



The Routledge International Handbook of Indigenous Resilience

Edited by Hilary N. Weaver

THE ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE

This handbook provides a comprehensive and cutting-edge strengths-based resource on the subject of Indigenous resilience.

Indigenous Peoples demonstrate considerable resilience despite the social, health, economic, and political disparities they experience within surrounding settler societies. This book considers Indigenous resilience in many forms: cultural, spiritual, and governance traditions remain in some communities and are being revitalized in others to reclaim aspects of their cultures that have been outlawed, suppressed, or undermined. It explores how Indigenous people advocate for social justice and work to shape settler societies in ways that create a more just, fair, and equitable world for all human and non-human beings. This book is divided into five sections:

- From the past to the future
- Pillars of Indigeneity
- The power in Indigenous identities
- The natural world
- Reframing the narrative: from problem to opportunity

Comprised of 25 newly commissioned chapters from Indigenous scholars, professionals, and community members from traditions around the world, this book will be a useful tool for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of manifestations of wellness and resilience.

This handbook will be of particular interest to all scholars, students, and practitioners of social work, social care, and human services more broadly, as well as those working in sociology, development studies, and environmental sustainability.

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Edited by Hilary N. Weaver

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This book is dedicated to All My Relations. I acknowledge the ancestors and all beings who came before. It is because of their resilience, perseverance, and foresight that Indigenous Peoples remain. I acknowledge all contemporary Indigenous Peoples, our allies, and the other beings in our shared world. It is because of their resilience and strength that Indigenous Peoples continue. I acknowledge the generations yet unborn who will inherit and continue in relationship with the natural world. It is because of them that resilience is crucial.

Mitakuye Oyasín – All My Relations



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INTRODUCTION

Hilary N. Weaver

Indigenous Peoples continue today with distinct cultures and communities. This, despite predictions of our imminent demise that began in the early stages of contact with foreign explorers and settler societies. We remain despite concerted efforts at our eradication, both physically and culturally, perpetrated by many strong and prosperous nations. We are not relics, remnants, or historical artifacts. We are vibrant, contemporary Peoples, yet our stories and experiences are rarely portrayed in ways that highlight our resilience, our strengths, and the nuances of our experiences.

Beliefs about Indigenous Peoples are shaped by who tells our stories and whether they are told at all. Public narratives are influenced by various factors, including who has access to information and communication opportunities such as publishing. Contemporary Indigenous people are often invisible in public narratives and our strengths remain unrecognized. The material in this book is offered to help rebalance and reclaim content on Indigenous Peoples; content that is often limited in terms of its presence, breadth, depth, and accurate contemporary portrayals of resilience.

This book provides a range of content rarely found elsewhere. While some of the contributors regularly participate in academic and scholarly spaces, many others do not have previous experience sharing their voices in print or have not published their work in English. This book is an opportunity to bring these voices forward. It is an opportunity to share stories of beauty and strength that counterbalance the stereotypes, deficits, and omissions of Indigenous perspectives.

I find myself in a position of great honor and privilege editing this volume. I am Lakota and have spent my career working to ensure that social workers and other helping professionals recognize the importance of our clients' cultures and incorporate it in our work. One of the few Lakota words I remember my mother using when I was a child was *iyeska*. She used it to refer to me as a person of mixed heritage, destined to be a bridge or interpreter between Indigenous people and mainstream society. She believed that I was fated to participate in both worlds and held a responsibility for communicating about Indigenous people, cultures, values, and beliefs with those who come from other backgrounds. As a social work academic, it is a role that I continue to inhabit and one that has informed my work on this book project. It is my responsibility to bring forward this information to a wider audience and do my best to ensure

that our voices are communicated clearly, accurately, and respectfully. The intent of this book is to share, inform, highlight, and celebrate Indigenous resilience.

An overview of Indigenous Peoples

An examination of Indigenous resilience must begin with an understanding of what it means to be Indigenous. The United Nations estimates there are more than 370 million Indigenous people residing in 70 countries from the Arctic to the South Pacific (United Nations, 2021). Indigenous Peoples are descended from the original inhabitants of their territories and maintain unique social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics, remaining distinct from the colonial societies that now surround them (United Nations, 2021).

The term *Indigenous Peoples* is used within this volume to refer to the societies, tribes, or nations of people descended from the original inhabitants of the land. Inherent rights of sovereignty are vested within these collective entities. Accordingly, Indigenous Peoples often retain their own social and governing structures independent of settler societies. The term *Indigenous people* (without capitalization) is used in this volume when referring to multiple individuals rather than the collectivity.

There is no formalized, agreed upon definition of Indigenous Peoples. While nation-states have pushed for precise definitions to facilitate administrative control and limit legal obligations, international Indigenous organizations have emphasized subjective approaches based on self-identification. The result of these competing interests is more of a description than a definition. The working description of Indigenous Peoples developed and used by the United Nations is based on:

a) historical continuity, b) longstanding connections to territories, c) colonized conditions and d) nondominant status in societies. It also highlights a subjective dimension by stressing a) the intention of preserving Indigenous ethnic identity, b) self-determination and c) self-identification. This working definition remains widely used by scholars, international organizations and Indigenous Peoples themselves as it gives a general sense of who Indigenous Peoples are but stops short of providing a definitive conceptualization.

(Samson & Gigoux, 2017, p. 36)

It is noteworthy that marginalization and vulnerability are almost always key descriptors in identifying Indigenous Peoples. Indeed, an advisory group working toward the development of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples noted three principles for identifying Indigenous Peoples, including “a state of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion, or discrimination because these people have different cultures, ways of life or mode of production than the national hegemonic or dominant model” (Samson & Gigoux, 2017, p. 33).

Since being subjected to colonization is a common factor shared by most Indigenous groups, it is not surprising that vulnerability has become, at least from outside perspectives, a defining characteristic. Grouping large numbers of disparate people under one label, particularly one that presumes vulnerability, can be problematic. On the other hand, Indigenous Peoples are often oriented toward collective identities and have turned the umbrella label *Indigenous Peoples* to their advantage in ways that challenge vulnerability as a defining characteristic. While vulnerability exists, it is balanced by strength. Samson and Gigoux (2017) note that by adopting the label Indigenous Peoples, this collective of nations from around the world has raised their voices

strategically in the international arena. “The collective voices of colonized people . . . [have] come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages” (p. 34). Clearly, resilience is also a central element of what it means to be Indigenous.

Identity, mobility, and borders

The cultures of Indigenous Peoples are shaped by our traditional territories – whether that be oceans, plains, mountains, or deserts. Our connections with the natural world shape our belief systems. For example, sacred mountains define the territories of many Indigenous Peoples, including the Hopi and Navajo of the Southwestern United States. Sacred mountains are home to the Kachina spirits that guide and support the people. Being away from traditional territories can have negative psychological and emotional consequences for traditional people (Griffin-Pierce, 1997).

