

“The Hoop” and Settler Apocalypse

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I really am pretty sure we’re gonna see the end of all things. And that’s not just civ things. That’s all things. And so I really don’t have hope...but that’s my effort, my effort in all my life, in all my joy...giving my entire thing, my whole existence, to something I really can’t believe in, which was this hopeful return...fulfilling all these prophecies of hopes of returns and renewals... Do I believe it? Fuck no. Do I love that shit? Absolutely, I’m gonna do it with all my heart.¹

–Finisia Medrano

INTRODUCTION

Finisia Medrano is a 60-year-old trans woman and a central figure in a grassroots network of mostly white-identified nomads who travel in the northwest United States’ Great Basin and Columbia Plateau regions. Living mainly on National Forest land, this movement of “rewilders” appropriates local Indigenous peoples’ traditional ecological knowledge in efforts to gather and replant wild foods in a seasonal round that they refer to as the “Sacred Hoop,” or simply “The Hoop.”² Before I had met Finisia and other so-called “Hoopsters” (or “Wildtenders,” or “Hoop Walkers”), my interest was sparked by the idea that there existed a community of folks living nomadically in the wilderness full time. The reality of this small movement turned out to be more complex than the romantic picture that I had imagined. However, my interest was sustained by their practical focus on ecological restoration—the planting back with “heart” referenced in the epigraph. Above all else, Wildtenders strive to nurture particular local plant species into abundance in order to help create habitat that is beneficial for both human and non-human lives. I have found again and again in both interviews and informal conversations that many “Hoopsters” have developed a passion for this brand of grassroots landscape management: “There are just so few people who are doing anything that’s actually beneficial to the Earth,” I was told by Jasper, who came out to “the Hoop” for the first time in 2015 with her partner, Zac.³ On the subject of planting back wild foods, Zac said: “It’s something that makes

¹ Seda Walker, and Neisan, “Interview with Finisia Medrano,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015): 26.

² During my 2014-2015 research “Hoopsters” often referred to their network as “Sacred Hoop Rewilding,” or “The Return,” although some were beginning to distance themselves from the word “rewilding.” Since then, the name changed to “Sacred Hoop Wildtending: a Return,” and then again to, “The High Desert Wildtending Network.”

³ Most interviewees chose to be identified by first name only. Some gave pseudonyms, and others preferred to remain anonymous.

me feel morally good. There is nothing negative about replanting and spreading these edibles. It's creating human habitat." In the small, high desert town of Halfway, Oregon, Cortni reflected, "I didn't know there was a possibility of being for life." Since beginning to interact with the biscuitroots (an assortment of plants in the *lomatum* genus, frequently *lomatum cous*) and other local wild edibles several years ago, Cortni has realized that we, as a society and as individuals, have the "capacity to renew" and give energy and attention back to "the living network that we rely interdependently and deeply upon."

While most Wildtenders agree that non-human animals and plants are sentient and ethical beings that should be engaged with socially and reciprocally, rather than used as resources to be managed and exploited, they are otherwise an ideologically diverse bunch. Disagreements abound within the "Wildtending" (or "Hoop") network, a phenomenon that is mirrored in the conflicting emotions and narrative contradictions present in the introductory quotation from Finisia Medrano. Individual Wildtenders describe a variety of significant motivations behind their work, including: the desire to interact ethically with the non-human world and offer renewal to the land, disgust with capitalism and racist colonialism, a yearning for personal freedom, and a vision of modeling a sustainable lifeway. Additionally, anxieties about climate crisis and societal collapse are ubiquitous, and often primary. Many people come to rewilding or "the Hoop" because of a deep concern about climate change, peak oil, and the so-called Anthropocene. However, while there is general agreement within the network that the deepening climate crisis mandates bold cultural transgression and radical experimentation with alternative ways of relating to non-human nature, Wildtenders do not agree on when or how such a crisis will occur, is occurring, or has occurred. The temporality of the apocalypse is in dispute.

This paper discusses the Wildtending network in order to explore the ecological practices and ethics of a group that is at once strikingly unique and also an embodiment of the problems of settler colonialism within the broader environmentalist movement. I begin by introducing the network itself and subsequently move into an examination of the multiple and sometimes-contradictory lines of apocalyptic narrative logic at work in Wildtending discourse.⁴ I assert that the Wildtenders' conflicting accounts of the Anthropocene, and the temporality of its disasters, are a manifestation of their ongoing efforts to grapple with their own racial positionality and

⁴ I will offer a word on my ethnographic methodology. Influenced by French Sociologist Bruno Latour's work on Actor-Network-Theory and British Anthropologist Tim Ingold's writing on "transformative" ethnography, I take my position to be that of a "facilitator." My work is to accurately and reflexively describe and render legible the most salient and compelling ideas and modes of praxis that are voiced and performed by Wildtenders, and to then complicate, challenge, and further illuminate these by putting them into conversation with interdisciplinary scholarship. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013).

status as non-Native settlers. Despite the “Hoopsters”’ uncompromising critiques of capitalism and environmental exploitation, they struggle to come to terms with their role in ongoing colonialism and the marginalization of Indigenous peoples. In this way, the Wildtenders echo the troubled narratives at work in broader North American environmental thought, which often reveres the idea of Indigenous cultures while failing to enter into solidarity relationships with Indigenous communities. Much rewilding and “Hoopster” practice entails flagrant cultural appropriation that could be seen by Native peoples as deeply disrespectful. Moreover, such radical environmental movements risk defaulting to modes of essentialist primitivism whose roots lie in historical colonial projects and whose branches provide the architecture for contemporary marginalization of and violence against Native communities.

This paper makes two general arguments. First, the potentialities of Wildtending practice, partial and fraught though they may be, challenge some of the entrenched dualisms that have constrained much Western environmentalist discourse, offering needful interventions as we approach and envision precarious ecological futures. Second, any environmental movement, no matter how radical, will always be settler colonial if it does not attend to contemporary Indigenous-led efforts towards decolonization and resurgence.

