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Hoover, Elizabeth

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**Elizabeth Hoover**

**“Fires were lit inside them;”**

**The Pyropolitics of Water Protector Camps at Standing Rock**

*“It’s a survival thing. Without fire there wouldn’t be life. Existence would be impossible for human beings. We cook over the fire. We warm our cold bodies after a hard day’s work over the fire. We sleep with the fire. We gather as a community around the fire. We pray around the fire. We cry around the fire. We smile around the fire. On a day-to-day basis fire is essential for our survival and even our mental and emotional wellbeing. There’s nothing like warmth.” –Dustin (Pueblo), camp resident<sup>1</sup>*

*“The symbolic fires were put out and that shocked us all. But we need to ask did the fire really go out? No it didn’t, as it lit the fire within us all. It ignited like a brush fire and all Indigenous nations’ fires were lit inside them. Now the world has been awakened by our Mother Earth and mni wiconi. So take what you have learned and go to your respected nations to light the fire brighter to awaken our own nations.” – Lewis (Lakota), camp resident and Horn headman<sup>2</sup>*

Fire has been instrumental in the development of human beings as a species, and has broadly shaped the development of different human societies. Around the world, fire has played an important role in religious rituals and social rites (Macauley), and historic fires have shaped civilizations (Pyne 1995). Changing social, political, and environmental conditions brought on by colonization have led to the types of wildfires currently blazing across the American west (Pyne 1982), and the slash-and-burn fires blazing through rainforests seen as threatening the natural environment and the temperature of the planet as a whole (Clark; Clark and Yusoff). In the ‘developed world,’ people’s relationship to fire has changed dramatically since industrialization. Hidden combustion has replaced open burning— lightbulbs replaced candles, gas heaters or furnaces for fireplaces, electric range stoves for cooking fires. Many people have become removed from fire, occasionally flicking a lighter or striking a match to light a cigarette or a festive candle.

As the fire régimes of colonial nations have changed, largely

eliminating open fires, those nations have then encouraged or coerced cultures that had utilized open outdoor fires to curtail those practices. “The open flame— fluttering in the wind— remains, for modern economics and environmentalism, symbol of defiant primitivism, and only by quenching it can a people cross the threshold to modernity” (Pyne, *Fire: A Brief History* 154.) While Pyne is describing the problem of temperate European or settler colonial countries like those in North America, that are trying to control forest ecologies in places that still practice controlled burns, this philosophy also applies to the ways in which settler governments and pipeline supporters viewed the #NoDAPL anti-pipeline movement, and the lifestyle of residents of the camps that formed in support of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, who suddenly found themselves living in close proximity to a variety of open flames. Camp residents used fire in a number of material ways—from the ceremonial fire that served as the heart of camp, to the secular social fires that brought people together at night, the home and hearth fires that kept people alive as the temperatures dropped well below freezing (and nearly killed people when they got out of control and burned down structures), and the cooking fires—burning wood or consuming propane—which kept camp residents fed. Lighters kept in pockets were imperative for the smoking habit taken up by many, or to light sage bundles for smudging. Fire was also used for protection and to express anger, as barricades and construction equipment were set alight to drive back authorities.

But the language of fire has also been used in illustrative ways to describe how social movements spark, flare, and sometimes sputter out. A spark of an idea will spread like wildfire among believers, until people, coming up against too many barriers and too few victories, become burned out. Bridging these notions, *pyropolitics* is a term described by philosopher Michael Marder (2015) as the literal and metaphorical mentions and uses of fires, flames, sparks, immolations, incinerations and burning in political theory and practices. Building on

recent scholarship about protest camps, as well as borrowing language from environmental historian Stephen Pyne about fire behavior, this article draws from ethnographic research to describe the pyropolitics of the Indigenous-led anti-pipeline movement at Standing Rock—examining how fire was used as analogy and in material ways to support and drive the movement to protect water from industrial capitalism. Describing ceremonial fires, social fires, home fires, cooking fires, and fires lit in protest on the front line, this article details how fire was put to work in myriad ways to support the movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), and ensure social order and physical survival at the camps built to house supporters of the movement. This article concludes with descriptions of how the sparks ignited at Standing Rock followed activists home to their own communities, to other struggles that have been taken up to resist pipelines, the contamination of water, and the appropriation of Indigenous land.

### **Fire Analogies and Social Movements**

People in protest often move like fire, and use fire as a tool for conveying their message. Sociologist Michael Biggs (2005a) notes that historians have persistently likened strike waves to wildfires, and was thus inspired to develop the “forest fire model” to analyze the outbreaks of class conflict in Chicago in the late nineteenth century (Biggs, “Strikes as Forest Fires” 1705–1706). Analogies of wildfire and fever were used in early accounts of the sit-ins that kicked off the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1960s. Martin Oppenheimer (cited in Polletta 137) described how “the sit-ins caught on in the manner of a grass fire, moving from the center outward,” spreading to fifty-four cities in nine states in a matter of a few months. Descriptions of the student protests “burst[ing],” “exploding,” “sweeping,” “surging,” “unleashed,” “rip[ping] through the city like an epidemic,” of students “fired” by the

“spark of the sit-ins,” were common and suggested an unstoppable moral impetus (Poletta 150). Some activists in the 1960s also used fire in extreme sacrifice to publicly deliver messages against oppression, through self-immolation “using their bodies like a lamp for help” as Buddhist monk Thích Thiên-Ân described the famous self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc in 1963 in Saigon in protest of dictatorship in Vietnam, and others who followed suit. (Biggs, “Dying Without Killing” 178) Because this act received wide media coverage, with a few years self-immolation entered the global repertoire of protest, and Christians in America were setting fire to themselves in protest against American foreign policy in 1965, and Czech student Jan Palach in 1969 to protest Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia (181). This trend has continued around the world as an extreme way to protest government policies in France, Vietnam, India, South Korea and China, among the most documented cases (Biggs).

On a slightly larger scale, full-blown revolutions have utilized both analogies of fire and lighting physical fires as a means to an end. Journalist and foreign policy analyst Mark Perry (28) states that “fire is both the symbol of revolution and its most powerful weapon,” noting how the American, French, German, and Iranian Revolutions all began with fires. He quotes 1812 revolutionary Claude Francois de Malet “with a match one has no need of a lever. One does not lift up the world, one burns it” (29). Similarly, the Arab Spring began with fire, as a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire in December 2010. Revolutions “begin with a spark, become a fire, and end with a conflagration,” fueled especially by disaffected youth (30). Speaking about the Arab Spring, Perry (33) describes how “the violence that sparked this fire will grow and spread ... consuming fires of this size are not often contained, but spread. These rulers are worried because they should be.” Thus, “for onlookers, the best policy is not to interfere, but to let the fire burn” (27). He concludes that “In truth, our best policy is to do what

firefighters do when faced with an overwhelming conflagration: they let it burn. For, in truth, the fire that we are witnessing cannot be extinguished: it is not in Tunis or Cairo or Sanaa or Damascus— it is in the minds of Arabs” (33).

