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Articles

Confluence: Water as an Analytic of Indigenous Feminisms

Joanne Barker

This article intends an orientation of readers to critical Indigenous feminist politics through a theorizing of and engagement with water as an analytic. It will not serve as an introduction in the conventional sense. There is nothing wrong with that kind of introduction or the expectations they engender; I have written them and find them useful. But I feel that the complexity of Indigenous feminist politics—defined as it is in this historical moment by the refutation of sexual violence, extractive capitalism, and the empire's apologia; respect of original teachings and cultural practices and the elders who care for them; and the futurisms of science fiction, and eco- and poly-eroticism—requires that I at least try to offer something other than the usual. I feel it requires something that thinks and moves with in relation and responsibility to, rather than sits in front of, or above, as with the usual script for the view and content of the introduction.[1]

And so I turn to water. Not a water romanticized in a nostalgia for a past authentic Indigeneity always already feminist (as if it has always been this way). Not a water subjected to recuperation or recovery efforts (implying if not demanding the apparatus of a state's recognition and conservation). And not a water whose dystopic contamination and toxicity leaves us with nothing but a cosmic-level crisis from which we will never survive, or can survive only as superheroes. Instead I turn to water as a mode of analysis, a water that (in)forms, a water that instructs. In doing so I try to think and move with other Indigenous women who hold and care for water as life, who see water as a relative, as part of a living network of interdependent relationships and deep responsibilities (fig. 1).[2]

To think through and with water's analytic, I focus on two solidifications of Indigenous feminist politics in the United States and Canada. The first concerns

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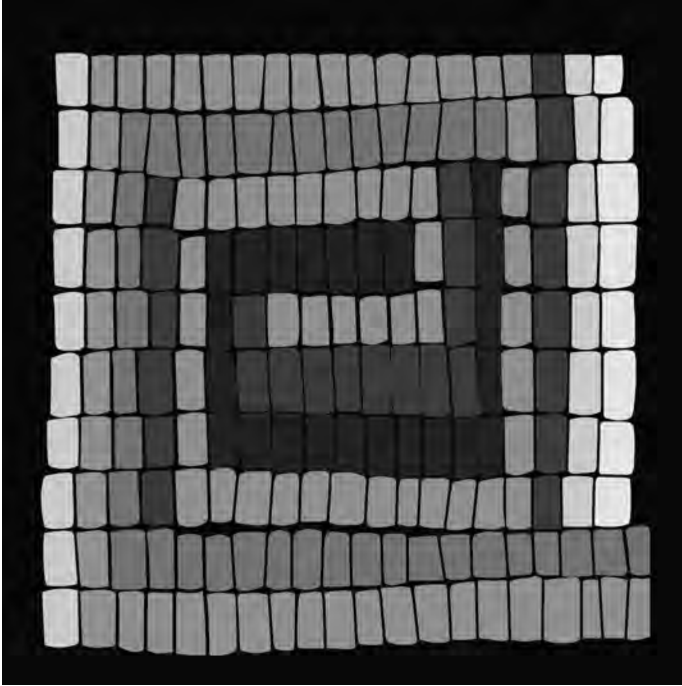

Figure 1. Water as Wampum
Responsibility in Relation

theory and method. What informs and distinguishes the articulation of a critical Indigenous feminist politics with/from other feminisms? What difference does water make within that articulation? The second involves the junctures of the Flint water crisis and the #NoDAPL action at Standing Rock. How did water bring people together, not just there but around the world? How does the coming together matter? In both solidifications, gender is understood as a core constitutive aspect of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and solidarity. In both solidifications, water rests with women and women-identified individuals and their social and cultural responsibilities to and in multiple kinds of relationships that include other-than-human beings and involve other-than-seen realities.[3]

I will offer less in the way of a decisive conclusion about these solidifications of Indigenous feminisms and the kinds of relationships and responsibilities that they entail than I will try to suggest a process of contextualized understanding as an Indigenous feminist method—the difference between the shoring up or damming of empirical objectivity about (the view in front of or above) and the confluence of knowledge within and between (partial, implicated, contradictory). The difference between empiricism and interlocution. But first a brief detour to consider what water is and is not (fig. 2).

Figure 2. Water Marks
Carving Water and Space

The water of empirical science, in all of its claims on objective knowledge, is understood as a chemical substance. Its component parts and their interactions are isolated and investigated. They are identified as one part oxygen and two parts hydrogen (H2O), connected by a covalent bond that involves the attractive sharing of electron pairs between atoms. Water takes one of three forms: liquid, solid, gas. It moves constantly between these forms through precipitation, condensation, evaporation, and infiltration. It is visible as lakes, streams, seas, oceans; snow, glaciers, ice; clouds, steam, fog, dew, aquifers, and atmospheric humidity.

According to the US Geological Survey and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, over 96 percent of the Earth's water is saline, less than 4 percent is freshwater, over 68 percent of freshwater is in ice and glacier form, and over 30 percent is in the ground: "Fresh surface-water sources, such as rivers and lakes, only constitute about 22,300 cubic miles (93,100 cubic kilometers), which is about 1/150th of one percent of total water."[4] Up to 60 percent of the human adult body is water, and for pregnant women, up to 75 percent.[5] Other-than-human beings vary: jellyfish are 95 percent water, some desert snakes are 20 percent, with an overall average of 63 percent. Plants vary between 2 and 95 percent.[6]

Figure 3. Water Bearers
Women Gather Waters from the Galaxy

Against the wisdom of empirical science, and often cast as irrational or nonsensical, some have argued that water retains a memory of all substances that have dissolved within it. They maintain that water memory represents a consciousness, the source of which is revealed by its ability to heal and transform other forms of life.[7]

In 2015 National Aeronautics and Space Administration scientists observed that water defines the stuff of galaxies: "The chemical elements in water, hydrogen and oxygen, are some of the most abundant elements in the universe. Astronomers see the signature of water in giant molecular clouds between the stars, in disks of material that represent newborn planetary systems, and in the atmospheres of giant planets orbiting other stars" (fig. 3).[8] Earth does not own water.

Indigenous peoples' knowledge of water is attuned to its role in life and as life. Teresia Teaiwa writes of Native Pacific people's life force in relation to the Pacific ocean, "We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood."[9] Melissa K. Nelson writes that, "According to traditional teachings, water or niibi, is a primary sacred element in life and therefore must be cherished as an essential relative, elder, and teacher. Water is basic to human survival and it is also imbued with great meaning and supernatural power. Water is Manitou, and contains manitous."[10] The Nibi Walk organizers argue that, "Water is a life giver, and because women also give life they are the keepers of the water."[11] Katsi Cook writes that environmental

Figure 4. Water Form
For Teresia

and reproductive justice are defined by women's roles in processes of creation, linking through water the universe, women, the fetus, and stories: "Woman is the first environment; she is an original instruction."[12] Cook instructs us to be mindful and respectful of water's direction by never facing against it.[13] In Lenape stories, at the places where water and trees meet, spirit beings move between worlds.[14]

Indigenous teachings about water belong to specific groups and places, providing meaningful context and protocols for cultural practice. Kristi Leora Gansworth and Karen Werner write that, "The waters accept songs and plants, dried leaves grown and braided with love . . . Waters respond to the offerings . . . Water . . . speaks, this speaking comes to the part of the body that remembers, the part that does not have physical limits."[15] Quoting a Tlingit elder, Eleanor Hayman, with Colleen James and Mark Wedge, explains that, "When our ancient people talked about water, what the Western world calls H2O, they would say 'Haa daséigu a tóo yéi yatee,' 'Our life is in the water . . . Our breath is in the water.'"[16] For the Tlingit and other northern peoples, glaciers (water), like stories, are sentient, possessing both autonomous agency and intergenerational perspectives on time and place.[17] Understanding the interdependence of life and human responsibilities for reciprocity to water are the conditions on which humans relate to other-than-human beings, remember in story and cross-multiple kinds of boundaries between seen and other-than-seen worlds (fig. 4).

