

THE POSTHUMAN TRIBAL: RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS VOICES IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed the intensification of debates concerning the role of Indigenous knowledge in reimagining post humanist engagements with digital technologies. This paper synthesizes interdisciplinary research and policy from 2024–2025 to examine how Indigenous communities worldwide are reclaiming epistemic and material agency during rapid technological transformation. Focusing on tribal data sovereignty, AI ethics, and environmental sustainability, the argument demonstrates how Indigenous ontologies unsettle anthropocentric assumptions of mainstream posthumanism while offering robust models for multispecies flourishing and ethical technology governance. The discussion highlights innovative Indigenous-led initiatives, new legal recognitions, and pedagogical approaches that braid technology with tradition, concluding that only a decolonial, justice-oriented posthumanism can respond inclusively and ethically to urgent global challenges.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, posthumanism, data sovereignty, decolonial theory, AI ethics, climate justice, epistemic pluralism

Introduction

The emergence of posthumanist critique has fundamentally altered scholarly conceptions of agency, personhood, and relationality. As Western technological systems penetrate deeper into the everyday lives of Indigenous peoples, questions of sovereignty, knowledge property, and multispecies futurity have acquired greater urgency (Schmelzer, 2025). Mainstream posthumanist inquiry, while important for decentring the autonomous human subject, has itself been critiqued for its reliance on Eurocentric epistemes and its at times instrumental adoption of Indigenous concepts in the absence of sufficient attention to coloniality (Jackson, 2022; Sundberg, 2014). Academic, legal, and policy momentum in the years 2024–2025 demonstrates a critical inflection point: Indigenous-led frameworks for AI governance (ASU News, 2025), land management, and environmental education provide concrete guides for building just, decolonial futures (Hulagoor, 2025; Keystone Foundation, 2025).

Current State of Posthumanist-Indigenous Engagement

A growing body of work published in the Journal of Posthumanism and allied journals underlines the rise of decolonial posthumanism.

Recent initiatives make Indigenous sovereignty central to the regulation of AI; for example, the Cherokee Nation has adopted cultural algorithms in framing ethical AI use (Schmelzer, 2025). International conferences have surfaced Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) for biodiversity conservation, policy, and environmental justice (Keystone Foundation, 2025), which resists the simplicity of fusing posthuman and Indigenous paradigms in favor of deep dialogue.

Unlike classical posthumanism, which risks disembodiment of personhood into techno-optimist abstraction, Indigenous posthumanisms root agency in historically and geographically situated beings—bodies, rivers, forests, algorithms, kin—not just human populations, but multispecies networks (Coombe, 2021). These new alliances have challenged existing structures of intellectual property, putting a spotlight on Indigenous data sovereignty and legal innovation for environmental protection at a time of catastrophic climate change (AIPI ASU, 2025; Hulagoor, 2025).

Tribal Data Sovereignty and AI Governance

The most transformative policy innovation of the past year is the coalescence of tribal data governance—anchoring the right to control, use, and benefit from data in tribal law—as a precondition for all technological engagement on Indigenous lands (ASU News, 2025; Pickens, 2025). The Cherokee Nation’s 2025 AI strategy, for example, demonstrates a sophisticated roadmap: every use of AI or digital data must be explicitly aligned with Cherokee values and subject to tribal cultural review (Schmelzer, 2025). This framework not only ensures protection from external surveillance or exploitation but makes digital inclusion conditional on collective benefit.

Further, the articulation of the CARE principles of Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, and Ethics have supplanted extractive, Eurocentric models of digital governance with community-centered, consent-based protocols (AIPI ASU, 2025). These protocols are being enacted globally, from the forests of India, where legal recognitions of TEK have shaped sustainable development (Keystone Foundation, 2025), to networks of tribal nations in the Americas, which are establishing a digital consortia for language and ecological data stewardship (Ndlovu, 2014).

Posthuman Environmental Sustainability: From Western Theory to Indigenous Praxis

While posthumanism has powerfully critiqued anthropocentrism and its environmental consequences, it is in the realm of Indigenous frameworks—in particular, the operationalization of systemic and interconnected accounts of multispecies life—that we find these ideals (Braidotti, 2019; Hulagoor, 2025). Indeed, Indigenous knowledge systems, as documented in India and the Americas, encode ecological science and also legal rights and reciprocal obligations to ensure forest health, biodiversity, water, and soil management far superior to most Western regimes (Keystone Foundation, 2025; Hulagoor, 2025).

Methodologically, ethnographic and digital research alike are now learning that climate anxiety and environmental trauma are not simply psychological states but situated knowledges—what Boyd (2023) calls “posthuman knowledge”—that function as warnings and guides for future planetary governance.

In this context, Indigenous sovereignty is the frontline of both ecological survival and ethical posthuman flourishing.

Decolonial Futures: Methodologies and Ethical Imperatives

The present research makes a case for moving beyond "additive" models in which Indigenous concepts are used to augment or legitimize post humanist theory. Instead, methodological innovations from 2025 emphasize participatory action research, collaborative knowledge mapping, and the creation of Indigenous-led digital humanities projects (Contending Modernities, 2024; Wang, 2025). Key to this movement is the principle that only Indigenous communities have the sovereign right to determine the uses and meanings of their data, languages, and knowledges—even as they participate in global technological systems (Pickens, 2025).

Moreover, legal and ethical frameworks in new treaties and agreements reflect the need for ongoing consultation, the repatriation of digital and biological data, and the recognition of Indigenous law and jurisdiction within the digital and terrestrial territories (Crepelle, 2024; Coombe, 2021).

Critical Challenges and Limitations

Despite progress, challenges abound. There is considerable tension between the desire for technological innovation and the risks of surveillance, control, and exploitation inherent in mainstream AI and data systems. Academic critiques continue to warn against technophilic that erases context, agency, or the material realities of gender, race, and class (Sundberg 2014; Jackson 2022). More precisely, supposed progressive post humanist projects sometimes overlook the spiritual and kin centric aspects of Indigenous ontologies, reducing more-than-human agency into material or utilitarian terms (Kimmerer 2003, 2020; Watts 2013).

The reclamation of Indigenous voices in the age of AI necessitates the development of frameworks that are locally accountable, globally networked, and institutionally enforceable: not an easy task but definitely an achievable one.

Conclusion

This also means the return of Indigenous authority to the centre of philosophical, legal, and digital dialogues heralds a post humanist "renaissance" in which the lessons of multispecies kinship, ecological reciprocity, and sovereignty-first governance offer hope for a sustainable future. The posthuman tribal is not a departure from tradition but its renewal in new circumstances.

As we confront the concurrent crises of technological transformation, climate change, and enduring coloniality, only a justice- and humility-based posthumanism, based on Indigenous knowledge, would be adequate.

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