‘And in this thing the animal is much like ourselves. They will not leave their old haunt unless forced to do so either by lack of food or overwhelming danger.’” Grayfoot’s remarks point out how attachment to a place may constitute a sense of home; they also reference Dakota resistance to dispossession by settlers.

As the hunters continue their search for rams, they begin to see how affective attachment adds another dimension to responsibility for the land and for the others who live on it. When the two sets of characters, human and ram, meet, the hunters catch their first sight of the gray chieftain, who “stood alone upon a pedestal-like terrace, from which vantage-point it was his wont to survey the surrounding country every morning.” In a conspiratorial aside, the narrator adds, “If the secret must be told, he had done so for years, ever since he became the head chief of the Cedar Butte clan.” With this aside, the story’s description of the ram as a chief becomes more specific, more historical, more bound to place, and, in the rehearsal of the ram chief’s credentials, it includes an ethic of sufficiency:

It is the custom of their tribe that when a ram attains the age of five years he is entitled to a clan of his own, and thereafter must defend his right and supremacy against all comers. His experience and knowledge are the guide of his clan. In view of all this, the gray chieftain had been very thorough in his observations. There was not an object anywhere near the shape of bear, wolf, or man for miles around his kingdom that was not noted, as well as the relative positions of rocks and conspicuous trees.

Haykinshkah’s survey of the land from the vantage of a central point, a node for the ram people’s relations with other animals, conveys more than a generalized comment on his perspicacity. His daily vigil and observations em-

phasize how the ram is intent on the survival of his clan and how that purpose informs both the sensual knowledge of his kingdom and the legitimization of his people’s place there. Vine Deloria, in *God Is Red*, describes a “sacred center” in “Indian tribal religions” that “enables a people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands, to relate all historical events within the confines of this particular land, and to accept responsibility for it” (66).

Key for my discussion of Eastman’s animal persons is Deloria’s linking of an embodied encounter with a land to a sense of responsibility for its well-being and for its inhabitants. The long-standing status of the animals as peoples always already places them in political relationship with human beings. In the spoonhorn story, the responsibility appears as an ethic of sufficiency. Despite the spoonhorn chief’s past vigilance, the hunters happen upon Haykinshkah during a lethargic moment, when the “younger members of the clan” were to assume the watch, and as he looks off “toward the distant hills,” they debate whether they should shoot him. Grayfoot, impressed that the ram “is a real chief” who “looks mysterious and noble,” argues for a delay, saying, “Let us know him better. . . . I never care to shoot an animal while he is giving me a chance to know his ways.” He also notes, “We have plenty of buffalo meat. We are not hungry.” This sufficiency argument shows up repeatedly throughout Eastman’s writings and is foundational to his criticism of the United States’ claim to be a greater civilization. The argument is received by Eastman’s characters in different ways. Grayfoot, for instance, speaks it as if it were a matter of universal knowledge among his tribe, while his friend, Wacootay, admits to his friend and to himself that “he had never thought of it in just that way before,” being “chiefly moved . . . in the matter of the hunt” by “the desire for meat.” Such differences index intratribal politics but also the need for, and possibility of, a

Dakota condemnation of the capitalistic logics of extraction and accumulation. After not shooting Haykinshkah and agreeing instead to track a ewe whose trail has excited their curiosity, they come upon the cave where the mother ewe has buried her lamb in its “cradle” but reveals the hiding place with “a faint ‘Ba-a-a!’” Again, Wacootay impatiently reaches for an arrow to kill the lamb, but Grayfoot stops him by reminding his friend that “we want horn for ladles and spoons. The mother is right. We must let her babe alone.”