But while Perry describes the fires of the literal and figurative form that have accompanied the world’s major revolutions, Seneca scholar John Mohawk also notes that lighting these fires is not generally easy:

Lightning strikes the earth hundreds of times every day but produces fire only rarely, and those fires seldom burn very far from the point of impact. Over the centuries, however, some fires can be expected to be significant. When conditions are right, fires can burn huge areas and conceivably change the world they touch forever. Revitalization movements— movements to create conscious change in the culture inspired by visions, revelations, or challenging circumstances— have appeared among human populations in history in a manner resembling lighting fires. A few such movements—especially those originally inspired by utopian beliefs or the pursuit of the ideal—continue to shape today’s world. (261)

Or, speaking literally on the matter, Pyne noted, “It can be as tricky to start a fire as to stop one” (*Fire: Nature and Culture*, 24)

But while analogies of fire have often been applied to social justice movements, what has been explored less are the connections between these analogies and material uses of fire as part of the ceremonial and domestic life of a movement.

### **Protest Camp Scholarship**

While the movement to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline included actions in communities and major cities across the US, this paper explores the #NoDAPL movement within the very specific space of the camps that formed at Standing Rock. Frenzel, Feigenbaum & McCurdy note that “despite protest camps’ increasing role as an organizational

form of protest, research on camps is limited” (457).<sup>3</sup> But, they argue, the establishing of camps was not just a passing tactic: “they can be the focal point of a movement both organizationally and symbolically,” and thus there should be a more focused analysis of “the protest camp as both a contemporary and a historical movement practice (458.) They note that spatiality is at the heart of all protest camps, as they are often defined by their physical location, and from this location serve a symbolic role to mobilize campers. As will be described below, the location of the camps themselves, along the path of a pipeline that was seen to threaten the adjacent Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, was a key aspect in mobilizing support and validating the cause. But in addition, the different types of fires within the camp also served to create specific types of spaces, determining which types of behaviors should be conducted where.

While there is not necessarily a corpus of scholarship specific to Indigenous protest camps, the American Indian civil rights movement has relied on the physical occupation of unusual places with Native bodies as a form of protest against American policy since at least the 1960s. As Native scholars Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior (1996) describe in their seminal work on this movement, the occupation of Alcatraz from 1969–1971 by Indians of All Tribes represented one of the first political pan-Indian movements in the country, working towards the ownership of the island, and the establishment of educational and community center facilities for urban Indians in the Bay Area. While the 19-month habitation of the constructed community on the island did not accomplish these goals, it did garner worldwide attention to the plight of American Indian people. Subsequent to this occupation, members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) also used their bodies in place to briefly inhabit the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington in 1972, and then the town of Wounded Knee for 71 days in 1973, in protest of federal

government policies and corrupt federal-government-backed tribal governments (Smith and Warrior). While scholars who have theorized the history and functioning of protest camps have not focused on this particular history, it was salient in the minds of some of the Indigenous activists who took part in resisting the Keystone XL pipeline, the #NoDAPL movement that will be described below, and subsequent protest camps that have developed against other pipeline projects (Estes).

Within protest camps, the study of affect can be used to explain social interactions and experiences, including “affect as the ways that sensations can move and circulate through physical and virtual spaces” (Feigenbaum, Frenzel & McCurdy 23). Citing the work of Anna Gibbs around the role of media and ‘affect contagion’, Feigenbaum, Frenzel & McCurdy describe how media acts as amplifiers of affect, increasing the rapidity of communication and extending its reach almost globally (23). A perfect example of this occurred when in late October of 2016, people around the globe began “checking in” on Facebook at the site of the Oceti Sakowin camp at Standing Rock, even though they were not there at the site in person, in an effort to help protestors avoid detection by police. As a *Time* article described at the time, “the Facebook activists are following the instructions of a viral post encouraging people to check in at the site to confuse the Morton County Sheriff’s Department . . . The initiative spread like wildfire online Monday, with more than 100,000 Facebook check ins at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The reservation has a population of less than 10,000” (Worland). In the end, more than 1.5 million people checked in as part of this remote action, as people used virtual space in defense of a physical one (Kennedy).

## **Standing Rock and #NoDAPL**



The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST) is a sovereign tribal nation located on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, comprised of 2.3 million acres that shares a border with both North Dakota and South Dakota. Even though a series of treaties, like the 1851 and the 1868 Ft Laramie Treaties, delineated a Great Sioux Reservation, subsequent acts of Congress as well as illegal actions by federal and state governments and encroaching settlers diminished their tribal land base. By the 1930s most of Standing Rock's Native families lived on the eastern part of the reservation along the Missouri River and its tributaries. In 1944 Congress authorized the construction of five major dams along the Missouri River, each located just downstream from Indian reservations, in order to help with flood control and irrigation for white farmers. Despite protest from the Standing Rock Tribal government, the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) completed the Oahe Dam in 1959, which inundated 55,993 acres of reservation land and forced the relocation of hundreds of families (Ruelle; Lawson).

The tribe has continued to fight to protect what land and resources they have left. In 2012 this included passing a resolution opposing all pipelines. In 2014, when it came to light that Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) planned to reroute the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) from its original path north of the town of Bismarck, North Dakota to instead cross the river just north of the reservation, the SRST expressed complete opposition to the plan and warned of resistance on the ground if the reroute proceeded. In early 2016 community meetings were held with elders on Standing Rock, and in March the "Run For Water" was organized by Bobbi Jean Three Legs. On April 1, 2016, Ladonna Brave Bull Allard and youth organizers opened the Sacred Stone Camp on Allard's property, inspired by the Keystone XL Spirit Camp on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. The "Run For Your Life" from Cannon Ball, North Dakota to the Army Corp of Engineers Region 8 Headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska 532 miles away took place from April 24-May 2. In May, the

respectourwater.com youth website was launched, and the SRST Council voted to support the youth and opposition to DAPL. In June, a Change.org online petition was launched, and Sacred Stone camp hosted 5–7 residents. A month later, on July 15 the youth organized a spirit run to the ACOE office in Washington, DC, to deliver a petition with 160,000 signatures. Regardless, in late July, ACOE announced its intent to approve the final DAPL permits to bore under the Missouri River.

