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Spiritual Essentialism at Standing Rock

In this research paper, I argue that the indigenous communities at Standing Rock, North Dakota practice spiritual activism. Their resistance towards the Dakota Access Pipeline is not only rooted in Indigenous identity, but is also a form of spiritual essentialism that is shared among indigenous tribes across the globe. Although spiritual essentialism is shared among a surplus of tribes, their shared spirituality of healing directly tied with the earth and body can also be understood by non-Native people, if practiced without appropriating, profiting, and romanticizing Indigenous spirituality. Standing Rock's choice of language in rejecting the word "protestors" and identifying as "protectors" creates an association between the interconnectedness of water, earth, land, and people that the term "protestor" cannot embody.

Because the injustice of the Dakota Access Pipeline is happening as I write, I rely primarily on articles and videos about Standing Rock as resources to support my thesis that Indigenous people are practicing spiritual essentialism and spiritual activism as the Dakota Access Pipeline is being constructed. I begin with brief definitions of spiritual activism and spiritual essentialism from scholars, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, and then outline the history of pipelines in the United States and how the movement at Standing Rock began with resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline. Next, I argue that the spiritual essentialism at Standing Rock is not the same practice as claiming an indigenous identity in order to abuse the

rights and historical practices of Indigenous spirituality to profit in a capitalist-centered white culture. Thereafter, I argue that spiritual essentialism is being practiced at Standing Rock and is being done without appropriation of New Age ideals. I end with a discussion of the women at Standing Rock, as they are the backbone of this movement and are vital to understanding the relationship of healing both the body and land. I also briefly discuss how Indigenous women and the land are interconnected in abuse from North American white culture and men. As I am an indigenous woman, this topic is personal. I include a short poem at the end of my thesis, which embodies spiritual essentialism, prayer and healing in response to the violence at Standing Rock.

Spiritual activism is the act of actively listening to the inner spirit to expand this light within outward to affect social change. Some describe it as a “fierce light” that burns from within and waves outward (Ripper 2008). Spiritual activism is symbiotic between social justice and the spiritual. Layli Maparyan, a distinguished womanist scholar and author of “The Womanist Idea” perceives spiritual activism as Luxocracy, which means “rule by Light.” The light in Luxocracy “refers to the Inner Light, the Higher Self, the Soul, the God within...As more and more people recognize this Inner Light in themselves and in others...structures of governance as we know them today will become unnecessary” (Maparyan 2012, 3). Using this Inner Light, she defined spiritual activism as Luxocracy, with three fundamental values:

Recognize your own sacredness. Recognize the sacredness of everyone. Recognize the sacred of all created things. And then act accordingly—inwardly and outwardly. Sacredness refers to the high dimension of a thing, that essence which evokes awe. When we become aware of sacredness, our mindset changes and we become capable of operating within a frame of reverence, and reverence evokes our most generous and respectful feelings and behaviors (Maparyan 2012, 8).

Gloria Anzaldúa, author of “Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza” defines spirituality similar to Maparyan:

You form an intimate connection that fosters the empowerment of both (nos/ostras) to transform conflict into an opportunity to resolve an issue, to change the negatives into strengths, and to heal

the traumas of racism and other systemic desconocimientos. You look beyond the illusion of separate interest to a shared interest—you're in this together, no one's an isolated unit. You dedicate yourself, not to surface solutions that benefit only one group, but to a more informed service to humanity (Anzaldúa 2002, 573).