Although Indigenous cultures are shaped by traditional territories, Indigenous people should not be assumed to be stationary. Some Indigenous Peoples have migrated and adapted to new surroundings. For example, Polynesians sailed thousands of miles, creating a diaspora across the South Pacific (Case, 2015).

Some Indigenous Peoples have experienced forced displacements and relocations, often at the hands of settler governments. For example, in the United States, the Indian Removal Act forcibly displaced Indigenous Peoples from the Southeastern part of the country (Venables, 2004). Indigenous Peoples have also been displaced by extralegal encroachments of settlers. For example, miners and squatters streamed onto the Great Sioux Reservation in the 1870s, even though the US government declared the land was protected in perpetuity under the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). More recently, some Indigenous people in the United States have relocated from their traditional territories because of social policies such as the 1956 Indian Relocation Act that encouraged Native Americans to leave their reservations and move to urban areas (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Additionally, Indigenous people sometimes leave their home territories to pursue education or employment opportunities in other regions. For example, subsequent chapters describe how Pashtun people from Pakistan and Tamang people from Nepal work abroad and send remittances to family members back home. These various circumstances have led to situations where people whose identities are shaped by their traditional territories are living elsewhere.

The authors in this book explore the nuances of contemporary Indigenous resilience for people who live on and off their traditional territories, in urban and rural areas, and in diaspora such as communities of Indigenous Africans in Columbia and Indigenous Pacific Islanders in Australia. Other chapters tell stories of return such as young Indigenous Atayal people who had migrated to cities for education and employment returning to their mountain homelands to rebuild communities and restore traditional farming after a devastating earthquake. For many, Indigenous identity persists, regardless of location.

Sometimes, even when staying in place, Indigenous territories are disrupted. In many instances, boundaries and national lines of settler states have crossed us. For example, the Jay Treaty that established the boundary between Canada and the United States divided Indigenous territories, communities, and families, leaving some subject to Canadian policies and laws and others subject to policies and laws of the United States. This somewhat arbitrary division came with life-altering consequences for generations of people like the Haudenosaunee. Likewise, dividing the African continent into nation-states had significant consequences. Unlike Indigenous Peoples whose identities and territorial boundaries are traditionally shaped by their natural

surroundings, European colonial powers created new nations without regard to the natural world.

New states necessarily brought under their authority disparate peoples with different ways of life and languages to whom national identity was often meaningless. Governments attempted to tackle this in part by promoting policies that made the assertion of ethnic difference a source of conflict. Tribal loyalties and non-modern forms of livelihood were seen as antagonistic to nation building, and, as a result, some states – Tanzania for example – refused to recognize ethnicity as a legitimate category of policy or public discourse. . . . As history of civil war, coups d'état and genocide in Africa make clear, nation building along European lines has often been catastrophic.

(Samson & Gigoux, 2017, p. 31)

Our differences and commonalities

Indigenous Peoples around the world are members of distinct societies. Even within a single settler state such as Australia or Nepal, there are many different Indigenous Peoples who do not necessarily share a common culture, language, or social structure. There are also differences in when, how much, and the nature of colonial contact. Some Indigenous Peoples, like those in Canada, have borne the brunt of colonial societies for centuries, others remain relatively uncontacted like some tribal groups in Brazil, and others have experienced multiple colonial experiences such as groups in Central Asia who have had their territories occupied by other Central Asians, the British, and the Russians before emergence of contemporary settler states.

There are also commonalities among Indigenous Peoples. Although our colonizers vary, having our territories claimed by outsiders who established their own governments on top of ours is a common experience. We typically find ourselves minorities within our own traditional territories or displaced to regions that colonists initially deemed less valuable. Our cultures and traditions were considered inferior. We often experienced multiple concerted attempts at eradication and assimilation. Sometimes assimilation efforts were remarkably similar across national contexts. For example, education was used as a tool to disrupt cultural and language transmission in many places including Australia, the Russian Federation, Scandinavia, Canada, and the United States (Smith, n.d.).

Indigenous Peoples recognize and maintain relationships with various non-human entities and spirits including animals, waters, mountains, stones, and thunder beings (Pexa, 2019). Our interactions are guided by respectful, reciprocal relationships with these relatives. While settler societies typically treat parts of the natural world as resources to be controlled, Indigenous Peoples traditionally maintain relationships with all elements of the natural world. They are relatives that we interact with and respond to, treating them with respect rather than as commodities to be exploited (Wildcat, 2009).

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of Indigenous Peoples is a strong desire to remain distinct from surrounding societies while maintaining traditions and values. Indigenous Peoples also have the right to citizenship and participation in settler states, as noted in the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008). Willingness to participate in settler states varies significantly among both groups and individuals. For example, the Haudenosaunee (a Confederacy of six Indigenous Nations in the United States and Canada) continue to assert their nationhood through acts such as issuing their own passports. Many of

their citizens refuse to participate in what they deem to be interference in foreign governments like voting or responding to the census for the settler states that encompass them.

Settler states typically do not recognize Indigenous Peoples as remaining fully independent and many treaties or legal agreements define their relationships. For example, settler states often assumed legal obligations to provide educational and health services in exchange for land cessions. Around the world, however, most Indigenous Peoples indicate that settler states continue to fail in fulfilling their legal obligations. The following chapters provide numerous examples. These include the failure of Nepal to provide adequate and humane disaster relief services for Tamang people displaced by earthquakes and the failure of the United States and Canada to build adequate health infrastructure and basic services like access to clean water, compounding pre-existing health disparities during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

While all Indigenous Peoples have been impacted by colonization, we have many perspectives and diverse experiences. In this edited volume, Indigenous voices are brought to the forefront. Many of the authors write from their own perspectives and experiences, often sharing personal or family examples to illustrate expressions of resilience across a variety of contexts. These narratives are frequently expressed in the “first person,” describing our experiences, our families, our communities, our struggles, and our resilience. In this way, readers are brought in as guests, directly exposed to Indigenous truths and realities. Just as we have many different experiences with colonization and its manifestations, we also have many different understandings of decolonization and nuances of resilience. There is not one truth, but rather many facets to our experiences.

Colonization

Colonization involves the appropriation of lands, regardless of occupancy. It is facilitated by objectification, dehumanization, and exploitation of people and territories. Indigenous Peoples were presumed deficient and uncivilized since their ways of life were different than those of explorers and settlers. Colonization is supported by assertions of superiority in terms of race, gender, economics, and culture. Ideals of racial superiority were espoused by European powers who extended their empires and conquests around the world. The racial beliefs that infused colonization continue to manifest in expressions of white supremacy. Other conquests accomplished by non-white colonial powers (for example, Imperial Japan during World War II) also claimed legitimacy for their actions based on their racial superiority over the peoples that they invaded (Pang-Yuan, 2018).