REWILDING AND “THE HOOP”

The “Hoop” network can be understood as a subcultural niche of the broader radical environmentalist “rewilding” movement.⁵ Rewilding philosophy emphasizes the acquisition of (controversially-termed) “primitive skills,” also sometimes known as “earth skills,” which are learned for wilderness survival as well as for spiritual transformation.⁶ The rewilding movement is intertwined with and informed by anarcho-primitivism, a socio-philosophical critique that advocates for society to be broken up into small, egalitarian communities that work to eliminate reliance on post-Paleolithic era technology (including in some cases, all forms of agriculture).⁷

The Spring 2015 publication of *Radical Faerie Digest* (RFD), a quarterly journal associated with the rural, queer, “Radical Faerie” community, is dedicated to the subject of rewilding.⁸ “There are many types of rewilding,” acknowledges the introduction. “The term has been taken up and passed about spawning inspiration for a movement of people returning to direct connection

⁵ The rewilding movement is robust in the Pacific Northwest as well as in Southern Appalachia.

⁶ “Rewilding” is also the practice in conservation biology of reintroducing keystone species into ecosystems. The radical social movement draws on this analogy, but is generally not connected to formal conservation biology.

⁷ Anarcho-primitivism, like the Wildtending network itself, is deeply fractured, and it is doubtful that all would agree with my summary here.

⁸ In each issue of *Radical Faerie Digest*, the initials “RFD” are redeployed towards an original title. This issue is called “Radical Feral Droppings.”

and symbiotic lifeways with the earth”.⁹ Another author writes that transcendent moments in nature bring “a knowing and a passion that wildness and wilderness, intertwined within and without, are core and key to our sanity and wholeness.”¹⁰ Rewilding is defined later in RFD as “the process of naturalizing yourself to the reality of what is happening around you in the wild natural world of trees fruiting, roots seeding, storms, cold and hot, when to sleep, when to wake... Going from our civilized ‘civ’ minds and programming to our wild native minds and *reprogramming* and undoing. To return ourselves to a flourishing state of wildness.”¹¹ Another RFD author explains simply: “you envision yourself as a part of nature.”¹² Most rewilders seem comfortable with the existence of a plurality of descriptions; the indefinable character of the project may be part of its appeal.

Relatively little academic literature has been published about anarcho-primitivism, and even less has been done on rewilding (and there is nothing about the Wildtending network). The few critics who have given scholarly attention to rewilding observe that the contradictions within the movement’s discourses and practices—and the name of the movement itself—index a networked genealogy of race, nature, indigeneity, belonging, and modernity. Mick Smith, in his 2007 article “Wild-life: Anarchy, Ecology, and Ethics,” both praises and critiques rewilding. He writes that its “understandings of self and nature offer diverse ethico-political possibilities but only if it is recognized that self-identities, ideas of nature, and even conceptions of individual autonomy are partly constituted by the same social histories that primitivism dismisses.”¹³ This observation speaks to a fundamental problem for rewilders: the movement attempts to model a revolutionary and sustainable way of being the world, yet it is often constrained by essentially conservative understandings of wildness, nature, and cultural and racial difference.

The Wildtending network, though it has emerged from the rewilding movement, is a distinct phenomenon. When I interviewed 29-year-old Seda, who has been on and off “the Hoop” for nine years, he summed up Wildtending like this:

We are trying to create a permanent, long-term culture of returning into these symbiotic relationships, these paradigms of how we live our lives that are being dictated by these natural forces. And being dictated by how to be in the right place at the right time and to live in a way that is symbiotic with these plants and these animals... In the past 7000 years

⁹ Rosie Delicious, “Between the Lines,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015): 1.

¹⁰ Fagus, “The Return,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015): 10.

¹¹ “Rewilding Hoop Glossary,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015): 34.

¹² John Clayton, “When In Wild Mode,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015): 47.

¹³ Mick Smith, “Wild-life: Anarchy, Ecology, and Ethics,” *Environmental Politics* 16 (2007): 470.

since recorded history we know that humanity has effectively eradicated...most of the ecological diversity of the world. We could say almost all compared to how it was. But that 7000 years is a tiny blip compared to how long humanity has coexisted... It's pretty fucking clear that humans have lived in ways that are not only in balance with nature but symbiotic with nature. And that doesn't mean reverting to stone age or whatever, it just means seeking to understand before seeking to be understood—seeking to understand how nature works when nature's working—and then seeking to be something useful to that....Instead of eating the future of your children and your children's children, eating those futures for your comfort today...you're giving a gift back.

The approach taken by the Wildtending network differs from the mainstream rewilding movement in four significant ways. First, Wildtenders endeavour to practice rewilding every day of the year, moving nomadically with the seasons—many of them traveling on foot with horses or goats, or living out of their cars. Merely attending annual earth skills gatherings or taking classes in bow hunting, gathering wild medicinals, or tanning deer hides is not enough, they claim. They stress that they are not mere rewilding “hobbyists.” Wildtenders seek to transition towards a permanent presence and “create a...long term culture,” living in a nomadic seasonal round—“on the Hoop,” as Seda and others say.

Second, the Wildtenders' central mission is to plant—not only to eat—wild foods. They plant back to create edible human habitat for the sake of future generations who will be living in a more resource scarce or even post-apocalyptic future. They plant so that there will be greater abundance when they return to that place next year, and they also plant out of an ethical obligation to the land itself. Third, because ecological restoration is the primary goal, most Wildtenders do not feel that partaking in consumer culture when it is helpful or making use of government aid programs compromises the integrity of their project. Their discourse tends to be dynamic and pragmatic in comparison with other rewilding communities, who often pride themselves on striving to be “separated” from consumerist-industrial mainstream capitalist (“modern”) culture. Wildtenders are not obsessive about living “off the grid;” Seda insists that being “on the Hoop” and living in symbiosis does not “mean reverting to [the] stone age.” Most accept rides in cars, and many have their own. Many of them use food stamps (which they called “Obama Bucks”). Some take a few months off from “Hoop” life per year to work and make money. Fourth, Wildtenders seek to transition towards a lifeway that is based, practically as well as philosophically, on symbiosis with the non-human world. This “planting back” component and attendant over-arching ethic of reciprocity is missing from most conventional rewilding *praxes*, which, as observers have noted, tend to emphasize individual freedom and

the development of skills.¹⁴ Wildtenders seek to cultivate an intersubjective and mutualistic relationship with the foods the land seasonally provides. Ultimately, they distinguish themselves from the broader rewilding movement in several ways: they strive to live nomadically, work to transition towards full-time rewilding, focus on gathering wild seeds and planting edibles, reject simplistic dualisms around “modern” and “premodern” technologies, and emphasize reciprocity in all human-human and human-non-human social relations.