By the end of August, Sacred Stone camp had grown to 300–500 water protectors. During the third week in August, an overflow site, named Oceti Sakowin Camp (meaning Seven Council Fires) was established on land taken from the tribe by ACOE as part of the creation of Lake Oahe. Red Warrior Camp was set up just north of Oceti Sakowin, and Rosebud Camp directly on the banks of the Cannon Ball River, across the river from Oceti, and near Sacred Stone. Also in August, DAPL survey and construction crews arrived, along with the Morton County Sheriff's Department, and the North Dakota governor declared a state of emergency in response to the increased peaceful resistance. In September, DAPL crews armed with security dogs and mace attacked water protectors who were trying to protect sacred sites from being bulldozed. In October, law enforcement attacked the 1851 Treaty Camp that had been set up along the pipeline route, using Humvees, helicopters, a LRAD sound weapon, impact munitions, and chemical agents. They were met with peaceful protest, but also flaming barricades as water protectors worked to keep authorities from overrunning the other camps. On November 20, confrontations on Backwater Bridge resulted in injuries to water protectors as officers fired water cannons, fire hoses, chemical agents, tear gas grenades, and impact munitions into the crowd at freezing temperatures. Rather than discouraging camp participation, this brought in more—during the Thanksgiving weekend there were estimates of up to 15,000 people staying in the camps, making it the 9<sup>th</sup> largest city in North Dakota at the time. In early

December, the camp was joined by thousands of veterans of US wars.

On December 4, 2016 the ACOE denied the easement that would allow the DAPL to cross under Lake Oahe, and many at camp celebrated what seemed to be a victory. But immediately upon taking office, President Trump signed an executive order to build the final section of pipeline. The ACOE subsequently withdrew its call for an environmental study, and then on February 7, 2017 approved the easement. On February 22-23, police rounded up or drove out the last remaining residents at Oceti Sakowin camp (at that point known as Oceti Oyate), and on February 28-March 2 conducted a raid of Sacred Stone camp, removing the last of its residents.

### **Research Methods**

I visited the Oceti Sakowin camp on November 17-28, 2016, and then again on January 9-19, 2017, primarily as a participant, in order to support the #NoDAPL movement, to take part in the largest Indigenous social movement so far in my lifetime, as well as to work in the kitchens so that I could make sure people were fed. As part of my involvement in this movement, I became interested in the myriad ways that fire was used both in material ways and as analogy at camp and online. As part of exploring this topic, I kept extensive notes while I was at camp, and in addition conducted 9 interviews with Indigenous people who had spent time at the Oceti Sakowi and Red Warrior camps. Five interviews were conducted in person at the camp in January 2017; one in February 2017 at the Indigenous Farming Conference on the White Earth Reservation; one at the Great Lakes Intertribal Food Summit at Jijak on the Gun Lake Potawatomi Reservation in April 2017, one on the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation in May 2017, and one by phone in May 2017. Participants represented Lakota, Pueblo, Mohawk, Tlingit, Anishinaabe, and Diné (Navajo) communities. Where they have agreed to have their identities disclosed, interviewees are identified by their first name and tribal

affiliation, or in cases where they preferred not to be identified by name, just by affiliation. I also collected 20 social media posts, uploaded to Facebook between December 11, 2016–April 4, 2017 that also illustrated issues around fire. All quotes below are taken either from these interviews or social media posts. While I recognize the important contribution of non-Native allies in the #NoDAPL movement, I chose to only focus on Native camp participants because I was interested in the ways in which participants’ Indigenous cultural backgrounds informed their perceptions of fire and the movement.

### **Sacred Fires at Camp**

#### *The Central Ceremonial Fire*

When the Sacred Stone Camp was started, a ceremonial fire was lit with the prayer that more people would come, and that the easement for the pipeline to pass under the river would be denied. As Lakota tribal member Aldo Seoane described in a Facebook live feed,<sup>4</sup> “the fire that was lit, the ember that lit that fire, actually came from the Youth. And the prayers the Youth created.” When the overflow camps were started, coals were carried from the Sacred Stone fire to light the new central fires. As Waniya (Lakota) described, “when we got relocated over there, they dug a pit and they said the exact same prayers. That when people would come, they’ll be fed, they’ll be warm, they’ll be taken care of, and that they’ll feel loved. And then that fire was lit for a second time.”<sup>5</sup> This sacred fire at Oceti Sakowin, visible almost as soon as people entered the north gate, became a central meeting place. As new people came into camp, many reported to the central fire to introduce themselves, deliver messages from their home tribal communities, and to receive announcements (although an emcee with a microphone and sound system that was continuously set up there made announcements audible through most of camp). According to Waniya “There’s 748 tribes that came in to Standing Rock, and at one time every single group has stood

around that fire. So it was definitely to bring unity, and it was also to signify that we're all here together."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to serving this social and administrative function, the space around this sacred fire was replete with protocols and proscribed behaviors. People were instructed to approach the fire in prayer; people were not supposed to take photos in this space, and women were expected to wear skirts. This fire was tended constantly and had to remain continuously lit. People met, prayed, sang, and danced around that fire. As individual tribal camps formed within Oceti Sakowin, some of them chose to start their own sacred fires (as distinct from social fires and cooking fires) using the coals from the central sacred fire.

### *Horn Fire*

For the first time since 1845, all seven nations that comprise the original Oceti Sakowin seven council fires came together at the camp, in one place for a common goal. To commemorate this, on November 5, 2016, they set up seven tipis in the shape of a buffalo with its horns down, and each of the seven nations put forth a headman to represent them. A ceremony was conducted by Lakota elders Arvol Looking Horse and John Eagle, and a ceremonial fire was lit, using coals from the central fire. As Aldo Seoane described it:

It was that fire lit that was us reaching back through our minds, through our understandings, back to 1845 and bringing that energy forward, so that there was a road for them to come and start to work on our minds start to work on our understandings to helping us in how we're going to govern this new direction that we're going and how we can support one another in a harmonious way.<sup>7</sup>

In this way, the Horn fire was not just another fire at the camp, but one that specifically had historic roots and connections for citizens of the member nations of the Oceti Sakowin.

## *Oceti Oyate*

In December, when the ACOE denied DAPL the easement to pass under the river, the camps celebrated, and the main central ceremonial fire at Oceti Sakowin was put out. This was upsetting for some people who had become very attached to the fire and had expectations that it would remain lit. As Beatrice (Tlingit/Anishinaabe) expressed it:

The fire was meant to be lit the whole time at Standing Rock. We were invited to be there, we were asked to be there, we came from many nations all over the world to come there to be peaceful water protectors. And the fire was very much a part, when you came into that gate, and you look over to your right and there would be the sacred fire, and we'd go there and hold meetings there and have our songs, it's where the women went to do their tobacco pipe ceremonies and our water ceremonies. So the fire watched over the people . . . when we were asked to leave Standing Rock I heard they put out the fire, because they said what they wanted to do was to stop that pipeline, and everything was agreed that it was supposed to stop. So they put out that fire. And sent people home. But I think they also wanted the people to leave. And if you had no sacred fire, then what are you going to do?<sup>8</sup>

But as Waniya described it:

One of the first prayers was to have the easement be denied, which our prayer was fulfilled and we had a *wopila* for it and therefore we had to put out the first fire. People didn't understand that because they're not Lakota or Dakota and they couldn't comprehend that, the first prayer was answered, there still many more prayers that need to be answered and there's still a long battle ahead of us. But we had to put out that fire because that was an acknowledgment to the spirits for helping us deny the easement. It wasn't like, we're trying to send people home. We just had to acknowledge that the first prayer was answered. But there was a long line of prayers that came after.<sup>9</sup>

A new fire was then started, relit with new prayers, and the camp was redubbed Oceti Oyate, under the leadership of Chase Iron Eyes.<sup>10</sup> In a live feed posted on Facebook on December 11, 2016, Chase explained: "Today one of the sacred fires was extinguished by those who started

that fire, but whenever something like that happens, an end always signals a new beginning and a new day is dawning here at All Nations camp”.