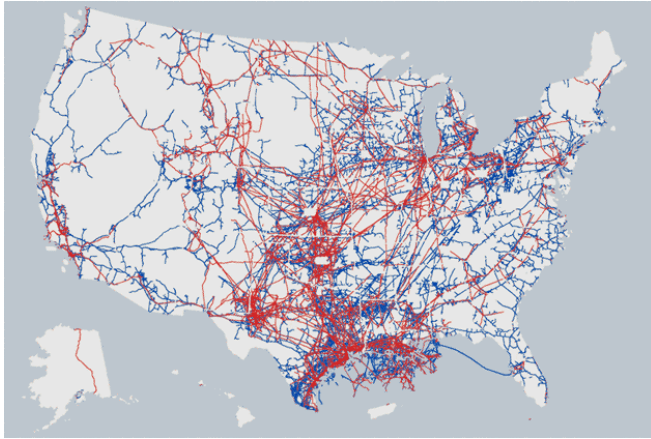
Anzaldúa defines this “conocimientos” as spiritual knowledge. Anzaldúa’s conocimientos are the same as Maparyan’s Inner Light. This spiritual knowledge is something that can be found within all of us, no matter our faith, heritage, or color of our skin. Conocimiento challenges the injustice around us and questions its authority, as does Maparyan’s Inner Light, or the God Within.

Conocimientos, like this fierce light are fluid and can extend beyond the systemic structures of capitalism, white supremacy, and injustice. Anzaldúa says:

conocimiento questions conventional knowledge’s current categories, classifications, and contents...conocimientos comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms—that persistent scalp itch, not caused by lice or dry skin, may be a thought trying to snare your attention (Anzaldúa 2002, 542).

This spiritual consciousness, or conocimiento, is the spiritual essentialism that is happening at Standing Rock. Many indigenous people from across the globe are able to understand the need for healing and protecting sacred land and water. This sustenance of indigenous culture and heritage that their ancestors died for in order for indigenous people to have today is at the core for protecting what is sacred.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is a 1,172-mile pipeline from an oil-rich Bakken formation, which is a vast underground deposit sitting beneath where Montana and North Dakota meets Canada. This pipeline is “a 30-inch diameter pipeline that will connect the rapidly expanding Bakken and Three Forks production areas in North Dakota to Patoka, Illinois” (dapipelinefacts.com 2016). The Dakota Access Pipeline company claims that this pipeline will provide independence from trading oil with other countries, such as those in the Middle East. The Dakota Access Pipeline states that “increased domestic crude oil production translates into greater energy independence for the United States” (dapipelinefacts.com 2016). One might



argue that releasing our dependence on international trade of oil would ease off on the United States' oil wars. However, this argument is unfounded and unstable, as the only way to move forward in protecting the future of our planet is to let go completely

of our "need" for oil. Dakota Access Pipeline accidently gave notice that the United States is addicted to oil consumption stating that "Although the United States is the third-largest producer in the world, we are the number one consumer of crude oil in the world" (dapipelinefacts.com 2016).

Lena Groeger, author of the article "Pipelines Explained: How Safe are America's 2.5 Million Miles of Pipelines" provides an image of the surplus of veins across the United States' body (propublica.org 2012). This image alone explains how addicted America is to fossil fuel, but it also provides a disturbing image of how we allow big oil and fossil fuel industries to control what we consume. In her article, Groeger writes:

In 2012, we detailed safety issues in the U.S.'s more than two million miles of natural gas and oil pipelines. Following months of protest at a section of the Dakota Access Pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, the Department of the Army decided to look at alternative routes¹. Our explainer remains a useful bit of context in light of this fight (Groeger, propublica.org 2012).

Groeger's article documents numerous spills due to degradation of pipelines and the limited number of people who can watch the pipeline and ensure no leakage happen before it becomes detrimental. The Dakota Access Pipeline claims that "pipelines are the safest, most efficient means of accomplishing this task" (dapipelinefacts.com 2016). However, it pipelines are so

¹ See image of alternate routes provided by the New York Times December 5, 2016.