Gender-based superiority in the form of patriarchy has also been a hallmark of colonization. Hierarchical relationships, where men were viewed as superior to women, and gender was perceived to be a binary construct were deemed “normal.” Different expressions of gender and sexuality along a spectrum without rigid categorization was considered unacceptable and immoral; a family should be led by a man who wielded authority over a wife and their biological children. Colonial structures emphasized heteronormativity and strict, limited ideas of appropriate family composition (Wilson, 2018).

Colonizers sought to replace existing cultures with their own models, priorities, and ways of thinking. Cultures are grounded in belief systems, ways of knowing, values, relationships, and spirituality. For colonization to be effective, these underlying components of culture must be altered. Belief systems and spirituality were undermined by missionary traditions that emphasized the superiority of colonizing religions. In many cases, the colonizing religion has been Christianity. Indeed, colonization in the Americas was spurred on by papal bulls, edicts issued

by the Pope that supposedly conferred legitimacy on European occupation of the Americas (Samson & Gigoux, 2017). These Christian-based documents and belief systems undergirded the Doctrine of Discovery, a 17th century principle loosely agreed upon by European colonial powers that the European nation that “discovered” a territory or people had the sole right to dispossess Indigenous Peoples of their land (Wilsey, 2017) and Manifest Destiny, a belief that settlers had a right and duty to expand across territories occupied by Indigenous Peoples (Greenberg, 2016). Christianity, although a monumental force in colonization, is not the only world religion that has claimed superiority and forced its beliefs on original populations that already had their own spiritual traditions. For example, Muslims spread Islam across much of Africa, supplanting many Indigenous spiritual traditions, long before colonization by Christian Europeans (Gooding, 2019).

Colonization is grounded in systems of exploitation, and as such, extraction of resources and enslavement of human beings become tools to support its economic foundations. Indeed, while preliminary reflections on colonization typically bring to mind a nation-state seeking to extend its territories through invasion and occupation, in fact, non-state actors like corporations have played significant roles in colonization. For example, the Hudson Bay Company in Canada and the Dutch East Indies company in Indonesia sought financial gain as they developed corporate bases and exploited territories and Peoples as a precursor or alternative to extension of settler societies occupying these areas. Economic forces, most notably capitalism, are a primary pillar that drives and supports colonization.

A complete understanding of colonization requires examining the role of other non-state actors. In addition to roles played by large corporations, as noted previously, other types of non-state actors supported colonial purposes and subverted Indigenous beliefs and practices. Religious organizations were some of the most significant non-state actors in advancing colonization. Indeed, many Christian denominations felt a moral obligation to convert others to their beliefs and practices. This predisposition led many churches to engage in missionary work and run boarding schools designed to assimilate Indigenous Peoples (Morrison, 2016).

There are other non-state actors who, like missionaries, have strongly held beliefs (often religious, political, or a mixture of both) whose members can become so driven and radicalized that they use violence to advance their interests. Nation-states sometimes align themselves with these extremist groups to promote their own interests. At times, gaining control over Indigenous Peoples and their resources is one of their motivations, while other times, Indigenous Peoples just happen to be in the path of competing forces. Terrorist groups have received funding and sanction from colonial governments when it suits their interests. For example, as described later in this book, both the United States and Saudi Arabia supported armed fighters to repel Russian forces in Central Asia, home to the Pashtun Indigenous Peoples.

In some places, colonial powers have withdrawn their occupations, such as the French leaving Vietnam and the British leaving the Indian subcontinent. Even in such instances, colonial powers leave an ongoing legacy. This is clear in countries like South Africa, where tensions and disparities remain between the descendants of settlers and those Indigenous to the land, long after the original occupying forces have withdrawn. The underlying values that legitimated colonization continue to inform societal institutions and are self-perpetuating.

For colonization to fully succeed, the original inhabitants must be eradicated or incorporated; thus, many colonial societal structures prioritized assimilation as an outcome. Sometimes, this was seen as benevolent and was promoted by people who saw themselves as helping Indigenous people. As Indigenous people became relegated to the lowest rungs of colonial societies, well-intended reformers and some Indigenous leaders of mixed heritage believed that uplifting

Indigenous people from their impoverished state and achieving equality could only happen by eliminating the safeguards that supported Indigenous people. For example, in Latin America,

revolutionary movements for independence were informed by liberal ideas of progress, equality, and freedom. In this context, the new republican order sought to eradicate institutions and laws, including the safeguards and limited rights that Indians had during the colonial period, in order to achieve the equality of the Indians. As a result, Indigenous Peoples were transformed into citizens and, in the process their Indigenous status was abolished. . . . Most Indigenous Peoples were transformed into landless peasants as they were deprived of their territories and resources.

(Samson & Gigoux, 2017, p. 23)

Particularly insidious and destructive is internalized colonization. Generations of colonization have often led Indigenous Peoples to absorb beliefs and practices that devalue Indigenous cultures. “Colonization decultured us. Euroamerican values of materialism, patriarchy, and individualism have been embraced by most of our people and have broken down any semblance of traditional governance in our communities” (Alfred, 2005, p. 84).

Decolonization as Indigenous resilience

Inequities are perpetuated by colonial structures, which, in turn, are supported by a colonial mindset. Both these structures and mindset are insidious, invisible, and accepted as normal in settler societies. Decolonization requires recognizing and taking active steps to challenge, reform, and redress colonial structures and ways of thinking – necessary steps toward promoting equity.

Rejecting a colonial mindset involves undertaking a journey from awareness to transformation. Members of both settler and Indigenous societies continue to be affected by colonization and both must go through decolonial processes. The challenges are significant. As noted by Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred,

Given the nearly complete absence of these indigenous forms of social and political organization in our communities today, the situation we face is indeed daunting. The one thing that is certain is that people who believe that we are going to be led out of our colonial reality by the colonial surrogate organizations that we have running our communities today are not looking at our situation honestly.

(Alfred, 2005, p. 187)

Alfred (2005) calls for a courageous way of being in the world; for Indigenous Peoples to work to change the balance of political and economic power, thereby creating social and physical space for freedom to reemerge. “Wasase is an ethical and political vision, the real demonstration of our resolve to survive as Onkwehonwe [original people] and do what we must to force the Settlers to acknowledge our existence and the integrity of our connection to the land” (p. 19).