### *Individual Camp Sacred Fires*

Within the larger Oceti Sakowin camp, smaller sub-camps developed, often centered around a tribe or region. Many of these smaller camps lit sacred fires of their own, using coals from the central fire. These ceremonial fires were treated differently from cooking fires or social fires, and people were expected to show them the same level of respect as the main sacred fire. One interviewee from Pueblo camp described how he felt it was the ceremonial fire in his camp that brought people from all over the world to visit them; they were drawn to its spirit. But then their fire went out for a bit, in part because as it got cold and people tended it less and wanted to use the wood instead for their home structures, and in part also due to strife in their camp. After they had a meeting addressing these issues, they decide it was “time to put that fire up again and unite everybody again.”<sup>11</sup> The relighting of this camp’s fire as a sacred fire, rather than a social or cooking fire, caused some confusion for people who had been gone for a few days, and upon returning were taken to task for throwing paper into the fire, an act that would have been acceptable when the fire was classified differently. A Mohawk interviewee, who had considered himself fairly spiritual, also expressed confusion about the classification of fires, remembering being yelled at “‘hey you can’t put that stick in the fire, it’s sacred . . . oh, you can’t cook in that, it’s sacred.’ Huh. That was kind of strange for me.”<sup>12</sup> In a camp that brought together people from hundreds of different tribal nations (as well as non-Indigenous backgrounds), establishing ceremonial protocol for everyone to follow could be challenging, even as the goal was to unite everyone.

## **Social Fires**

While the ceremonial fires served their spiritual purposes, at night the camp was also dotted with over a dozen social fires, campfires that people gathered around for warmth and socializing, and singing with hand drums. These fires served to bring people together and form social bonds. It was these moments, wandering from one campfire to the next, from 49 songs<sup>13</sup> to stick games, that the camp felt to some, like me, like a sort of Indigenous social utopia. Vanessa, an Indigenous medic who spent several months in camp, described how during her first night:

It was a little cold at night but not too bad, and I stood around the fire and talked. I went to bed in my tent, but I could see the glow of the fire and it was mellow and calming. Our people playing hand drums, sitting around their campfire and their camp. Heard people drumming and having just good songs going. I heard horses neighing outside of my tent. Just the glow of the fire, the way everything was, I said, you know this is perfect! This is the way life is supposed to be, and this is the way it used to be. Just hearing those low conversations around the fire. And everywhere you went there were people sitting at a fire, just sharing and talking and laughing and living. I think for the first time in a very long time, a lot of people were out of their homes. They were living communally. People would wander from campfire to campfire and just sit and talk. And good conversations were had. And talking about important issues, and not lying. There was a real connection there, a real community spirit. So fire did play an important part in very real ways.<sup>14</sup>

As Beatrice asserted, “that’s really the essence of fire, is the bringing of people together.”<sup>15</sup>

Also around these social fires, many people took up smoking cigarettes. Several people reported to me that they had never smoked before coming to camp. The new, or accelerated, smoking habit that people picked up, combined with the tear gas shot by authorities, the dust kicked up by cars driving over makeshift dirt roads around camp, smoke from fires in every corner of camp, and some would assert toxicants being dropped from DAPL-hired planes, led to what came to be



known as “the DAPL cough”— a lung rattling cough that persisted for many for months after returning from camp.

## **Home Fires**

As Marder notes, “there is no dwelling without an inner fire, around which the house is constructed and its inhabitants gather for nourishment and warmth” (129). For people at camp, this worked on multiple levels: fire forms and symbolizes kinship, in addition to keeping people alive through warmth, and serving as a locus around which people had to negotiate their domestic living situations.

Cynthia Fowler uses the term “pyrosphere” to describe the interpersonal interactions between people who participate in the ignition and management of intentionally lit fires (Fowler). For two of the camp residents I spoke with, in their tribal communities, families comprise these pyrospheres, and conversely, fire defines family. In reflecting on the meaning of fire for her people, Waniya described how in Lakota, the words for family represent relationships around fire, and one’s relationship to members of a household dictated how one approached and where one sat around a fire inside a lodge. How one took care of their home fire was a reflection on that family. She went on:

[Fire] symbolizes a lot: It symbolizes warmth, it symbolizes home, it symbolizes food. Fire represents a lot of different things. What it means to Lakota people is it’s definitely a homestead and we’re *thiwahe* we’re a family. And then we’re *thiyospaye* that’s extended family. . . . This is all based around the fire, and so any time we enter a lodge the first thing you see is their fire. That takes work to maintain, so you got to have good work ethics, so you got to be able to project and foresee. I have this X amount of wood and it’s going to last me this many days. So you just got to really project how long your fire will run. And then how hot your fire will run, and that has some science in it to. So like, are you going to use it to cook with? Are you going to make coffee out of it? Are you going to use it to keep warm? How are you going to utilize this fire? There’s some science that’s applied to it. And that’s something

that's really great about Lakota structures is that we were definitely far more advanced than western civilization in recognizing how all these elements work together, on a chemistry level, on an organic chemistry level, and then on an astrological level.<sup>16</sup>

Stephen (Mohawk) reflected similarly on how “in Mohawk, family and fire mean the same thing. What the longhouse taught me was that fire is in all of us.”<sup>17</sup> Akhwá:tsire (or Kahwa:tsire in some communities) is a Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) word that means both “family” and “all our fires are connected.”

At camp, as the weather turned colder, people had to gather closer together, many in structures called “tarpees”—a low budget contemporary tipi made from heavy duty polyethylene tarp and 16 foot long two-by-four boards, invented and brought to camp by two Native men from the Pacific Northwest, along with a team of volunteers who raised funds and joined their efforts (Pacheco). Each tarpee was outfitted with a barrel wood stove, around which residents arranged their beds, and the feeding of which required a constant series of negotiations. Who would get up in the middle of the night to feed the fire before it went out sometimes became a standoff among tarpee-mates. Alternatively, tempers occasionally flared in the tarpee where I was staying when one resident would add too many logs, resulting in searing indoor temperatures that sent people out into the snow, or to press their faces against the cooler wall of the tarpee to cool off. Having to gather together around the fire that kept people alive every night not only created a family-like setting, but forced domestic negotiations. As a Diné woman noted, “right now [winter] is the time for the home fire. It's good, it's going to bring people closer together, it's going to bring that real community.”<sup>18</sup>