safe, why have we had so many oil spills? Like the Dakota Access Pipeline, the Keystone pipeline also declared that the XL pipeline would have “no material impact on the environmental resources along the route” and “would have a degree of safety over any other typically constructed domestic oil pipeline under current code” (TransCanada.com 2012). The XL Keystone pipeline is “a proposed 1,179-mile (1,897km) pipe that would run from the oil sands in Alberta, Canada, to Steele City, Nebraska, where it could join an existing pipe” (bbc.com 2015). The construction of the Keystone pipeline was prevented by the Obama administration after it was determined that it was unsafe. Tony Iallonardo of the National Wildlife Federation was quoted in Groeger’s article. He said, “It’s inevitable that as pipelines age, as they are exposed to the elements, eventually they are going to spill...They’re ticking time bombs” (Groeger, propublica.org 2012). Using government data, Groeger provided a link to a website which has documented the number of pipeline breaks from 1986 to 2012². Every single state has suffered from “significant accidents” due to pipeline leaks and lack of repairs. Using this information, North Dakota has suffered from 54 major incidents and paid out \$17.1 million for damage repairs (Groeger, projects.propublica.org 2012).

The Native Americans at Standing Rock, as well as other indigenous tribes across the globe, have had firsthand experience with the detrimental effects pipelines have on people and the environment. Not only have indigenous people suffered from pipelines, but they have also suffered 525 years of erasure and genocide of their culture, heritage, language, and land. When the Dakota Access Pipeline was first proposed, the map of the pipeline erased the existence of the Standing Rock tribe. LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, a member of the Standing Rock Tribe was one of the first to call for people to join the movement. In an interview conducted by the Young

² See <http://projects.propublica.org/pipelines/>

Turks, she recounted the beginnings of the Standing Rock resistance of the North Dakota

Pipeline:

When Dakota Access first came in to the Standing Rock Sioux tribe to inform them they were building this pipeline it was 2014. I remember the day because [a friend from the] tribal historic preservation called me and told me they were coming. And she showed me this map and I said, ‘Oh my gosh...I think I’m the closest land owner.’ And she said [to] come to the meeting and hear what [Dakota Access] has to say. So I went to the meeting and at that time our Chairman Dave Archambault II...told them he did not support this pipeline...at the end [of the meeting] I remember talking to the lad from Dakota Access saying, ‘Remember me. I’m going to be the one that’s standing, because I cannot let you build a pipeline next to my son’s grave’ (“Brave Bull: Why do we have to fight for our own land? (The Young Turks 2016).

When Allard realized she would need more support, she called out to friends and family, and posted on social media for a gathering of people to join the Standing Rock community to stop the construction of the pipeline. Social media is one of the best ways to network with organizations and to spread the word like wildfire. Jack Jenkins, a senior religion reporter at *Think Progress* wrote an article on Standing Rock titled, “The growing indigenous spiritual movement that could save the planet” (2016). He interviewed several people at Standing Rock who were practicing spiritual activism through prayers. I found that the water protectors used social media to describe the meaning of prayer at Standing Rock as a resistance to the pipeline and a way to protect our mother, the earth. The prayers implemented and practiced at Standing Rock are not the same kind of prayers practiced in Christian religion. The prayers practiced at Standing Rock are best described in Maparyan’s *The Womanists Idea*. She says that:

Spiritual activism begins with the concept of vibration, the defining characteristic of all energy. Everything is energy, every natural element, every manufactured element, every human being, all our thoughts and emotions and ideals, the sounds, the smells, tastes, treasures, and light patterns that make up our world, and, by extension, entities, beings, archetypes, and ideals or forms that occupy the so-called spiritual or transcendental realm. Everything has a vibration (Maparyan 2012, 122).

For Diné people, or “Navajo³,” prayers are spoken with the intention of affecting energies that instill our way of living, which is to “Walk In Beauty.” Words have so much impact, as do intentions, so by recognizing that every little thing in this earth has energy, we as a people are able to use this awareness as prayer to affect change in the world. The people at Standing Rock are using songs, chants, and dances in order to heal the earth, which they believe receives healing through these vibrations, which are an embodiment of prayer. The water protectors use words like “I love you” to the very policemen who are arresting, pepper spraying, and using sound cannons, rubber bullets, and ice cold water because they believe their words can open hearts. The people at Standing Rock recognize that their output of positive energy and unconditional love provides healing towards the earth, the policemen of North Dakota, each other, and every creature and inanimate object that resides on this planet.