I spent months living and traveling with “Hoopsters,” and it took a while for me to gain a clearer perspective on some of the network’s apparent paradoxes. For example, how can Wildtenders be claiming to ‘return’ to a pre-agricultural lifeway and at the same time make periodic use of gasoline, processed food, and even cellphones? Over time, I came to understand that Wildtenders are more interested in restoring a set of anti-capitalist human-non-human social relations, and they are only secondarily focused on rejecting the material products of industrial capitalism.

Finisia Medrano would offer little riddles to illustrate this point. “You were so focused on the baby that you forgot the baby,” she told me once in the summer of 2014. What did she mean? I was camped out with Finisia and her companions Michael and Kelsey on the Imnaha River in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest of eastern Oregon. Michael and I had gotten up early that morning to drive into town (about 40 miles away) to run a few important errands. In our haste, sleepiness, and perhaps excitement about taking a little trip, we forgot a few things that we needed to bring with us. When we got back to camp in the early afternoon, Finisia was annoyed. Michael and I forgot the empty plastic bottles they use to store camp stove gasoline. According to Finisia, the first baby here is us, ourselves. Michael and I are babies, immature and irresponsible, mostly thinking only about our own comfort and gratification, and failing to heed the greater needs of the group. Also, and more generously, we are babies to this lifeway, brand new to living nomadically. That morning I had been thinking only of the first baby: myself. The second baby is that which we are supposed to be nurturing and looking after at every moment—our responsibility, our obligation, that which we have the honour and privilege of caring for. The second baby is the Wildtending work: the planting of seeds, the creation of human habitat, the tending of what “Hoop Walkers” call “wild gardens.” We were so focused on the baby that we forgot about the baby.

Michael and I were looking sheepish. Finisia, suddenly energized, rose to her feet and started pacing around the camp, picking things up and shaking them at me. “All things on the Hoop are sacred!” she explained. She was worked up, but not angry. Not just the roots are sacred, she continued, but also all the Wildtenders’ carefully assembled sets of tools and equipment, down

¹⁴ Matthew Hall, “Beyond the Human: Extending Ecological Anarchism,” *Environmental Politics* 20 (2011): 374, 382-383, & 387, and Smith, “Wild-life,” 470, 480, & 483.

to the last mundane detail. These empty two-litre Pepsi bottles are sacred because they hold the gasoline that allows them to operate the cook stove, which allows them to eat, which allows them to live out here, which allows them to harvest, gather seed, plant, and care for these special places where wild foods are still abundant. Finisia and others assert that they encounter their own humanity most fully when they are caring for plants, and even a piece of consumer refuse such as an empty Pepsi bottle can be sacred if it contributes to the enactment of that relationship.

For many Wildtenders, the fundamental appeal of the over-arching nomadic vision is the opportunity to live ethically. From the point of view of this network, contemporary society in the United States is understood to be like (and referred to frequently as) ancient “Babylon”—brutally hierarchical and governed by violence and intimidation, with most of its inhabitants essentially enslaved. The culture of Babylon is careening unsustainably toward collapse, many Wildtenders assert, and all of its technologies, innovations, comforts, and conveniences, from the most spectacular to the most mundane, are founded upon and inseparable from unrelenting ecocide, genocide of Indigenous peoples, and war. Living in Babylon thus means living in a culture of death. The vision of “the Hoop” represents an opportunity, and to some the only opportunity, to be “for life.”

“The shame of Babylon is that it’s a huge ecocide, isn’t it?” quipped Finisia Medrano. In a 2015 interview, printed in *Radical Faerie Digest*, she mused:

How we all love our Babylon, but how we all hate its consequence of ecocide. How it leaves you without a shred of conscience... “I was born in Babylon, I got nothing I can do but minimize my damage.” Minimize like hell, and end up without a soul, without a conscience... [You] know it’s nothing but ecocide. It’s worse than rape. It’s a suicidal hatred of existence. Killing everything before you die first. That’s civilization, that’s Babylon. And we’re all loving it and addicted to it, and it leaves us without a conscience, struggling to defend the undefendable, struggling to sustain the unsustainable.¹⁵

When I asked what message they would like to send to anyone reading my work, many Wildtenders responded that they want people to know that there is another way to live, and that we all do have choices. Kelsey, a young woman who had been traveling with Finisia and their friend Michael for about two years, moving between “wild gardens” on horseback, and

¹⁵ Seda Walker and Neisan, “Interview with Finisia Medrano,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015): 30.

gathering and replanting seeds, expressed this sentiment succinctly.¹⁶ She told me: “there’s free food out there. And it’s completely possible to live in a way that’s different.” “Hoop Walkers” thus differentiate themselves from both mainstream society and the broader rewilding movement based on their desire to engage in active symbiosis with the non-human world and their willingness to live as poor, itinerant nomads.

However, aside from these distinctive traits, Wildtenders have less in common with one another than one might expect. They are each individuals embedded within particular webs of relationships, each with an idiosyncratic story that led them to this unusual lifeway. I have not collected much quantitative data about this network and its participants, but I can offer some general demographic information.¹⁷ I have met no more than thirty individuals who would consider themselves current or past “Hoopsters.” If pressed, I would suggest that the network is comprised of no more than one hundred and fifty and no fewer than fifty persons, although estimates would vary wildly depending on who is asked.¹⁸ There is no generally agreed upon criteria for what makes a “Hoopster,” and the network has no single clear insider-outsider boundary. Many Wildtenders travel alone, in pairs, or in trios. Some are “on the Hoop” all the time, some only in warm months, and some only intermittently. The majority of people involved with this grassroots network are in their 20s or 30s, but there are a handful in their 40s, 50s, and 60s. Most Wildtenders can be found in eastern Oregon, Idaho, and Nevada, in the Great Basin and Columbia Plateau bioregions, where ancient “wild gardens”—traditional gathering places of Nez Perce, Western Shoshone, Northern Paiute, and other Native peoples—

¹⁶ In an article for *The Believer* magazine, Lisa Wells describes Michael and Kelsey as “a couple of skinny blonds from Spokane...their skin is milky and unblemished behind a layer of dirt... The boy, with his bushy beard and chin-length hair, wears a flannel shirt...the girl has blond dreadlocks and a faraway look. They’re both easy on the eyes, sweet-mannered, and seemingly mute.” This is a good physical description, but they both have plenty to say once you get to know them. Lisa Wells, “All Across the Desert Our Bread Is Blooming! Finisia Medrano and the Nomads of the Great Basin,” *The Believer* (January/February 2015): 38.