Resilience in colonial contexts takes many forms. The fact that resilience exists in no way indicates that colonialism has not done harm. Indeed, resilience is often formed in a crucible of trauma. Resilience co-exists with examples of significant damage. The working definitions that continue to be widely used include vulnerability and marginalization as defining characteristics of Indigenous Peoples. Such definitions fail to recognize the resilience inherent in Indigenous survival. Indeed, as Indigenous Peoples develop partnerships across international boundaries to

advance their interests, although not often explicitly named, resilience is apparent. As noted earlier, that damage and trauma is often presumed to be representative of Indigenous Peoples and colonial experiences. Damage and trauma, however, are only part of our story. Resilience completes this complicated picture.

Resilience is an ability to resist, persevere, survive, and grow despite significant challenges. Indeed, resilience is evident not just in individuals but in the ability of communities, Peoples, and the natural world to successfully grapple with adversity. That being said, resilience can also be multifaceted and nuanced. The experiences of individuals, communities, and the world are not as simple as good or bad, success or failure, resilient or devastated.

Major themes and concepts

The reoccurring themes of duality and balance; interconnections between past, present, and future; and culture as continuous and ever-evolving are woven throughout this edited volume. The phrases Original Instructions, Traditional Teachings, and traditional Indigenous Knowledge are also frequently used. While individual authors often elaborate on their meaning within specific contexts, a basic overview of these concepts is offered here to provide a foundation for subsequent content.

Duality and balance

Balance is often emphasized as central to Indigenous wellbeing. The Medicine Wheel is a conceptual framework and powerful symbol for many North American Indigenous people that illustrates balance, among other things. Although there are different versions, at its most basic it is a circle divided into quadrants. Typically, the quadrants include the colors black, white, red, and yellow, although sometimes black is replaced by blue. The Medicine Wheel has many different layers of meaning and many different interpretations, all related to balance among the different elements. The Medicine Wheel reminds us that our wellbeing consists of a balance among Mind, Body, Spirit, and Heart. It also depicts the balance among different life stages (infancy, youth, adulthood, elderhood) and different types of people from around the world. Traditional Indigenous societies retain balance with different roles and gender expressions, all considered not only normal but essential to community and societal wellbeing.

Balance implies that there must be difference, not solely uniformity or sameness. Indeed, many Indigenous traditions are grounded in stories and beliefs about duality. The Haudenosaunee Creation narrative describes twins, one who creates great beauty in the world and the other who causes destruction and chaos (Mohawk, 2005). While their characters and actions are often over-simplified and referred to in terms of good and evil, the descriptors creativity and chaos have a more nuanced and synergistic relationship than simply oppositional forces or beings. That is the way it is with balance. Darkness and light balance each other, as do sorrow and gladness, trauma and resilience.

Different facets of balance emerge in this book. The content shares Indigenous Knowledges, histories, and practices, yet not all is shared. As the authors note, some Traditional Knowledge has been lost, some things have been reclaimed, and other things have been hidden. Many practices are protected by not sharing information in public or written forms. Some Indigenous Knowledge must remain private and available only within certain contexts and to certain people. Other things could be shared but rarely become public because Knowledge Holders do not typically deliver workshops, speak at conferences, or publish in English-language academic publications. This book seeks a thoughtful balance of sharing content that is appropriate to be

shared but that is not often easily accessible beyond members of specific communities or regions of the world.

As *iyeska*, the interpreter or bridge, it is a great privilege to be able to use my networks to encourage sharing of content that depicts a wide array of expressions of resilience in Indigenous Peoples. The authors live on six continents and share examples of resilience from many different Indigenous contexts. Indeed, most of the authors are Indigenous themselves and write with firsthand experiences about communities where they live and work. Other authors are non-Indigenous but have a long-term commitment to Indigenous communities, thus earning trust, access, and permission to share examples of resilience. This book contains examples that we chose to share.

While it is beyond the scope of any one publication to include content from all Indigenous contexts, this book strives to present a broad spectrum of representation. Although this is a publication in English, (a colonial language), I deliberately sought to include authors who primarily speak and write in other languages. I also worked to ensure that North American content did not obscure other voices. I tried to reach beyond academia to include content from others grounded in Indigenous communities who are not familiar with publishing. In these ways, I sought to compile rich and diverse perspectives of Indigenous resilience beyond those that typically find their way into publications. While some selectivity remains – for example, not all people are privileged with the time to be able to write – I worked to go beyond typical academic writers in compiling this volume. Through these efforts, I sought to achieve balance.

The past, present, and future are interconnected

Indigenous thinking and conceptualizations of time are not necessarily linear. There is a sense of relationship and interconnection between the past, present, and future. Each informs and has implications for the others. This is illustrated by the Native American concept of the Seven Generations. Ancestors were conscious of and deliberately planned for the needs and cultural continuity of the generations that exist today. We must do the same for coming generations so that our cultures, languages, spiritual traditions, and the natural world can be healthy and vibrant for generations yet to be born.

A sense of connection to ancestors and their ongoing relevance for the day-to-day lives of contemporary Indigenous Peoples is the foundation for Historical Trauma Theory (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 2011). Colonial brutality, massacres, and devastation caused by diseases are not perceived as distant, historical artifacts, but rather factors that continue to shape our existence and wellbeing. The past informs the present and the future in interactive, circular, mutually reinforcing ways. These connections are apparent throughout these chapters. Our contemporary existence is grounded in the experiences and gifts of our ancestors. Our contemporary actions must be guided by our responsibilities for and duties to future generations.

This sense of connection, relationship, and time differs from settler societies' ideas about progress. By and large, Indigenous Peoples are not invested in a hierarchical belief that we are moving toward a future that will be an inherent improvement over the past. Conversely, there is not a sense that the past was backward and lesser-than. This does not, however, mean that Indigenous Peoples are inherently stuck in the past or focused on a return "back to the blanket" that idealizes history and dismisses potential. Rather than a simplistic, linear sense of progress, there is importance placed on retaining core cultural values and beliefs while adapting to contemporary circumstances. It is not that we are not headed into the future, but that we chose to do so while remaining true to our Indigenous values rather than setting them aside in the name of progress to adapt, integrate, and assimilate into settler societies (essentially losing us to

become them). We do not accept that adapting to and participating in someone else's society at the expense of our own is a mark of progress or a superior way to live. Just because we do not choose a future defined by settler society priorities does not mean that we are not future oriented. There is more than one path to the future – and for many Indigenous Peoples, it remains highly synergistic with the past.

Culture: continuity and change

Culture has always been a balance between continuity and change. That is the way it has always been, the way it is now, and how it will be in the future. Culture has never been static. It is living, breathing, and ever changing.