Maparyan confirms that words and songs can create positive change through vibration, which is found in energy. She gives an example of an independent researcher who found that words, music, and environmental settings affect water, which can affect anything that can be shaped by or made up of water:

A vivid illustration of the impact of vibrational frequency on matter can be found in the work of independent researcher Masaru Emoto, who has studied the impact of words, music, and environmental agents on ice crystal formation. Emoto discovered that when water is brought into sustained contact with words and ideas that we generally consider negative (e.g., “I hate you”), as well as certain forms of music (e.g., heavy metal) and certain environmental agents (e.g., microwaves), ice crystal formation is impeded or deformed. In contrast, when water is brought into sustained contact with words and ideas that we generally consider positive (e.g., “I love you”), as well as certain forms of music (e.g., classical music) and certain environmental agents (e.g., organic fruits and vegetables), then beautiful, harmonious well-formed ice crystals result. While the beauty of an ice crystal is certainly subjective, the harmony and completeness of the crystal formation is not. One implication of this research is that, since the human body is 50 to 90% water (depending on the age and health of the person) vibrational impacts on water also influence the human organism in corresponding ways (Maparyan 2012, 124).

³ The Diné nation are my people.

As human beings, we are made up of mostly water. The water protectors at Standing Rock know that their use of prayers, expressed through dance, affirmations, chants, sweat lodges, visions, sharing of indigenous knowledge, saying “I love you”, and art affect all living beings, as well as “non-living” objects as well.

Standing Rock’s concentration on spirituality and prayer is not new. It has been the driving force for many other acts of resistance for North American tribes for generations. For example, four women in Western Canada created the Idle No More movement which kick started a new movement for indigenous people where solidarity among tribal nations grew strong.

Idle No More’s success set off a firestorm of solidarity protests among indigenous groups in the United States, who in turn used the energy to draw attention to their own local fights—virtually all which involved some sort of spiritual claim. In Hawaii, protestors instilled the same tactics—and sometimes even the same slogans—into an ongoing effort to halt the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) atop Mauna Kea, a volcano Native Hawaiians consider sacred. In Arizona, members of the Apache nation began occupying an area known as Oak Flat, vowing to fend off the proposed development of a copper mine on land they call holy (Jenkins 2016, 8).

Gonzales, a member of the Chemehuevi nation said, “Idle No More raised our consciousness. When people are chaining themselves to bulldozers, that is prayer” (Jenkins 2016, 5). Pua Case, an indigenous woman who claims a Hawaiian identity, came to Standing Rock to pray because of the sacredness of the land. Before Standing Rock’s movement was created, there was already a spiritual network of indigenous activists. Through social media, they have been able to establish these networks among each other and have also been able to use social media as a platform for gaining awareness and interest in their spiritual activism. Because social media was able to spread awareness of the events at Standing Rock rapidly and accessibly to those who were connected to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, people from across the globe were able to stand in solidarity with Standing Rock, either at home or by travelling to the site. However, mass media tends to focus on the violence happening at Standing Rock and the spiritual activism that is being practiced is not addressed. Jenkins wrote,

Gonzales insisted spirituality isn't a cursory side-affect but is a crucial, driving force behind the recent surge of Native environmental activism. Virtually all the protest she has attended, she said featured some form of prayer or sacred ritual. 'All of us are protesting because we are part of this sacred [connection] to the earth...we are all the mountains, we are all the birds—it sounds corny, but it's true (Jenkins 2016, 7).

