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Our intention is to invite proponents of western ecological agriculture (e.g., regenerative ag / permaculture) to go deeper and encourage their peers to go deeper—to not just ‘take’ practices from Indigenous cultures without their context, but to also encompass the deeper Indigenous worldviews... inspiring a consciousness shift that hopefully will support us to go from a dominant culture of supremacy and domination to one founded on reciprocity, respect, and interrelations with all beings—including, of course, among all humans.

Whitewashed Hope

A message from 10+ Indigenous leaders and organizations

Regenerative Agriculture & Permaculture offer narrow solutions to the climate crisis

Introduction

Regenerative agriculture and permaculture claim to be the solutions to our ecological crises. While they both borrow practices from Indigenous cultures, critically, they leave out our worldviews and continue the pattern of erasing our history and contributions to the modern world.

While the practices 'sustainable farming' promote are important, they do not encompass the deep cultural and relational changes needed to realize our collective healing.

Where is 'Nature'?

Regen Ag & Permaculture often talk about what's happening 'in nature': "In nature, soil is always covered." "In nature, there are no monocultures." Nature is viewed as separate, outside, ideal, perfect. Human beings must practice "biomimicry" (the mimicking of life) because we exist outside of the life of Nature.

Indigenous peoples speak of our role AS Nature. (Actually, Indigenous languages often don't have a word for Nature, only a name for Earth and our Universe.) As cells and organs of Earth, we strive to fulfill our roles as her caregivers and caretakers. We often describe ourselves as "weavers", strengthening the bonds between all beings.

Death Doesn't Mean Dead

Regen Ag & Permaculture often maintain the "dead" worldview of Western culture and science: Rocks, mountains, soil, water, wind, and light all start as "dead". (E.g., "Let's bring life back to the soil!" — implying soil, without microbes, is dead.) This worldview believes that life only happens when these elements are brought together in some specific and special way.

Indigenous cultures view the Earth as a communion of beings and not objects: All matter and energy is alive and conscious. Mountains, stones, water, and air are relatives and ancestors. Earth is a living being whose body we are all a part of. Life does not only occur when these elements are brought together; Life always is. No "thing" is ever dead; Life forms and transforms.

From Judgemental to Relational

Regen Ag & Permaculture maintain overly simplistic binaries through subscribing to good and bad. Tilling is bad; not tilling is good. Mulch is good; not mulching is bad. We must do only the 'good' things to reach the idealized, 99.9% biomimicked farm/garden, though we will never be as pure or good "as Nature", because we are separate from her.

Indigenous cultures often share the view that there is no good, bad, or ideal—it is not our role to judge. Our role is to tend, care, and weave to maintain relationships of balance. We give ourselves to the land: Our breath and hands uplift her gardens, binding our life force together. No one is tainted by our touch, and we have the ability to heal as much as any other lifeform.

Our Words Shape Us

Regen Ag & Permaculture use English as their preferred language no matter the geography or culture: You must first learn English to learn from the godFATHERS of this movement. The English language judges and objectifies, including words most Indigenous languages do not: 'natural, criminal, waste, dead, wild, pure...' English also utilizes language like "things" and "its" when referring to "non-living, subhuman entities".

Among Indigenous cultures, every language emerges from and is therefore intricately tied to place. Inuit people have dozens of words for snow and her movement; Polynesian languages have dozens of words for water's ripples. To know a place, you must speak her language. There is no one-size-fits-all, and no words for non-living or sub-human beings, because all life has equal value.

People are land. Holistic includes History.

Regen Ag and Permaculture claim to be holistic in approach. When regenerating a landscape, 'everything' is considered: soil health, water cycles, local 'wildlife', income & profit. 'Everything', however, tends to EXCLUDE history: Why were Indigenous homelands steal-able and why were our peoples & lands rape-able? Why were our cultures erased? Why does our knowledge need to be validated by 'Science'? Why are we still excluded from your 'healing' of our land?

Among Indigenous cultures, people belong to land rather than land belonging to people. Healing of land MUST include healing of people and vice versa. Recognizing and processing the emotional traumas held in our bodies as descendants of assaulted, enslaved, and displaced peoples is necessary to the healing of land. Returning our rights to care for, harvest from, and relate to the land that birthed us is part of this recognition.

Composting

Regen Ag & Permaculture often share the environmentalist message that the world is dying and we must "save" it. Humans are toxic, but if we try, we can create a "new Nature" of harmony, though one that is not as harmonious as the "old Nature" that existed before humanity. Towards this mission, we must put Nature first and sacrifice ourselves for "the cause".

Indigenous cultures often see Earth as going through cycles of continuous transition. We currently find ourselves in a cycle of great decomposition. Like in any process of composting there is discomfort and a knowing that death always brings us into rebirth. Within this great cycle, we all have a role to play. Recognizing and healing all of our own traumas IS healing Earth's traumas, because we are ONE.

Where to go from here?

Making up only 6.2% of our global population, Indigenous peoples steward 80% of Earth's biodiversity while managing over 25% of her land. Indigenous worldviews are the bedrocks that our agricultural practices & lifeways arise from. We invite you to ground your daily practices in these ancestral ways, as we jointly work towards collective healing.

- Learn whose lands you live on (native-land.ca), their history, and how you can support their causes and cultural revitalization.
- Watch @gatherfilm and Aluna documentary.
- Amplify the voices and stories of Indigenous peoples and organizations.
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