The dialectic between what science knows about water, and what Indigenous people believe, both locks analysis, and reflects an analysis that is locked, into overdetermined debates between scientific empiricism and cultural relativism. These debates undergird imperialism by providing its rationale and demand—sometimes in the name of intellectual superiority, or social evolution, or economic development (assimilation, industrialization, extraction), and sometimes in the nomenclatures of liberal multiculturalism ("all lives matter"). Anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, core features of radical Indigenous feminist politics, require something other than an inversion of the science/culture binary. Naming Indigenous belief science or Indigenous science culture is not decolonization; it does not require us to change anything about our understandings of science and/or culture.[18] Instead, water teaches us to think about knowledge in continuous movement, transition, and change. Water is confluence, transformation, diversion (evaporation, sublimation, condensation, precipitation, storage, runoff, infiltration), exchange, not qualitative or stagnate systematicity (this equals that). Water is about the movement and form of when and how and with whom we know, and not merely what we claim or make claims on. Its analytic values story, humility, care, generosity, and reciprocity. It is life.

Part I: On Theory and Method

Water teaches us to be mindful of our relations with one another, including other-than-human beings and the lands and the waters on/in which we live together. It decenters human exceptionalism when considering issues of life and well-being, requiring practices of responsible care in understanding the world and its varied, place-specific ecosystems that extend beyond the centrism of humans.[19] It brings our attention to the connectivity and interactions between water, land, and air, between humans and other-than-humans, in the visible world and in the context of other-than-seen realities. It emphasizes, not romanticizes, those connections and interactions as the principles on which the terms and conditions of our sociocultural, ethical responsibilities are based.

At the same time, given the realities of catastrophic contamination and destruction, water shows us the intricacies and intimacies of imperial violence. It negotiates the difficult terrain of this violence in movement, displaying its power to home, shape rock, move earth, and transition between. Refusing these teachings has had consequences not only to the health of humans, fish and mammals, plant life, and many other beings, but also in contributing to the severity of water's reactions to extractive capitalism (hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, droughts).

In previous writings I have traced various intellectual genealogies of Indigenous gender, sexuality, and feminism.[20] I have argued that Indigenous feminisms are deeply embedded within unique and shared Indigenous territories and cultural histories, ethically responsible to the relationships defined there/within.[21] This is not an argument that Indigenous territories and relationships are uncontested, but rather that they are, in all of their complexities, constitutive of the terms and stakes of contestation over/within territories-as-cultures. Drawing from this work, I want this iteration of Indigenous feminism to consider how Indigenous territory, cultural history, and

Figure 5. Water Dance
Interdependence

relationships matter in Indigenous feminist conversations with other feminisms (fig. 5). Specifically, I want to think about these conversations in the context of intersectionality. I do so for two reasons. First, my work has been deeply informed by those, including Audre Lorde and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who have developed intersectionality as a critical, radical feminist methodology. As with any writing that we have thought and moved with in our own work, even as it is generative and empowering and the place from which we build political engagement, we also think with its troubles. For me, this has involved paying attention to how intersectionality has conceived of power in context of Indigenous locations and territories and state imperialism.

This is not about how or if an Indigenous difference is included or excluded from a preexisting, even archetypal, intersection—as if it is already defined and the Indigenous arrives to muck up the waters. This is about how Indigenous locations and territories, and histories of United States and Canadian imperialism, as well as colonial practice, work in the conceptualization of how power is formed and articulated. It might be useful to begin with my conclusion.

Part of the trouble with the way indigeneity is made to appear within the terms and conditions of intersectional analyses goes to the exceptionalization or relativizing of Indigenous issues, which always seem to be important over there but never here,

back then but never now, except when the same as. A difference seen, but always differed, temporally and spatially. It goes to the way indigeneity is made to speak to the same issues of race as everyone else, missing and so distorting the legal, economic, and social importance of location, territory, imperialism, and colonialism within processes of racialization for Indigenous people. A sameness that distorts the differences that matter. Part of the potential goes to how intersectionality has served as a critical mode of solidarity across feminisms, a mode of working together in anger, love, grief, compassion, and generosity against race, gender, sex, and class-based violence and state oppression. This potential provides partial context for theorizing water as an analytic of Indigenous feminisms.

Of Intersectionality

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.
>
> —The Combahee River Collective Statement

> There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.
>
> —Audre Lorde

> Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.
>
> —Kimberlé Crenshaw

Intersectionality[22] has been criticized for advancing identity politics, creating hierarchies of oppression, victimizing women, and demonizing white men.[23] It has been criticized for "hijacking feminism," ostensibly from white feminists and the women's movement.[24] It has been criticized for reifying identity politics and celebrating difference, with racialized-gendered subjects afforded a privileged claim on oppression.[25] It has been criticized for centering Black women and their concerns: "Nearly everything about intersectionality is disputed: its histories and origins, its methodologies, its efficacy, its politics, its relationship to identity and identity politics, its central metaphor, its juridical orientations, its relationship to 'black woman' and to black feminism."[26]

Mindful of these criticisms, I situate this conversation with Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," the article credited with formulating/formalizing intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological approach (though it, too, had its own intellectual genealogy, most importantly including its roots in the Combahee River Collective).[27]

I then examine the criticisms of intersectionality through Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* and "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess."[28] Puar's work is credited with bringing criticisms of intersectionality to the fore of queer feminism. I think through the works of Crenshaw and Puar in the form of the close reading to deliberately reflect on the cross-currents between intersectionality, assemblage, Indigeneity, feminism, and activism. How and where do these currents pool, or diverge? How do Indigenous issues get taken up, or not?

In "Mapping the Margins," Crenshaw examines the intersectionality of racism and sexism in violence against women of color.[29] Drawing from a history of Black feminist abolitionists including Sojourner Truth, bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Audre Lorde, and the work and writings of the Combahee River Collective, Crenshaw argues that feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to understand how the experiences of women of color are the product of both racism and sexism: "the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately."[30] She continues, "The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women."[31]

Crenshaw argues that an intersectional approach interrogates how race and gender—as well as other axes of social differentiation including sexuality and class—inform the experiences of women of color.[32] She identifies three types of intersectionality: (1) the structural (such as the marriage fraud provisions of immigration laws and public funding of rape counseling); (2) the political (such as the politics of antiracist and feminist movement discourses, the community suppression of the recognition of violence in the name of "larger" antiracist concerns, dominant conceptions of rape and policing practices, and vilification or silencing of rape survivors within communities of color); and (3) the representational (such as the cultural imagery of women of color).[33] In defining these types of intersectionality, Crenshaw's focus on the experiences of Black women with sexual violence and battery and rape law is meant to instance—not contain or represent—the experiences of women of color. By centering Black women's subjectivity in her analysis of both battery and rape law and Black women's organizing against sexual violence, Crenshaw reveals the failures of privileging race (blackness) or gender (women) in theorizing oppression and in organizing work (not necessarily discrete labors).[34]

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir K. Puar defines "homonationalism" as an "assemblage" of simultaneously and continuously (re)constituted queer subjectivity, nationalism, racism, and sexism in the service of US neoliberalism and imperialism.[35] Drawing from the works of those writing within the junctures of Marxism, post-structuralism, and psychology, including Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Lacan, Puar argues that homonationalism is aligned with the state's imperialism vis-à-vis consumerism, security, surveillance, detention, and deportation.[36] Puar's analysis of the representational politics within queer communities over their public displays of patriotism following September 11, 2001, the photographs of

Abu Ghraib prisoners and Arab-as-Muslim sexuality, the decriminalization of sodomy and uses of the indefinite detention of immigrants, Sikhs' responses to hate crimes of "mistaken identity," and suicide bombers, demonstrates how queer homonationalism supports US militarism "at home" and abroad. Queer complicity with Islamaphobia is directly implicated in the militarized invasion and occupation of the Middle East.[37]

Puar develops her notion of assemblage through a critique of the identity politics of intersectionality within queer studies and queer communities. This intersectionality, she claims, advances the "representational mandates of visibility identity politics that feed narratives of sexual exceptionalism."[38] She insists that US imperialism requires critical queer theories and organizing efforts that "disentangle the relations between representation" (the stable, the visible) "and affect" (the work of the "spatially and temporally contingent").[39] She asserts that to contend with the politics of complicity and collusion with US imperialism within queer studies and communities, the fixed must be turned over for the process, the represented for the ontological.