After the ewe has fled with her lamb, the narrative elaborates its sufficiency argument by explaining why taking more than is needed from animals, is wrong. “After a long silence,” Grayfoot invokes an affective commonality beyond linguistic differences: “So it is . . . that all the tribes of earth have some common feeling. I believe they are people as much as we are. The Great Mystery has made them what they are.” In this summation, he conveys his sense of why accepting responsibility for both a place and those who dwell in it is appropriate if not necessary. Observing first an equivalence among “all the tribes of earth,” which bars ontological division among them, he returns to the story collection’s opening problem of viewing language as a marker of persons. A kind of sympathetic communication exists between human beings and animals. In “seem[ing] to understand their thought,” Grayfoot locates this power to communicate in a broader narrative of shared cosmological origins, in which “[t]he Great Mystery [Wakan Taŋka] has made the animals what they are”—that is, the “silent people,” as Eastman calls them in the foreword of *Red Hunters*.

### The Nation-State Translated

The complex figure of Wakan Taŋka, which is often translated as “Great Spirit,” appears as a nexus for interpersonal relations in both Eastman’s writings and Dakota philosophy.

In his essay “The Sioux Mythology,” Eastman evokes Wakan Taŋka through the image of the medicine lodge and a distinctly Dakota version of the biblical commandments: “Thou shalt often make a holy feast or a lodge feast to the God. Thou shalt not spill the blood of any of thy tribe. Thou shalt not steal what belongs to another. Thou shalt always remember that the choicest part of thy provision belongs to God” (88). His “thou shalt nots” place a premium on maintaining kin relations in ways that not only go beyond but also actually invert the Mosaic commandments’ prohibitions against bad relations with one’s neighbor. Through their emphasis on preparing a feast “to the God” or the Great Mystery, they have the effect of drawing people together in a ceremony of forging mutual obligations. As Raymond DeMallie notes, Dakota cosmology has historically reflected mutual relations among human and other-than-human persons. The *wakan* beings that made up Wakan Taŋka, numbering sixteen according to “some holy men,” included “sun, moon, wind, Thunder-beings, earth, rock, White Buffalo Woman, and a variety of invisible spirit forms.” These beings formed a “oneness” that “was symbolized in kin relationships that bound all together and provided accepted patterns for interaction.” This oneness was the template for human interactions, such that “human relationships—parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives—were reflections of these greater, more fundamental relationships established by the *wakan* beings” (81).

The foreword to *Red Hunters* expresses this kinship succinctly, naming the “grandfather” of “these silent people,” the animals, as “the Great Mystery,” because they know “the laws of their life so well!” “They must,” concludes a “philosopher and orator of the Red Men . . . have for their maker our maker. Then they are our brothers!” More than just affirming ontological solidarity, invoking the Great Mystery here authorizes

a discourse of adoption that is dramatized in the opening story of *Red Hunters*, "The Great Cat's Nursery." Eastman stages Dakota adoption practices, practices that resulted from white territorial encroachments, through a puma mother who adopts another puma's kit. The kit

was the age of her own baby which she had left not long before, and upon second thought she was not sure but that he was her own and that he had been stolen. . . . So she took him home with her. There she found her own kitten safe and glad to have a playmate, and Nakpaksa decided, untroubled by any pangs of conscience, to keep him and bring him up as her own.

The adoptive mother, who is later killed by white hunters, is not only the victim of settler aggression. Eastman is playing on, and extending, familial sympathies, while also showing the empathetic (and so also political or diplomatic) failure of whites who act as if they have no relatives.

In *Red Hunter's* most pointedly anticolonial tale, "On Wolf Mountain," a "tribe" of wolves convenes a council meeting to debate what should be done about a rancher's violent encroachment on their territory. The rancher, Hank Simmons, regards the wolves as mere nuisances until, starved, they attack his herd of sheep and threaten to kill him. By asserting wolves' rights to the land, based on an ontological (rather than historical) relation with it, and by representing their slow starvation at being driven off their land, Eastman replays the Dakota dispossessions that resulted from the 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux:

The large Mayala wolf with his mate and their five full-grown pups had been driven away from their den on account of their depredations upon the only paleface in the Big Horn valley [Hank Simmons]. It is true that, from their stand-point, he had no right to encroach upon their hunting-grounds. ("Treaty")

The wolves are not enemies of all human beings; they made alliances in the past with the Dakota. A Dakota-wolf reciprocity appears, for example, in hunting practices, about which Eastman recounts the custom that human beings leave behind "much meat upon the plains for the wolf people." Out of this mutual respect, this hunting by the wolves with "these Red hunters as guide and companion," an accord takes shape, in which the wolves and Dakota act together to drive away Simmons, whom the narrator derides as "quite another kind of man who is their [common] enemy."

