



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education

STANDING ROCK

AS A PLACE OF LEARNING

- Strengthening Indigenous Identities



Master thesis in Indigenous Studies

IND-3904 (Fall 2019)

Tuula Sharma Vassvik

STANDING ROCK AS A PLACE OF LEARNING

- Strengthening Indigenous Identities

Tuula Sharma Vassvik

Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Fall 2019

Supervised by

Siv Ellen Kraft

Religious Studies

For my siblings; Lucy Milou Sharma Uhre, Tao Bonnefoy Vassvik, Seth Sharma Uhre and Hedvik Hortensia Sharma Uhre.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Zintkala Mahpiya Win Blackowl, Hehaka Wakan Win and Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska, to Sesam (Centre for Sámi Studies), to my parents Neena Sunity Sharma Uhre, Torgeir Vassvik and Kristian Magnus Uhre, to my supervisor Siv Ellen Kraft, to Andreas Daugstad Leonardsen and to all the great people I had the pleasure of sharing reading rooms and lunches with at UiT, thanks for the inspiring conversations and motivation.

Ollu giitu!

ABSTRACT

The paper looks at Indigenous identities and ways of decolonization through the lens of Standing Rock, an indigenous movement called, located by Lake Oahe (the Missouri River), North Dakota, from the spring in 2016 until late february 2017. The movement arose to protect the local drinking water against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) and with time came to symbolize Native American Resistance, environmentalism and the fight against eco-racism worldwide. Standing Rock saw an unprecedented growth and became well known internationally for its many participants (called water protectors), the indigenous people and allies who came from all around the world, and its focus on peaceful ways of resistance.

The paper is based on interviews with Zintkala Mahpiya Win Blackowl, Hehaka Wakan Win and Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska, three indigenous women who travelled to Standing Rock during the water protector camp.

Due to the processes of colonization indigenous peoples all over the world have had to struggle to preserve their ways of life and traditional knowledge. This has created a shared frame of reference particular to colonized people, just as the indigenous ways of life share inherent commonalities through such aspects as relationship to the land, community, spirits and all living beings. The focus of this thesis is Standing Rock as a place of learning with a special attention on the process of self-identification as a way of decolonizing for indigenous people and their communities.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
1.0 Introduction- Standing rock – reaching out and looking inside.....	1
1.1 The interviews.....	4
1.2 Process of analysis.....	5
1.3 “Can you learn how to be a Sámi?”.....	6
1.4 Who came to standing rock?.....	7
1.5 Strengthening Indigenous Belongings.....	8
1.5.1 Processes of Identification.....	8
1.6 Indigeneity.....	9
1.7 Indigeity within research.....	11
1.8 Decolonizing from within - oppressive authenticity.....	14
1.9 Neo-liberalism.....	16
2.0 Context.....	18
2.1 The beginning.....	19
2.2 Environmental racism.....	20
2.3 Not just water.....	21
2.4 The Water Protectors are gathering.....	23
3.0 Marielle: To yoik belonging.....	26
3.1 Learning experiences.....	27
3.2 Sámi identities.....	29
3.3 <i>Vuoijnjalašvuohta</i> - Spirituality.....	32
3.4 <i>Juoigan</i> - Yoiking.....	34

3.5 Yoiking in the past.....	37
3.6 Yoiking today.....	38
3.7 Everchanging traditions	40
4.0 Zintkala: Birthing resistance.....	42
4.1 Being a mother – raising activists.....	44
4.2 Zintkala’s father	45
4.3 Discovering privileges	46
4.4 A tipi for the women – Holding Space for Support and Healing.....	46
4.5 Strengthening identities – towards self-definition	49
4.6 Working on colonial relations and whiteness	51
4.7 “Connecting with our bodies”	54
4.8 Decolonizing pregnancy and the birthing experience.....	57
4.9 Reconnecting body and spirit – uniting with the land	59
4. 10 Conclusion	61
5.0 Hehaka wakan win (Holy Elk) – becoming a leader	62
5.1 Walking in two worlds: a traditional way of life	64
5.2 Relearning ways of living	65
5.3 Becoming a leader in a time of conflict	66
5.4 Women decolonizing leadership.....	70
5.5 Decolonizing gender roles	74
5.6 Reestablishing connections – prayer as survivance	78
5.7 Doing things differently – walking alone	81
6.0 METHODOLOGY	83
6.1 Reciprocity and relevance.....	84
6. 2 I wrote about standing rock as a place of learning - so what?	86