"I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess" clarifies Puar's argument and responds to criticisms of her interpretation of intersectionality. Defining intersectionality as "foreground[ing] the mutually coconstitutive forces of race, class, sex, gender, and nation" to understand the social consequences of difference, Puar argues that intersectionality "retroactively forms the grid and positions on it."[40] To resolve "Encountering poststructuralist fatigue with the now-predicable yet still necessary demands for subject recognition," Puar describes assemblage as "that which is prior to, beyond, or past the grid."[41] While intersectionality examines "subject positioning on a grid," assemblage examines the perpetual movement and process of the grid's formation in formation; assemblage is about "connections with other concepts" that do not "prescribe relations" nor exist "prior to them;" "rather, relations of force, connection, resonance, and patterning give rise to concepts." [42]

Puar considers assemblage in relation to other-than-human relations and embodiments: "Assemblages do not privilege bodies as human, nor as residing within a human animal/nonhuman animal binary. Along with a de-exceptionalizing of human bodies, multiple forms of matter can be bodies—bodies of water, cities, institutions, and so on. Matter is an actor . . . [it] is not a 'thing' but a doing." Assemblages "come into existence within processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization."[43] However, "deterritorialization and reterritorialization" are not developed, nor is it shown how other-than-human bodies inform Puar's analyses or concerns about queer nationalism. She concludes that while intersectionality "attempts to comprehend political institutions and their attendant forms of social normativity and disciplinary administration," assemblages "ask what is prior to and beyond what gets established."[44]

Intersectionality upended the historical centering of white, middle-class women and heteronormativity in feminist theory and organizing and patriarchy in antiracist theory and organizing by articulating a feminist antiracist politic. The roots of intersectionality in Black feminist abolitionism, and more specifically the work and writings of the Combahee River Collective, situated its feminism away from white women's suffrage and civil rights discourses and against the co-production of racism, sexism, sexual violence, capitalism, slavery, policing, prisons, and sexual violence.

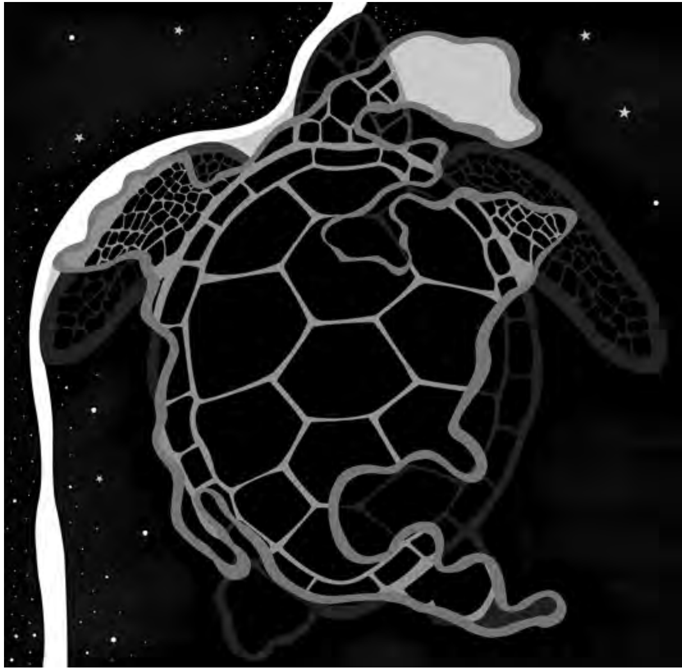

Figure 6. Turtle Island
Turtles All the Way Down

Assemblage toppled the exceptionalism of queer (of color) subjectivities—and the hierarchies of oppression that they advance—by tracing the implications of their theorizing, organizing work, and self-(re)presentations within processes of imperial formation, militarization, and the neoliberal ideologies on which they are based. It challenged the fixedness and rigidity of theories of social structure, and the meanings that produce and perpetuate that structure, for an understanding of the ongoing-ness of social relations and concept.

There is much to be done with Crenshaw and Puar, on their own terms and in conversation with one another. For my purposes here, I want to stay with how they conceptualize power and its implications for understanding imperialism and violence from the context of Indigenous feminisms (fig. 6). Both conceive of power in ways that implicate, but do not engage or complicate, the locations or territories on which their theories rest. I think that this lack of engagement is because indigeneity does not figure on its own terms. This is not about inclusion/exclusion. Their respective conceptual radars are certainly attuned to Indigenous people's experiences under state imperialism and gender violence. But a genuine accounting of indigeneity requires more than a presumed inclusion within the oppressed, as a racial difference that is ultimately the same as others racialized. And it has to do with the location and territory of power.

Intersections are quite literally a location. But I cannot help but wonder if that location is situated within a territory—a specific, identifiable place or land—or if the intersection is conceived of solely as a metaphor, abstracted from its place of meaning. Similarly, in assemblage, territories are assembled but never landed. I would suggest that neither intersectionality nor assemblage necessarily demand critical attention to locations or territories as they matter within Indigenous feminism. As suggested by Manu Karuka's argument in *Empire's Tracks*, the problematics of not accounting for Indigenous territory might be a naturalization of the imperial state formation or nation-state.[45]

Take, for example, the Combahee River Collective to which their respective intellectual engagements are so deeply indebted. The Collective describes its origins on a webpage entitled "The Struggle":

> The founders of the Combahee River collective (CRC) first met at the National Black Feminist Organization's (NBFO) regional conference in 1973. A year later the women began to have regular meetings in Boston, Massachusetts. At one of these meetings they chose their name based off of the Combahee River raid of 1863 led by Harriet Tubman. They chose the name not only because hundreds of slaves were able to escape but because this was the first military strategy designed by a woman. By the summer of 1974 the collective separated from the NBFO to become a separate black feminist group. The founders of the CRC felt that the NBFO didn't convey the importance of black lesbianism and felt they were not radical enough to make the impact they felt was necessary for change. The goals of the collective were to make black feminism and lesbianism a part of the women's movement because before this group the feminist movement was based solely on the heterosexual white middle class women.[46]

The Collective emphasizes the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality, identifies the time and place from which their name originates, but does not pay attention to the historical significance of that place within its naming or political mandate. Beyond its marking of an historical moment in abolitionist struggle, the Combahee River is quite literally, and geographically, not important to the Collective's sense of struggle.

The Combahee River is located in South Carolina at the confluence of the Salkehatchie and Little Salkehatchie rivers. Part of its lower drainage combines with the Ashepoo River and the Edisto River to form the ACE Basin. It empties into the St. Helena Sound which in turn empties into the Atlantic Ocean. This region defined the original territories of the Combahee (sometimes Cusabo) people, who spoke a Muskhogean dialect. The area was defined by conflicts among and between empires and their colonies for control of its agricultural and water-rich lands and extensive trade networks. The complicated history of the Combahee people and their Indigenous allies (and adversaries), their repeated displacement and genocide, and their subjection to southern plantation economies, is not a part of the Collective's sense of itself nor among the intersections it needs to pay attention to, even as it centers the intersections of race, gender, sexuality (lesbianism), and class.

In other words, the perception of intersectionality that the Collective articulates is one in which the ongoing social forces of imperialism and colonialism against Indigenous peoples are not figured. Again, this is not about the erasure of Indigenous peoples or of indigeneity (as Robin G. Kelley argues, the complexities of Black indigeneity also matter to how indigeneity is conceived).[47] Rather, it is about the way intersectional analyses conceptualize power. Without an accounting of imperialism and colonialism, the "system of oppression" that is imagined reinforces the state as a settled structure, effectively naturalizing the state's territorial claims and "domestic" jurisdiction—which, in profound ways, undermines Indigenous peoples' experiences, concerns, and organizing work for sovereignty and self-determination.[48]

Again, the issue is not lack of inclusion or presence. It is about a power without a relevant, formative Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination over the land that directly challenges the state's authority and legitimacy. One could credibly argue that this is not the point of the arguments of the Collective, Crenshaw, or Puar and meet them there on those terms, presuming that they are amiable.[49] But genuine respect of and alliance with Indigenous peoples—and their experiences, concerns, and organizing labor—requires that two additional kinds of analytic work happen. The first is attention to the formative place of location and territory within how "systems of oppression" and state imperialism are defined and operationalized.