Indigenous Peoples are often stereotyped as historical artifacts by members of settler societies. They expect that we will remain frozen in time, and when we do not meet these expectations, we are invisible. There is a presumption that our authenticity is defined by past practices, and thus, we cannot truly follow our traditions and live in a contemporary world. Indeed, assimilation into settler societies was perceived to be the only logical and inevitable conclusion in the face of colonization.

These chapters dispute that assertion and provide numerous examples of how Indigenous cultures continue and are expressed in our contemporary, shared world. We need not choose between being relegated to historical artifacts or becoming completely immersed in settler societies. We are empowered to define our contemporary cultures.

Grappling with tensions between continuity and change do not inherently diminish Indigeneity. Adapting in culturally congruent ways is part of cultural vibrancy. Indeed, the Native Americans of the Great Plains region of the United States are noted for (some would say defined by) their use of horses. The Comanche became known as the Lords of the Southern Plains, noted for their skillful riding, although their original access to horses came from the Spanish colonizers. Likewise, Native Americans of the Southwestern United States are known for their talents in creating distinctive silver jewelry, but silversmithing was a new technology acquired in the mid-1800s.

Original Instructions, Traditional Teachings, and Traditional Indigenous Knowledge

The terms Original Instructions and Traditional Teachings often refer to specific guidance about living in relationship with other beings and aspects of the natural world. These teachings were received by our ancestors in ancient times. This guidance has typically been passed down orally across generations and may also be represented in physical forms such as ceremonial items. For example, strings of wampum beads can serve as mnemonic devices to accompany recitations. Different Indigenous Peoples received their own Original Instructions. Many have to do with maintaining or restoring balance and wellbeing within an individual, community, or the world. Traditional Indigenous Knowledge is the science and wisdom that Indigenous Peoples have accumulated living in their territories in relation with other beings over generations.

Original Instructions and Traditional Teachings are believed to be fundamental and perpetually relevant despite changing times. They provide guidance for all aspects of living. While the oral format of these teachings continues, now some Traditional Teachings are shared in written or video formats. For example, the edited collection *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future* (Nelson, 2008) contains essays based on content from Indigenous speakers

at Bioneer conferences, a forum dedicated to cultural survival and ecological renewal. As noted in Nelson's preface,

Original Instructions remind us that it's not people who are smart. The real intelligence dwells throughout the natural world and in the vast mystery of the universe that's beyond our human comprehension. Humility is our constant companion. The Original Instructions celebrate our interdependence and interconnection with the diversity of life and one another.

(p. xxii)

There are many Traditional Teachings among the different Indigenous Peoples. While they often share a common foundation of providing guidance, they are rooted in specific cultural contexts and vary in expression. One concept rooted in Haudenosaunee Traditional Teachings is that of the *Good Mind*. This concept is referenced later, so is briefly described here as one example of a Traditional Teaching. The Peacemaker came to the Haudenosaunee, five nations that had been at war with each other. He guided them to bury their weapons of war under the Great Tree of Peace and they joined together in a confederacy of friendship that continues today. This historical event reminds us that awareness of our thoughts and intentions allows us to be more kind and loving, resulting in peace. This state of awareness is the Good Mind. As Onondaga elder Frieda Jacques noted, "while we actively become more aware of our thoughts, especially those that have a kind and loving intent; we naturally allow ourselves to become spiritually in tune with the Creator's wishes. This allows us to use our talents to fulfill our purpose on earth" (Ganondagan, 2021).

Reclamations and transformations

Indigenous Peoples often demonstrate resilience through tandem processes of reclaiming and transforming. We reclaim many Indigenous beliefs, values, and practices that have diminished or been hidden to protect them against loss. Reclaiming our heritage and the legacies left by our ancestors is a powerful demonstration of resilience. Further, we transform traditional practices, keeping them relevant for contemporary circumstances. An Indigenous elder from British Columbia noted:

It may seem that many of our traditions and songs are lost, but we have nothing to worry about. They're just put away for now, stored in our collective memory, our land. It's going to be our children, he said, who'll bring them back. And, over the years, I've seen it happen. I'd take our boys and girls out to different parts of our Ha'hulthii and some of them would bring back our forgotten songs, our traditions, our knowledge – whatever gifts the Creator would choose to share with them.

(Raygorodetsky, 2017, p. 256)

Reclaiming our Indigenous Knowledge and practices is happening on all levels from the micro to the macro, from personal practices to national structures and policies. Reclaiming constitutes acts of resilience, resistance, and transformation. We reclaim, not just for ourselves. We do this for future generations, all beings, and our shared world. As the Seven Generations teaching described earlier reminds us, we have a duty to plan ahead to support and protect generations yet to come. We reclaim for them. Our Original Instructions remind us that humans are one type of being. We have responsibilities and relationships that connect us with other

beings. We reclaim for them. We are also fully conscious that while Indigenous Peoples may have custodial responsibilities for the world, we share this space with other human beings from diverse societies and value systems. We reclaim not to impose our ways on others, mirroring what colonial societies have done, but to share and support using the gifts that we have received.

It is said that in the time of the Sixth Fire we will go looking for much of what was stolen or lost, and we will recover those songs, medicine bundles, and seeds. Then we will come into the time of the Seventh Fire. In that time it is said we will make the choice between a scorched path and a path that is green. The essential part of following that green path is how we return to living here on this land.

(LaDuke, 2019, p. xv)

While Indigenous Knowledges and practices may not have been at the forefront in many places in recent generations, that does not mean that they no longer exist. Many Traditional Teachings remind us that our Indigenous Knowledge is still here, will never be lost, and will always be available to those who seek it in a good way. “Traditional knowledge bubbles up from the deep well of ancestral wisdom embedded within the Indigenous peoples’ traditional territories, nourishing the long-term, intimate, and sacred relationship between Indigenous peoples and their land, water, air, and the cosmos” (Raygorodetsky, 2017, p. 256).

Restoring food sovereignty and rematriating (restoring) our seeds are examples of how Indigenous Knowledge and practices are being reclaimed. This is true both literally and figuratively.

In your own life, water that seed planted deep inside the earth that is your own body, a tiny seed that sings an achingly beautiful song of remembrance, resistance, resilience, redemption, and reconciliation. This powerful seed song is what kept our grandmothers upright, what whispered them to get up amidst the sorrow to do what needed to be done to tend the earth and feed the children. It was these melodies that guided our grandfathers under the sea of stars as they made their way into new lands to protect the young. This map is written in the seeds and the stars and the waters and the Earth. This seed song is now your heart beating fiercely in promise to uphold the agreements to feed the sacred hungers of time.