While scholars often draw a dichotomy between the sacred and the domestic, some people at camp did not see sharp distinctions between these types of fires, assuming a level of sacrosanctity to all of

them. A young Diné woman described that she preferred putting her prayers into the home fire that she had been taking care of in her camp, because “I know that it’s taken care of in a certain way. It’s being treated in a certain way, it’s being respected,” as opposed to the main ceremonial fire which she saw as having been overrun and misused by the influx of non-Native camp visitors.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Vanessa described, “Even the little fires that were in people’s homes, in their tipis, in their woodstoves, those were sacred things.”<sup>20</sup>

Fire was necessary to sustain life and maintain homes, but could also turn dangerous, and a number of tipis and tarpees burned down as a result of open fires that were not tended to properly, from propane “buddy” heaters that exploded, from malfunctioning woodstoves, and from arson. One woman described to me losing everything when her tipi was burned down “by infiltrators,” an experience that she recounts as traumatic, but also cleansing. Vanessa, who worked as a medic described how “we did treat a lot of burns. From woodstoves and campfires and buddy heaters, we treated a lot of injuries from people cooking over these fires, like real serious burns.”<sup>21</sup>

Eventually every tipi and tarpee in camp was provided with fire extinguishers and carbon monoxide detectors. These detectors proved lifesaving—one evening when his family in Pueblo camp didn’t wake up to the detector beeping, Rambo the dog grabbed the device and ran through camp with it until a fellow resident followed him back to a smoke-filled tarpee filled with sleeping people who would have been asphyxiated due to their malfunctioning wood stove.

### **Cooking Fires**

Anthropologists have theorized that the use of fire for cooking shaped humans’ diet and evolution. According to Wrangham (2), “the transformative moment that gave rise to the genus Homo, one of the great transitions in the history of life, stemmed from the control of fire

and the advent of cooked meals. Cooking increased the value of our food. It changed our bodies, our brains, our use of time, and our social lives. It made us into consumers of external energy and thereby created an organism with a new relationship to nature, dependent on fuel.” Pyne (2012:46) asserts that because of cooked food, “our head can become big and our gut small. We can process ideas rather than herbage. . . . we have become physiologically dependent on cooking.”

Tens of thousands of people passed through the camps at Standing Rock over the course of the ten and a half months they were in operation. Whether they were visiting for a weekend or stayed for months, everyone needed to be fed. What started as cooking over open campfires morphed into a series of distinct kitchens (there were at least 13 when I arrived in November), each representing the food preferences of different sub-communities. Vegans were more likely to find sustenance in the Main Kitchen, a large green army tent that held a gas powered range and shiny metal counter space. Winona’s Soup Kitchen, founded out of concern that people weren’t getting enough meat at the main kitchen and needed traditional Lakota fare, often had a huge cauldron of soup boiling over an open fire, but later evolved during the colder months to include indoor cooking arrangements. People cooked over woodstoves, campfires, electric stoves run by generators, wood fired smokers, and the refined blue flame sourced from canisters of propane that campers stood in long lines to receive. Many camp residents who had traveled from near and far to protect water from a pipeline recognized the irony of cooking their food using fuel or fracked gas.

### **Maintaining Fires**

A great deal of collective labor went into maintaining the various fires at camp. Acquiring enough wood to feed the constantly burning ceremonial fires as well as the many domestic fires was a constant concern. Because the camp was located on the windswept plains of North Dakota, there

were not many trees available from which to harvest firewood. Lakotas noted that the camp was constructed in the path of a pipeline, not where their ancestors would have wintered, and thus not in an ideal camping spot. Even if better located, historic camps would have been burning as much if not more dried buffalo dung than wood, a resource not made available to these campers. Some local residents did not want to sell firewood to water protectors, either because they wanted the camp to go away, or there was concern about whether locals themselves would have enough wood to get through the winter. Many of the sub-camps had wood delivered to them from various parts of the country as supply runs traveled back and forth. The chopping of wood was a constant and ongoing activity that served to keep people busy and warm (as the adage goes, wood chopping warms you twice).

But depending on the type of fire, the job of who would actually feed it was often a special role. As Dustin (Pueblo) describes, “our way, we have designated people to start that fire, to protect that fire to keep the fire going, to let that fire know why we gather around to carry those prayers, to hold those prayers.”<sup>22</sup> For the ceremonial fires, these fire keepers were always men, who often had to stay up for shifts that lasted a day or more. As a Diné woman described,

I have a lot of respect and admiration for the people who take care of those main fires, because that’s a lot of responsibility. It takes a toll on you. So shout out to all the fire keepers. I have my little brother at camp, I never met him before this but he’s my little brother. He would always make sure that the main fire was going, even in the blizzard, he would make sure that it was going, and his dedication to seeing that fire continue was really beautiful.<sup>23</sup>

Being asked to take on the role of firekeeper, while grueling, was considered an honor. As Jamarkis (Diné) posted on his Facebook page on December 25, 2016, “Yesterday afternoon I was given the opportunity to be fire keeper of the sacred fire. I am a fire keeper, a youth keeper, a caregiver for the camp, for the people. I thought I would never be given

the opportunity to be fire keeper. I was relieved of watch 40 minutes ago I began watch at 1:30pm yesterday. I am very tired and blessed.”

Even as the roles were not as recognized, the fires tended to in homes and kitchens also required discipline. A Diné woman described,<sup>24</sup>

I've been a caretaker of fire in this camp in different forms and manifestations. In one of the camps I was staying in, a wellness space, an Indigenous women's wellness space, and I took care of the fire in that space, and just the discipline that comes with it, of having to get up early and get a fire started, or stay up late watching the fire to keep people warm, making sure that the fire gets fed, that meals are cooked, giving the fire cedar, talking to the fire.

She went on to describe how the home fires,

That's really women's space too, when you think about it. The realm of fire keeper, in like a hogan [traditional Navajo dwelling] for example, that's a lot of the women and the cooking and that's where the small pieces of wood come in because small pieces of wood make the hottest fires.

There is a lot to be untangled about the gendered aspects of fire, both in many traditional cultures and in the enforcement of neo-traditional gender roles as ceremonies are revived and re-created. Anthropologists write about role of men as hunters, and therefore women as the tenders of domestic fires to cook the meat they brought home (see Wrangham). Marder (xviii) describes the “fire of the hearth” as “traditionally imbricated with the politics of sexual difference.” Stereotypically, men are often depicted as keepers of the ceremonial, women of the domestic. In reflecting on the teachings about fire that she had received in the Mdeewin lodge, Beatrice described

Time, before time, in the time of total darkness, the time before sound, fire was created by our creator, and made the stars, and the making of our grandfather sun was what led to our creation. Where that fire was put eventually inside of our mother the earth, the core that heats up the earth right now. The fire to us also means that it is the men's work. We have the duality of men and women, we have the women who are water carriers, the mni wiconi, the water is life. And then we have that fire teaching, which shows that the

men are the caretakers of the fire. They are not creators like women are, who create life inside of them, they are protectors. And so the fire is what brings the man's teachings together. The men go there and they use their flint and steel, they use their traditional methods that our ancestors always used, and their tobacco and their prayers, and using all those things, all those prayers from the four directions to create a sacred fire, that's what watches over our camp.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately I cannot do justice here to the topic of the gendered differences in which fire was handled, and I did not have the opportunity to interview anyone from the Two Spirit Camp—which embraced camp residents who often operated outside of the conventional gender dyad and “norms,”—to see how fire was handled in their camp. But many people at camp handled fire according to gender-based expectations.

