

## *Chapter One*

# **Water Is Life**

### *Shared Destinies*

Emilie Falc

Xiuhtezcatl Martinez (Aztec) (2017), youth director for Earth Guardians, recalls how the International Indigenous Youth Council formed at Standing Rock in the spring of 2016. It began, Martinez says, with the Sacred Stone Camp, a youth prayer camp, along the Missouri River. The camp sought to bring together tribal youths in the community to heal from an epidemic of suicides, domestic and sexual violence, missing and murdered indigenous girls and women, and drug and alcohol abuse. It also sought to stop the Energy Transfer Partners' sponsored project from drilling under the Missouri and laying the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) upriver from eighteen million people who rely on the region's aquifer as a water source. He explains that, after several weeks, the youths organized their own five-hundred-plus mile relay run to the Omaha, Nebraska, Army Corps of Engineers office to convince an Army Corps representative to meet with them. After that meeting, the young people decided to run another relay from Standing Rock to Washington, DC. However, in the meantime, the Corps gave DAPL a green light. Martinez recalls that when the youth returned from spreading their message across the country, they thus called for "water protectors" to join them at Sacred Stone Camp.

In October 2016, the water protectors from Sacred Stone created the Oceti Sakowin camp along Lake Oahe in the treaty territory as a nonviolent, direct action occupation of the land next to the Missouri River and as a place for thousands of people from across the globe to stand in solidarity with Standing Rock (Indigenous Environmental Network 2016). Water protector Winoona LaDuke, White Earth Ashinaabe, explained, "We heard the call from LaDonna Allard" and responded and that the gathering included "water pro-

tectors from all over the continent" (APTN 2017). Former camp coordinator at Oceti Sakowin, Phyllis Young (Standing Rock Sioux), spoke these words: "[I]t's time for the woman to stand up. We owe it to our ancestors to fight to live and we have answered that challenging spirit that is in each and every one of us. So the linear age of man is over and it's time for the woman to step up. The circular motion must be put in place" (Lafleur Vetter 2016).

Soon, the news program *Democracy Now!* captured the moment when protectors rushed to stop a bulldozer attacking an ancestral burial site and the militarized police force sprayed mace while their attack dogs bit protectors. Martinez (2017) argues that this moment is when the hashtag #WaterIsLife began trending. He describes that conflict escalated on Thanksgiving weekend in November 2016, when police fired water cannons, rubber bullets, and a concussion grenade at protectors, causing hypothermia and injuries. The power of the Standing Rock demonstrations brought international support and media attention to the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies (Moore 2019).

In December 2016, President Obama's administration paused DAPL by seeking an Environmental Impact Assessment; however, when President Trump took office in January 2017, he ordered DAPL to proceed, and it has done so, in spite of law requiring the Army Corps to consider the impacts of an oil spill on fishing rights, hunting rights, and environmental justice (Martinez 2017).

Progressive campaigns often fail to generate enough popular support to draw sustained media coverage and international support. Yet Lakoff (2010) argues that the messages that frame the environmental movement can have a significant impact on swaying public opinion and creating social change. In the pages that follow, my analysis of anti-fossil fuel rhetoric retrieved from social media sources seeks to underscore the effective rhetorical framing of the collective direct-action movement. In this chapter, rhetoric includes slogans of the No Dakota Access Pipeline (No DAPL) movement, naming or labeling practices, and images of women depicted in the No DAPL movement art, banners, posters, and political cartoons. The slogans and labels repeated by organizers and advocates—including "*mni wiconi*," "Water is Life," "protect the sacred," "water protectors," and "Mother Earth"—act as rhetorical frames, critical to the image management and self-determination of the communicators. These phrases coincide with images of women that invoke and address power.

The communication of themes in the images themselves creates a visual argument. The repetition of the images makes this compelling argument a master trope of nonviolent strength in the face of riot police, and the images defy historically dehumanizing images of Native women in popular culture which anthropologist Elizabeth Bird (1999) notes as sexualized or in service to white men.

This chapter identifies the coherent moral framing of the Standing Rock movement rhetoric through the repetition of visuals and art of indigenous women in social media, and its success at mobilizing thousands to participate in the resistance to white supremacist, colonialist, capitalist patriarchy. Within the aims of this collection, it highlights a visual rhetorical campaign for water justice, and interrogates its successes to inform future work.

## FRAMING, ECOFEMINISM, AND INDIGENOUS AMERICAN ONTOLOGIES

Rhetorical scholar Randall Lake (1983) explains that within Native American protest rhetoric, “Language is instrumental largely in the sense that it can invoke the supernatural. Discourse may be addressed, but its audience is Power, not other humans. And Power is addressed through ritual, through the proper recitation of songs, prayers, and dance” (136). Additionally, the rhetoric can be interpreted through an ecofeminist understanding of “power-with,” “power-within,” and “power-toward” (Hunt 2014), as the water protectors seek to articulate their traditional, cultural values as resistance and in direct response to the hegemony of the white supremacist, colonialist, and capitalist patriarchy. Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo/Sioux) (1986) writes that “Indian control of the image-making and information-disseminating process is crucial” to resist cultural and spiritual genocide (42). The images recirculate a visual trope of internal strength and courage of nonviolent resistance.

My analysis underscores the importance of creating repetitive visual messaging in the social media context that employs a moral frame that resonates with the audience’s values across cultures. Nevertheless, I agree with Cox (2010) who indicates that Lakoff’s approach to effective rhetorical and moral framing alone will not protect the waters. Cox’s insistence on a campaign’s ability to exert leverage to redress an imbalance in the system will apply in this case both with legal means and through divestment.

Lakoff (2010) claims words and slogans without attention to moral framing are not enough to create a successful environmental campaign. Rather, in the case of environmental communication, the messaging needs to counteract the prevailing politically conservative moral system that privileges consumption over conservation with its ideology that “man is above nature in a moral hierarchy, that nature is put there by God purely for human use and exploitation,” the neoliberal frame expressed in appeals to “let the market decide,” and other economic principles that ignore the fundamental value of life (74; see also, chapter 6). Progressive values that he sees as more aligned with environmental campaigns are “empathy, responsibility (personal and social), and the ethic of excellence (make the world better, starting with yourself)”

(74). Developing messaging that expresses and connects with these values can both move an audience to action and connect with an audience's need for community.