(White, 2019, p. 197)

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, many Indigenous people stepped forward and offered leadership. They emphasized that we have what we need to move forward. Some offered step-by-step, practical instructions that reflect our Original Instructions. Dr. Rodney Haring, a Seneca social worker and cancer researcher, offered tangible ways to nurture our wellbeing during these difficult times. He recommended that we say one or two words in our own language daily. Reconnecting in even in the smallest ways is important and is a step toward keeping our cultures alive. We can dance or play lacrosse. We do this for the Seven Generations. We do this for cultural resiliency. Dr. Haring told us we must find the courage to move on and shape our health for future generations. He referred to this as “being respectfully persistent.” As we create health within ourselves, we can bring it forward to share with our families and communities. We can bring laughter, wellness, and dancing during the hard times of the pandemic. Share a smile, share a wave. We find new ways to have socially distant gatherings during summer. We are finding new ways to do ceremonies, maybe outside or individually. We can share wellness, happiness, and peace with other nations and neighbors, including those beyond Indigenous communities. This is an expression of real truth and reconciliation. We must act with peace and

courage, and share this with others. There is duality in our being. Sometimes, we get caught in ruminating, but we must find and embrace courage. We must be aware of our cultural resilience and put it forward every day, even in small ways. Our actions can be full of hope, vision, and intent. Every day, move forward with a Good Mind (Center for Indigenous Cancer Research, 2020; Haring, 2020).

Indigenous Peoples are contemporary nations and communities constantly responding to an ever-changing world. Trauma adds fuel to our fire. We are not passive.

The grief and anguish buried beneath the soil of intergenerational trauma are only half our stories told. COVID-19 has given recall to examine the pervasive injustice of western power and privilege. Our people are dying at disproportionate rates not only from the direct respiratory effects of this virus, but as a result of a failed system that is inherently racist. We see our people; our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, children, and young people in great peril because of systemic health inequities and economic exclusion.

(Mataira, Morelli, & Spenser, 2020, p. 1)

We build culturally grounded institutions, informed by our recognition of the nuances of colonization and resilience. We must recognize and claim “our vitality in light of perceived impending dooms” (Mihesuah, 2019, p. 300). Guided by our Original Instructions and Traditional Knowledge, we strive to meet our needs as contemporary people. We know that colonization is not just about taking land. We must understand how the economics of capitalism have replaced Indigenous systems and how colonial belief systems have supplanted our understandings of gender, sexuality, and relationships to people, land, other beings, and the cosmos.

Resilience and reclaiming are not just about us being in charge. We must do more than just have tribal governments modeled on states and elected governments that replicate patriarchy. Some authors of the following chapters frame resurgence and transformation in terms of Indigenous nationalism, while others articulate it in terms of patriotism. In Chapter 20, the author notes that the phrase *Aloha Aina* can be translated as patriotism, but she goes on to describe how Indigenous Peoples tend to define patriotism differently than most members of colonial settler societies. In this case, the author emphasizes the need for “disassembling some of the imported and imposed colonial assumptions, such as the alignment of nationhood and patriarchy.” For Indigenous Peoples, reclaiming is not just about politics but about relationship. For us, land is a relative, not a possession.

The hard life experiences that we have can be transformed, just as composting food scraps results in creation of nourishing soil. As Nephi Craig, a Diné and White Mountain Apache chef, noted, “Don’t transmit pain. . . . Transform it.” (Mihesuah, 2019, p. 317). This transformation requires an active – not a passive – response.

The temporal context for this handbook

Although released in 2021, the initial development, content solicitation, and decisions about topics for inclusion in this volume happened prior to the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Most chapter proposals were submitted and approved in the fall of 2019, with full chapters expected in the spring 2020. The pandemic spread rapidly around the world before the submission deadline. That same spring, the United States was rocked by protests over police killings of unarmed African Americans. Violence and looting ensued in many places, sometimes fueled by long-standing frustrations with racial injustice but often just a cover for destruction

and greed. In the United States, instability growing from racial injustice and COVID-19 were deemed two simultaneous pandemics. Before completion of the book, a violent insurrection took place at the US Capitol, shaking the complacency of many privileged Americans not used to such threats. Likewise, a variety of problems erupted or continued around the world that shaped the lives of chapter authors, including political instability, natural disasters, and violence against Indigenous people.

As COVID-19 and other challenges gripped the world, some authors who had planned to contribute chapters to this volume withdrew to meet personal, familial, community, and changing work responsibilities. Others stepped forward and added new elements to what they had initially planned to write. With some international borders closed, travel restricted within countries, and communities on lockdown due to COVID-19, some authors had difficulty accessing data or information related to their research. This caused delays or changes in how they approached their chapters as they negotiated how to move forward amidst new and ongoing crises.

All authors found themselves juggling priorities, yet many persisted in writing their chapters. Indeed, this volume became an example of Indigenous resilience and collectivism. We draw our strength from others. Even when some of us cannot move forward and rise to overcome challenges, others can do so on our behalf. Some find important roles in communicating and sharing information. These stories of resilience are indelibly shaped by the challenging times in which they were written and compiled.

Overview of the book

The book is divided into five parts of interrelated chapters. Part 1, *From the past to the future*, provides examples from Ireland and the United States that illuminate how our ancestors gave us the strength to endure. We are still here, thanks to the gifts and forethought of our ancestors. We have survived and continue to survive the onslaught of colonization drawing on the many strengths that nourish our resilience. Chapters in this section highlight Indigenous continuity and transcendent identities rooted in Africa and the Americas that persist in spite of being crossed by colonial borders or relocating from home territories, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

Part 2, *Pillars of Indigeneity*, provides examples of expressions of identity and wellbeing grounded in the South Pacific and New Zealand. Language and storytelling can sustain Indigenous cultures and values while serving as mechanisms to transmit Indigenous identity across generations. Examples from Central Asia, Guatemala, and the United States illustrate how our words reflect and sustain our cultures.

Part 3 builds on this content and explores *The Power in Indigenous Identities*. This section highlights the collective values of Indigenous societies, exploring how Indigenous families and communities care for each other in the United States, as well as in Southern Africa. Regardless of difficult circumstances, Indigenous Peoples rely on our collective strength. Gender and age also play significant roles in Indigenous identities. Chapters highlight the persistence and power of women's leadership in Canadian and Hawaiian Indigenous cultures. The voices of youth and the humor of elders illustrate resilience among Native Americans of the United States.

Indigenous connections with *The natural world* are explored in Part 4. The relationship that Sámi people of Norway maintain with the natural world through reindeer herding and that the Atayal people from the Daan River region of Taiwan maintain with the soil and spirits through natural farming remind readers that these other beings are our relatives, not resources. Chapters on earthquakes in Nepal, climate change, and activism at Mauna Kea remind us that

our Mother Earth is hurting. As we live in relationship with the natural world, we also have a responsibility to care for and protect Her.