7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY 87

1.0 Introduction: Standing Rock – reaching out and looking inside

This thesis is based on interviews with three indigenous women who participated in what came to be known as the Standing Rock protests, and spent time at the Standing Rock Camps, in North Dakota. Standing Rock as a site of indigenous resistance will be explored in chapter 2 and throughout this thesis. Redefining and strengthening indigenous identities have been ongoing projects for centuries. This thesis investigates these processes by presenting and analysing the stories of four indigenous women and how their experiences at Standing Rock affected their understanding of their identities and their roles in their communities.

Did the interviewees Zintkala, Hehaka and Marielle learn anything during their stay at Standing Rock? And did it affect the way they perceive themselves as indigenous people? Through these questions I want to talk about these women's stories and give a space for their experiences as indigenous people in Standing Rock.

Struggling for basic human rights against large international corporations is nothing new for indigenous peoples. However, the strength with which people fought back at Standing Rock was special. Indigenous activists and allies from many parts of the world came in solidarity, gathering in an unprecedented way and numbers helping out with cooking and chopping wood, taking shifts emptying the toilets. Some people look at what happened there as a major step towards a new era of decolonization and Indigenous resistance.

My group travelled there to help out in the ways we could, but also to experience and learn and for some of us to share of our own knowledge. As an example; one of my interviewees, also someone I shared camp with, Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska, brought her *luohti* (Sami traditional singing), her stories and handwork, and together with others from our group she initiated a course in dressing for the cold weather and in sewing traditional shoes from reindeer skin that she brought with her from Sápmi. Her idea was that the knowledge could be used locally, but with buffalo-leather instead. Many people came to Standing Rock with skills and knowledge that they wanted to share and that they felt would be helpful for the water protectors.

The Standing Rock water protector camp consisted of several camps (see map page 19) The camp we stayed at, Oceti Sacowin, felt like a village. Some unusual traits in this camp was the composting toilets where many spent some time, taking turns changing the full

garbage bags, talking to the “visitors” and burning sage and other incense over the fireplace. There were some food-tents offering breakfast, lunch and dinner and tent manned by people who had experience with tools and building materials. While we were there they were building shelters for the horses in the camp. There was also a medic-tent, a massage therapy-tent, a women’s-health-tent and an herbal-tent where doctors, herbalists, massage therapists and midwives worked shifts, ready to receive anyone who needed treatment.

Some days there was a seemingly never-ending stream of visitors in our *lávvu* (traditional Sámi tent). There were people that some of us knew from before and people that we had just met and invited in for a hot drink, and there were people who had heard about our group and wanted to talk with us.

Indigenous people came in support, but I also think many were attracted by the *survivance* that shone through via videos, articles and posts that were spread online. This force could also be found in music, and art that were inspired by what was happening there. *Survivance* is a term firstly used in the context of Native American studies by the Anishinaabe¹ cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor. It describes a life of active survival, of surviving and thriving as indigenous peoples, recreating and strengthening cultures and identities freely without the confinements of stereotypes and oppressive authenticity (Sissons 2005). In many ways the camps at Standing Rock became a “liminal space” organically where people felt free to live lives of active survival. However it is important to keep in mind that it was not a place of perfect harmony. Many indigenous peoples told of experiences where Non-indigenous people within the camp took on roles that re-created situations of settler-colonialism².

The following sections are from an interview I read with Cannupa Hanska Luger, an artist, born on the Standing Rock reservation. His reflections put into words some of my thoughts, and show how important this movement was for many Native Americans.

It seems like everyone who has interacted with the space, there is something

¹ The autonym for a group of culturally related Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the United States that include the Odawa, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Oji-Cree, Mississaugas, Chippewa, and Algonquin peoples https://www.google.no/search?dcr=0&source=hp&ei=8s6WWtmJHoaLsAGd_7zYDQ&q=Anishinaabe&oq=Anishinaabe&gs_l=psy-ab.3..0110.906.906.0.1275.3.1.0.0.0.158.158.0j1.1.0....0...1c.2.64.psy-ab..2.1.157.0...0.0icn8QLO-AQ.