Furthermore, Lakoff points out that the concept of the "environment" is unfortunately a "terribly false frame," meaning a frame that is like a fallacy (77). An environment that exists outside of oneself excludes one from seeing oneself as part of nature. Allen (1986) writes, "The notion that nature is somewhere over there while humanity is over here forces English-speaking people into a position of alienation from the world they live in. Each creature is a part of a living whole" (59–60).

Native American worldviews create a moral system that is more aligned with the progressive values regarding the natural world than the conservative moral system. Allen (1986) also asserts, "American Indians are not merely doomed victims of western imperialism or progress; they are also the carriers of the dream that most activist movements in the Americas claim to be seeking. The major difference between most activist movements and tribal societies is that for millennia American Indians have based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews" (2). Further, she states, "Among gynocratic or gynocentric tribal peoples the welfare of the young is paramount, the complementary nature of all life forms is stressed, and the centrality of powerful women to social well-being is unquestioned" (3). She writes:

Symbols in American Indian systems are not symbolic in the usual sense of the word. The words articulate reality—not "psychological" or imagined reality, not emotive reality captured metaphorically in an attempt to fuse thought and feeling, but that reality where thought and feeling are one, where objective and subjective are one, where speaker and listener are one, where sound and sense are one. (71)

Allen's views align with ecofeminist theorists' views of the importance of recognizing how natural ecosystems are models of the balance of power, integrity, and regeneration.

Ecofeminists seek to revalue women's roles and life-giving processes while emphasizing interconnections as the web of life is viewed as less hierarchical and more interdependent (King 2005). This is not to say that the artifacts under study are ecofeminist, but rather ecofeminists can actively resist seeing nature as separate from oneself in solidarity with the water protectors. Ecofeminists have been critiqued as essentializing the connection between women and nature (Warren 2002). Noel Sturgeon (1997) points out: "The figure of the Native American woman as the 'ultimate ecofeminist' mediates, for white ecofeminists, the conflict between the critique of the patriarchal connection between women and nature and the desire for that very connection" but that it could also reinforce negative stereotypes of

primitivism and the “noble savage” in hunting and gathering societies (268). Furthermore, Sturgeon argues that Native American environmental activists are not likely to identify as ecofeminists even while they generally agree with ecofeminist positions, since they frequently ground their ethics in cultural beliefs. Sturgeon sees possibilities for ecofeminists to begin to see nature in urban and constructed spaces and ally environmentalists with feminists and antiracists. King (2005) articulates an ecofeminist future which includes learning “holistic health and alternate ecological technologies, living in communities that explore old and new forms of spirituality which celebrate all life as diverse expressions of nature, considering the ecological consequences of our lifestyles and personal habits, and participating in creative forms of public resistance, including nonviolent civil disobedience” (474). These views can be described as shifting to a “power-toward” stance, which rejects life-denying systems in order to embrace a holistic view and healthy relationships (Hunt 2014). The political expression of our lives through mindful actions brings our whole selves to a communication campaign.

Tom Goldtooth (Diné and Dakota) and Daniel Wildcat (Yuchi, Muscogee) explain Native beliefs in a statement from the 2012 International Indigenous Conference:

Our Indigenous lifeways are the original “green economies.” This is more than an abstract philosophy. Our Mother Earth is the source of life. Water is her lifeblood. The well-being of the natural environment predicts the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual longevity of our Peoples. Mother Earth’s health and that of our Indigenous Peoples are intrinsically intertwined. When our homelands are in a state of good health our Peoples are truly healthy. This inseparable relationship must be respected for the sake of our future generations and for the well-being of the Earth herself.

Ed McGaa (Oglala Sioux) (1990), reminds us:

Now our planet is in great danger. Why not turn to ceremony, at least to get the feeling, the message that our planet must live? She is speaking to us quite strongly already. Let her speak also in ceremony. We can gain a special resolve by communicating within the ceremonies. By listening to nature through nature-based ceremonies, we can be like the Sioux. (11)

This is to say that the framing of discourse in the social movement acts both as power-within (a special resolve) and as a moral framework for how to address the problem in our natural world that we face. McGaa’s view is consistent with Lakoff’s (2010) advice that “what needs to be done is to activate the progressive frames on the environment (and other issues) and inhibit the conservative frames. This can be done via language (framing the



truth effectively) and experience (e.g., providing experiences of the natural world)" (76). We see both at play in the rhetorics of pipeline protest.

## IMAGES AND ANALYSIS

The voices of the organizers and advocates belong to those from Sacred Stone Camp and Oceti Sakowin Camp. This chapter approaches the artifacts from a perspective of discourse analysis which contextualizes the images within the broader sign systems and provides examples of the movement rhetoric that express the repetition of the core messaging through words and images, following methods of visibility in social media laid out by Martin Hand (2017). Hand notes that "inter-textuality" is significant in "discourse analysis of visual materials, which focus on the sites of images themselves in relation to a broader discursive framing" (219).

Search terms in Google Images and Google Videos included #NoDAPL, #WaterIsLife, and Standing Rock. Examples were selected through available sampling of popular video blogs about Standing Rock seen by thousands of viewers, and banners and art depicted in those video blogs that were part of the direct actions. While researching, additional examples of political cartoons and photos that inspired the art were found on social media sites like Twitter and Tumblr. According to Hand (2017): "On the one hand, the image is an *evidential document* of something else (communities, identities, events), where on the other hand, the image is more like an inter-textual site of discursive *relationships*. Both approaches may treat images as representational or pictorial forms, meaning that images are taken to represent *something*, regardless of whether this is thought to 'mirror' or 'construct' that object" (220). Thus, the moral frames which I identify here were not the only frames employed by the water protectors and their allies, but were the *prevalent* frames employed that help to express the shift of the moral framing away from topics of land management and rights to a reframing of the survival of people and all living beings, recognizing interconnectedness through solidarity.

Further, "the significance of the 'stream' now outweighs that of the single image" (Hand 2017, 221). Olson's (2009) explication of the persuasive potential of recirculation emphasizes that recirculation of an image through a close but slightly altered rendering can be analyzed with attention to the producers' and public's reuses in their specific contexts. Within this environmental movement, the images recirculate among the supporters and activists of Standing Rock in North Dakota but also draw from earlier images from the Mi'kmaq women's anti-fracking resistance in New Brunswick, Canada, still in circulation during and after the Standing Rock protests. This online

“stream” of discourse directs our attention to the protectors of the water and how the public responds.