For indigenous people, there is a particular spiritual view of the environment and its connection to humans and animals. Joshua Lanakila Mangauil, a Native Hawaiian activist at Standing Rock reaffirms this interconnectedness in Jenkin's article. She says "There is no separation from our spirituality and our environment—they are one and the same" (Jenkins 2016, 9). Winona LaDuke, a renowned Native environmental activist wrote about this deep, spiritual connection to the earth and all living beings in her book "All Our Relations":

Grassroots and land-based struggles characterize most of Native environmentalism. We are nations of people with distinct land areas, and our leadership and direction emerge from the land up. Our commitment and tenacity spring from our deep connection to the land. This relationship to land and water is continuously reaffirmed through prayer, deed, and our best way of being—*minobimaatisiwin*, the 'good life.' It is perhaps best remembered in phrases like *This is where my grandmother's and children's umbilical cords are buried...That is where the great giant lay down to sleep...These are the four sacred Mountains between which the Creator instructed us to live...That is the last place our people stopped in our migration here to this village* (LaDuke 1999,4).

The spiritual knowledge indigenous people practice is an understanding that all life is interconnected because the land is where we as indigenous people and non-Natives come from. Although this knowledge may not be practiced the same way as non-indigenous practices, it can still be understood by non-Natives as well. The people at Standing Rock ask for people across the globe to pray *with* them, which implies that prayer intended for spiritual healing of the earth and all beings residing on this planet can be accessed by non-Natives as well.

However, there are some practices within Native American spirituality that cannot be accessed by non-Natives. For example, Lee Irwin, editor of "Native American Spirituality" wrote about how non-Natives, particularly white people, feel that they have the right to claim

things. For this particular example, a photographer felt he had the right to take photographs of a traditional ceremony closed to the public and that the photographs he took belonged to him:

An example from my own family revolves around an article titled, 'Chief Joseph,' complete with photos, which was produced by William Albert Allard and published in *National Geographic* in 1977. I was astonished when I opened the magazine to find a double page photo of four women elders engaged in the ceremonial farewell to my grandmother at her funeral. The photo was taken with a long range lens; from the position in which they are standing (and because I know how their stance would correspond to a particular moment of the ceremony) I can surmise that these elders were literally on the precipice of the gravesite. Photos are not taken at these ceremonies, and this particular photojournalist did not have the permission of my grandmother's son or her daughter to document the funeral services in this way... I asked Allard to release to us whatever pictures he had taken. He was arrogant and rude in his refusal; as far as he was concerned, those photos (and the images) are his property, and he is entitled to them (Irwin 2000, 27).

This example of "claiming" can also be tied to people who "claim to be Indian". The claiming of indigenous land and people has been a core suffering for Native American people across North America. As noted by Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr.:

According to some New Agers, everyone was 'Indian' in a past life, which justifies the taking in this life of anything that is Native American. 'Rainbow Tribe' (and lately I've heard 'Eco-Tribe') encampments and gatherings abound in many places, even in Europe, especially, I understand, in Germany. There are non-Indians who think they are more Indian than the Indians... (Deloria cited in Irwin 2000, 27).

Karlyn Crowley, author of the essay "The Indian Way Is What's *Inside*: Gender and the Appropriation of American Indian Religion in New Age Culture" discusses New Age practices by Lynn Andrews and Mary Summer Rain, two women who used female Indian identities to connect with the "inner Indian" they believe we all harbor. According to Crowley, Andrews believes that the core commonality between women and American Indians is that both have been oppressed and have endured suffering. Andrews romanticizes Native American identity and strips her white body to what she claims is beneath her white culture:

The Yucatan metamorphoses into the body of a woman of color, which Andrews, as colonialist voyeur, watches undress... Andrews wants to be that body. The Yucatan, both literally and figuratively, 'browns' Andrews' own body as she strips white culture to reveal what she has always been: 'Indian' (Crowley 2011, 65).