The second is a disaggregation of indigeneity from race and ethnicity. As has been well theorized in Indigenous studies, the presumption of indigeneity fitting within analysis or organizing through the rubric of race and ethnicity does a particular discursive work of equating or eliding indigeneity with a race or an ethnicity, and thus of equating or eliding Indigenous experiences of, concerns about, and strategies against oppression with the civil rights struggles of racial and ethnic groups.[50] It is not that Indigenous peoples are not racialized or made-ethnic within state regulatory or social politics, or that they are not concerned about civil rights, or that other groups are racial and ethnic and only address civil rights. Rather, the result of the presumption that indigeneity is merely another race and ethnicity is that it is racialized as the same, which denies the very important legal, political, and social differences that indigeneity makes. Indigeneity demands a reconceptualization of race, one that understands what Derek Gregory terms "the colonial present" as the condition on which the racialization of the Indigenous is articulated in service to state imperialism and its neoliberal ideologies.[51]

Confluence Redux

I am going to redirect the flow of this article to (re)consider confluence as an analytic of Indigenous feminisms—to think through how or what it might have to tell us about intersectionality and assemblage. Then I will return to the issues I have discussed above—conceptualizations of state power, the formative place of location and territory, and the racialization of indigeneity—to consider the analytics of water at the juncture of the Flint water crisis and the #NoDAPL action at Standing Rock.

Water is not created "out of thin air" nor impervious to human behavior. The hydrologic cycle is not about the creation of new water; it is about the continuous

Figure 7. Rivulets
World Building

movement and changing states of water in liquid, solid, and gas form. As Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke explain, "The earth's water supply is finite. Not only is there the same amount of water on the planet as there was at its creation, it is almost all the same water."[52] Water is not about the continuity of equation or sameness between its forms; it is about the continuity of perpetual movement and form-changing.

In Indigenous teachings this confluence is the relationality and reciprocity of our limits, boundaries, memory, story, and mutability. It is a respect for other-than-human beings and other-than-seen realities. It is a life-giving that is held, cared for, and embodied by women and women-identified individuals:[53] As one teaching puts it, "For Indigenous peoples and their ways of life, water is a living thing, a spiritual entity with 'life-giving' forces, which comes with certain duties and responsibilities to ensure that it is respected, protected, and nurtured."[54] It is about building a world together that transforms relationships across and within. As Melissa K. Nelson has written, "Most of us find it easier to separate ourselves from nature than to embrace the liquid mystery of our union with it. As freshwater disappears on the earth, so do the water stories that remind us that we too can freeze, melt, conceive, and evaporate. We too can construct a confluence of cultural rivulets where the natural and cultural coalesce" (fig. 7).[55]

This possibility is embodied in Indigenous water knowledge, including cultural teachings and practices and Indigenous organizing efforts to protect water against

catastrophic exploitation and contamination. This necessitates that the analysis begin in territory, attuned to the cultural specificities of Indigenous governance in a located place and the knowledge that informs that governance, in addition to the realities of exploitation and contamination. This analysis considers what kinds of responsibilities Indigenous peoples hold and practice. It is attuned to how, and whether or not, those responsibilities are acknowledged and respected by imperial jurisdictional authorities and their colonial apparatuses, such as the United States and its states, Canada and its provinces, and all of their respective courts, military, and police. It denaturalizes the state's authority and recenters Indigenous governance. It is critical when Indigenous officials go the way of the state and enable imperial interests.

It considers relationships. If water is in us and we are in water, the link between human and other-than-human beings, the earth and other-worlds, is profoundly intimate and visceral. Water is not a mystical, abstracted fable. It is not quaint when Indigenous peoples tell water stories or perform water ceremonies. Water represents that humans are not the preeminent life force in the universe, nor are human political and economic systems the most important forms of governance. Water points us to other life-forms and realities, to our ancestors and futures, to our relationships across and within and between, to connections and dependencies. For humans, it emphasizes our responsibilities to one another and centers women and women-identified individuals in defining how those responsibilities are fulfilled. This involves the protocols and ceremonies for living within specific places and to the entire web of ecosystems that they contain and relate through. Confluence understands the interdependence of life and human responsibilities for reciprocity and humility. Confluence also directs us to think about reaction, and specifically, engagement with life around us.

In an imperial state formation, on the other hand, water is treated as a commodifiable resource subjected to regulation, management, and conservation, even while climate and weather are being mutually confused so that illegal extraction and waste disposal are obscured. Water is represented as innately, inevitably available, as if drought can just be waited out until the return of abundant snows and rains. It is abstracted from capitalist practices—themselves almost always illegal—to create a water that is replenished on its own, into infinity, not only perpetually reproduced but reproduced in a natural world that has extranatural abilities to heal itself. (I am thinking here of oil industry executives and their congressional representatives that claim rivers, streams, and oceans take care of oil spills on their own, sometimes with the help of beavers.)[56] All the while, and ultimately, how humans treat water does not matter, because clean drinkable water will always be there as a renewable resource.[57]

But confluence knows better. It knows that reactions matter and are on the move, changing the earth as they go. It insists that "systems of oppression" are understood to be actively engaged in the articulation of an imperial state formation whose core mode of operationalizing is colonial, located at the defining nexus of finance and war, resource extraction and property theft, sexual violence and indifference.[58]

Part II: Of Rights and Responsibilities

In *Rivers of Empire*, Donald Worster argues that states have developed vast regulatory policies that privilege corporate and non-Indigenous access and use of water, and in addition, forgive pollution and contamination of water even when its effects will remain in the environment for thousands of years. [59] Simultaneously, states heavily regulate Indigenous water use and access and have used excessive military force against Indigenous challenges to the law and its enforcement that are rationalized through neoliberal notions of national security.

That the global water crisis is exasperated by population growth has been well recognized for quite some time, but the crisis is more pointedly caused by irresponsible and excessive use of water by corporations.[60] In *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*, Vandana Shiva explains that at each level of the hydrological cycle, "modern humans have abused the earth and destroyed its capacity to receive, absorb, and store water. Deforestation and mining have destroyed the ability of water catchments to retain water. Monoculture agriculture and forestry have sucked ecosystems dry. The growing use of fossil fuels has led to atmospheric pollution and climate change, responsible for recurrent floods, cyclones, and droughts."[61]

The exploitation and pollution of water defies its scarcity, as well as the vulnerability of whole regions to water lack and disease. Neither the international community nor individual states have effectively addressed the situation. When they do, they tend to do so through international resolutions that are not legally binding or contradictory, or federal regulations that are unevenly enforced or inadequate, ultimately serving the interests of extractive capitalists.

In the international community, primarily through the United Nations, several nonbinding resolutions have provided for public water rights. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women included provision of an adequate "water supply."[62] In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provided for "clean drinking water."[63] But then, in 1992, the United Nations facilitated the global privatization of water by defining it as an "economic good:" "Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good."[64] Seeming to reverse course, in 2002 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provided that water is a human right: "The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses."[65] In 2006, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provided that persons with disabilities had a right to "clean water services."[66] In 2010, the Human Right to Water and Sanitation again linked human and water rights, directing states to provide basic services.[67] Yet none of the resolutions ensuring states protect public water rights have effectively curtailed the extraction and contamination of water; instead, due to the privatization of water as an "economic good," there has been an exponential rise in water-related risks, including shortage and disease.

In the United States, over one hundred bills protecting water failed to pass the Congress before the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1948. The act was largely ineffective. In 1970, the National Environmental Policy Act, which established the

Figure 8. Mother Earth
Mother Is Not a Metaphor

Environmental Protection Agency, directed federal agencies to assess the environmental impact of their proposed actions before implementing policy. This included permit issuance, land management, and constructing highways and other publicly owned facilities. In 1972, substantial amendments were made to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. These amendments were known as the Clean Water Act. The act regulated industry pollutant discharge and established quality standards for water use. It established a permitting process for the discharge of pollutants into navigable surface waters. In 1974, the Safe Drinking Water Act focused on all waters actually or potentially designed for drinking use. It authorized the agency to establish minimum standards to protect tap water and required public water systems to comply. An amendment in 1996 required that the agency consider risk and cost assessment, and best available peer-reviewed science, when developing water standards. In 1977, policy shifted to water quality standards, marking "a move away from pollution as a violation to pollution as permissible."[68] Companies reintroduced the right to pollute through tradable pollution rights or tradable discharge permits based on the "right to discharge a specified level of pollution into a water body or water course."[69] Perniciously, US federal and state law yielded itself to corporate interest and failed to regulate against the contamination of water.