I identify three primary themes in the pages that follow, united in an indigenous American and ecofeminist moral appeal.

## **Water Protectors**

In the images circulated by and among DAPL protestors, a persistent self-identification as “water protectors” frames protestors’ actions as a collective involving other indigenous people in a decolonizing effort to emphasize relationships instead of individual voices in the struggle to support human needs for survival. The theme of a need for protection rings true at a time of fearfulness over damaging toxins, oppressive regimes, and environmental instability of the planet due to global warming. A focus on water allows for representatives of other tribes to participate in the communal element of water and helps to underscore the sharing of the commons.

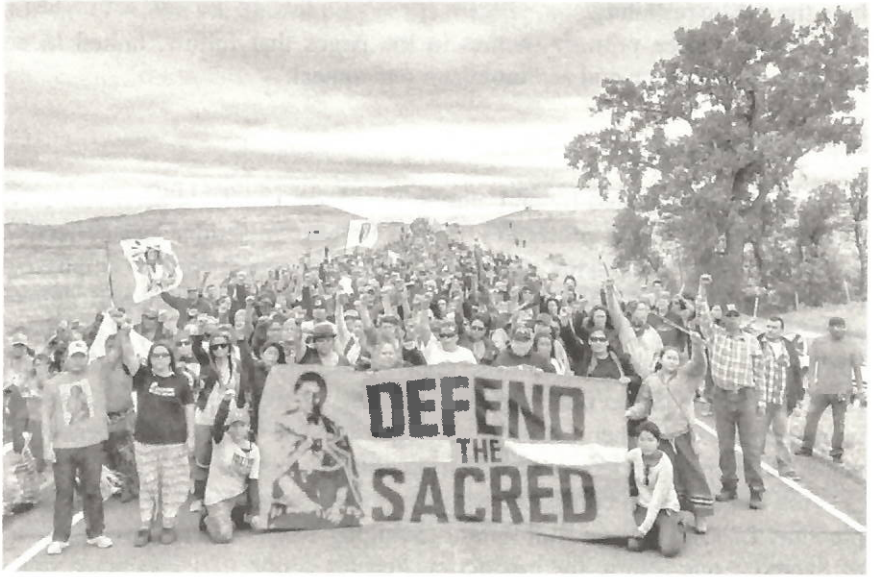
This frame is also consistent with the prayerful approach to resisting the pipeline. Ladonna Brave Bull Allard (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe), founder of Sacred Stone Camp, for instance, called for action in a Facebook video posted in the spring of 2016, writing, “I will stand to protect the water and the land. I am asking each of you to come stand with us.” Jodi Gillette (Hunkpapa and Oglala Lakota), former White House advisor for Native American Affairs, explains, “We don’t have any other place to go. These are our only remaining homelands. We have to protect them. Enough is enough. Really awful things happen to different tribes and it is deeply wounding, and when people see this their spirit is called to act” (Divided Films 2016).

The images most heavily circulated on protestors’ social media enact a stream of visual “water protector” imagery (see figures 1.1 through 1.6). They depict nonviolent strength as the courage to stand, with images of women in the center and foreground.

The repeated message of protecting the water in these images is consistent with rhetoric of the water protectors. A Sicangu/Oglala Lakota youth, Iyuskin American Horse (2016) writes from Standing Rock:

We are not protesters. We are protectors. We are peacefully defending our land and our ways of life. We are standing together in prayer, and fighting for what is right. We are making history here. We invite you to stand with us in defiance of the black snake.

The framing of the direct action as protecting the sacred is also expressed as defending the people from the pipeline (also known as the “Black Snake”) and the bulldozers run by the unfeeling Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) Corporation, backed by the state government. Dave Archambault (2016), Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, explains that the Black Snake is



**Figure 1.1.** A large assembly of indigenous people and their allies stand on the highway that runs between the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation and Bismarck, North Dakota, with a banner that reads “Defend the Sacred” and includes a figure of a woman in a shawl. The figure could be Asdzáá Tl’ógí or Juanita Manuelito, a Diné woman who fought for indigenous rights of the Diné people according to Indigenous Action Media ([www.IndigenousAction.org](http://www.IndigenousAction.org)). Source: Goldtooth, D. (2016). *Defend the Sacred* [Photo]. Retrieved from Twitter.

“made of nothing but Greed. There is nothing good that has ever come from Greed. Greed is pure poison. It blinds and twists thinking. It is what my people have endured and continue to endure.” Stopping DAPL would mean stopping the Black Snake through strength and the community working together as women lead the way. The Black Snake, too, then, also plays a role in the visual enactment of the “water protectors” theme (see figures 1.7 and 1.8). Each of these images indicate that the women will continue to resist and hold back the menacing Black Snake, representing the oil pipelines that threaten the water.

The “water protector” theme also built heavily from existing water sovereignty demonstrations, campaigns, and struggles. For instance, prior to the ETP’s application submitted for the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2014, Mi’kmaq water protectors of the Elsipogtog First Nation in New Brunswick, Canada, in 2013 employed the moral frame of protecting water in their resistance to fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, that began with a peaceful blockade of the highway and escalated into a conflict involving Royal Cana-