As the dark cold winter descended on the camp, bringing blizzards and temperatures that plunged below -25 Fahrenheit, some camp residents began to express skepticism about the time, energy, and wood that was going into feeding sacred fires. One young man I spoke with, reflecting on his cold, exhausted friend who had just been awake for 48 hours tending the Horn fire, wondered out loud if this was the best use of human or firewood resources. Similarly, Aldo Seone (Lakota) tried to convince camp residents that maintaining costly outdoor fires might not be necessary if people consider the importance of internal flames.

And then I'm back out to camp, twenty five below. But there's easy like eight cords of wood, up by that center kitchen fire. And people need wood. People need to survive and they need to stay warm. And the funny thing is that people don't acknowledge that the coals that are in that fire they go into the other fires that keep people warm, the ones that are sitting inside your stoves, your woodstoves . . . it's all the same fire. So it never goes out. No matter if that one in that hole goes out. Because we're always carrying it. And actually the fires in my little woodstove are the same coals, you know. And LaDonna's fire's burning bright, the one over in Sicangu, over there, that one is burning bright, so don't worry. Don't worry about them coals going out.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless, camp residents worked hard until the end to maintain the variety of fires that sustained the camp.

### **Front Line Fires**

While fire was used in myriad constructive ways throughout the camp to unify people spiritually, provide social connections, and keep people alive and well fed, as Pyne (2012:110) notes, “even a nominally tame fire can turn rabid or go feral.” As part of expressing anger towards a broader colonizing and oppressive system, as well as protecting the camp from authorities that some participants were concerned were coming to raid the camp, there were occasions, like when barricades and construction vehicles were set ablaze on October 27, 2016, when this generally peaceful movement flared up.

While raging bonfires or a flaming barricade might be construed by authorities as acts of aggression, camp participants described using fire in protective ways, to shield their comrades from danger. As one interviewee described the events of October 27:

We scrambled, we took everything we could find, logs, coals. I remember taking a tub of canned food and throwing it into that barricade. Because there were so many cans of food, and we lit it on fire. And I truly believe if it wasn't for that barricade of fire, that on that day they would have come in and hurt a lot of people. I believe they would have conducted themselves in a manner that was not conducive to any laws, let alone NATO regulations. I think they would have hurt a lot of people. So with that barricade of fire, that fire protected the entire camp.<sup>27</sup>

In recounting the same story, one of his friends included that a local landowner contributed cottonwood logs for the barricades—wood that he had been planning to take it to camp for firewood, but they used it as a barricade instead, to feed alternative fires. Another camp participant described how they set up three barricades on Route 134, and when police started advancing “we lit that sucker on fire... so that way they wouldn't be able to see. Then we dispersed everybody out to the side



and threw tires on it. By then the water cannons came and tried putting it out but they couldn't because they ran out of water." This same camp resident described how on November 20, 2016, when people were getting hit with rubber bullets and concussion grenades and water on the bridge, he set "distraction fires" on the hillside, to try to divert some of the water that was being aimed at camp members. In these ways, fires were set to distract authorities, in order to protect Water Protectors.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Shatekaronhiase (Mohawk) described how the camp where he was staying at the edge of a peninsula, "where we were was kind of like a snatch and grab area. It wasn't really protected," referring to reports of camp residents being kidnapped at night by DAPL security and police. But, he noted, the police would not come close if there was a bonfire, so they kept one going at night, with the understanding that "whoever's watching the fire's watching over everybody."<sup>29</sup>

Not all fires on the front lines were lit with protective intentions: some just erupted out of generations of suppressed anger. As one woman emotionally described,

All these fires. From the excavators being on fire, to the vehicles... the first DAPL truck that was on fire, to just the bridge that night. That fire, I remember watching it, the bridge, everything unfolding on the bridge that night and just being overcome with these emotions and I cried these tears of joy because this fire was lit and there was no turning back. I knew that this rage from five hundred years of oppression, five hundred years of bullshit was manifesting itself, and it went POOF, you know, that night and it was lit. And it was beautiful to me. For a brief time that bridge was a liberated space and people were happy. People were dancing, people were joyous, and that's when I cried these tears of joy because it was this moment of liberation. It made me so happy, and then the teargas started (laughs). . . . When that property is owned by entities that are abusive, that are exploitative, like any corporate entity anywhere, I think it's a very powerful symbol to see these machines of destruction lit up and burning, rendered useless. It's a reminder of how vulnerable it actually is. I think it's a spontaneous thing. I don't think it was anything, again I'm speculating because I can only speculate about why people do

what they do, but from what I observed it was a very spontaneous in the moment thing. And the way you watch fire, it can start slowly then it can go POOF. That's what I saw happen that day was the fire got lit, there was this moment, there was no going back.<sup>30</sup>

Summarizing this situation, Waniya described, "I think it represented all the anger of the injustice from the past 500 years that these young twenty-year-olds had felt and it just exploded, and that's why the fires had occurred."<sup>31</sup>

Rumors circulated about who had actually set the construction equipment on fire. Some people theorized that it must have been agitators, instigators sent into camp to impersonate water protectors and make them look bad to the outside world. Others suggested that DAPL set their own equipment on fire. But one interviewee described that it was a friend from Six Nations who had just arrived in camp the day of the barricade fires, and who got a little carried away. "And the Lakotas were like 'no don't light it,' and it was already lit, you know. And he was like, 'oh, I'm sorry, it's what we would have done at home,'" bringing west a Haudenosaunee history of protest fires, from Senecas burning tires on the highway in 1992 and 1997 to protest state tax policies, to highway (Murphy) and bridge fires set as part of a fight over land in Caldonia Ontario taken from Six Nations people that was slated to be developed in 2006, and a handful of protest fires in between (McCarthy).

While the barricade fires were described as having a protective intent, the act of lighting these fires was criminalized. DAPL had a helicopter in the air with a passenger using a digital camera to document the events, and authorities used this aerial photography to identify five men they claimed to be involved in setting the fires. In *United States of America v. Michael Markus aka Rattler*, the men were charged with two crimes, including the felony of "knowingly using fire to commit civil disorder." In an Opposition to Government Motion for Detention filed on February 13, 2017, Bruce Nestor contended that the government was

legally stretching a statute that was intended to cover crimes in which explosives were used, later amended to include “fire” in order to facilitate the prosecution of arson. Of the five men arrested for that day’s events, one is currently serving jail time.