Examining United States-Dakota treaty history reveals how a Dakota kinship logic extended to the land and its occupants. The human-wolf reciprocity in Eastman's tale serves as a basis for evaluating that history and the actions of settler society. In the 1851 treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, Eastern Dakota tribes ceded all but a thin strip of land along the Minnesota River ("Treaty"). The treaties made them dependent on annuities, many of which were withheld or lost to graft among Indian agents over the next ten years. The 1862 United States-Dakota War was a direct result of United States failure to uphold the kinship obligations that had been formed through the treaties and of the starvation among Dakota stemming from this neglect. Following a resolution by the *tiotipi* (Dakota Soldier's Lodge) to acquire food through force, four young Dakota men killed five settlers near Acton, Minnesota, on 17 August 1862. The first large-scale attacks against settlers in the Lower Sioux Agency the next morning followed another meeting of the *tiotipi*, who convinced the reluctant former spokesman for the Mdewakanton tribe, Taoyateduta (Little Crow) to lead the fight ("Timeline"). The motive for these attacks was similar to that of the wolves on Simmons, in Eastman's story. Before the attack, the wolves hold a council meeting in which they air their grievances against the human encroacher:

A gaunt old wolf, with only one eye and an immensely long nose, occupied the place of honor. No human ear heard the speech of the chieftain, but we can guess what he had to say. Doubtless he spoke in defence of his country, the home of his race and that of the Red man, whom he regarded with toleration. It was altogether different with that hairy-faced man who had lately come among them to lay waste the forests and tear up the very earth about his dwelling, while his creatures devoured the herbage of the plain. It would not be strange if war were declared upon the intruder.

A Dakota scout, after taking shelter in a cave where the wolf people reached their decision to declare war on the rancher, returns to a Dakota council meeting to report the news:

“The paleface,” said they, “has no rights in this region. It is against our interest to allow him to come here, and our brother of the wandering foot well knows it for a menace to his race. He has declared war upon the sheepman, and it is good. Let us sing war-songs for the success of our brother!”

In both these passages, the explicit statement of rights and the claim to territory (the Dakota do not “allow” the rancher “to come here”) powerfully show that the brotherhood between the Dakota and the wolves is more than an abstract figure of solidarity. It is a citation of both treaty history and Dakota knowledge of wolf-human relationships, as Luther Standing Bear recounts in his collection of Lakota tales *Stories of the Sioux* and Ella Deloria writes in “The Rock-Cave Dweller.” Both these texts speak to the importance of human-wolf reciprocity and personal sacrifice as Dakota ethical norms. In a Standing Bear tale, alliance is founded on an act of sacrifice by Marpiyawin, an old woman who leaves her camp and human kin to look for her dog even though a blizzard is immanent.

The alliance obligates the human beings to join the wolves in war for their mutual success. Kinship between the wolf and Dakota

nations, then, serves as an organizing logic for military and political action. This alliance is further motivated by the genocidal intentions of the white settlers, who Eastman represents as wanting to poison the entire wolf nation. A trader, chiding Simmons for his lack of initiative, says that extermination would have saved Simmons’s ranch: “Well, I told you before to take out all the strychnine you could get hold of. We have got to rid the country of the Injuns and gray wolves before civilization will stick in this region!” Here, Eastman’s portrayal is designed to show that the settler’s image of himself as a civilizing agent is distorted. As in a Lacanian mirror, non-Dakota readers see themselves for the first time reflected back grotesquely. His purpose is not only to show the wolves’ and Dakotas’ ethical superiority but also to shame his white readers. This tactic, based on the hope that non-Dakota readers will recognize themselves in the trader and Simmons, may well be mistaken, since the social work that shaming does is quite different in Dakota and other indigenous contexts than in liberal, secular societies, where, as Marx and Engels note in *The German Ideology*, forms of relation are transformed by competition into ones that are “purely monetary” (372).