# SOLIDARITY WITH STANDING ROCK

STOP THE DAKOTA  
ACCESS PIPELINE

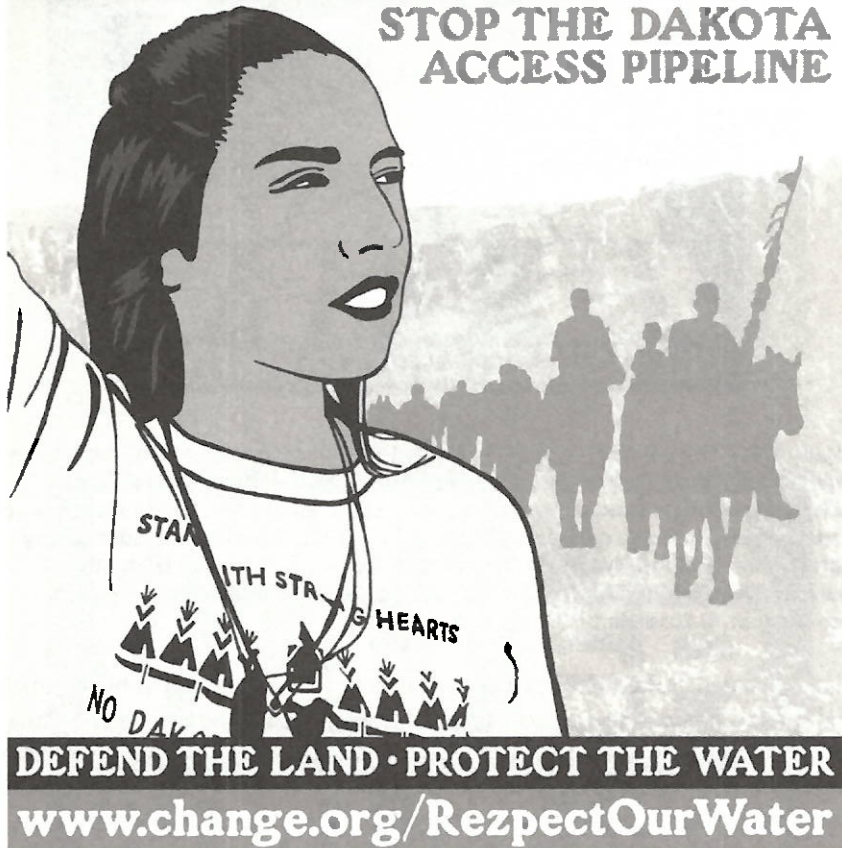
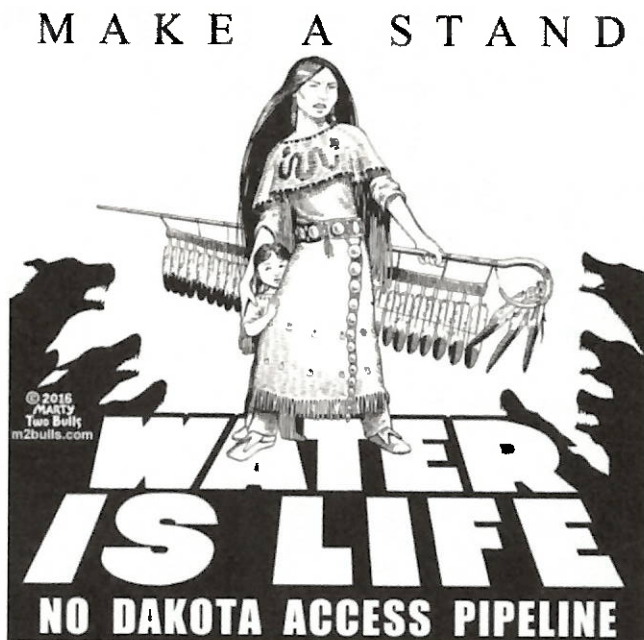


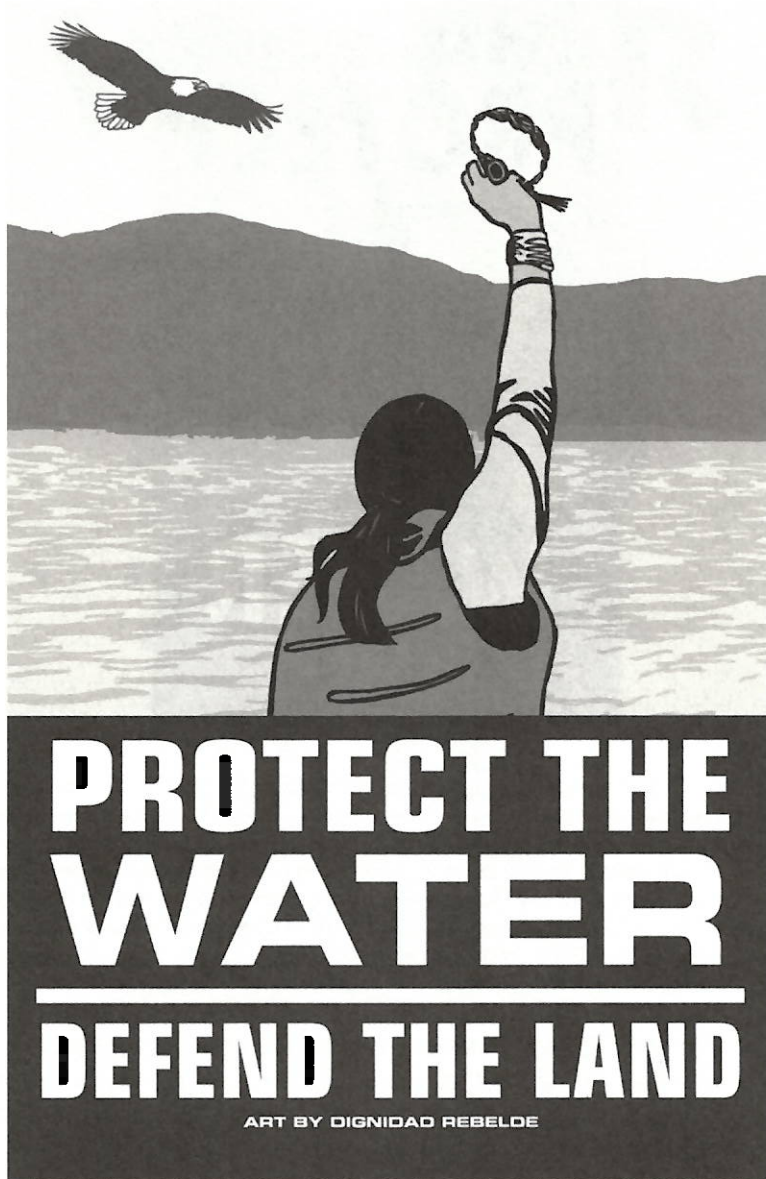
Figure 1.2. Jesus Barraza (Chicano) and Melanie Cervantes's (Chicana) poster design portrays a young indigenous woman in a Stand with Standing Rock T-shirt in the foreground and calls for solidarity with Standing Rock to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline, defend the land, and protect the water. In the background, horses and riders, including an indigenous rider carrying a warrior staff, lead a group of people. *Source:* Barraza, J., and Cervantes, M. (2016). Solidarity with Standing Rock [Poster]. Retrieved from <https://justseeds.org/graphic/solidarity-with-standing-rock/>. Licensed under Creative Commons Zero on Just-Seeds.org.