As Stephen Pyne notes, “The history of colonization... is thus a history of eruptive fire” (*Fire: Nature and Culture* 80), as Indigenous fire ecologies are interrupted at the same time as biomass resources are rapidly extracted from the earth for incineration. As Pyne and scholars of Indigenous fire ecologies have noted, when people lived on the land and managed the landscape through a series of small, fire related activities, a balance was maintained. Culturally intact systems prevented most destructive fires. As people have become disconnected from the land and fuel has built up, there are now destructive, debilitating fires. One cannot help but to see similarities in these volatile youth, many of whose communities have been forcefully detached from their cultural systems and cultural practices. Unhealthy fuel loads in the form of intergenerational trauma have accumulated, and once provide with a spark, these fires sometime burn hot and destructive.

Nonetheless, fire suppression is the current bureaucratic goal. Right-wing politicians are viewing protest the same way that departments of forestry have seen fire: as a challenge to their authority and a threat to state-sponsored conservation (Bernhard Fernow, America’s first professional forester, famously denounced the American fire scene as one of ‘bad habits and lose morals,’ conceiving of fire as a problem of social disorder. Pyne, *Fire: Nature and Culture* 104). Since November 2016, dozens of bills and executive orders aimed at restricting high-profile protests have been introduced in at least 31 states and the federal government (Kusnetz). Squashing protest, like fire suppression, is seen as a precondition for a smoothly running petro-fueled economy.<sup>32</sup>

## **Oceti Went Out In Fire**

Just ahead of the deadline to evacuate at 2 pm on February 22, 2017, the last remaining camp residents set fire to many of the structures that remained. The structures which had once provided home, storage, and meeting space were ceremonially burned as the water protectors were forced out, as a means of both taking these structures down on their own terms, seeing the camp off in a ceremonial way, and ensuring that what was left behind was not desecrated by DAPL and Morton County the way that tents and possessions had been when the Treaty Camp was raided. As Indigenous Media Rising described in a Facebook post on February 22, 2017:

Based on the behavior of the law enforcement in the past, who during raids have broken and thrown away sacred items and who have shown disregard and horrible disrespect to tipis and sacred dwellings, it is best to burn these sacred structures instead of having them desecrated by Morton County and North Dakota law enforcement. Lighting our dwellings on fire is a sign of respect for them. It's a sign of respect for the purpose they have served over these past few months. They have been containers for prayer and for bringing people together. By lighting them on fire we send their smoke up like prayers. By lighting them on fire we ensure these structures go out in dignity.

I interviewed Vanessa just a few weeks after she had watched the camp burn, and she reflected on the experience with a surprising calm:

I realized the beauty and the peace of it all, that these were people burning down their structures in a good way of ceremony. It was appropriate, it was right. And I sat and watched them, I sat and watched those fires and I would smile because it was peaceful and people would stand around and sing, or they would be very quiet and watch. It was their way of saying goodbye. It was their way of saying, at least I have control over this place that's been my home. I have place over this hogan, that it's going up in a ceremonial way. I have control of this one thing. So it was beautiful. There was a structure fire that I watched from the top of Facebook hill. And it was an explosion, and it was huge. But the fire! The fire was beautiful. It danced and people really watched them too to make sure that nothing else was

going to catch on fire, so it was beautiful. And it was peaceful and people would just stand and look and watch. And I know they all had a little prayer in their heart as these places were going up.<sup>33</sup>

What was left of the camp was bulldozed after the last residents were rounded up, and the landscape has since returned to a grassy river bottom.

## **Smoke**

The last remaining traces of fire that water protectors took home with them was the smell of smoke. As a result of being in close contact with fires all the time, the smoky scent permeated everything that water protectors had with them at camp, and marked them when they left. As Rebecca Bengal memorably articulated in her article about Standing Rock in *Vogue*, “it was easy enough to tell them apart. In North Dakota you will know the water protectors by the scent of fire” (Bengal). This mark might evoke camaraderie in some, and loathing in others. I was visiting the medic tent in mid January 2017, just as volunteers were calling around Bismarck inquiring about tetanus shots, as several water protectors had gotten cut on the razor wire lining the barricades. One medic sighed in frustration, knowing that clinics would be unlikely to treat people from camp, and would recognize them immediately by the smell of campfire that permeated everyone.

As people left camp, they posted on social media about the sadness they felt when the smell of smoke faded from their clothes. Playfully dubbed “Oceti cologne” or “Oceti perfume,” the smell of smoke often evoked visceral reactions in former camp residents. As Marissa posted on Facebook on March 8, 2017, “I find myself crying lately with my face buried in my jacket that smells of Oceti on more nights that I would like. I’ll never wash it though.” Similarly, during our interview, Vanessa reflected, “I’ve got a coat that will never not smell like wood smoke. It just has permeated the coat. I keep it close by, it reminds me. It

reminds me.”<sup>34</sup> I too kept articles of clothing balled up, in the hopes that they would retain the smell of camp. The smell of smoke, which remains after the light and heat of fire have faded, continues for many to serve as a sensorial reminder of their participation in the movement, and the sense of home they felt in camp.

### **Conclusion: Ashes and Sparks**

According to Pyne, “Every fire has its life cycle. Something has to start it into existence; the reaction must then release more heat than it absorbs; and when the advancing front exhausts its fuels, it withers away” (*Fire: Nature and Culture* 27). The same could poignantly be said for some social movements, although many would prefer to look ahead to new life rising from the ashes. But Marder does not agree that this optimism towards perpetual renewal is ultimately productive. In reflecting on ‘pyropolitics,’ the problem Marder finds with the “Phoenix complex” is that it allows people to move on from destruction with hope, without learning a lesson. This faith in the system to renew itself, he concludes, leads to further environmental destruction. He asserts that we need to understand the finality of some destruction in order to change behavior. Rather than thinking of ashes as facilitators of new life, nourishing renewed growth, Marder (162) asserts grimly:

There is nothing either measured or orderly about ashes, whose inescapable dispersion supplies deconstruction with one of the most evocative equivalents of dissemination. There is, moreover, no justice for all those and all that served as fuel for the pyre of world history; no satiety or quenching of need after the process of combustion has fizzled out; no bright light flowing from the remains that challenge the power of the spectacle. In the closure of metaphysics, when everything has been consumed, the light of the ashes themselves replaces the shining-forth of phenomena, and the fading afterglow of fire gives way to the obscure trace of its victims.

Some of my comrades from camp reflect this grey description; scattered, discouraged, some resembling the fading smoky smell they clung to—

burned out, cold, ethereal, wispy, wafting, seeking a purpose and the sense of family and community they found at Oceti.