² Outside. The last days at Standing Rock, Mark Sundeen, <https://www.outsideonline.com/2142031/last-days-standing-rock>

transformative that has happened there. The media's general interest is in "struggle porn," so people have missed what is beautiful about it. (...) Everybody came in hoping to experience something new, something profound. But when they got there, they realized they're not a part of something new, they've just been absorbed into something that is much older than the entire country. That's incredibly humbling.

(...) The big difference is that I think [people have] had the opportunity to encounter us not as a mystic, romantic other. It's just like, "Dude, we're just human beings." What does "Lakota" mean in English? It literally means "the people." (...) This is why we say this is not a protest, why we are water protectors. We're not just in protest of a pipeline. What we are trying to do is maintain a cultural practice. This is our culture. It's a part of our society.

(...) The amazing thing is that whether you were Native or not, what we witnessed up there is the awakening of a giant that has been sleeping. It's the power of us as living things — rather than us waiting for somebody to save us. It was so grass roots. Native people have never been subject to that amount of solidarity. It left everybody awestruck. And the number of Native people coming together, nothing like this has been seen since the 19th century. Enemies that had previously been enemies, coming together — there's no way for me to describe to you what that means. It's far too profound³.

I would like to emphasize three of his points in this article: The fact that mass-media somehow missed some of the most important aspects about the movement; the fact that so many different people were there, and that they created a society, very different from the society outside of camp, and also that the meetings between people that took place there opened up for many new conversations and experiences.

In the structure of this paper I will first discuss some central themes, to give an outline for the stories and experiences of the interviewees. Which is followed by analysis of interviews with Marielle, Zintkala and Hehaka, who each have their own chapters, where I

³ LA Times, "The artist who made protesters' mirrored shields says the 'struggle porn' media miss point of Standing Rock", <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-cannupa-hanska-luger-20170112-story.html>

contextualize their stories. Lastly, in the methodology chapter I outline the framework that has guided me in the writing process, leading into my final thoughts and conclusion.



From the sewing course Marielle and two other Sámi women from our camp (Sandra Márjá West and Inger Biret Kvernmo Gaup) held.

1.1 The interviews

Why did they go to Standing Rock? What did they experience there? And what did they take back with them? While my three informants had very different experiences there, what was similar for all the three women was that their trip to Standing Rock made an impact on their lives. Zintkala Mahpia Win Blackowl gave birth at the camp and established a space for women to talk about their lives and share their knowledge, Hehaka Wakan Win (Holy Elk) became a leader and learned that she can do anything, Sara Marielle Beaska Gaup said that she restored her faith in the good in people and learned new things about spirituality and the power of music. Their stories are important because, as Canuppa Hanska Lugar says, it is not often that indigenous stories get to be shared outside our own communities, moreover complex stories, stories about conflict, and insecurities when it comes to identity. They show some of the many ways in which indigenous belongings were strengthened and created at Standing Rock. I consider them – and my work in this thesis- as a part of the broader project of decolonization (Smith 2012:145).

Decolonization strives towards developing a critical consciousness about the causes of oppression, the distorting of history and discovering our own role in this process and the degrees to which we have internalized colonialist ideas and practices. It is about rejecting victimization, and it is about empowerment; believing that change is possible, and working towards those changes and a positive rebuilding of our communities (Stevenson 2000).

I used a method where I simply asked questions and the interviewees “shared what they wanted to share” (Kovach 2009:99). Besides from the three questions, if the timing was right and there was a natural pause in the conversation, I asked questions based on matters that had emerged through the conversation, or I asked them to expand, if had touched upon something that I found relevant or unclear. I reasoned that this would be the best way to let Marielle, Zintkala and Hehaka steer the conversation and thus stay more true to their way of sharing and to what they wanted to share. The interviews were recorded, with their consent, either with my laptop or with a recorder, so that I could transcribe them in their full length. A more extended account of my methodology can be found in chapter 6.

1.2 Process of analysis

There were many times where I was reading some parts of their interviews thinking “There is no need for me to add anything on to this, or “I’ll just quote the whole page of this section, I will never be able to say it in the same way with my own words”, but there were also times where I thought: “This is such a good point, but I’m afraid that a non-Sámi person, or someone who did not stay as Oceti Sacowin, wouldn’t understand this. How can I expand on this so that they maybe would comprehend?”. Margaret Kovach reminded me as an indigenous person, that indigenous experiences, “our identity factor” is important and becomes “integral to interpreting our research” (2009:100).