Here, Andrews romanticizes a stereotype of Indigenous people, that they are “one” with nature and have a “wisdom” of nature. Similarly, Summer Rain has a desire for Indian female ancestry and uses a method of “feeling Indian on the inside” (Crowley 2011, 76). Instead of using Andrews’ method of breaking the skin of white culture and finding “the Indian inside”, Summer Rain depends on an indigenous identity found through memory. Crowley writes, “By feeling Indian on the inside, feelings that have been accessed through the paranormal, Summer Rain can claim the power she seeks, the power of an Indian heart that must not justify itself through Indian practices. Thus memory determines identity for Summer Rain” (Crowley 2011, 76).

Along with these claims on “spiritual Indian identity”, New Agers also profit off of Native American spirituality with jewelry, clothes, and artifacts. The connection between profiting and claiming indigenous identities, land, culture, and spirituality is something that has been happening since the arrival of Columbus to the Americas. Since then, almost all of our land has been taken and our resources exploited for profit, leaving Native Americans and indigenous peoples with open mines, fracking, toxic fumes from coal mining and natural gas emissions, and oil spills on or next to our reservations. Much of colonial white culture is rooted in the taking and conquering of land and people. Irwin writes:

While Indian people are still being denied their own full religious expression, many non-Indians are devouring Native American spiritual traditions in the same way they have consumed Native American art, jewelry, clothing, weavings, and crafts, once again with no thought to the real, present-day, political, social, economic, and cultural/religious struggles in which Native people are engaged...Many, if not most, non-Native Americans seem to feel an entitlement regarding Native American ceremonial and cultural traditions, artifacts, and gravesites, including ancestral bones, that can only be understood in the context of the original entitlement the first colonizers felt toward this land by ‘right of conquest’ and soon after, ‘Manifest destiny.’ This entitlement assumes the right to take what is indigenous, with complete disregard for Native peoples, in a manner in which the perpetrators would not think of doing so easily with other traditions (Irwin 2000, 25).

Both Andrews and Summer Rain participate in New Age practices, which do not embody spiritual activism. In AnaLouise Keating's essay "I Am a Citizen of the Universe" she defines the difference between New Age practices and spiritual activism. She writes,

New Age...focuses almost, if not entirely, on the personal and thus leaves the existing oppressive social structures in place, spiritual activism's holistic approach encompasses both the personal and the system. Spiritual activism begins with the individual but moves outward as these individuals (or what Anzaldúa calls 'spiritual activists') expose, challenge, and work to transform unjust social structures. And unlike the latter, which often impose authority on individuals through external teachings, texts, standards, and leaders, spiritual activism locates authority within each individual (Keating 2008, 57).

The spiritual essentialism happening at Standing Rock is not to be confused with that of Lynn Andrews and Mary Summer Rain's romanticizing and colonization of Native identity. When I say that non-Native people can access the spiritual activism at Standing Rock and some of the prayers publicly expressed, that does not mean "you are innately an Indian" and have the right to claim an Indian identity. What I mean by spiritual essentialism goes back to Anzaldúa's *conocimientos*. *Conocimientos* are the consciousness that questions the system and authorities in place and from there transformation to the spiritual begins. Anzaldúa writes:

When a change occurs your consciousness (awareness of your sense of self and your response to self, others, and surroundings) becomes cognizant that it has a point of view and the ability to act from choice. This knowing/knower is always with you, but it is displaced by the ego and its perspective. This knower has several functions. You call the function that arouses the awareness that beneath individual separateness lies a deeper interrelatedness 'la naguala' (Anzaldúa 2002, 568).

This spiritual knowledge, or consciousness, resides within us all. *Conocimientos* embodies the spiritual essentialism I am referring to and it can be accessed by everyone because we all have an Inner Light or *conocimientos*. Anzaldúa also adds, "Through creative engagements" such as dance, song, and saying "I love you" to our oppressors, "you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself" (Anzaldúa 2002, 542). The "creative engagements" that are shared with the public at Standing Rock are mostly made up of gatherings where people can

participate in singing songs, playing music, dancing, and expressing love through art and sharing of stories. These engagements tap into the vibrations Maparyan described, creating energy to fuel the *conocimientos* and intention of resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline.