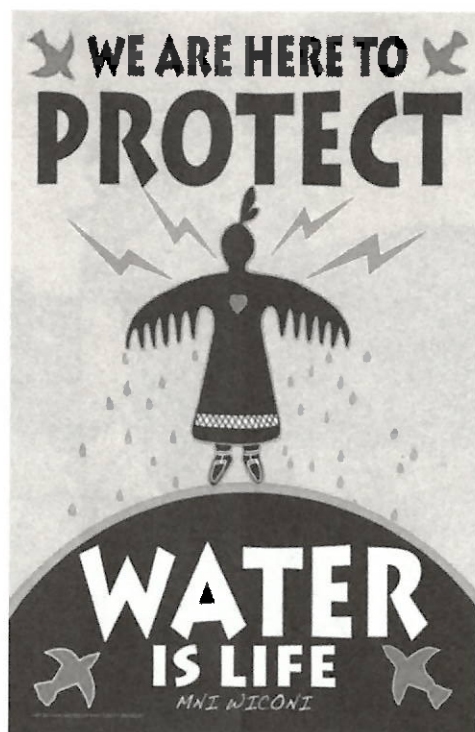
**Figure 1.3.** The political cartoon by Marty Two Bulls (Oglala Lakota) depicts an indigenous woman in a traditional dress with a feathered warrior staff in one hand and her other hand protecting a young child behind her. She is standing up courageously to fierce guard dogs baring their teeth. *Source:* Two Bulls, Marty. (2016). *Make a Stand: Water is Life* [Political Cartoon]. Retrieved from <https://www.herblock-foundation.org/herblock-prize/prize-winners/marty-two-bulls-sr>, © 2016 Marty G. Two Bulls, Sr.

dian Mounted Police (RCMP) anti-riot tactics like shooting rubber bullets and using pepper spray against the Elsipogtog First Nation citizens (Troian 2013). Women stood face-to-face with the RCMP, at times shouting at them, and, then, one woman, Amanda Polchies, knelt before the RCMP and held up an eagle feather. She explained, “I prayed for the women that were in pain, I prayed for my people, I prayed for the RCMP officers. . . . I prayed that everything would just end and nobody would get hurt” (Troian 2013; see figure 1.9).

The resulting iconic photo, taken by Ossie Michelin (Inuk), became the basis for several artistic images for the campaign and gave a visual for the moral frame of the sacredness and prayerfulness of the resistance. Doris Copage, a Mi’kmaq elder explains, “I want to call it ‘protect’ [. . .] rather than ‘protest.’ We are here to protect our water, our land. We have a river. It’s a beautiful river, we love it and we respect it” (Troian 2013). Through such



**Figure 1.4.** The poster depicts a woman with arm raised, holding a braid of sweetgrass looking over the lake and an eagle flying high above the water. The text reads "Protect the water. Defend the land." *Source:* Cervantes, Melaine. (2016). Protect the Water [Poster]. Retrieved from <https://justseeds.org/graphic/protect-the-water-defend-the-land/>. Licensed under Creative Commons Zero on JustSeeds.org.



**Figure 1.5.** The screenprint by Issac Murdoch (Anishinaabe) of Thunderbird Woman, a woman in a traditional dress with wings, a feather tucked in her hair pointed skyward, heart symbol on her chest and surrounded by lightning, rain, and four thunderbirds. The thunderbird woman is a strong symbol of the experience of heart, water, and sky. This screen print continues to appear in its grayscale design in social media in images of actions in resistance to the pipelines. *Source:* Murdoch, I. (2016). Thunderbird Woman. Permission for noncommercial use granted by the artists.

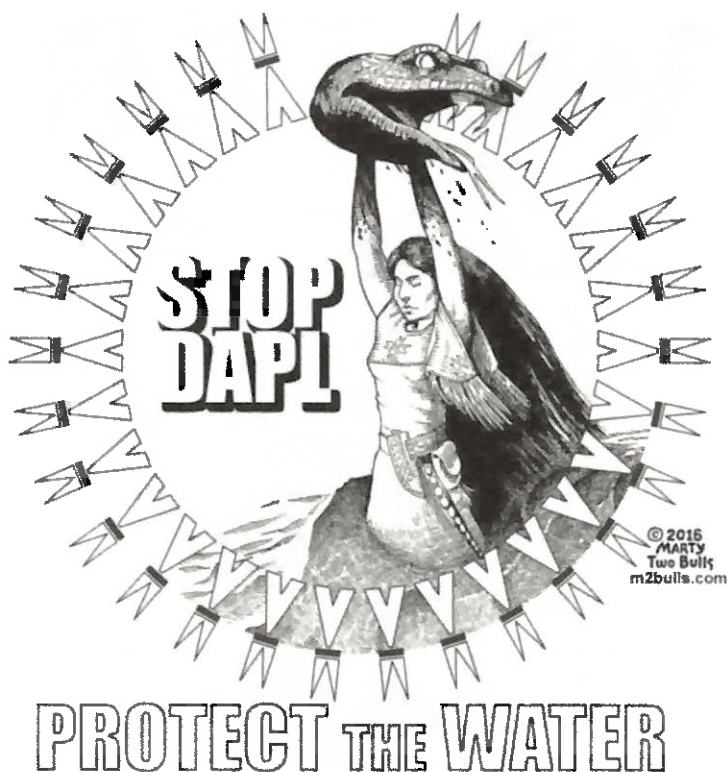
framing, the photo depicts Polchies in a position of leadership through defense. The significant moment of resistance is replayed in artfully enhanced images created by Gregg Deal and Nicholas Lampert that honor the significance of the role of women as protectors of the water (see figures 1.10 and 1.11).