¹⁷ My research methods are primarily composed of participant observation, personal self-reflection, and interviews. I also review various online and print texts written by “Hoopsters” and rewilders. I began spending time informally with Wildtending camps in the summer of 2014 and transitioned into formal participant observation in the late summer of 2015. Some visits were no more than two days, and sometimes I lived “on the Hoop” for over a month. I have spent no more than a total of three months with “Hoopsters,” which is a relatively short time for the purposes of learning a new lifeway or for writing a comprehensive ethnography. I also conducted open-ended interviews with approximately a dozen Wildtenders and those affected by the network, some of whom have chosen to appear anonymously in my writing. Most of these interviews were audio recorded, and I took notes during those that were not. I have additionally learned a great deal from texts written by “Hoopsters” and rewilders. See Finisia Medrano, *Growing Up in Occupied America and Other Writings* (Raleigh: Lulu, 2010) and Seda Joseph Saine, “OP 3.3 Toward a Philosophy of Rewilding Psychology,” September 21, 2012, <http://portfolios.gaiauniversity.org/view/view.php?id=1866>.

¹⁸ From Finisia’s perspective, there is almost nobody actually “on the Hoops.” Others see a much broader but socially disconnected network. Seda, for example, agrees with Finisia on this matter, but emphasizes that there are many people striving in different ways for the realization of the movement.

are relatively plentiful. However, many Wildtenders can also be found in Southern Oregon, Northern California, Washington State, and elsewhere. Most present and identify as white, Euro-American, and non-Native. Many are queer, transgender, or gender nonconforming. Some are from the Northwest, and others are not. Some come from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, but most do not. Some have been homeless, some have been involved with sex work, and some have struggled with different kinds of addiction. Most consider themselves to have radical political views. While rewilding as a cultural-political-philosophical movement may have its origins in the 1980's, this grassroots network is less than fifteen years old. Participation has steadily increased, although many have attested to a generally high "turnover" rate. More specific figures would be quite difficult to obtain for reasons both logistical (Wildtenders are geographically spread out, and sometimes "off the grid") and political-social (Wildtenders would be understandably wary of an outsider taking a survey).

ABUNDANCE THROUGH DISTURBANCE: SEASONAL ROUNDS IN THE GREAT BASIN AND COLUMBIA PLATEAU

The concept of "the Hoop" does not exist in most rewilding discourse around the United States and Canada. Wildtenders only do their work in the northwestern United States, and even in that region neither the concept nor the network is universally or fully understood amongst rewilders, anarcho-primitivists, or primitive skills enthusiasts. The term "Hoop," as it is used by Wildtenders, primarily refers to a "seasonal round," where a migrating people interacts with and consumes certain kinds of plant and animal foods in particular places during different seasons in a yearly cycle. The seasonal round, more than just a modality of gathering and hunting practice, is a traditional lifeway for many Indigenous peoples that is deeply imbricated with almost every aspect of political, social, material, and spiritual life.¹⁹ It is a dynamic, spacio-temporal, more-than-human social meshwork of tasks, foods, and practices.²⁰

The Wildtenders mainly work in traditional gathering places that have been tended since time immemorial by the Nez Perce people (Nimíipuu), whose ancestral lands encompass much of what is now known as Idaho and eastern Oregon and Washington. Many contemporary Nez Perce people are Tribal members of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (in Washington State) as well as the Nez Perce Tribe (in Idaho). Over the course of the middle and late nineteenth century, the Nez Perce were dispossessed of their territory, originally over 17 million acres, through a series of conflicts with whites (often stemming from settlers' desire for gold) and increasingly duplicitous and contentious treaty arrangements with the federal government. This culminated in a four-month long war between the U.S. army and several Nez

¹⁹ Nancy J. Turner, *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge: Ethnobotany and Ecological Wisdom of Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern North America* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

²⁰ Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25 (1993): 152-174.

Perce bands, who finally surrendered in October 1877.²¹ On reservations, the Nez Perce were subject to numerous coercive assimilation policies and were forced to adopt Western agriculture and abandon their migratory seasonal rounds. Much of the lands in question have thus been under U.S. federal and private settler control for less than 150 years, a fact that Wildtenders are keenly aware of, but whose ethical implications are not totally agreed upon within the network.

Wildtenders do their ecological restoration work primarily in what they term “wild gardens”—remote sites where Nez Perce and other Columbia Plateau peoples used horticulture and selective harvesting to create an abundance of valued plant foods such as *cous* (biscuitroot), bitterroot, wild carrot, and other roots, nuts, and berries. For Wildtenders, the process of caring for a wild garden can involve a number of practices, including gathering and scattering seeds, transplanting, removing harmful invasive species, cleaning up litter, occasionally treating underbrush with low and cool burning, and harvesting roots during times of year when plant tops can drop mature seeds into recently dug soil. Wildtenders use the term “wild gardens” with tongue in cheek in order to draw attention to the apparent contradiction entailed by food cultivation in the wilderness, and they are aware that the phrase strikes many as oxymoronic. Western conservationist thinking makes a clear distinction between wilderness and agriculture, they argue. But, as Powtawatomi botanist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us, many North American Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge systems eschew this dichotomy, making productive use of intricate permaculture—or agro-ecology—practices.²² Rewilding the Northwest, for Wildtenders, entails reinvigorating these Indigenous traditions in order to bring the wild gardens back to abundance.

Writing as a non-Native academic, I do not claim to be an expert on past or present Indigenous first foods practices. The historical descriptions provided in this section are meant to offer context for the activities and philosophies of the Wildtending network, and the information cited throughout is from generally available sources. Before colonization, Sahaptin speaking peoples on the Columbia Plateau as well as their neighbours, the Nez Perce, engaged in sophisticated horticultural practices and used their seasonal rounds as broad-based environmental management regimes. Alan G. Marshall notes that the Nez Perce in particular “practiced a mode of agriculture that was...largely invisible to Euro-Americans. Rather than creating geometric, fenced, ploughed fields of a single plant species, Nez Perce people

²¹ Elliott West, *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²² Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013). See also Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, 3d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012).

developed irregular plots by hand labour and fire.”²³ They planted, cultivated, and tended staple root foods, but Euro-American settlers were unable or unwilling to see this fact.