In order to understand the consequences of water pollution, I will turn to the issues raised by the Flint water crisis and the #NoDAPL action at Standing Rock. But first, I need to redirect; the argument, like water, has no linear movement.

There is a real problem in framing the water crisis through rights-based discourses. This framework confines our understanding to binary relations, both in terms of what the struggle is and what reform is desired. As the escalating water crisis reveals the commercialization and pollution of water by colluding governments and corporations, commercialization has been able to easily accommodate to rights-based demands, either by manipulating the law or refusing to respect it. Rights, while appealing to extra-state or global humanitarian ideals, are articulated through legal ideologies and discourses that have been developed to serve imperialists. As Glen Coulthard, Robert Nichols, and Audra Simpson have argued, the promise of rights recognized is the capitalist lie of inclusion.[70] The righted individual or group will always be righted to serve the ruling class. Rights, like wages, will never demand a revolution of the system that defines, assigns, regulates, and issues them. Rights defined are rights denied. It is the system of capitalism that needs to change, not the currency the system trades in as a mechanism or apparatus of its power.

Nowhere is the capitalism of rights clearer than in the extension of human rights to other-than-human beings, including water. The revolution has truly failed when the only way for water, air, or the land to remain unpolluted is by legally assigning it the status of human. Genuine revolution means genuine alterity. Vine Deloria Jr. suggested that for Indigenous peoples, responsibilities capture the core ethic of this alterity: "The basic problem is that American society is a rights society, not a responsibilities society."[71] In thinking about what that might mean, I turn to the juncture of the Flint water crisis and the #NoDAPL action at Standing Rock. I will try to show how the juncture served as a place where participants attempted to "construct a confluence of cultural rivulets where the natural and cultural coalesce" on their own terms.[72]

Flint

Flint, Michigan, is in the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe (fig. 9). According to the US Census, Flint has a current population of 102,434: African Americans are 56 percent of the total, whites 37 percent, Hispanics or Latinx alone 3 percent, American Indians/Alaskan Natives less than 1 percent, and Asian Americans less than 1 percent.[73] Since the 1980s, it has been in a deep economic recession, implicating employment, poverty, housing, education, and health: "45 percent of Flint residents lived below the poverty line in 2016, up from 42 percent in 2015. Flint also ranked first in childhood poverty: An estimated 58 percent of Flint residents under age 18 live below the poverty line compared to a national average of 18 percent."[74] In 2011 the state of Michigan audited the city's finances and projected a $25 million deficit. It imposed strict austerity goals throughout the state, combining cuts in public funding with increased charges for public services. In 2014, under the austerity goals, Flint switched its water source from Lake Huron (through Detroit) to the Flint River. It failed to apply proper corrosion inhibitors to the water, resulting in the breakdown of

Figure 9. Flint, Michigan.
Mapping Water

lead pipes that leached lead chips into the water. Even as public reports of the contamination and related health problems increased, including "Flint Lives Matter" protests at city and state offices, Flint's mayor and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality insisted that the Flint River's water was safe to drink.

From 2015 to 2016, several studies were conducted of Flint's water. In October 2015, the water source was switched back to Lake Huron; residents were advised to use filters and pregnant women were advised to use bottled water during this interval.[75] Included among the studies conducted is one by pediatric researchers at the Hurley Medical Center in Flint and one by environmental engineers from Virginia Tech. Both found high lead levels in the drinking water and reported twice as many infants and children had dangerous levels of lead before the city switched its water source.[76] They also reported that it was the corrosive lead pipes and lack of treatment that were the source of the health crisis, with poisoning symptoms including developmental and learning difficulties, irritability, loss of appetite, weight loss, sluggishness and fatigue, abdominal pain, vomiting, constipation, hearing loss, and seizures; premature births, miscarriages, and stillbirths; high blood pressure, joint and muscle pain, memory problems, headaches, mood disorders, skin rashes, and reduced sperm counts.[77] Other studies found that "the city's fertility rates decreased by 12 percent," "while fetal death

rates rose by 58 percent."[78] Additionally, an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease also linked to lead exposure resulted in the death of at least twelve people.[79]

As the relationship of the health crisis to water contamination came into focus, Flint cracked down on unpaid bills for private water and sewer services. It mailed out thousands of letters to homeowners six months or more late in an effort to collect $5.8 million. When homeowners did not pay by requisite deadlines, the letters threatened to transfer property liens to taxes, which could have led to foreclosure.[80] So even as homeowners were dealing with increased costs related to unsafe water, they were charged fees and threatened with foreclosure: "75% reported exposure to water with elevated lead levels. Of these, 75% reported additional monthly expenses resulting from exposure. Almost 40% of parents reported changes in their children's health and 65% reported changes to their health."[81] In response to the studies, a state of emergency was declared in 2016 and residents were instructed to use bottled and filtered water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and bathing. Later they were issued filters. Over twenty individuals with federal, state, and city agencies have been fired or suspended and charged with felonies. The city has yet to replace all of the corroded pipes.

All along the water crisis was linked to Black Lives Matter organizing against police violence.[82] The explicit links made by activists and reported in the press emphasized the institutionalized politics of race and class that (in)form water pollution and police violence: "The crisis in Flint is not an isolated incident. State violence in the form of contaminated water or no access to water at all is pervasive in Black communities";[83] "What we're saying as part of the Black Lives Matter movement is that when our communities don't have access to clean water that is also state violence. You know, we've talked a lot about police and vigilante violence but it's a matter we have to take up as a movement";[84] and "Race is in the air we breathe and in the water we drink in Flint."[85]

Black Lives Matter groups throughout Michigan organized to support Flint, by raising public awareness and organizing donations of bottled water and water filters. For instance, Invincible, a Detroit-based artist and organizer, explained her working relationship with Nayyirah Shariff, a Flint-based member of the Flint Democracy Defense League:

> Our cities have water warriors who work in solidarity for clean and affordable water for all as well as to address all the other injustices caused by emergency managers who are given dictatorial powers by the state of Michigan to suspend democracy in almost all majority black cities in our state . . . Black Lives Matter entered to uplift and amplify that work that Nayyirah and her team have been doing in that movement, as well as connect it to address the war on black lives throughout this country.[86]

Standing Rock

The Standing Rock Indian Reservation includes the Hunkpapa Lakota, Sihesapa Lakota, and Yanktonai Dakota. It was originally part of the Great Sioux Reservation, carved out of the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1851 by the Treaty of 1868 (fig. 10). Article 12 of the 1868 treaty provided that no cession of land would be valid unless

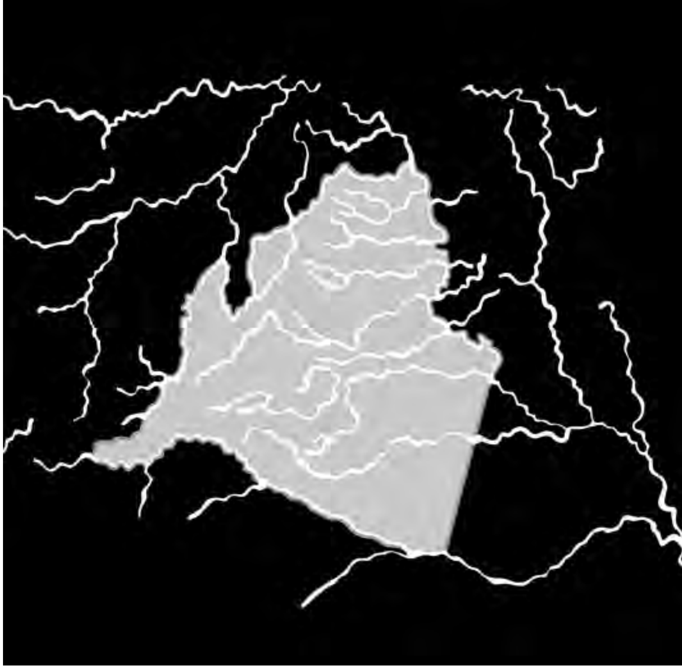

Figure 10. Standing Rock, North Dakota.
Mapping Water

approved by three-fourths of adult males. The US Congress and military systematically illegally annexed reservation lands in violation of the treaty. This included dividing the reservation into five separate reservations in 1889: Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Lower Brule, Upper Brule (Rosebud), and Pine Ridge (Oglala). Lands outside the area were privatized and developed.