By and large, most people in the world remain oblivious to the continued presence or circumstances of Indigenous Peoples. When we are noticed, we are typically viewed from a deficit perspective, depicted as backward, exploited, to be pitied, or a barrier to progress. Part 5 challenges those beliefs. Indeed, we are *Reframing the narrative*. Indigenous Peoples refuse to be defined by problems. We will build opportunities. Chapters in this section examine the experiences of Indigenous people with disabilities in Canada and how Native Americans in the United States are drawing on the Warrior Spirit to heal from trauma. Examples from Fiji and Papua New Guinea demonstrate how traditional Indigenous values inform entrepreneurial endeavors and economic development. The final chapter examines how Indigenous Peoples in various parts of the world, although often depicted as among the most vulnerable, have risen to the challenges presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The book concludes with a summary and a look toward the future for Indigenous Peoples, both within our homelands and within diaspora. I invite readers to read these narratives with an open mind and an eagerness to understand more of the resilience and diverse experiences of Indigenous Peoples. As eloquent Cheyenne elder and eminent historian Henrietta Mann reminds us, we come from great people who have an enduring presence on these lands. We carry unending responsibilities and stewardship for the Earth. These are things that coming generations must know (Circle of Notable Native American Scholars, 2021).

The Indigenous people and allies who contributed to this book bring voices and perspectives that inform and inspire us to continue moving forward. They remind us of continuity and transformation – both defining characteristics of the Indigenous experience. They remind us that we remain, unable to be snuffed out by the brutalities of colonization. As Oromo activist Ebasa Sarka, an East African living in the United States, reminds us, we remain, although some are displaced halfway around the world and others are tempted by the presumed ease, comfort, promised success and safety that accompanies assimilating to mainstream society (Sarka, personal communication). Indeed, some of us are reclaiming and transforming ourselves as we choose to undergo processes of internal decolonization. I invite readers to listen to and learn from our narratives.

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PART I

From the past to the future

In Part 1, authors explore resilience across time and space, beginning with historical examples from Ireland and the United States. Seven Generations Teachings tell us that we continue as Indigenous People because of the strength of our ancestors and the plans they made for our continuity. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 delve into the circumstances that Indigenous ancestors endured so that we can persist. Knowing our history is crucial to understanding our contemporary circumstances.

Indigenous Peoples have survived, despite extraordinary colonial forces – yet our resilience and continuity often remain invisible. The dual reality of colonial assaults and resilient continuity are apparent as we examine these histories. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 explore contemporary challenges for the descendants of enslaved and displaced Indigenous Peoples and examine our interconnections, posing the question, *who are we among all our relations?* Readers are invited to explore the connections that Indigenous Peoples share across territories and externally imposed boundaries. Continuity across time and place manifests in transcendent identities, despite crossing or being crossed by borders.

Colonial exploitation and transformations

Authors in Part 1 describe how policies became a primary mechanism for implementing colonization. Teachers, social workers, medical professionals, and philanthropically minded individuals often had good intentions, but typically viewed Indigenous Peoples through their own paternalistic or idealistic lenses. The practices and policies they implemented facilitated socialization and assimilation in attempts to make Indigenous Peoples more governable and less distinct from the larger society. Likewise, religious doctrine, most often enacted through Christian churches, became a primary tool of colonization. The authors describe how the helping professions and social welfare policies played instrumental roles in governmental agendas of colonization, land expropriation, and assimilation.

Expanding empires and exploiting human and natural resources became key characteristics of colonization, and with expansionism came cooptation of Indigenous institutions. The authors call our attention to the patriarchal, capitalistic underpinnings of colonization. Resource exploitation and slave labor became inherent in colonial exploitation as capitalist priorities led to subjugation of both territories and Peoples.

As empires spread across the globe, they attacked cultural belief systems, co-opted traditional systems to serve their own priorities, and moved people – yet did not fully succeed in annihilating the Original Peoples. For example, the British Empire expanded around the world, facilitated by exploitive labor and slavery, often moving populations according to their need for a labor supply. As England assumed power over Ireland, it ruled through a puppet government, something later replicated in other locations, and co-opted Indigenous institutions, a mechanism also echoed in subsequent parts of the book.

When cultures interact

Socialization and change are not necessarily unidirectional. When people from different cultures interact, there can be mutual influence. During the early stages of colonization, colonists were often absorbed into existing societies. This was the case in Ireland, as English settlers learned Gaelic and followed Irish customs; that is, until a tipping point came in the balance of power. Indeed, while the Church ultimately became a tool of colonization around the world, the author of Chapter 1 argues that, initially in Ireland, the Church was an ally, becoming transformed or Indigenous in the process.

All too often, colonization resulted in Indigenous erasure, a form of denial and invisibility, even though cultures persisted in unseen ways. Historically, some Indigenous Peoples experienced formal, legal processes of termination, while others remained unrecognized or were presumed to have ceased to exist. In all such instances, Indigenous people are without rights and settler states see no need for promises to be kept or for treaties to be fulfilled. Being seen and recognized as contemporary Peoples has significant implications for possession of lands and rights, while being unrecognized supports dispossession. In contemporary times, Indigenous People must often fight for recognition, asserting that they still exist and must be recognized.

Transcendent identities

The authors explore Indigeneity across different times and contexts. They offer reflections on Indigenous identity from both personal and outsider perspectives. Identity is multifaceted, always consisting of multiple dimensions. As an example, the author of Chapter 4 explores how someone can carry responsibility and privilege while being part of a marginalized group.

As we define ourselves, Indigeneity is often characterized by our desire to remain autonomous and not be incorporated into another society, although this does not necessarily mean remaining in isolation. The authors remind us that colonization tips the balance of power and how we define ourselves is not always respected. Others define or ignore us, according to their standards, priorities, and agendas. Indeed, successful dispossession and subjugation of Indigenous Peoples required defining us as pagan, barbarian, lesser-than members of colonial societies, and sometimes as subhuman. These definitions legitimate violence. We continue to be affected by these legacies of history: laws that categorized us, defined us, have seen us, or not seen us.

The authors in Part 1 describe how contemporary Indigenous Peoples may espouse identities that transcend colonial boundaries. Indigenous Peoples remaining in their traditional territories often had their lands crossed by borders not of their making, have experienced dispossession as other societies attempted or succeeded in supplanting them, and at times have been transported to “new worlds.” The authors remind us that regardless of displacement, our ancestors continue to watch over and protect us. We find ways to maintain connections, even under the guise of the colonizer’s institutions.