Because of this capitalistic transformation, Eastman’s writings and citations of Dakota oral tradition stand as utopian efforts to enact noninstrumental relations. In *The Soul of the Indian*, Eastman gives an account of the world’s “first treaty,” made between a human being, Little Boy Man, and the animals, because the animals see Little Boy Man’s superior hunting ability. Created by Inishnaechage, the “First-Born” was a “being in the likeness of a man, yet more than man.” Little Boy Man was made out of Inishnaechage’s loneliness, who sought to make “not a mate but a brother.” Although Little Boy Man is Inishnaechage’s brother, he is also very much like a son, receiving “rules” and “counsels” from his elder brother, to

whom, Eastman writes, “we trace many of our most deep-rooted beliefs and most sacred customs.” The conflict between animal people (“who were in those days a powerful nation”) and Little Boy Man begins when Uᅅktomi, the spider, who sees the lone human being growing “in wit and ingenuity,” advises the animal people, “who all loved the Little Boy Man because he was so friendly and so playful,” to kill him before “he will be the master of us all!” In a scene that recalls the death and rebirth of Osiris, the water monsters act on Uᅅktomi’s advice, killing the first human being and hiding his body in the sea, only to see him “given life again” by First-Born in an inipi, or “sweat lodge.”

The mutual trust and relation of kinship between the first human being and the animal people were only interrupted by Uᅅktomi. Little Boy Man, after his death and rebirth, resumes his peaceful life with the animal people, learning their languages and customs, until Uᅅktomi again “sowed dissension among the animals, and messages were sent into all quarters of the earth, sea, and air, that all the tribes might unite to declare war upon the solitary man who was destined to become their master.” First-Born, seeing his brother sorrowful, “naked and unarmed,” arms him for the coming battle, which finds Little Boy Man fighting buffalo, elk, bears, thunder beings, and swarming insects (“the little people of the air”). With the help of his elder brother’s advice, Little Boy Man overcomes all his animal opponents, who sue for peace and make the first treaty: “[T]hey must ever after furnish man with flesh for his food and skins for clothing, though not without effort and danger on his part.” In return, human hunters honor those animals for the sacrifice of their lives, and the hunter, out of

respect for the immortal part of the animal, his brother, often leads him so far as to lay out the body of his game in state and decorate the head with symbolic paint or feath-

ers. Then he stands before it in the prayer attitude, holding up the filled pipe, in token that he has freed with honor the spirit of his brother, whose body his need compelled him to take to sustain his own life.

The human-animal relationship outlined in Eastman’s recounting of the first treaty, determined by both physical need and ethical agreement, demonstrates that the political realm extends to nonhuman persons who are bound to human beings in a web of kinship rights and obligations. It also indicates that war is justified when waged in defense and so is an anticolonial assertion about the just cause of Dakota in the 1862 war. The account is told not out of nostalgia but “to educate a derelict treaty partner,” as Robert A. Williams, Jr., notes in *Linking Arms Together*, and to allow “once alienated groups to imagine themselves as connected in a world of human diversity and conflict” (84–85). Eastman’s rhetorical purposes in the Little Boy Man story become evident—to educate, certainly, but also to shame and thereby draw back into proper ethical relation those who broke their promise to act as a good relative should, with generosity and sharing.