However, these gardens were only a part of the traditional seasonal round. Many Indigenous peoples on the Columbia Plateau began harvesting roots in late winter, went to salmon fisheries in the spring, and then returned to their root gardens again in the summer. From April through July, communities regularly joined together for “root camp”—six weeks of root digging, socializing, and trading, and individuals from Tribes speaking different languages communicated through sign language.²⁴ Berries, fruits, and edible lichen moss were harvested in August and September, and late summer’s uphill movements of people paralleled the movement of game such as mule deer. As the temperature became colder, bands would establish more fixed winter camps, a practice emulated by Wildtenders today.²⁵

I term the Wildtenders’ mode of reciprocal environmental management “abundance through disturbance” for two reasons. First, this phrase refers to the ecology of plants such as *Lomatium cous*, also known as biscuitroot. Biscuitroot is a central first food for many Tribes in the Great Basin and Columbia Plateau, and it is a staple for Wildtenders as well. Like many edible plants in this region, biscuitroot gardens actually become more abundant when they are disturbed by human activity. If the root is dug in the summer or early autumn, mature seeds fall into the churned soil and are effectively re-planted. Thus, in contradiction to the Western common sense paradigm regarding natural resource scarcity, the more biscuitroot is harvested this year, the more will be available next year. The importance of this harvest-as-planting ecological phenomenon cannot be overstated. It is an essential component of the seasonal rounds of the region. This subtle but crucial practice was one of many overlooked by invading settlers.

Second, I propose that ‘abundance through disturbance’ is a useful way to broadly conceptualize the ethos of traditional Indigenous land management in the Great Basin and on the Columbia Plateau. This phrase may seem counterintuitive. The terms “abundance” and “disturbance” reflect a long-standing conceptual and pragmatic dichotomy that exists in Euro-American culture regarding the relationship between human society and the non-human world. Westerners often suppose fallaciously that “natural wilderness” can either be in abundance (if left alone) or it can be disturbed or exploited by human beings. It cannot be both. In distinction,

²³ Alan G. Marshall, “Unusual Gardens: The Nez Perce and Wild Horticulture on the Eastern Columbia Plateau,” in *Northwest Lands, Northwest Peoples: Readings in Environmental History*, ed. Dale D. Goble and Paul W. Hirt (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 117.

²⁴ Marilyn D. Couture, Mary F. Ricks, and Lucile Housley, “Foraging Behavior of a Contemporary Northern Great Basin Population,” *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8 (1986): 150-60.

²⁵ Eugene S. Hunn and James Selam, *Nch'i-wána, “The Big River”: Mid-Columbia Indians and Their Land* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

many traditional Indigenous ecological practices do not aim to minimize impact on the land. Rather, they aim to be impactful in a way that engenders abundance of the most valued and cherished plants while simultaneously promoting broad ecosystemic health. The most bountiful sites to gather wild foods are the places that have seen the most human interaction. The most abundant gardens are those that have been the most, and the most recently, disturbed. Sandra L. Peacock and Nancy J. Turner observe that elders in the Interior Plateau of British Columbia, Canada:

insist that the best places to collect particular plant resources today are where they have always been harvested....One might logically assume that such [plant] populations, having been intensely exploited, might show decline compared to places where they were not harvested... [B]ut this does not seem to be the case.²⁶

These special places have been tended, or disturbed, into abundance for thousands of years and only neglected for a few generations.

Wildtenders see themselves as part of a rising generation that will begin the process of restoring these ecosystems. They assert that proper ecological health entails active and sustained human involvement, and that in the Great Basin and Columbia Plateau, people are a keystone species that needs to be reintroduced. However, we must be critical of the presentism that sometimes accompanies the environmentalist pursuit of innovative solutions to ecological problems. These gathering and restoration practices are appropriated from Indigenous management regimes that have existed since time immemorial. The Wildtending network cannot be understood without considering the context of Indigenous dispossession and settler occupation. The following sections consider the manner in which “Hoopsters” succeed and fail to attend to these histories and ongoing realities. I also discuss Wildtending’s interventions into more mainstream Western environmental theory.

STRONGHOLD GARDENS: WILDTENDING ECOLOGIES

Wildtenders emphasize that the seasonal rounds on which they live and work are mere shells, post-holocaust fragments of land bases that were not long ago almost unimaginably abundant. In *Radical Faerie Digest*, one author writes, “when Europeans...got to North America they told stories of natural abundance that now seem unbelievable: skies dark for hours with flocks of birds, waters so fish-full one just had to reach in and pluck.”²⁷ Following this narrative, a

²⁶ Sandra L. Peacock, and Nancy J. Turner, “‘Just Like a Garden’: Traditional Resource Management and Biodiversity Conservation on the Interior Plateau of British Columbia,” in *Biodiversity and Native America*, ed. Paul E. Minnis and Wayne J. Elisents (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 133-134.

²⁷ Fagus, “The Return,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015): 9.

Wildtender in his mid-20s named Michael told me: “you can look and know what this land was—and know what it is [now]. And that’s heartbreaking. Honestly...and so when you see these foods you’re looking at remnants.” He paused for a long moment and then rephrased his statement to connect the survival of the plant foods to the survival of humans. “You’re looking at your right to live on this planet. These foods reserve your place here. And you can see them going away.” Michael and others stress that the gardens are nothing compared to what they used to be, and what they could be again if tended properly by people who understand the delicacy and importance of human-plant mutualities.

Many of the sites of abundant root foods that do exist now are what many Wildtenders call “stronghold gardens.” These are places that were too rugged or too out of the way to be ploughed under, paved over, trampled by cattle, or otherwise ‘developed’ by Euro-American settler society. Wildtenders use titanium digging sticks to harvest biscuitroots. They have often told me that in the old days women could dig with sticks made of wood. Those women were expert diggers, and they could probably do things with a fire-hardened stick that few Wildtenders could do with titanium, but they were also digging in soft earth in valleys. Digging roots today is difficult because all the foods are in tough, rocky hillsides called “biscuit scabs.” Finisia also tells me that these stronghold gardens were collaborative schemes between Native peoples and the “stone people” (the biscuitroots) to keep the seeds and the relationship alive in the face of imminent conquest and destruction. These rocky and out-of-the-way gardens are like seed banks for the future.