Due to a long history of marginalization and silencing of indigenous women in research, the importance of naming Marielle, Zintkala and Hehaka, and attempting to give their voices proper and unfiltered space, has been prioritized here (Somby 2016). Keeping a distance between my analysis and their words has also been crucial, to emphasize the fact that these are *my* interpretations of *their* words. Recognizing furthermore that this interpretation filters through yet another indigenous women, myself, the length of this thesis has been longer than the requirement. It ultimately felt more appropriate not to compromise.

To situate myself as Sámi woman in this thesis was important to me, to show how my own experiences colored the process of interviewing and interpreting their stories. Bringing in

other Indigenous voices from Standing Rock was also central to the process, so that I could show why the interviewees, or I, were talking about the camp and the what happened there in a more general sense. As I had been reading many articles about the movement at Standing Rock, I was often able to relate what the interviewees were talking about to other peoples experiences and accounts.

Following Linda Tuhiwai Smiths strategies for decolonization: deconstruction and reconstruction (2012:17), I sought to problematize colonial ways of thinking around indigenous peoples, illustrating some of the historical processes that has lead to racist and prejudice representations of indigenous identities. And through Smith's project of self-determination and social justice I sought to reinforce practices that have sustained the lives of the interviewees by seeking to center my analysis on their realities, knowledges and values, focusing on their resilience and acts of resistance (Chilisa 2012:18).

1.3 “Can you learn how to be a Sámi?⁴”

Arild Hovland talked to young Sámi people from Olmáivággi (Manndalen) in Gáivuona (Kåfjord) municipality North in Norway in 1996. Based on these conversations he concludes that, for many, “becoming Sámi” is a learning process, it is absolutely crucial, because of the Norwegianization process, many don't know what it is to be Sámi: “To be a Sámi is a question of competence (...) and the wide and nuanced repertoire of social competence is something that a lot of the young people in the region can't access during their upbringing” (1996:88).

This is a common situation for many indigenous people, based on similar processes of missionary, colonization and forced assimilation politics. The importance of learning about culture cannot be underrated in these contexts. The role of friendship and meetings between people play a huge role in this. Camps are sites of encounter. In “Protest camps: an emerging field of social movement research” Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel and Patrick McCurdy writes: “The term ‘convergence centre’ has been commonly used by activists to refer to ‘immediate’ or physical locations that offer a common focal point for activists to assemble, discuss, strategize and share skills, knowledge and experience.”

⁴ From Modern Indigenous peoples, Saami youth in motion, Arild Hovland, 1996

1.4 Who came to Standing Rock?

I have read about young people who found a sense of belonging at Standing Rock. Young people found themselves among likeminded indigenous people; elders, activists and allies. Some were looking for a community, a place to belong, or just a safe space to live. Some found the lack of alcohol and drugs, that were making their life harder outside the camp, relieving, making it possible for them to build a sound daily life without them while also connecting with elders in a way that had not been possible for them before. "There's an atmosphere of support at Oceti Sakowin," Tami DeCoteau, a counselor who owns DeCoteau Psychology of Bismarck, North Dakota, says in an article by *USA today*: "the feeling of unity, positivity and prayer stands in stark contrast to the lives many Natives will return to."⁵

Standing Rock gave people shelter and food and purpose, but may also have scarred some people for life; "There seems to be a number of people with serious mental health needs that have experienced trauma because of the stress of being at the camp or through being out on the front lines," DeCouteau said. "Face-offs with officers in riot gear or time spent in temporary holding cages⁶ can shake loose trauma for Native Americans, particularly those whose families have felt the effects of generations of poverty and substance on reservations," another counselor, Tami Jollie-Trottier said⁷. Faced with the violence of the security guards and police, some said they felt on their own bodies what their ancestors might have felt when they too were removed from their lands. Not only were they seeing the strong manifestations of a nation who did not care to protect them from an international corporation, they felt a part of their people's traumatic history being repeated. In an article by *Indian Country Today* it says:

All 76 of them were loaded onto buses and taken to Fort Rice, an old decommissioned military base a few miles north that the police and private security officers were using as a staging and bivouac location during the standoff. Iron Eyes recalls seeing the old fort and feeling what his ancestors must have felt. (...) "It was just stacked with

⁵ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/11/21/94240550/>

⁶ "Native American protesters have reported excessive force, unlawful arrests and mistreatment in jail where activists describe being held in cages" <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/31/dakota-access-pipeline-protest-investigation-human-rights-abuses>

⁷ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/11/21/94240550/>

armaments and gear and so forth,” Iron Eyes remembers. “It was a poignant moment for me as I realized that the Indian Wars have not ended.”⁸

Oceti Sacowin (meaning Seven Council Fires) became a place both for healing and for ripping open old wounds, Marcella LeBeau from the Cheyenne River Reservation not far from Standing Rock, have witnessed the effects the boarding schools had on her family and friends, she sees Standing Rock as the antithesis to the project of colonization: “I look at this as a reawakening.”

The counselors hoped that the community and sense of purpose at camp was helping people build the strength and knowledge to face their next battles: “You hope people take that positivity and momentum back with them, regardless of what happens.”⁹

1.5 Strengthening Indigenous Belongings

Identity is fluid, adaptive and in constant change (Hall 2011:29). Changes may happen consciously or subconsciously within a group of people or an individual. A person is free to shape and express their identity, but, some might say, probably speaking from experience: “Only to some extent,” as the limits to your identity are set by society. Why? Limited for whom? And: limited by whom? The following chapter offers possible answers to these questions.

1.5.1 Processes of Identification

Describing my work as being about identity feels more like an accusation, a narrowing, a marginalizing, than it does an affirmation, an extension, an engagement. (...) It feels like researching ‘identity’ is something for those of us whose experiences of being Māori do not suit the easy monolith of authenticity. (...) ‘Identity’ feels like the stuff of the individual, a navel-gazing luxury rather than the stuff of the collective, political urgent. Indeed, it feels like something is limited in the state of identity: Something more fixated than fixed, perhaps. I have found (...) that it’s easier to re-

⁸ https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/news/case-dismissed-records-unsealed-iron-eyes-wins-release-of-nodapl-documents-QmTLnDWaPEa9GTdkd0LcGQ/?fbclid=IwAR1e-ID_0iK-HbeswmpD-vQIzn-djisebHHeOuiLDnEzapJiXH9ZyViOxpU

⁹ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/11/21/94240550/>

engage the word rather than to ditch it all together: to describe my work as being about identification rather than about identity. (...) The way I use it identification is an act, rather than a thing. It reminds us that people are involved in the creation of things, rather than passively being labeled or interpolated by them. Identification is subjective, ongoing, supple, dynamic, negotiable. It is about a 'how' and perhaps a 'why' rather than a 'what'. Identification suggests there are multiple forms, multiple contexts, multiple – well – multiple people (Alice Te Punga Somerville 2011:37).

The quote resonates with ideas that I have had about my own process in reintegrating Sámi culture and also about the theme of this thesis; that “identity” is a bit of a “first world problem.” I had a feeling to search for a belonging is a navel-gazing activity, separated from the collective struggles in indigenous communities where people still struggle with the effects of harsh assimilation politics. Coming from the largest city in Norway, my ongoing process of identification have been and is different from Sámi people who have grown up in what is commonly known as Sámi core-areas.

I will tell Hehaka, Marielle and Zintkala's stories. They have, however, been filtered through my experience, and structured by my questions, my framing of the interviews and my analysis of them. Through the process of writing this thesis I have been on quite a journey myself. It is only now, in the final days of hastened working, reading and writing, that I have come to understand how important it has been for my own healing as an Indigenous woman.

1.6 Indigeneity

To be indigenous is a way of belonging, and for some it is about being heard. In some situations indigeneity can seem like a choice, for others, in other situations, it is impossible to get away from (if one wished). Indigeneity is a contested subject just as identity is. Some people might say that there is a difference between two types of search for identity, one that is rooted in community and indigenous people's daily struggles against colonial systems, and one that is rooted in individuals who are searching outside of themselves and inside themselves for a place to belong. These different types of identity search may take place within one person or one community, but as the stories of my interviewees show: at Standing Rock these two met each other in many ways. Here I will use Linda Tuhiwai Smith's take on indigeneity:

“Indigenous peoples” is a term that internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples. (···) They share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out (Smith, 1999: 7).