In order to tap into this shared spiritual consciousness, the ego must be dismantled. In order to dismantle the ego, or “your customary point of view” Anzaldúa says that a shift of awareness to empathizing in seeing others’ “circumstances from [their] position, you accommodate the other’s perspective, achieving un *conocimiento* that allows you to shift toward a less defensive, more inclusive identity” (Anzaldúa 2002 569). Keating describes the ego as self-identification that “functions through exclusion and binary opposition: we define who and what we are by defining who and what we are not. These exclusionary identities occur within a restrictive framework that marks, divides, and segregates human beings based on narrow, dualistic models of difference” (Keating 2008, 61). The spiritual essentialism at Standing Rock does not ignore identities within it, but rather creates bridges which allow people from all identities to access *conocimientos*. Keating describes Anzaldúa’s radical interconnectedness, which “adopts flexible, context-specific perspectives enabling [everyone] to see and see through exclusionary identity classifications” (Keating 2008, 62). She writes:

[Anzaldúa] does not ignore the importance of color, class, gender, and other identity markers; however, she puts these classifications into a more holistic perspective...she defines each person as a part of a larger whole—a “cosmic ocean, the soul, or whatever.” By so doing, Anzaldúa can insist on a commonality shared by all human beings, a commonality we share despite the very real differences among us. For Anzaldúa, this ‘common factor’ goes beyond—*but does not ignore*—identities based on gender, ‘race,’ or other systems of difference; it is ‘wider than any social position or racial label (Keating 2008, 62).

The common factor for Standing Rock is water. The water protectors at Standing Rock are fighting for the lives of our children, the environment, plants, trees, and living creatures of this planet. We as a species cannot survive without water, and although the movement at Standing

Rock is rooted in indigenous identity, the spiritual essentialism practiced at Standing Rock is a recognition that our “common factor” is greater than race.

Spiritual activists and people at Standing Rock are not only dismantling the ego, but they are also rejecting the term “protestor.” The word “water protector” is used instead. Much of Native American and indigenous culture have a similar, if not identical, understanding of being a protector of water. In a video called “Protectors, not Protestors” Kandi Mosset, an active spiritual activist at Standing Rock said:

It’s so important for people to understand that the label of protestor is so small in scope that it could *never* describe the protectors that are here. I am not a protestor. I am *protecting* the very essence of what I am made up of, which is mostly water. I am protecting that for my future generations, all those that can’t speak for themselves. Not just the babies, but everything that flies in the sky, all those that swim in the waters, the four-leggeds. Somebody has to speak on their behalf, because they don’t have a voice (“Protectors, Not Protestors” 2016, Fusion).

Protesting arose out of the patriarchal, white supremacist system America was founded upon, and since then protesting has been used to disrupt that system. Protecting has been put in place longer than protesting, and has been an innate part of Native American identity towards the government as both land and bodies were taken, profited from, and colonized. In “Brave Bull: Why Do We Have To Fight For Our Own Land?”, LaDonna Brave Bull Allard claims that because “we [indigenous people] are still alive” despite the genocide and cultural genocide “because we have an obligation to the earth. We must stand to save the earth” (The Young Turks, 2016).

Not only is the term “protector” rooted in indigenous identity, but it is also rooted in feminine strength. Women, in almost all Native American tribes, are deemed to be protectors of water. Mosset says:

Women are the ones going and breaking down fences, running in front of bulldozers. Women are the ones locking arms with babies on their backs going in because it’s that desperate... The women, in my culture, are the keepers of the water. It’s no coincidence that when we’re pregnant we carry our babies in water (“Protectors, Not Protestors” 2016, Fusion).