Sometimes it is easy to see the human presence and intentionality in shaping the gardens, and at other times it is more difficult. I remember one garden in particular, several miles outside of Enterprise, Oregon. On our first visit I dug roots, mostly what the Wildtenders call “ball cous,” round, white, bready biscuitroots roughly one to six inches in circumference. I enjoyed the work and got quite a bounty, but it was not until my second visit that I truly saw the way the land had been shaped by human interaction: there were different kinds of roots planted in swirling patterns around wide and eroded but evenly sized mounds. Suddenly, as if I had put on a pair of tinted sunglasses, I was seeing differently. These were “wild foods” according to a Western scientific definition, but this was certainly a deliberately constructed site for controlled harvesting. Curving trenches a foot or two deep and three feet wide had been dug out in figure-eight designs and filled with small rocks. In these “rivers of rocks” the ball cous were growing. No digging was necessary. Anyone could simply remove rocks and then pick out the edible, nutritious roots with bare hands. I could imagine the hillside swarming with people. They had arrived to see what had grown here in the year since their last visit. We encountered many gardens like this, and also many where the results of human interactivity were more difficult to see. But when I can see it, and I start to visualize the abundance that might have existed in such a place and many others like it, and the ease with which the foods would have been tended and

harvested, my imagination opens. Cortni and others have described having similar revelatory experiences in gardens. There is a sadness in these places, and also a sense of possibility.

Today, to encounter something like the kind of abundance that Wildtenders say was common before colonization, one has to be in the exact right place at the exact right time of the year, looking for a specific kind of plant, and even then one has to be lucky. In the summer of 2014, when I was visiting with Finisia, Kelsey, and Michael in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, we all took my car to scout a garden that Finisia suspected might be worth spending some time in. This was mid-August, and we found a decent amount of wild carrots, which at that time in the late summer were too dried out to be worth digging up. We also found plenty of wild onion tops, which had gone to seed. In 2015, I went back to this same spot with Michael, Kelsey, and two others. It was mid-July. What we found was shocking. The wild onion had turned the field into an ocean of purple flowers, and just centimeters below the surface of the ground the onion bulbs were as thick as sod. I could sweep my hands through the moist earth and come up with dozens of wild onions the size of grapes. It was raining and so we did not stay long that day, but in mere minutes we were able to stuff our pockets with enough onions to make a large pot of soup. I have a similar memory of encountering unbelievably fat and thickly growing huckleberries at the foot of a mountain in early August, in a patch of woods that looked like it had burned a couple of years earlier. Sometimes the bounty of the wild foods is astounding and exhilarating, but these times are the exceptions that prove the rule. In general, the gardens are few, far between, and require some effort to harvest.

THE REACH-AROUND: WILDTENDING ETHICS

For “Hoop Walkers,” planting back is not only a horticultural practice; it is an ethical paradigm regarding the proper relationship between people and their environments. Unfortunately, much scholarship in the European and Euro-American dominated fields of environmental philosophy and ethics, even work from more progressive or radical authors, has failed to substantively engage with this kind of reciprocal, active ethics-in-practice. This has been a consistent oversight since the early days of American environmental conservation. M. Kat Anderson, in her powerful study from 2005, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California’s Natural Resources*, writes, “John Muir, celebrated environmentalist and founder of the Sierra Club was an early proponent of the view that the California landscape was a pristine wilderness before the arrival of Europeans.”²⁸ However, the natural beauty upon which he gazed was, “really the fertile seed, bulb, and greens gathering grounds of the Miwok and Yokuts Indians, kept open and productive by centuries of carefully

²⁸ M. Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

planned indigenous burning, harvesting, and seed scattering.”²⁹ John Muir, considered by many to be a progenitor of United States environmental thought, thus helped to legitimize a suite of false premises: that nature is healthiest if untouched by humans, that the abundance of the North American landscape was a result of God or wild Nature (with a capital N), and that Native peoples did not have the inclination or wherewithal to impact their environments in a meaningful way.³⁰ In the next century, in a text foundational to the modern American environmental movement, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold famously wrote that, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”³¹ The word “preserve” in this canonical statement is often taken for granted by Western readers. However, in an ethical system based in reciprocity, a more apt verb might be “promote” or “enhance.”

Many authors writing from deep ecology perspectives also work uncritically from the assumption that the best thing humans can do for an ecosystem is to leave it alone, and that environmental policy should focus on minimizing our impact and preserving as much untouched wilderness as possible. These ecocentrist approaches have their critical interlocutors, such as anarchist-socialist social ecology exponent Murray Bookchin, who identifies underlying conservative and imperial politics of deep ecology, and William Cronon, who has lucidly illustrated the hypocrisy and Eurocentrism of the very idea of ‘wilderness.’ Still, neither of these critics offers an alternative to the Western preserve-or-exploit paradigm.³² Thus, while some individuals involved in the Wildtending network take inspiration from deep ecologists and thinkers such as Leopold, most explicitly differentiate themselves from Western environmentalists through the practices and ethics of planting back. Wildtenders assert that humans are themselves a key component of the ideal biotic community. Less interested in conservation for its own sake, they focus on mutually beneficial interaction, intersubjectivity, and active landscape management made possible through regular visits to the wild gardens.

In characteristically bawdy fashion, many Wildtenders call their alternative ethic of reciprocity “the reach-around.” Western society commits constant, brutal, and non-consensual violence against the natural world, and so it is only decent of us to give a little something back, Finisia reasons: “when you’re getting a dick up your ass, it’s so nice when they come around with their

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 108-110.

³¹ Aldo Leopold, and Curt Meine, *A Sand County Almanac & Other Writings on Ecology and Conservation* (New York: Library of America, 2013), 84.

³² See Murray Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007) and William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 7-28.

hand and give you a shake or two, you know what I mean.”³³ This analogy is meant to be funny, and though somewhat shocking at first, after a while we all found ourselves referring to “the reach-around” without really thinking about the sexual and potentially violent origin of the term. Once when I was preparing to depart camp after spending nearly two weeks with Finisia and others, Finisia told me that I had “a good reach-around.” It was said sincerely and sweetly, and I took it as a compliment. The implication was that my presence in camp had not been exploitative. “You better give more to this community than you take,” I had been warned by a friend of the Wildtenders early in my project. I continue to take that advice seriously.