But at the same time, not all of the ashes are cold, and camp leaders and participants have insisted that even if the on-the-ground fires of the camps at Standing Rock have dispersed, many people left camp with a spark that has spread. Reflecting on the end of camp, Horn headman Dallas Goldtooth (Dakota) posted on Facebook on February 22, 2017, “The closing of the Oceti Sakowin / Big Camp / Oceti Oyate Camp is not the end of a movement or fight, it’s merely a transition. Come what may, they cannot extinguish the fire that Standing Rock started. It burns within each of us. So let’s rise, let’s resist, let’s thrive.” Similarly, in our interview, Vanessa reflected, “the real fire that was there was what burned in the hearts of people. They’ll never be the same. It’ll never be the same again. . . . That fire lives within us, it’s never going to die. Not in my life, nor anyone else who spent any amount of time there, their life’s never going to be the same. They’re going to remember it, and I hope that they take that fire within them and go other places. I hope they speak out.”<sup>35</sup> Lastly Stephen (Mohawk) also stated:

Everyone took a piece of that fire at Standing Rock and brought it to wherever they are, whatever territory they’re from or whatever rez or city whatever. That fire that we all felt there, I know you probably felt it there too, that big ball of energy of everyone fighting for the same American dream of clean water and Indigenous rights and all this. But to me I think it’s from everyone coming together, all in one...it created that big fire of energy, positive energy.<sup>36</sup>

Some people left camp and immediately set themselves to work fighting the same corporate machine in other ways. Lewis (Lakota) described the spread of people from Oceti out into the world to fight against corporations as being “like a brush fire. . . . That ripple effect went across the world.”<sup>37</sup> For some, like Charlie (Ojibway), this was achieved through working to get people to divest from fossil fuel companies. On February 23, 2017 he posted on Facebook: “We continued

lighting the fire that has led to a national divestment movement that is now a worldwide movement.” Some went to try to start or join camps in other areas with proposed pipelines, for example the L’eau es la Vie Camp fighting the Bayou Bridge pipeline in Louisiana; Camp Turtle Island and Camp Makwa near the proposed route of the Line 3 pipeline in Minnesota; the Wakpa Waste Camp and Winconi Un Tipi Camp in South Dakota along the proposed route of the Keystone XL pipeline; the Two Rivers Camp that challenged the Trans Pecos pipeline in Texas; Camp White Pine in Pennsylvania resisting Sunoco’s Mariner East 2 Pipeline, and other smaller camps that temporarily popped up in New England to resist the construction of natural gas pipelines, among many others.

Some Oceti camp residents returned to their home communities and started fires there that they maintained as gathering spaces for people who had been to camp, and to bring continued awareness to environmental issues. In the Mohawk community of Akwesasne, Stephen, Jesse, and others who had been to Standing Rock started their own Akwesasne Protectors’ Fire in order to create a space where people could communicate and counsel one another, the way they had around fires at Standing Rock, as well as to discuss the environmental problems in their own community. For two months, the fire was kept lit, fueled by wood, and its watchers fueled by Tim Hortons coffee and donuts donated by the community. After the DAPL was constructed, the focus of the fire, which is now relit only when occasion arises, has shifted to bringing awareness to a proposed natural gas pipeline project that will impact Akwesasne.

Reflecting on the wildfires which are becoming increasingly severe in the American west (as I sit and write this paper, California is on fire and the air quality outside of my office is terrible), nature writer Gary Ferguson predicts that “For now, and probably for a great many decades to come, we’ll be living in the middle of a thoroughly arresting yet increasingly daunting landscape. A turbulent and often overwhelming land of fire” (192). Between the literal fires ripping through the



landscape right now, and as we monitor the progress of proposed pipeline projects and the legislation aimed at suppressing those who would resist those projects, his prediction sounds accurate.

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- <sup>1</sup> Interview with Dustin on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 19, 2017
- <sup>2</sup> Lewis Grassrope facebook post, January 20, 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> I want to note that participants of the #NoDAPL movement rejected the term “protester” in favor of “water protectors,” commonly employing the slogan “we are protectors not protestors” made popular by, among others, the Indigenous-led organization Honor The Earth during their campaign against pipelines in Minnesota.
- <sup>4</sup> On December 5, 2016 Aldo Seone left camp and recorded a 20 minute live speech in order to try to explain the cultural context of the different fires at camp, for the benefit of all of the people who were expressing upset about the extinguish of the main fire at Oceti Sakowin.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with Waniya on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 10, 2017
- <sup>6</sup> Interview with Waniya on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 10, 2017
- <sup>7</sup> Aldo Seone facebook live stream, December 5, 2016
- <sup>8</sup> Interview with Beatrice on Gun Lake Potawatomi tribal territory, April 23, 2017
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with Waniya on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 10, 2017
- <sup>10</sup> Although, one Lakota speaker and long time camp participant complained to me that “Oceti Oyate” translated to “Fire people,” which she expressed “isn’t even grammatically correct in Lakota language,” and so she felt it was not an appropriate new name for the camp.
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with Pueblo man on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 18, 2017
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Shatekaronhiase on Akwesasne Mohawk tribal territory, May 13, 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> 49 songs are contemporary social dance songs, sung to a round dance beat. The lyrics often include message in English, and address relationships, sometimes in serious, sometimes in humorous ways. There were songs that people brought from their home tribal communities, and others that were written specifically about the #NoDAPL movement.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Vanessa on White Earth Ojibway tribal territory, April 17, 2017.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Beatrice on Gun Lake Potawatomi tribal territory, April 23, 2017
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Waniya on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 10, 2017
- <sup>17</sup> Phone interview with Stephen, May 18, 2017
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with a Diné woman on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 18, 2017
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with a Diné woman on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 18, 2017
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Vanessa on White Earth Ojibway tribal territory, April 17, 2017.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with Vanessa on White Earth Ojibway tribal territory, April 17, 2017.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with Dustin on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 19, 2017
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with a Diné woman on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 18, 2017
- <sup>24</sup> Interview with a Diné woman on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 18, 2017
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with Beatrice on Gun Lake Potawatomi tribal territory, April 23, 2017
- <sup>26</sup> Aldo Seone facebook live stream, December 5, 2016
- <sup>27</sup> Interview conducted with an Oceti camp resident on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 2017. Details withheld to protect the interviewee.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview conducted with an Oceti camp resident on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 2017. Details withheld to protect the interviewee.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Shatekaronhiase on Akwesasne Mohawk tribal territory, May 13, 2017.

- <sup>30</sup> Interview with a Diné woman on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 18, 2017
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Waniya on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 10, 2017
- <sup>32</sup> Previous drafts included a section on fires started by Morton County, and the way that water protectors came “under fire” from their weapons, for reasons of brevity these sections have been cut out.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with Vanessa on White Earth Ojibway tribal territory, April 17, 2017.
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with Vanessa on White Earth Ojibway tribal territory, April 17, 2017.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview with Vanessa on White Earth Ojibway tribal territory, April 17, 2017.
- <sup>36</sup> Phone interview with Stephen, May 18, 2017.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Lewis on Standing Rock Sioux Tribal territory, January 18, 2017