This is a wide definition. It was made to be that way, because the experience of indigeneity is very varied (Coates2004:1). I will not go into the issues of indigenous belongings in a general sense. That is not what I have set out to do in this thesis. What I can do, however is to show glimpses of the constantly changing experience of indigeneity, hoping that it might shed light on the issue of what that can be.

I took a break from writing this thesis to learn North Sámi for a year, Some of fellow students complained, very understandably, that if the Norwegianization process never happened, they would not have had to have to spend a year learning their Native language. This is true. But I, the cocktail of a person that I am, would not ever have been born if it the Norwegianization process never happened. None of us sitting in that classroom probably would. The process of colonization is a part of us in many ways and that is important to acknowledge. Yet I agree that we have a right to feel angry, because we still carry the wounds of Norwegianization process (which is an ongoing process) and we have seen our family members’ and friend’s lives affected by it in many ways. Many indigenous people have internalized some of the prejudice and racist views and that have shaped the way Indigenous people look at them selves. Even to the extent of our own personal devaluation because we are not *indigenous enough*.

Loosing touch with ones identity as an indigenous person is a direct effect of assimilative, colonial politics. As I will explore further into in the following chapters, the act of defining one self and reconnecting with one’s community, ancestral land, cultures and spiritual practices is a part of a healing process that is important for all peoples, Indigenous or not. A process that neither can be said to take solely place within one person or a community, identification, as TePunga Sommersville calls it, is a continual act, a constant process of communication between people, places, ancestors, spirits, stories, rituals and communities.

For some, to define themselves as indigenous is a choice, and this might seem like a privilege (maybe it is?). I can't speak for anyone but me, but I know that identifying as an indigenous person is a process that is not so much about "getting to know yourself," as taking back what was taken from you, your family and your ancestors through processes of colonization and assimilation. It is also about holding on to and re-integrating what emerges in this process. It is a battle for many and something that takes up a lot of energy and space in ones life. But I would argue that it is worth it in many ways. As Poia Rewi says:

Cultural identity is important for peoples' sense of self and how they relate to others' and contributes to the individual's wellbeing. Identity reassures one's sense of self-worth, confidence, security and belonging. It instills pride. Conversely, to have no culture is to experience a lack of identity. (...) People without identity are like the tree with no roots to establish itself firmly. It is constantly at disposal of the elements.
(Rewi 2011:57)

What I am trying to convey, is the inherent emotional need that fuels this process. No matter how complex and intertwined our identities are we are entitled to fully claim our heritage and our histories. Indigenous people have been criticized and attacked, for expressing their culture and for living out their lives grounded in an indigenous culture and belief system, both through violent processes of colonization and forced assimilation. But also through the idea that has been prevalent among many non-indigenous researchers who have viewed identity and belonging as a construct and a strategy. My points boil down to this: Indigenous identities are varied, and they do not fit any descriptions of what they are "supposed to be." The trouble with concepts like "indigeneity" and "identity" is the inherent colonialist environment that created it.

1.7 Indigeneity within research

What make ideas 'real' is the system of knowledge, the formations of culture, and the relations of power in which these concepts are located. What an individual is – and the implications this has for the way researchers or teachers, therapists and social workers, economists or journalists, might approach their work – is based on centuries of philosophical debate, principles of debate and systems of organizing whole societies predicated on these ideas (Smith 1999:48).

Whenever western thought was met with confrontations from other societies in the form of other worldviews or ways of thinking, it became strengthened by a belief in its superiority. Western forms of thinking were believed to be objective, and repellant to any superstition, magic, or “primitive” ideas. It was believed to be universal, and together with literacy, democracy and the “development” of “advanced” social structures this package was believed to be the necessary criterion for what became known as “civilized society” (Smith 1999:49).

Among the first stories to reach the European countries about the native habitants of “the New World” were those told by Christian explorers and missionaries in the sixteenth century. These tales were to play a much bigger role than the storytellers themselves could have imagined (Coates 2004: 148-50). Representations of what today is called indigenous peoples are still shaped by the ideas about a “natural other”, an “eternal being”, “a part of the landscape”, or a “primitive human being”, some one who lives simply and close to nature (Sissons 2005:39).