Owned by the Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), the Dakota Access Pipeline Project (DAPL) is a $3.78 billion "mega-pipeline" 1,172 miles long, running from the Bakken fields in North Dakota through South Dakota and Iowa and on to Patoka, Illinois, where it joins existing pipelines to transport crude to refineries and markets in the Gulf of Mexico and the East Coast.[87] At Standing Rock the pipeline passes underneath the Missouri River, the main source of water for the reservation and a region containing many historic, cultural, and burial sites. An earlier proposal had the pipeline crossing the Missouri north of Bismarck, but state officials were concerned about the risk to the capital's water supply in the advent of a spill and so it was diverted.

Between February 2015, when the permitting process was initiated by the US Army Corp of Engineers, and January 2017, when the project was green-lighted by a new president, Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, and thousands of activists from around the world protested the immediate issues the pipeline raised: the illegal annexation of

treatied lands, the lack of required consultation and due process, the lack of adequate EPA review, and the historic and environmental impact of the pipeline. Camps, including the Oceti Sakowin Camp, were established near the river on federal lands in North Dakota. The camps were defined by ceremonial and memorial events to honor ancestors, the land, and the water. Severe counterterrorism measures were carried out against those involved. Camp demonstrations against the construction involved private security and local sheriffs attacking people with dogs and mace, the use of pepper spray, and the use of a water hose in subfreezing temperatures. Tribes filed repeated suits and injunctions to stop the pipeline and militarization of the region. The ETP and DAPL sued back.

Activists began an international movement calling for individual, corporate, and state divestment from banks funding the pipeline and related extractive industries. The divestment campaign applied severe pressure on the ETP and DAPL, which they blamed for a loss of revenue and job opportunities, as the Bakken had not proved to be the lush investment it had promised. Activists likewise highlighted the rampant crime the pipelines had brought, such as an increase in drug-related crimes and sexual assault of 160 percent.[88] This figure includes a staggering 75-percent increase in reported sexual assaults and a 30-percent increase in sex trafficking.[89] The links emphasized the relationship among institutionalized violence within an imperial formation, whether environmental, gender- and sex-based, and/or committed by police against Indigenous territories and bodies. Individual posts clarify how these relationships guide their activism: "her cousin reminded her that the Lakota word for womb is tamni. The word means 'her water'. . . . If the water is poisoned, then she is poisoned";[90] "The way we treat the earth is inseparable from the way our society treats women";[91] "The fight doesn't end with the symptom . . . It continues where the problem exists . . . The spirituality and the ceremony and the reality around climate change continues . . . We're not naïve in saying, 'Stop one pipeline,' and we're done. This is one fight in the struggle to just transition."[92] As Tara Houska (Anishinaabe) explains:

> Gross human rights violations associated with fossil fuel infrastructure are not limited to the well-publicized fight at Standing Rock. All over the world, indigenous peoples and Mother Earth's finite freshwater resources are threatened by needless fossil fuels projects. We ask the banking industry to take a stand for all people that big oil won't. Stop funding destruction and abuse with consumer money. We want just transition to renewable energy and the lives of your customers to matter more than oil profits.[93]

Confluence[3]

The hydrologic cycle has no starting or ending point. It is continuous movement and transformation (fig. 11).

> The sun, which drives the water cycle, heats water in the oceans. Some of it evaporates as vapor . . . a smaller amount of moisture is added as ice and snow

Figure 11. Infinity
Trans Formation

> sublimate. . . . Rising air currents take the vapor up into the atmosphere, along with . . . water transpired from plants and evaporated from the soil. The vapor rises into the air where cooler temperatures cause it to condense into clouds. Air currents move clouds around the globe, and cloud particles collide, grow, and fall out of the sky as precipitation. Some precipitation falls as snow and can accumulate as ice caps and glaciers, which can store frozen water for thousands of years. Snow packs in warmer climates often thaw and melt when spring arrives. . . . Most precipitation falls back into the oceans or onto land, where, due to gravity, the precipitation flows over the ground as surface runoff. A portion of runoff enters rivers in valleys in the landscape, with stream flow moving water towards the oceans. Runoff, and groundwater seepage, accumulate and are stored as freshwater in lakes. Not all runoff flows into rivers, though. Much of it soaks into the ground as infiltration. Some of the water infiltrates into the ground and replenishes aquifers (saturated subsurface rock). . . . Some infiltration stays close to the land surface and can seep back into surface-water bodies (and the ocean) as groundwater discharge, and some groundwater finds openings in the land surface and emerges as freshwater springs. Yet more groundwater is absorbed by plant roots to end up as evapotranspiration from the leaves.[94]

If we listen to what water teaches us, we will think through our responsibilities to the water and not our rights claims on the water.

At the juncture of the Flint water crisis and the #NoDAPL action at Standing Rock, where the Anishinaabe are Indigenous to Flint and the Lakota and Dakota are Indigenous to Standing Rock, it is important to listen as well to what they are saying about water. Their teachings reflect an emphasis on responsibility and reciprocity, captured by the #NoDAPL movement's "mni wicone." Candace Ducheneaux (Cheyenne River) explains, "Mni wakan, water is sacred. Mni Wiconi, water is life. As Lakota, this is something we have known since we first uttered words and it is evident in our language. Mni: Mi, I; Ni, live. Mni, I live or we live. We all need water to live. It is only from liquid water that all known forms of life exist."[95] Tiokasin Ghosthorse (Cheyenne River) explains other layers of meaning:

> Mni does not literally mean "Water". . . . The Ni (nee) is "life" and could also mean "mother's milk" or a "mother's breast." This is where the "M" of Mni becomes translatable as "you and me" but also becomes a little more understandable if we say Mni is "you and me of that which carries or causes feeling with another through itself." Like a mother who is the carrier of Water, Mni is an action of living. . . . Water is a First Consciousness bestowed upon Mother Earth. First Consciousness means the awareness of the movement that sustains life in a continuum. Lakota people have Mni in their creation story as blue blood (water); thus, Water provides a shining mirror to the universe, its transparency offers a model and a path to creation. It produces synergy and becomes "Water as a Being."[96]

Before the #NoDAPL action, Indigenous people held regular water ceremonies throughout the Great Lakes region, to pray for and honor water, such as those organized by Nibi Walk.[97] They also held ceremonies in Flint and otherwise supported Flint Lives Matter organizing efforts, regularly attending rallies and marches.[98] After the formation of Black Lives Matter, they participated in events addressing police violence. The Lakota People's Law Project, directed by Chase Iron Eyes (Standing Rock) and Madonna Thunder Hawk (Cheyenne River), supported the links made by Black Lives Matter between the water crisis and police violence, situating the issues in the historical context of racist colonial ideologies and practices serving US imperialism, in turn challenging the naturalization of US statehood.[99]

The Standing Rock camps, including Sacred Stone, Treaty, and Oceti Sakowin, were initiated in April 2016 and closed in February 2017. In August 2016, Black Lives Matter national sent a delegation to Standing Rock and later issued a statement in support of #NoDAPL.[100] In September, multiple anti-police brutality groups from New York City joined Standing Rock, including NYC Shut It Down, Millions March NYC, Copwatch Patrol, and Equality for Flatbush.[101] They "see themselves engaged in a fight against state violence, oppression, and exploitation. For these activists, black and indigenous struggles are intimately tied together."[102] Their organizing of solidarity actions in New York were mirrored in cities throughout the United States and Canada, serving to link the environmental racism and police brutality experienced in Flint and Standing Rock to the racism of capitalism's militarization in Canada, Mexico, Palestine, and South Africa.[103]

During my short ten-day stay the first week of December, I spoke with a group from Black Lives Matter. They told me that many had come from Minneapolis, Detroit, and Flint. Some had been there since the summer. What struck me about our conversation and the work they told me about was that they were there for the people of Standing Rock, taking direction from Standing Rock leaders, and that they had a keen sense of being there because of and for the water. Water had brought everyone together.