Whereas commodity forms of the gift predominate in a market society, gift giving among the Dakota, as among other Native peoples, is strongly linked to establishing and maintaining relationships at personal, communal, and cosmic levels. Kenneth Morrison argues that “if ‘power’ differentiates between personal entities who otherwise share the same manner of being, then the category ‘gift’ becomes the central ethical trajectory of religious practice.” Although he writes in the context of seventeenth-century Algonkian philosophy, this statement and his further observation that “positive, powerful others share; negative, powerful others withhold” apply well to Eastman (160–61). In linking power with gift, Morrison elucidates how kinship, as a way of allying with those out-

side one's people, went beyond metaphoric analogy to motivate behavioral responsibility and material practices of sharing. Instead of viewing whites as ontologically different from the Dakota, Eastman regards them as powerful others whose negativity lies in their withholding of generosity. That the Dakota were and are bound up in inextricable relationship with whites (note that Eastman was married to a white woman, Elaine Goodale Eastman) adds moral force to the shaming.

Eastman's translations of the nation form into Dakota terms through writings that sought to undercut the designative authority of United States law had the effect of asserting the primacy of indigenous ethics as a long-standing and legitimate basis for sovereign political action. In writing about the past, Eastman pointed to the failures of a national model that was founded on a temporality of abstract capital and on liberal assumptions about the necessity of individual ownership of property, an ownership that has lacked certain ethical protections offered by consensus politics based in a relational cosmology. The grossly unequal distribution of wealth, the graft, and a Christianity evacuated of communitarian concern that Eastman observed in his life up to the publication of *From the Deep Woods* find a powerful tribal retort in his animal stories. Their commitment to an acknowledgment of and respect for persons of various kinds out of a sense of the power inherent in alterity, and their commitment to an ethic of reciprocal gifting, constitutes a model of peoplehood (and, by extension, nationhood) that was and remains relevant as an alternative to the nation-state and its tendency to abuse its power. In constructing a tacit theory of political legitimacy that recognizes multiple national centers—indeed, a vast field of nations made up of human and animal collectives—Eastman suggests not just the critically corrective potential of Dakota philosophy and forms of governance for non-Native society but also their rehabili-

tative role for tribal communities in the ongoing work of decolonization.

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## NOTES

1. Historically, Dakota was the term used to describe a number of different bands, including the Lakota, or Tituŋwaŋ, who share kinship ties with both Eastern Dakota—who are often referred to collectively as Isanti (Santee) but are composed of Sisuŋwaŋ, Bdewakaŋtuŋwaŋ, Waŋpehtuŋwaŋ, and Waŋpekute bands—and the Middle Dakota bands of Ihanktuŋwaŋ and Ihanktuŋwaŋna. The alliance or confederacy of these seven bands is called the Oceti Šakowiŋ (“People of the Seven Council Fires”). For a full account of the divisions of Dakota-, Lakoŋa-, and Nakoŋa-speaking bands, see Waziyatawiŋ (Angela Wilson), *Remember* 4–5.

2. The 1883 code of Indian offenses created an apartheid-like criminal code that banned Native Americans from social feasts, plural marriages, ritual specialists (“medicine men”), mourning and memorial give-aways (regarded as “the destruction of property” that left the family of the deceased “in desolation and want”), the paying of dowries, and alcohol (*Rules*).

3. The legal doctrine of Native wardship was based on the construal of Native peoples in the United States as “domestic dependent nations” rather than independent sovereigns and as being subject to congressional power (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*).

4. Eastman's tales differ from posthumanist concerns for dethroning human sovereignty in that they emphasize ethical meanings that emerge at the crossroads of place (as land historically occupied), time (as occupation and care for a place), and peoplehood (the existential basis for and way of mediating power). In his tale “The Gray Chieftain,” Eastman glosses peoplehood as “knowledge.”

5. Joel Pfister's *Individuality Incorporated* reads part of the “ideological violence” of assimilation discourses in their being “packaged as regeneration through individuality” (45).

6. I view the cosmological as the generative unfolding over time—but unfolding most rapidly, most violently, in response to colonial pressures—of core cultural categories like those that Marshall Sahlins describes in his account of British-Hawaiian relations, *Islands of History*. He adopts a modified form of Saussurean structuralism, arguing that even with the “most abstract representation” of cultural categories, “which is cosmology,” there is a more or less fluid unfolding: “the categories are set in motion” (xv).

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