The Polchies photo is a key example of how the repetition of an image of a woman showing nonviolent strength persisted in the social movement opposing fossil fuel before, during, and after the Standing Rock protests. Lampert's image merges a Mi'kmaq woman with a Standing Rock slogan, "Water is Life," as a recirculation of nonviolent strength, faith, and spirit. The shift from a woman kneeling to a woman standing in some artistic renderings



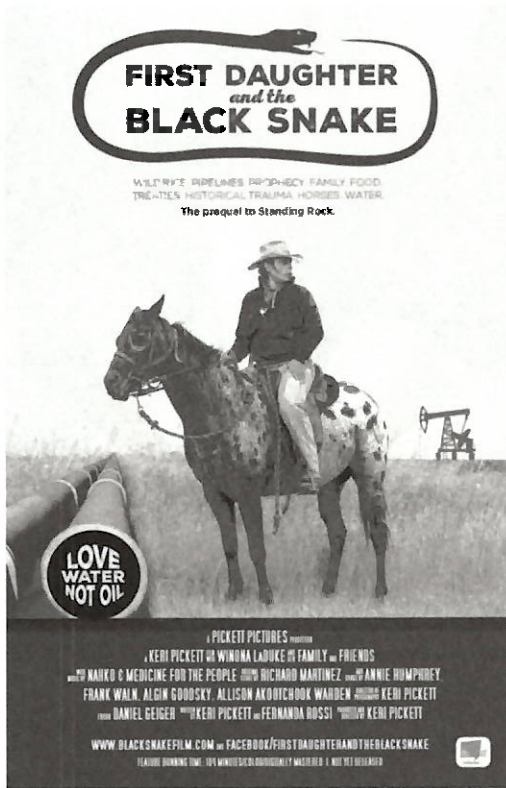
**Figure 1.6.** The screenprint by Christi Belcourt, *Thunderbird Baby*, shows a pregnant woman standing in a stream with a raised fist who is connected intimately with water and the understanding that water flows through us. The woman and thunderbird in the cloud have heart symbols on their chests. The cloud rains into the stream and the kettle. *Source:* Belcourt, C. (2016). *Thunderbird Baby*. Permission for noncommercial use granted by the artist.





**Figure 1.7.** This art of an indigenous woman wearing traditional dress, having long black hair, shows her standing in the water while holding over her head the severed head of the black snake baring its fangs and forked tongue. The image circulated on Twitter. *Source:* Two Bulls, M. (2016). Stop DAPL [Political Cartoon]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/indiancountry/status/795835390779330560>. © Marty Two Bulls, Sr.

and adaptations of the Lambert/Polchies image resonated with the place name, Standing Rock, and reinforced the sense of a women-led movement. Additionally, the point of view of Lampert's image as well as Michelin's photo is that of being an active, frontline water protector, not just an onlooker from a distance. The raised arm in the image signals, potentially, a connection to the sky and spiritual power. The gesture of holding an eagle feather up could resonate in a U.S. context with echoes of the torch-bearing arm of the Statue of Liberty, holding up a light to peace and freedom. Clearly, the repetition in these multiple images of women facing environmental injustice, circulating in social media, invites the viewer to empathize with and draw strength from the iconic symbol of water protectors.



**Figure 1.8.** Promotional poster of the *First Daughter and the Black Snake* documentary shows Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe) in a cowboy hat and jeans sitting on a horse in the northern plains below an image of a black snake with oil derricks in the background. LaDuke articulates solidarity with Standing Rock in using similar black snake imagery to fight pipelines in Minnesota as in North Dakota. *Source:* Pickett, K. (2017). *First Daughter and the Black Snake* [Poster]. Retrieved from <https://www.keripickett.com/portfolio-item/first-daughter-and-the-black-snake/>. Copyright Pickett Pictures.

### *Mni Wiconi* and Water is Life

A second recurrent frame, in repeated reference to the maxims “Water is Life” and/or “*Mni Wiconi*,” emphasizes how water is essential to survival. It stresses a human interconnectedness to water, as it is needed by everyone and within everyone, and implicitly argues that water needs to be respected and valued.

The phrase “Water is Life” speaks to “the popular Lakotayapi assertion ‘*Mni Wiconi*’—water is life or, more accurately, water is alive” (Dhillon and



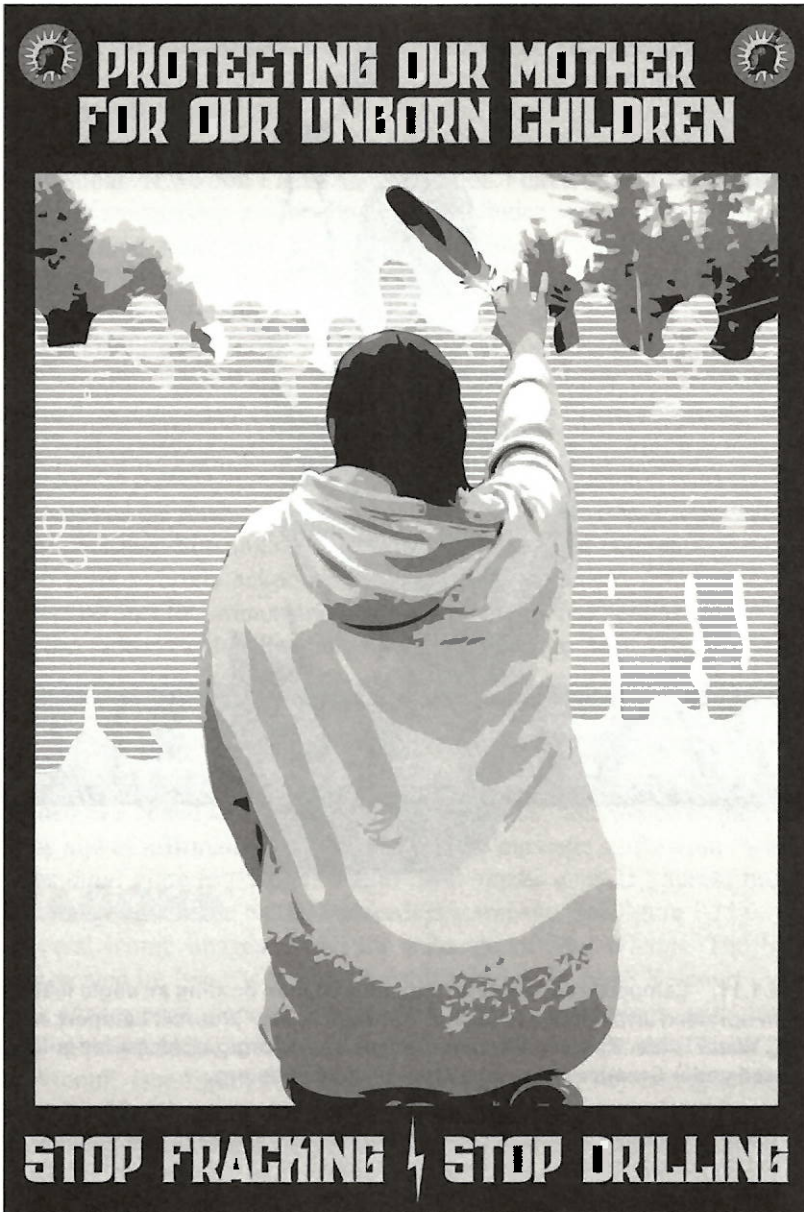
**Figure 1.9.** Amanda Polchies (Elsipogtog) kneels on the road holding up an eagle feather in face of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in navy blue uniforms and baseball caps. *Source:* Photo credit: Michelin, O. (2013). Amanda Polchies. APTN News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/inuk-journalist-ossie-micheline-best-image-museum-1.4174047>. © Ossie Michelin. Used with permission of the photographer.