The reach-around, then, is about our relationship with the land, but it is also an approach to relationships in general. To get a better idea about this, we can look at the three unofficial Wildtending mottos, written in *Radical Faerie Digest* by Sigh Moon: “Come Bearing Gifts / Carry Your Own Weight / Give Everything It’s [sic] Life”.³⁴ These phrases are applied broadly. They mean arriving at a Hoop camp with a bundle of seeds, or a load of groceries, or a handmade gift, and it also means replacing the rocks in the trenches after the ball cous have been removed, and it means spreading seed everywhere it might grow. For Wildtenders, the cyclical metaphor of a hoop connotes that all our manifold relationships (human-human as well as human-non-human) should be reciprocal and mutually beneficial.

The social ethics articulated and performed by Wildtenders point to a way to help us think outside the nature-culture divide, offering a theory of sociality that extends beyond the human. In their appropriations of Indigenous knowledge systems and ecological practices, Wildtenders tell us that non-human nature is not a territory to be managed for resource extraction, nor is it a pristine extra-human field to be protected and passively conserved, nor is it even a holy site of sublime transcendence. It is, rather, a dynamic network of social relations with which to actively and reciprocally engage.

WHOSE APOCALYPSE?

Increasingly, Native and non-Native thinkers across disciplines are arguing that a broad cultural movement towards such a ‘regenerative’ worldview will be necessary to survive the crises of our time, ecological, climate, human rights, and otherwise. In *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Naomi Klein discusses this topic with Mississauga Nishnaabeg writer, musician, and Idle No More activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Klein writes that Simpson “describes her people’s teachings and governance structures like this: ‘Our systems are designed to promote more life.’ This statement stopped me in my tracks.”³⁵ Klein and Simpson

³³ Seda Walker and Neisan, “Interview with Finisia Medrano,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015), 30.

³⁴ Sigh Moon, “Coming Out to Hoop,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015), 44.

³⁵ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 442.

go on to advocate that environmentalists move from a discourse of resilience to one of regeneration. Instead of asking how human activity can reduce or minimize harm to the non-human world, we ought to begin asking how we can transform our practices and policies and become a society that is based on the promotion of continual biotic re-birth.

But does anthropogenic global warming “change everything?” Certainly our contemporary climate crisis and its attendant apocalyptic story-lines are broadly and profoundly shaping and re-shaping the dynamics of our social collectives, and in particular networks of environmentalists. However, Wildtenders do not universally agree upon either the ethical mandates or the temporality of the climate crisis. With this in mind, I move to trace three lines of apocalyptic thought that I encountered during my time amongst “Hoop Walkers.” First, there is the sense among many in the Wildtending network that societal collapse is already taking place, that our present moment of economic and ecological crises is not a mere aberration or a pole of a broader historical cycle but is rather the exigent unfolding of a dramatic and catastrophic descent into chaos and devastation. The apocalypse is happening now, this way of thinking proposes, but we are in denial. Second, some Wildtenders assert that apocalypse is actually a structural component of the capitalist-industrial economic system that presently holds global dominance. Indigenous peoples and colonized communities in North America and around the globe, as well as non-human collectives of fish, birds, trees, and so on are already living in post-apocalyptic conditions. If there is an apocalypse presently occurring, this narrative tells us, it is only experienced as apocalypse by the privileged classes that have until now been insulated from the consequences of their own destructive lifeway—the few who have benefitted from the exploitation of the many. A third strain, more closely related to the first, holds that “civilization,” or “Babylon,” currently presents itself as totalizing and stable for the time being, but in fact it will suddenly collapse in the near future, and all hell will break loose. Wildtenders like to call this moment of disaster “when the shit hits the fan.” These three perspectives are not necessarily associated with distinct groups or factions within the network. Rather, they are rhizomatic lines of thinking that fruit in different contexts and moments. A single “Hoop Walker” might give voice to any or all of these perspectives. Wildtenders, like all of us, are multiple and contradictory.

Regarding the first line of apocalyptic thought, Zac and Jasper observed to me that industrial civilization is inherently unsustainable and currently collapsing around them. “I think that the world’s going through a huge transition,” Zac told me. “The whole world is going through transitions always,” he admitted, but then clarified that:

The United States is going through transitions quicker than anyone is prepared for. I’ve been expecting the apocalypse for a long time. I think it

started 60 or 70 years ago and we're slowly going through it. I want my kids to be prepared to live in a very different...world than I've grown up in.

When I asked Zac and others how they imagine an apocalyptic scenario playing out, they would assert that these scenarios are already occurring. They would give, as examples, the current conditions of Detroit, Michigan, as well as the government's response to 2005's Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana. Zac supposed that:

If there is a massive destruction event anywhere...in the United States...as we see happen to other parts of the world, people from there are going to become refugees...which is going to clog highways... If four or five lanes get complete gridlock...nobody's going anywhere. Food shipments aren't making it to cities anymore, which means that cities are able to exist only on the food that they have in their store-shelves... Those...are going to be ransacked immediately. There's going to be martial law declared...to protect those food stores, because that's what we saw happen in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. We're seeing parts of the United States collapse already. Detroit's already post-collapse... New Orleans is a perfect example as well. The government didn't do anything for those people. They let them die. The government used their police to keep people from looting. They protected the Walmart with guns, and shot people in the parking lot to keep people from getting the food and supplies that they need to feed their family. They protected the company's wealth over the lives of a bunch of poor people... I predict that to happen everywhere.

Some Wildtenders apprehend recent economic crises in the United States and abroad, extreme weather events such as tsunamis, powerful hurricanes, and earthquakes, and subsequent catastrophes such as Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, as elements of a vast, gradually unfolding collapse scenario.

In *This Changes Everything*, Klein echoes some of Zac's sentiments. She debunks two fallacies about climate change: first, that there is a universally shared culpability, and second that we will all suffer its disastrous effects equally. Regarding the former, Klein argues that the structures of capitalism (and in particular their recent acceleration in the form of globalization) and their most powerful human agents—wealthy elites running powerful transnational corporations—are to blame. Regarding the latter, Klein argues that climate crisis does not erase hierarchies of wealth, race, gender, and so forth. To the contrary, it exacerbates them. Those communities already marginalized by the violence of capitalist power will be (and have been) the first to suffer the effects of climate disaster, and they will (and do) lack the resources to sufficiently insulate and protect themselves. Thus, the agreement among some Wildtenders,

and among a growing body of academic and public literature, is that apocalypse, or collapse, will have no revelatory single moment. Rather, it is a structure of the present, unfolding within existing paradigms of capitalist accumulation, wealth inequality, militarized state power, and institutionalized racism.