For 525 years, indigenous women have been viewed as objects that can be claimed, like the land. Irwin states, "...the removal and attempted alienation of Native peoples from their ancestral land bases by government forces almost ensures cultural genocide. The land bases give form and sustenance to Native cultures; the ceremonial, spiritual life of any Native culture is guided intimately by the land base as teacher as well as provider" (Irwin 2000, 18). Native women are exploited and used for profit, not only for sexual pleasure but also within the capitalist marketing system. The Dakota Access Pipeline only sees the earth as something to profit from, rather than take care of. This exploitative system began with the settlers and has expanded outward into fossil fuel consumption. M. Annette Jaimes, editor of "The State of Native America" wrote,

Indian nations were entitled to keep their land, but only so long as the intrinsically superior U.S. agreed to their doing so. Given this, Indians could be legally construed as committing aggression whenever they resisted invasion by the United States, a matter which rendered literally any military action the U.S chose to pursue against native people, no matter how unprovoked, a 'Just War' (Jaimes 1992, 142).

Whenever Native people become in the way of "progress and development", violent force is used to claim what little land left Native Americans have in order to satiate fossil fuel addiction or land expansion for white Americans. The colonization of land can be reflective to the treatment of indigenous women, both destructive systems in exploiting in order to profit.

Although the spiritual activism at Standing Rock is embedded in indigenous identity, the spiritual essentialism being practiced is accessible to everyone, including non-Native people. The inner consciousness within, the *conocimientos* or Inner Light, causes an enlightenment of spiritual awakening, and combines with a surplus of identities that transcend into a larger concept of commonality between non-Natives and indigenous people. In order to access the spiritual essentialism, the ego must be confronted and dismantled in order to proceed towards an

enlightened self that appreciates our identities but does not let them keep us from expanding into a greater being of light. Keating writes:

Positing our radical interconnectedness—or what [Anzaldúa] describes in ‘now let us shift’ as ‘the deep common ground and interwoven kinship among all things and people’—Anzaldúa challenges us to move beyond mono-thinking, binary-oppositional politics, and other forms of self-destructive thought and action (Keating 2008, 66).

At Standing Rock, the consciousness of spirituality is the commonality, and it connects to a greater aspect of healing for the earth. This healing is perceived as prayer, and is expressed as words of affirmation, song, dance, and chants through vibrations that cause positive change within a system. Anzaldúa’s politics of spirit allows for a radical interconnectedness that opens the gateways for alliances and spiritual essentialism. These alliances are pertinent in this movement, as well as other indigenous movements, because the very planet we exist upon is suffering. She requires our attention. With spiritual essentialism, everyone standing in solidarity with Standing Rock is linking together and healing our mother earth.

To the Policemen of Bismarck, North Dakota:

Medicine Song

My eyes are drawn back
their sockets are looking straight through me.
my insides feel sharpened by
the whites of polar bear teeth.
but I can feel your heart shifting
as you water us down with genocide and oppression
and break our skins open
to water the Black Snake's tail with blood.

Limb by limb

you took my mother
apart
dug out her reproductive organs with
shiny little hands and Benja-
min Franklins
Your history bought our souls for
Some barrels of oil
costed us 98% of the land
just to get your fix.

Brothers, we can see your hearts have been twisted
hung backwards off of tire shops and
dog leashes.
you've been eating too many
calories from the fat of the rivers
disregarding her bones and regurgitating her saliva
year by 525 year.

We have called your names from the other side of this bridge
bend together and you will see the wings of our waters
the rebirth of women and period blood stains bring seasons with burning suns
we have scars etched on our backs and breasts
knotted and worn over
the map of America
and its inhalation of trucks.

From the graves of our grandmothers,

we give our love to you
as you cut us with pepper spray
an attempt to rinse the words "I love you"
from our colorful mouths.

Come stand with us
in the water.
Our mother has suffered for too
long.

We sing

We pray

Medicine:

We love you,

We love you,

We love you,

We love you,

We love you,

We love you,

We love you.

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