During the ninetieth century Social Darwinism shaped the way people looked upon individuals and societies. This meant that a society was seen as a ‘species’ of people with biological characteristics. The non-western and non-white ‘primitive’ societies were ranked according to these characteristics, which could in turn also provide ideological background for justification of the colonial, racist and discriminating behavior towards ‘primitive’ peoples (Smith 1999:50).

The cultures of indigenous peoples were seen as lower steps in a series of developmental stages and sociologists would study these societies with the intention of discovering how western societies had developed. In a way people now could feel that they were doing the “primitive natives” a favour, taking their land so that it could be used in the most profitable way, teach them how to learn, how to speak, how to dress, how to pray to the right God, and how to feel about themselves. The studies of these societies also had a goal of uncovering “essential mechanisms” in human nature, strengthening the thought that indigenous peoples somehow were closer to this than people in western societies were (Smith 1999:50).

I have a background in archaeology where the subject of ethnicity was taboo for a long time. The study of different ethnicities and development of racial types from the nineteenth century and onwards, led by German, Swedish and Norwegian researchers, mapping the

Norwegian and Sámi populations often by measuring their bodies, in their homes or during school-visitations, and digging up old and more recent Sámi gravesites, taking the bones of peoples family members with them to museums for analysis, became a huge part, and one could say one of the pillars of social science, and with that archaeological research and theory (Bjørng 2008).¹⁰

After the Second World War there has been a marked resistance towards touching on the objects of race amongst many researchers, and the outright racist ways of talking about different cultures and peoples were abandoned. However, Jeffrey Sissons, amongst others, comments on the way the nineteenth centuries racist ideas have ben smuggled into the research of today. How the ninetieth century idea that “the human species consisted of different races inhabiting different environments and this explained differences in appearance and thought,” still is evident in the way

We now divide humanity into different cultures instead, and culture, not race, is said to explain differences in appearance and thought. But the earlier racial thinking persists in the shadow of the new culturalism. (...) Racism now exists as a trace, a ghostly presence that haunts culturalist thought (2005:37).

Archaeologist Bjørnar Olsen (2011) talks about the way Sami archaeology and Sami culture in general are looked upon as different from “Norse” culture, and also too loaded. This is because many archaeologists have seen it as impossible to go into the subject of Sami culture without discussing ethnicity. On the contrary talking about “Norse” and “Norwegian” culture is considered neutral, and can be presented without further discussion.

The underlying “logic” of western philosophy and science is now challenged, and has been challenged for a long while, by people who know that they won’t be taken seriously; that their histories wont be seen as valid, that their daily life-experiences will continue to be devalued, and that their cultures will continue to be seen as exotic, entertaining, intriguing, and strange, if they don’t tell their stories. And even more importantly, these stories need to be told to make sure that they don’t start seeing themselves in the same way. As Lina Tuhiwai Smith says:

¹⁰ <http://icarusfilms.com/if-giv>

Reading and interpreting present problems when we do not see ourselves in the text. There are problems, too, when we do see ourselves but can barely recognize ourselves through the representation. One problem of being trained to read this way (As if the text's "Us" or "we's" does not constitute me) over many years of academic study, is that we can adopt uncritically similar patterns of writing. We begin to write about ourselves as if we really were "out there," the "other," with all the baggage that this entails (Smith 1999:35-36).

Evjen and Beck notes based on the growing influence that Indigenous peoples have had on research in the last 1500 years in Norway and the United States show that the relationship between the researcher and the researched have become increasingly complicated (2011:27). Although, as the section above shows, it has always been complicated, just not from a Western viewpoint. It is from the Western viewpoint that things are starting to change; familiar stereotypes and ideas are cracking up, making the world a bit more unfamiliar in some ways, and maybe more familiar in other ways. It is not so much that indigenous people today finally have gained the means to take part in the discussion, although that surely is part of it. It is just as much the willingness of institutions like research centers and universities to accept the fact that Indigenous people are human beings on the same level as non-indigenous peoples, that their contribution matters and that it has meaning and value. Indigenous allies within research have always existed, however, and now more than ever (Hale 2006). But an important project for the decolonization process has to happen inside indigenous minds and communities.