Estes 2016). This framing that decommodifies water resurfaces again and again in video narratives posted online. The *Mni Wiconi* frame was part of the discourse of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's listening session with the Army Corps of Engineers in the spring of 2016, currently circulating via YouTube (Unicorn Riot 2016). The theme was expressed in this listening session through song and through repeated arguments by LaDonna Allard and others who expressed, "We cannot live without the water. This is not an Indian issue. It's a people issue. This is an everybody issue. Everybody needs water, so if we don't stand up and fight for water we're [*sic*] lost our humanity."

The *Mni Wiconi* frame is also uniquely connected to women through messages and images in video interviews of the water protectors circulating via Vimeo. In the fall of 2016, Melaine Stoneman (Sicangu Lakota) noted:

Some people say Mni Wiconi is just water, but for us Lakotas it's more than just water. It's more than just praying for water. It's our way of life. Water of life. And our way of life, you can't find it in the dictionary. (App 2016b)

She then draws an explicit relationship between water and *women*, adding:



**Figure 1.10.** The poster created by indigenous artist Gregg Deal shows the woman raising an eagle feather to the sky in prayer in the resistance to fracking and drilling. *Source:* Deal, G. (2016). Mi'kmaq Protest [Poster]. Retrieved from <http://www.ethicalactionalert.com/2013/10/download-this-anti-fracking-protest.html>. Open source.



**Figure 1.11.** Lampert's screen print depicts a woman holding an eagle feather with an upraised arm and the message is "Water is life." *Source:* Lampert, N. (2016). *Water is life*. Retrieved from <https://justseeds.org/graphic/water-is-life-3/>. Licensed under Creative Commons Zero on Justseeds.org.

We're here to make a connection, here to make a connection with the water and the sacredness it has here for all of us, for all of us women. Watching our women hit the ground. Watching the women on their knees. Watching them bleeding and rubber bullets to their head is very disheartening to see that they had some kind of intentions to hurt us women. . . . So there is a reason why we must continue on as women nation. So there's a reason why we must stand together, not only in solidarity, not only in prayer, but it is in unity all over the world, not just here at Standing Rock, but globally we must stand together as one. (App 2016b)



The *Mni Wiconi* frame hails women as included in the spiritual life of the community as well as a part of the basis of power in the community. Stoneman insists, "A woman should never be yelled at. [They] targeted our women," yet the response of the water protectors is to nonviolently "stand in prayer" (App 2016b).

In another video circulating on Vimeo, J. C. Begay (Sicangu Lakota) reiterates that "if we don't have water, we don't have life," and explains that one of the songs sung at Standing Rock includes words of healing and to "pray for clean water, and everlasting life with our water. And, again, that praying that our sacred hoop be mended" (App 2016b). Water is imbued with power in its status as sacred in these recirculating online videos.

Lakota historians Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota) (1995) confirm these views, thus reinforcing the power of the imagery of water and its significance to indigenous people. St. Pierre and Long Soldier write, "Mni (water) is essential and seen as connecting all life. It is viewed as having sacred powers of healing. Water is used in conjunction with almost all ceremonies as the most precious and basic of gifts" (46). St. Pierre and Long Soldier continue: "In Lakota society, the spiritual and economic powers of women were not only acknowledged but well respected." (48). Such views reinforce respect for women and water in traditional indigenous ways.

In the videos of the Standing Rock activists, the *Mni Wiconi*/"Water is Life" frame is highly visible in the graphic images on demonstrators' banners and posters, many of which were designed by artists from the JustSeeds artist collective. Simpson (2017) notes that the resurgence of artist collectives is "a disruptive and deliberate act of turning away from the colonial state . . . grounded in a coded articulation . . . of Indigenous intelligence as theory and process and as affirmative refusal" (198). The message shifts from "water of life" or *aqua vitae* to "Water is Life" and "*agua es vida*" across multiple digital images available on the Justseeds.org website (see figure 1.11).

Several iconic images depict the message of *Mni Wiconi*. The banner image created by Issac Murdoch (Anishinaabe) and Christi Belcourt (Michif Metis), for instance, depicts Thunderbird Woman with wings, with drops of water, lightning bolts, and the message "We are here to protect. Water is life. Mni Wiconi" (see figure 1.5). Belcourt (2016), in her keynote speech, "The Revolution Has Begun," at the Maamwizing Conference in Sudbury, Ontario, explains, "The waters are viewed as the lifeblood of Mother Earth." The message of *Mni Wiconi* and "Water is Life" is reinforced in an image circulating on INDIANZ.com of Bobbi Jean Three Legs, citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux and organizer of the indigenous youth relay run across the nation. Madonna Antoine Eagle Hawk (Rosebud Sioux) explains in a video circulating on Vimeo: "The prophecy was that all the generations, the indigenous, all tribes would come together to fight the black snake and the youth would be the ones to lead it. And they were the first to run all the way to

Washington, DC, and lead it" (App 2016a). The repetition of the slogans over time reinforces the message as a coherent moral frame.