Along the second line of thinking, Wildtenders Seda and Amara write in *Radical Faerie Digest*, “The apocalypse has already happened many times. So many countless human, plant, and animal cultures have been completely destroyed in the desperate insanities of ‘progress.’”³⁶ In this sense, civilization is itself inherently apocalyptic. The growth of powerful empires has for thousands of years consistently resulted in the collapse of ecosystems and societies. In a similar vein, Metis anthropologist Zoe Todd voices concern about the current preoccupation with locating the “golden spike” of the beginning of the Anthropocene, the geologic era of human influence. She writes:

What does it mean to have a reciprocal discourse on catastrophic end times and apocalyptic environmental change in a place where, over the last five hundred years, Indigenous peoples faced (and face) the end of worlds with the violent incursion of colonial ideologies and actions? What does it mean to hold, in simultaneous tension, stories of the Anthropocene in the past, present, and future?³⁷

Addressing Todd’s inquiries, Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte asserts that Native communities in the United States and Canada are “Living Our Ancestors’ Dystopia.” “In the Anthropocene,” writes Whyte, “some indigenous peoples already inhabit what their ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future. So they consider the future from what they believe is already a dystopia.”³⁸ Todd and Whyte argue that discourse around the Anthropocene often speciously universalizes a set of environmental anxieties that is in fact particular to white settler society. When non-Native academics and activists assert that eco-apocalypse is on the horizon, they (we) erase the ways that Indigenous peoples have for hundreds of years resisted and survived ecological collapse, and are currently fighting against settler colonialism and its attendant environmental and humanitarian catastrophes. To put a finer point on it, to claim that the apocalypse has not happened yet is to implicitly claim that Indigenous peoples and their experiences do not matter, and to erase a fundamental dimension of United States society.

³⁶ Seda and Amara, “Wanna Get Free-Key,” *Radical Faerie Digest* (Spring 2015), 17.

³⁷ Zoe Todd, “Relationships,” Theorizing the Contemporary, *Cultural Anthropology* website, January 21, 2016. <http://culanth.org/fieldsights/799-relationships>.

³⁸ Kyle Powys Whyte, “Living Our Ancestors’ Dystopia: Indigenous Peoples, Conservation, and the Anthropocene.” Lecture presented at Penn State University, March 22, 2016.

The third line is a narrative that predicts the fall of Babylon. Michael has described Babylon as a metaphorical and a literal façade, and he speaks about its imminent collapse. We were in my car one evening, driving through a rural eastern Oregon town. “This is just a show,” he said. “You know? Can’t you see the cardboard props? That’s what it looks like.” He continued looking out the window. “I think it’s stable enough,” he said, and there was a long pause before he finished the sentence: “to jump off.” This was a metaphor that had come up a lot in “Hoopster” conversations that summer: would you rather leap off a structure that’s still standing, or one that’s crumbling beneath your feet? It is a rhetorical question. Of course, you cannot physically jump off a platform that is falling. You have to jump while it is stable. The point is: don’t wait until Babylon falls to come out onto “the Hoop.” Leave Babylon now or go down with it. However, comments Finisia, most people will not leave a lifeway that maintains the twin illusions of stability and totality.³⁹

Otter, a teacher in the Wildtending network in his 50s, emphasized that the illusions of “civ” are both comforting and numbing, and thus people do not leave. However, according to Otter it would be better to begin transitioning towards a nomadic and reciprocal way of life now, rather than in the future when society is already collapsing. Otter explained:

When the shit hits the fan, and the slaves aren’t so comfortable in this country no more, and everyone’s future is looking desperate (and for those with children that’s going to have special meaning)...there’ll be people looking. Right now there’s just a few that are looking, but that number could change drastically if the stores’ shelves start shrinking.

Here an imminent apocalypse is anticipated with terror and relish. This way of thinking asserts that a difficult road lies ahead. Some will be prepared, and inevitably others will not. However, the question posed by Seda and Amara, Todd, and Whyte about this third and most familiar collapse narrative is, simply, whose apocalypse?

CONCLUSION

These three disjunctive narrative lines regarding societal and ecological collapse—as a structure of the present, or as a constant effect of colonial conquest and occupation, or as a forthcoming catastrophic event—exist in dynamic tension throughout the Wildtending network. There is no agreement about whether the apocalypse is in the past, the present, the future, or some combination, and no agreement about when the Anthropocene began, or if this term has any real usefulness. Finisia and other Hoopsters are just as likely to describe our current society as

³⁹ Wildtenders, and in particular Michael (who had been travelling with Finisia for about two years), love to come up with puns. Some of the puns are pretty clever. “You believe in Babylon. We be leavin’ Babylon”—grinning, Michael shared that one with me in the summer of 2015.

dystopic as they are to imagine possible scenarios in a post-collapse dystopia, or possible utopia, to come.

The broader rewilding movement, and the “Hoop” network in particular, give voice to multiple and often-contradictory logics around colonialism, power, and difference. Looking forward, questions abound. Can Wildtenders engage climate crisis discourse in a way that acknowledges that many Native communities may be already “living [their] ancestors’ dystopia[s]” and promotes decolonization and Indigenous self-determination? Can they decenter their own apocalyptic visions and apprehend that Native peoples continue to survive and resist the societal and ecological cataclysms of settler colonization? Can they work toward ecological restoration in a way that is in collaboration and solidarity with local Native peoples and Native-led cultural revitalization, resurgence, and land management efforts, rather than in a way that may be appropriative, offensive, and disrespectful? Can Wildtenders parlay their critique of colonization into a reflexive awareness of their own white privilege: their ability to move through rural mostly-white areas with minimal harassment from law enforcement or other hostile provocation from bigoted locals; the unavoidable reality that they do their planting on National Forest, Bureau of Land Management land, and private property, and thus benefit daily from Indigenous dispossession; the fact that they appropriate Native ecological practices, vocabulary, philosophical concepts, and attire without consent from Tribes; their only occasional recognition that the seemingly emergent climate crisis that spurs many of them to search for a more ecologically regenerative lifeway is only emergent for a particular privileged section of the population? These are their challenges. They are many of ours.

The Wildtending network is dynamic, constantly in flux, always growing yet always falling apart, and always generating new ideas and modes of practice. However, the blind spots and contradictions of the “Hoopsters” are not theirs alone. Their visions, fears, challenges, and contradictions are echoed in broader environmental conversations about the politics and poetics of our unfolding ecological moment.