We are asked to reflect on what it means to be Indigenous in the face of colonial definitions of territories and boundaries. Further, the authors help us contemplate what it means to have heritage from multiple Indigenous Peoples, or Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage. These multiple facets of Indigenous identity result in additive or transcendent identities. We have truly received gifts from our ancestors that enable us to endure and build pathways forward from the past to the future. We do this within the context of our relational existence, connected with relatives from the Four Directions. We maintain relationships between humans and spirits, those who are living and ancestors, all beings, and across nations. Solidarity with our relatives is central to our existence. Relationships provide foundations for identity, health, and wellbeing. We fulfill prophecies of re-establishing connections, as illustrated by Indigenous Peoples of North America and South America reaffirm their relationship.

We maintain our connections to land and to each other, as well as across generations past, present, and future. The land defines and shapes Indigenous identity and is a Being, in and of itself. We affirm our affective attachment to the natural world and the spirits that inhabit it. These spiritual connections enable our political viability as Peoples. Recognizing this strength, colonization attacked our collective structures and connections to land. Collective societies and collectively held lands are buffers against assimilation, something troublesome for settlers who want to commodify, exploit, and privatize according to their ideas of development and progress. Indigenous values of collectivism and collective identity rights resurface in contemporary times in examples such as Celtic communism in Ireland and tribal humanitarian zones in Colombia.

The authors pose questions such as *what is Indigeneity?* and ask whether it exists only in contrast to a non-Indigenous other. We are asked to reflect on who is Indigenous (or tribal) as we consider the experiences of Celts and displaced Africans. We are led through an examination of the nature of Indigeneity. Is it transportable, and if so, what does it look like when not on your land, or even on your continent? In Part 1, the authors introduce ideas that will be echoed later, such as the roles of institutions like the Church and educational systems in promoting conformity and assimilation. Most centrally, these authors chart the course of the reader by emphasizing themes of continuity, reclaiming, moving forward, and strength as key facets of Indigenous resilience.



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IRELAND, FIRST COLONY OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

A Celtic story of Indigenous resistance, resilience, and cultural renewal

Suzanne Jenkins

Introduction

Geologically, Ireland is older than many other European countries (Somerville-Large, 1992) and can be described as “a geological accident forged between two continents and then frozen, dunked between warm seas, lifted in part to the heights of the Himalayas, covered with lush tropical swamps, blistering deserts and vast expanses of molten rock, then again buried under ice and finally thawed out” (Mallory, 2015, p. 13).

Ireland’s history is no less turbulent. The Celts are believed to have arrived in Ireland over the course of several centuries (Kruta, 2015). The homelands of the earliest Celts are thought to be Scotland, the Isle of Man, and Wales. Populations previously inhabiting the Isle of Man Basin were forced westwards because of rising sea levels after the last ice age (Mallory, 2015). Celtic peoples did not refer to themselves as “Celtic.” Rather, they thought of themselves as belonging to different tribes (Matthews, 1989).

A learned class comprising druids (who acted as priests, teachers, and judges) and bards and poets (who were professional storytellers, verse-makers, music composers, and historians) integrated the island into a single cultural system (Mac Cana, 2011). Extending beyond tribal affiliations, Ireland was divided into five provinces, Connacht (west), Ulster (north), Leinster (east) and Munster (south), with Meath as a separate province at the center of the island. These provinces were more important than regional political divisions such as counties. “They were part of a cultural cosmology, a way of partitioning the world in which each province was imbued not only with a directional significance but also a conceptual characteristic” (Mallory, 2015, p. 293). This concept of a national consciousness is presumed to be prehistoric, dating back to time immemorial; a sacred time when the natural world and human cultural traditions originated, forging new beginnings that continue to resonate in the spiritual life of the Irish. Ancient Celtic wisdom, embracing divinity in all living things – animals, rivers, hills, lakes, oceans, rocks, and sky – continues to offer a vibrant legacy that informs our world today (Matthews, 1989; Matthews, 1991; O’Donohue, 1997).

Celtic spirituality

A shamanic spiritual system emerged in Ireland by the first century BC. The word shaman originates from the Alta mountain regions of Siberia, Russia. It is only one of a number of words used by various cultures to denote someone who can “shapeshift” into various states of being. The word shaman can be translated as meaning to burn up, to set on fire. This refers to the ability of the shaman to work with the energy of heat (Matthews, 1991). One of the ancient meanings of the word shaman is “one who knows.” The shaman was a “seer,” able to perceive, navigate, and negotiate energies usually unseen.

One of the central aspects of the Celtic world was the idea of “shapeshifting.” A person’s essence or soul was not limited to its regular shape. Souls had fluidity and energy that was not caged within any fixed form. In Celtic tradition, there was an interflow between soul and matter, and between time and eternity (O’Donohue, 1997).

The Celts believed in various divine presences. Lugh was the god most venerated. He was god of light and giftedness and was also known as “The Shining One.” The Earth goddess was Anu. Negativity and darkness were also acknowledged to have divine origins. Trees, wells, and rivers were special places of divine presence. They were seen as threshold places or gateways between different worlds. The underworld was not considered dark, but rather full of spirit. The Celts had an intuitive spirituality informed by mindful attention to landscape. A rural farming people, they lived within a landscape that was alive. Landscape provided a narrative where nothing was lost or forgotten. Each field had its own name, and each place had its own life and history. The Irish landscape is full of memory, with traces of ancient civilization and sacred places full of presence (Matthews, 1989, 1991; O’Donohue, 1997).

The mystery of the Irish landscape can be best understood through the stories and legends of different places. The Celtic tradition was primarily an oral tradition. Stories, poems, and prayers lived for centuries in the voice of the people. They were learned by heart and kept in memory. Language was regarded as having the power to cause events and divine future events. Chants and spells could reverse a negative destiny to one who was wholesome and full of promise (O’Donohue, 1997).

Celtic communism

Ellis (1985) offers a comprehensive account of early Celtic society in Ireland, which he defines as “Celtic Communism”. He describes how land occupied by an Irish clan belonged to the community, with boundaries defined by natural features. Although it was a stratified society, where sections of land were appropriated by the ruler and the civil service class, their elevated position depended on the quality of work they delivered for the common good of that society. Each clansman received a piece of land to work and develop. A large section of fertile clan territory was retained as “common land” for everyone’s use. A further section of land was retained for the maintenance of the poor, the old, and anyone who could not contribute to the common wealth. Clan members with individual plots paid taxes for the upkeep of the community, the support of the poor, the aged, and orphaned children. There was no absolute ownership of the land.

In ancient Irish society, there were six basic social categories. A person could rise from the lowest social category to the highest and vice-versa. At the bottom of the scale, “non-freemen,” were convicts who had committed actions resulting in

[suspension of] civil rights, cessation of pensions, prohibition to practise in professions or be employed in the civil service. . . . Offenders were not excluded from