### **Mother Earth**

Thirdly, a recurrent hailing of the land as "our mother" or "Mother Earth" reinscribes a respectful relationship with the Earth that revalues and honors the natural world and the beings on it. This framing of "Mother Earth" is also a moral frame, which Lakoff (2010) argues is needed to advocate for the environment in the face of fierce opposition. "The Mother Earth is Huncí Waka the grandmother of everything and the water is her blood. And through this blood we live," explains LaDonna Allard (Lakota) in a video circulating on YouTube (Divided Films 2016). The hailing of the Earth as mother was echoed throughout the Standing Rock campaign by many leaders, including Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred Buffalo Calf Pipe Bundle of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nations.

Along with the theme of water, the Lakota belief in the Mother Earth as sacred and vulnerable to assault was expressed at the listening session in the spring of 2016 with the Army Corps of Engineers in a video circulating via YouTube (Unicorn Riot 2016). In the fall of 2016, Eryn Wise (Jicarilla Apache/Laguna Pueblo), a youth leader in the International Indigenous Youth Council from Sacred Stone Camp, stood at the doors of the Army Corps of Engineers and spoke to Colonel John Henderson in front of the gathered crowd. The following intense questioning was recorded and shared via social media: "Have you ever been raped?" Wise asks. Henderson replies, "No, I have not." Wise continues, "Okay. I have. When they put that pipeline in our Mother, every single day they do it reminds me of what it was like when somebody forcibly put something inside of me that I did not request to be there. And on behalf of the youth that want to wake up with clean water tomorrow and want to have children consensually, we are asking you to not grant that easement. We're asking you to stand up on behalf of the people that you swore to protect" (Becker 2016).

The framing of the raping of Mother Earth is consistent with the protection framing and the call to respect life and American lives.

### **DISCUSSION**

The three major frames of the No DAPL campaign at Standing Rock discussed here—water protectors, water is life, and Mother Earth—are more than just slogans. The frames evoke an indigenous moral system that includes the responsibility to be life-supporters and to have empathy for all who share our ecosystem, invoking power and asserting "power-toward." The frames are effective because they are internalized, inspiring, and whole-

some in emphasizing “power-with,” a coalition-building power among indigenous people. The repetition of the moral frame visually in images and text, and voiced in videos circulating in social media among the water protectors, also flows beyond reservation borders, state borders, and national borders and streams into the political consciousness. The moral frame of the water protectors aligns with conservationists’ perspective on protecting ecosystems to improve habitats and ecofeminists’ perspectives on recognizing how respecting and caring for nature means caring for and respecting women. Water protectors’ framing aligns with health-conscious consumers who seek to protect themselves and their families from the onslaught of industrial hazards. In addition to the representatives from international tribal groups, Standing Rock drew in numerous clergy and an estimated two thousand veterans as demonstrators and allies (Healy 2016). Water protectors’ framing aligns with the values of clergy oriented toward social justice and veterans who took an oath to serve and protect Americans from threats, foreign and domestic.

Protecting the sacred rejects a consumerist narrative of unstoppable progress and affirms the indigenous peoples’ return to traditions and indigenous wisdom. The prevalence of this stream of images of strong indigenous women in social media builds empathy, whereas traditional images of indigenous men might evoke stereotypes. Respecting indigenous women as courageous leaders of their own communities exemplifies a vision in which gender equity is a presumed component of a transition to a more sustainable future. The “Water is Life” frame and its call for unity invites us to stand in solidarity and as witnesses to the disrespect of sacred land and water. The frame of *Mni Wiconi* exists in a context of an America facing threats to water on multiple fronts. Solidarity is essential to see this social movement continue to grow and for seeking justice. And the Mother Earth frame expands upon and unites these other two prevalent themes in the image rhetorics of the movement.

Of course, moral frames are not enough on their own to impact the outcomes of the conflict. Cox (2010) argues that in order for an environmental campaign to be successful, it needs to apply leverage to the weakest point in the prevailing power structure which could be in the form of a lawsuit regarding upholding regulations. Still, in the big picture of Standing Rock, the direct actions of the water protectors might have had an impact on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s legal efforts by raising awareness and engagement, and thus directing more legal funds toward the tribe’s ongoing legal battles with the Army Corps of Engineers (Meyer 2017). Earth Justice lawyers continue to support Standing Rock’s legal fight at the time of this writing (by, for instance, filing a “supplemental complaint” on November 1, 2018, in their lawsuit against the Army Corps to stop DAPL). The confrontations with the private security workers also brought to light a larger concern about the

increase in state tolerance of the use of violence to suppress freedom of expression and to attempt to manipulate peaceful demonstrations into the appearance of a riot. Also in the bigger picture, the “Water is Life” campaign boosted the awareness of the No DAPL campaign and its online push urging customers to divest from Wells Fargo and other major banks that finance the corporation constructing the pipeline. With the attention from activists from multiple tribal affiliations on the water, a successful online divestment campaign hindered Kinder Morgan’s Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project (Gignac 2017). A kind of indigenous internationalism has been described by artist and environmental activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) (2017), as an international co-resistance. Without the unifying moral frame and the stream of images, such campaigns would have a much harder time developing necessary solidarity and on-the-ground coalitions to pressure banks and to work on municipalities divesting as well.

Moreover, the No DAPL campaign and its stream of images—of women, in particular—could have impacts beyond pipelines. More indigenous women ran for office in America in 2018 (Trahant 2018). Minnesota stands in a historical moment electing as Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan (White Earth Ojibwe), on the Democratic ticket, while Donna Bergstrom (Red Lake Ojibwe), ran on the Republican ticket. These are tangible results of respecting indigenous women’s strength, courage, and leadership.

Public support and visibility for the No DAPL campaign is not enough to turn away the bulldozers, security helicopters, and riot-gear security workers; however, the campaign’s rootedness in multiple moral frames shows a path to integrity through steadfastness in understanding the nature of life. Sky Bird Black Owl, a water protector, explains, “they talked about that first it would be the children, and then the women, and finally our men would stand up. I firmly think that our men need our women to stand up and be strong and to be reminded they need to make the world safe for us and our daughters, and their mothers, sisters, aunties, [and] the women they don’t know” (Kring 2016). The solidarity of working together and collaborating via our natural diversity strengthens the movement toward respecting Mother Earth and begins to redistribute the wealth of our nation’s generosity, caring, kindness, and fortitude as these values resonate in the images and voices of indigenous women.

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