> We have all these nations coming together, which I don't think anybody ever thought was possible. And with Black Lives Matter, it's just an added plus for the two movements to stand in solidarity with one another . . . I've been down with the Black Lives Matter movement since the beginning because white America just doesn't understand the residual effects that going through slavery and going through a genocide has on future generations.[104]

> I am in solidarity to bear witness to this struggle, lend a hand in the kitchen, bring supplies, and do whatever is asked . . . Solidarity and kinship between African peoples and the peoples of the Americas is almost 500 years old . . . We proudly have fought together in wars against European invaders and slavery, from Jamaica to Florida and elsewhere. This is why thousands of people of color claim both black and indigenous nations as their racial and cultural identities.[105]

In December, Flint residents Arthur Woodson and George Grundy II joined the #NoDAPL protest at Standing Rock as part of the Veterans for Standing Rock call. They "immediately saw parallels to the experience of the Native Americans at Standing Rock to the community of Flint, where elevated lead levels were found in the municipal water system last year, creating a health crisis."[106] The Veterans, after several days of being on lockdown under blizzard conditions, voted to go to Flint next.

As Tara Houska observes, "I think we're starting to see that a lot of these movements are related, that there's intersectionality between issues of social justice and issues of environmental racism . . . We know that our communities are not only targeted by police and killed at a disparate rate by police officers, we also know that our communities are targeted at a disparate rate by these projects."[107] Vienna Rye (Millions March NYC) emphasizes, "We're talking about forced enslavement, dispossession, corporate privatization of natural resource, and we see this from the Bronx to Flint to Standing Rock. And the key point is that this entire system is made possible by the police institution, by the prison system, which functions as the enforcement arm of this violent system."[108] As Jumoke Emery-Brown (Black Lives Matter Denver) said, "For us, the same law enforcement that's being employed to brutalize sovereign [Indigenous] nations is simply an extension of the forces being used to brutalize and terrorize [Black] communities . . . We do not believe that the history of stolen lands is separated from the history of stolen labor, so while we're not centered in this fight, it is absolutely something we are proud to be a part of, because our histories are intertwined."[109]

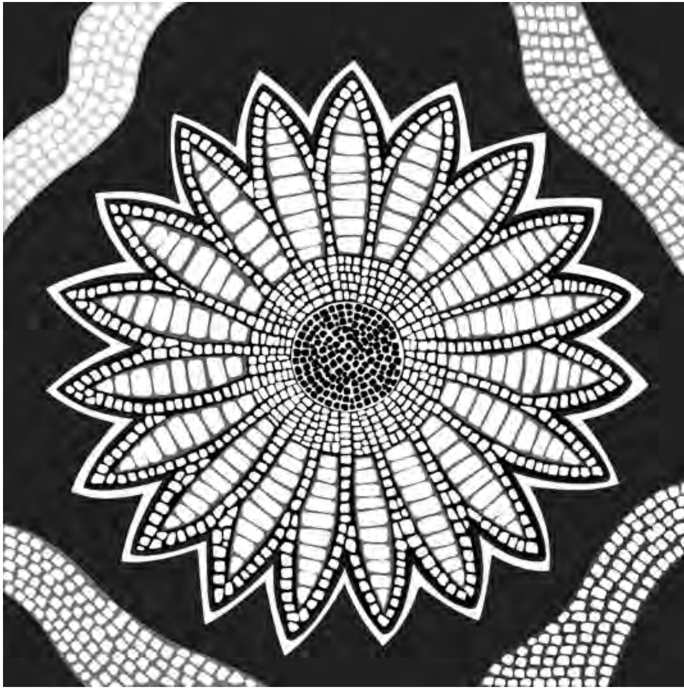

Figure 12. Water Is Life
Mpi Wakan (Lenape for Water Is Life)

All the while, Indigenous women linked environmental injustice, police violence, militarism, and capitalism to sexual violence (fig. 12). Despite the curtailment of the North Dakota oil boom between 2014 and 2016, largely due to the recession of oil prices, population growth and violent crime has remained relatively steady, with anticipation of a 2017 comeback.[110] The violent crime has been attributed to the "man camps" contracted by the oil and gas companies to house the thousands of male employees working the wells. Journalists report that "According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, men hold 85 percent of the jobs in the mining, oil and gas industries. Outside of administrative and management positions, women hold less than 2 percent."[111] On site, the camps provide anywhere from 500 to 2,000 units for mostly male employees.[112] The men are not permitted alcohol, tobacco, pets, or guests (even wives) on the premises. The men work grueling 12- to 14-hour shifts, on a 10-days-on/10-days-off rotation. The camps are surrounded by overbooked hotels as well as mobile home and RV parks where men with families tend to reside. As industry executives and other staff have outnumbered local residents, rents and mortgages have skyrocketed (more than $2,500/month for a single-bedroom apartment). Certainly not all male workers are drug users or sexual abusers. But since 2008 there has been a staggering 168-percent increase in reported sexual assaults and a 30-percent increase in sex

trafficking in the region.[113] In an interview, Grace Her Many Horses, who works in law enforcement at Fort Berthold in North Dakota, describes the local situation:

> When I first got there some of the things they talked about, in any of these areas, was they told the men "Don't go out and party. Don't get drunk and pass out. Because you're going to get raped.". . . Sexual assaults on the male population has increased by 75% in that area. . . . That kind of statistic makes maximum security prisons look like the minor league. One of the things we ran into while working up there was a 15 year old boy had gone missing. He was found in one of the Man Camps with one of the oil workers. They were passing him around from trailer to trailer. He went there looking for a job and was hired by individuals within the Man Camp to do light cleaning in and around their personal areas. The young teenager was forced into sex slavery. It's the kind of thing you hear about in the ghettos of third world countries; not in the quiet and remote countryside. The victims aren't just males but females too. Everyone has heard by now of the missing school teacher that was kidnapped as she was out jogging, repeatedly sexually assaulted, and murdered near one of these Man Camps. The age of the Man Camp victims varies. The assailants are not necessarily looking for male and female adults. They are also going after little girls.. . .We found a crying, naked, four year old girl running down one of the roads right outside of the Man Camp. She had been sexually assaulted. . . . We found thirteen sex offenders in one Man Camp and that Man Camp is found directly behind the tribal casino. Our supervisors would tell us "Watch your kids. Don't let them run through there."[114]

Montana US Attorney Mike Cotter has spoken similarly about the region's rising crime rates, saying that, "In South Dakota, approximately half of the victims [of sex trafficking] are Indian girls."[115] In *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies: Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence*, Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network report that

> For Indigenous communities in North America, the links between land and body create a powerful intersection—one that, when overlooked or discounted, can threaten their very existence. Extractive industries have drilled, mined, and fracked on lands on or near resource-rich Indigenous territories for decades. Although the economic gains have been a boon to transnational corporations and the economies of the U.S. and Canada, they come at a significant cost to Indigenous communities, particularly women and young people. Many of these communities are sites of chemical manufacturing and waste dumping, while others have seen an introduction of large encampments of men ("man camps") to work for the gas and oil industry. The devastating impacts of the environmental violence this causes ranges from sexual and domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, murders and disappearances, reproductive illnesses and toxic exposure, threats to culture and Indigenous lifeways, crime, and other social stressors. The very health of Indigenous nations is threatened, but there has been little action by policy makers and international bodies because of a lack of formal documentation of the damages.[116]

As Sarah Deer has argued, the accepted statistic in the United States is that one in three American Indian and Alaska Native women will experience sexual violence in their lifetimes.[117] As reported by the Stolen Sisters Campaign, in collaboration with Amnesty International, in Canada "Indigenous women reported rates of violence, including domestic violence and sexual assault, 3.5 times higher than non-Indigenous women. Studies suggest that assaults against Indigenous women are not only more frequent, they are also often particularly brutal. According to another government survey, young First Nations women are five times more likely than other women to die as a result of violence."[118]

There were many problems with violence at the Standing Rock camps. Notwithstanding the much-publicized expulsion of a man for threatening a woman, many more incidences of gender- and sexuality-based violence occurred that were never publicly acknowledged nor addressed. During my short time there the first week of December 2016, for example, I spoke with someone at the Two-Spirit Camp: a trans person had been raped that week and many stories were coming out about the harassment and abuse of trans and queer people as well as women. Many were trying to keep the stories from "getting out" to avoid them being used to discredit the cause or to justify further police activity. There was real confusion and despair over what the right thing to do was and how to do it.

I want neither to romanticize the camps nor to contribute to silencing the issues. But I do want to think about the importance of the Standing Rock action despite its troubles. And I think its importance, at least in part, is the way it functioned to bring people together. I do not think it is an accident that it is water that has brought the movements together. As the Black community of Flint and the Lakota and Dakota peoples of Standing Rock have taught us, water links us together in our struggles for life. It points our attentions to what is destroyed by military, security, and corporate concerns in Ferguson, Mexico, Palestine, and British Columbia; what highlights the illegal seizing of lands for the illegal construction of pipelines; what has been contaminated with hubris in the Delaware River basin, Flint, Michigan, the Dakotas, and too many other places to name. It provides a good place for beginning to denaturalize the inevitability of the current state formation.

Melissa Nelson writes that "Most of us find it easier to separate ourselves from nature than to embrace the liquid mystery of our union with it. As freshwater disappears on the earth, so do the water stories that remind us that we too can freeze, melt, conceive, and evaporate. We too can construct a confluence of cultural rivulets where the natural and cultural coalesce."[119] Perhaps we too can embrace the life of water to recognize the ways our movements cogenerate, to find our coalescence.

A Moving Conclusion

In 1985, during a speech at the United Nations Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi, Lilla Watson said, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." Watson, a member of the Murri indigenous to Queensland, has

Figure 13. Risen

said since and repeatedly that she was "not comfortable being credited for [saying] something that had been born of a collective process" and preferred that the words and their meaning be credited to "Aboriginal activist groups, Queensland, 1970s." She thus held herself, and the practice of citing her, accountable to the community to whom she belonged. That ethic is further reflected in her—in her community's—perspective that genuine decolonization will happen as our movements address our shared conditions of oppression. Our liberation is bound together.

"But," Oklahoma-based Black activist tells me, "I want Indigenous peoples to take responsibility for the way they enslaved Black bodies and internalized white racism towards Blacks in the conduct of their tribal sovereignty."

"But," Mississippi Choctaw scholar says to me, "I want Blacks to take responsibility for the way they grabbed at Indian lands after the Civil War. For the way the US illegally and violently acquired the lands from us that they promised to give to Freedmen. That Freedmen and their descendants ignore this when they call for reparations."

I am still trying to figure out how, in the difficult moments when the transgenerational trauma of land dispossession, slavery, and racism so profoundly precludes our perceptions and expectations of one another, we can find a way to affirm one

another's concerns and move our liberation struggles forward. A way that rejects the "respectability" of United States recognition and the containment politics of financial settlement. As Glen Coulthard argues, recognition is a lie of capitalism that dresses up exploitation in liberal inclusion.[120] As Alyosha Goldstein argues, settlements "foreclose the lineages of historical injustice" and "individualize" in liberal fashion what is a matter of collective and sovereign claims to territories and economic reckoning.[121] A way that rejects the legally and economically inconsequential responsibility-taking performances typical of church and government apologias. A way that refuses to be settled up or settled down to negligible levels of financial compensation that change nothing.

A way, I believe, in which Indigenous, Black, Palestinian, women, queer and trans persons, and others figure centrally in the leadership and definition of the struggle, modeling collaboration and alliance-building in ways that refuse the divisions that serve imperialist interests. In this, I believe we can draw from what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues are our cultural teachings for behaving towards one another (fig. 13). She offers compassion, generosity, and humility as the points at which genuine restoration of ourselves and our relationships are possible. From there, as Coulthard argues, we carve a way forward through a "disciplined maintenance of resentment," a "politicized anger" toward state oppression that refuses to accept guilt ridden, meaningless gestures of acknowledgment and payouts for genuine reparations and land return.[122]

In This Issue

Moving toward the publication of a special issue in the midst of a pandemic has posed special challenges. Several had to withdraw their contributions. In particular, I acknowledge Cree scholar Priscilla Settee, who in the final moments of revision took care of herself and withdrew her article.

In "Notes on Becoming a Comrade: Indigenous Women, Leadership, and Movement(s) for Decolonization," Jaskiran Dhillon explores the politics of becoming a comrade to Indigenous peoples in their struggles for justice and freedom in the settler colonial present. She cuts across questions of ethnographic research, political organizing, and Indigenous feminism to write from the perspective of a non-Indigenous woman of color "standing with" Indigenous communities through politicized allyship. Dhillon maps her trajectory to becoming a comrade through a kind of auto-ethnography that highlights key moments in the development of her critical consciousness by foregrounding the fundamental leadership of Indigenous women in decolonial activism and scholarship across a range of sociopolitical arenas—including environmentalism and climate change, gender-based state violence, and the arts—that have been foundational to the anti-colonial framework guiding her scholarship and organizing. She argues for the importance of placing Indigenous women's intergenerational knowledge, intellectual prowess, and leadership at the epicenter of social movements focused on critical praxis and decolonization.

In "Indigenous Trauma Is Not a Frontier: Breaking Free from Colonial Economies of Trauma and Responding to Trafficking, Disappearances, and Deaths of Indigenous Women and Girls," Annita Hetoevėhotohke'e Lucchesi maps colonial economies of

Figure 14. *Lightning Water*

trauma as they pertain to trafficking, disappearances, and deaths of Indigenous women and girls, and argues that we have a collective responsibility to dismantle these structures by uplifting the expertise and leadership of the most marginalized of Indigenous women and girls. She calls for us to shift our value system away from putting up barriers to success to instead acknowledge that experiences such as sex work or incarceration are actually additional credentials that enhance capacity to design creative and effective efforts to account for and address violence. What might that shift in values do, she asks, for our organizing and our research, for our communities, and for Indigenous women and girls themselves?

In "Wrestling with Fire: Indigenous Women's Resistance and Resurgence," Melissa K. Nelson examines the way Indigenous labor is self-defined as "struggle" because it seems never-ending. She argues that knowing struggle and desiring non-struggle is an ongoing labor of activism, whether an anti-nuclear struggle, an LGBTQ2 struggle, or an Indigenous woman's struggle. These intersectional struggles include fighting oppression on many different levels and scales, from the personal to the planetary, from the spiritual to the political, from the human to the cosmological. By examining Indigenous fire stories and practices, she shows that the struggle is not only about

fighting and resisting, but about the human capacity to learn, grow, connect, repair, and love despite the ongoing brutal atrocities continuing and expanding on the Earth today.

In "Women and 2spirits: On the Marginalization of Transgender Indigenous People in Activist Rhetoric," Kai Pyle examines why the phrase "women and 2spirit" has become so popular and what issues it might obscure. Pyle suggests that the juxtaposition is part of a larger problem within Indigenous communities and activism of failing to address the realities of Indigenous trans people, and specifically Indigenous trans women. While the phrase has been a productive entry point into conversations about gendered issues in Indigenous communities, it can inadvertently reveal the marginalized position which transgender Indigenous people continue to hold.

In "US Imperialism and the Problem of 'Culture' in Indigenous Politics: Towards Indigenous Internationalist Feminism," Melanie K. Yazzie aims to uncover the actually existing internationalism that has long shaped the myriad political formations in the United States. She also articulates a political formation that I call Indigenous internationalist feminism, which centers a critique of US imperialism and is premised on three intellectual and political traditions: radical Indigenous internationalism, Black left feminism, and queer Indigenous feminism. Indigenous internationalist feminism expands upon Lower Brule Sioux historian Nick Estes's definitions of "radical Indigenous internationalism," which can be traced to historic organizations like the Society for American Indians and the International Indian Treaty Council. It also draws from the tradition of Black left feminism, which has long made connections between Black struggle, revolutionary feminism, and national liberation. Indigenous internationalist feminism provides a framework for transnational Indigenous practices that seek to build counterhegemonic power with other anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-capitalist liberation struggles, both within and outside of the United States. At the center of these practices is an ethics of expansive relationality between humans and between humans and our other-than-human kin. As I have written elsewhere, this notion of expansive relationality has been worked through by queer Indigenous feminists, profoundly shaping the politics and horizons of contemporary Indigenous liberation struggles in North America. I explore how expansive relationality can be applied to an internationalist politics that seeks to undermine and challenge the hegemony of capitalist social relations globally.

The volume concludes with poems by Kecia Cook and Janelle Pewapsconias, and a short story by Deborah Miranda. This literature helps us contemplate powerful issues of loss and expectation, returning us to consider the roles of our cultural histories in defining our relationships and responsibilities to one another in this political moment.

Notes

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