1.8 Decolonizing from within - oppressive authenticity

It may seem that in a culture which is richly organized by ideas of contagion and purification the individual is in the grip of iron-hard categories of thought which are heavily safeguarded by rules of avoidance and by punishments. It may seem impossible for such a person to shake his own thought free of the protected habit-grooves of his culture. How can he turn round upon his own thought-process and contemplate its limitations? (Douglas 1966:5).

Indigenous researchers like Linda Tuhiwai Smith have been asking the same question: How can Indigenous peoples decolonize themselves and their communities, when the colonizing

culture surrounds their lives, and maybe even their thoughts? Many people are on the case, some of them are Zintkala, Hehaka and Marielle. They all have their own ways of decolonizing themselves, and plans and strategies of decolonization for their communities now and in the future as you will see in the next chapters.

The mechanisms of oppressive authenticity might be hard to understand. In my experience the idea of authenticity can go as far as to making individuals unable to connect with ones own heritage. By thinking that my ethnicity was neutral and unimportant, I failed to recognize my own privileged position. By not taking part of any of my ethnic cultures I claimed a “neutrality” that I have no right to claim and that in no way actually exists.

However, the feeling that I wasn’t anything in particular just a mix, just myself, also came from the feeling that I wasn’t *enough* of any of my cultures. I often had to explain why I looked the way I looked. At the time I did not understand why some people found it quite funny when I told them that I was “a quarter Indian and half a Sámi, but Norwegian of course” (the math didn’t even add up!). It was logical for me because I always had to add that “No, I haven’t been to India” and “I don’t speak Sámi.” I had to claim the ethnicities and disown them at the same time. How could I call my self a Sámi when I had grown up in Oslo (not what one would call a Sámi core area), when I did not speak Sámi and I did not own a *gákti*, a traditional Sámi dress; all the common markers that I knew to symbolize Sáminess. I doubted my authenticity as a Sámi person, because I could not find myself in the picture that was painted by the society I grew up in. I let the picture of an authentic Sámi person dictate my own sense of belonging.

For some reason there is quite often a form of unease detected in people whenever they are faced with something that is hard to categorize (Douglas 1966). Be it ethnicity, gender, sexuality or other aspects of ones personality. Sometimes the easiest way to make people comfortable is to compromise, to tune down certain aspects of ourselves. I think we all do it to some degree, probably even without thinking of it. As we grow up, adjusting to fit in and make people comfortable is a way to deal with our daily lives. Those of us who don’t “look the part” in certain situations are supposed to be able to explain why we look the way we do (if we’re asked). For Indigenous peoples this can happen quite often. Due to the lack of knowledge in Norway, for example, about Sámi history and culture, both Norwegians and Sámi people (especially those who have grown up outside Sámi core areas) might have a narrow idea about who Sámi people are. Jeffrey Sissons point out that

Indigenous purity has been, and continues to be, of interest to settler and post-settler governments that require varying degrees of biological and cultural authenticity before granting political recognition and economic support to indigenous people. These requirements of authenticity can in themselves become oppressive (2005: 39).

He also poses the very relevant question: “Why should first peoples be expected to have authentic identities while settlers and their descendants remain largely untroubled by their own ill-defined cultural characteristics?” (2007:37). Indigenous peoples are expected to fulfill the expectations of what an indigenous person should look like and behave. Movements like the water protectors camp at Standing Rock however contribute in the process of turning this around.

1.9 Neo-liberalism

Indigenous peoples have been resisting globalization and globalization-like forces for centuries in the western hemisphere, and for millennia in Africa and Eurasia. (...) A key difference for indigenous movements is that they typically are not interested in reforming the system. Rather, they are interested in autonomy and preserving their own political–cultural space to remain different. In this sense they are often deeper challenges to neoliberalism than other movements (Hall and Fenelon 2008:abstract).

The historical context of the philosophical advance of cosmopolitanism during the age of enlightenment was based on many factors including the rise of capitalism with its worldwide trade and theoretical reflections, the expeditions around the globe, ‘discovering’ the world through its anthropological glasses, and an interest in Hellenistic philosophy with its emergence of and definitions of human rights and a philosophical focus on human reason¹¹

Because the neoliberal governance and the international human rights discourse are seeped in (western) cultural assumptions it overruns and dominates all other cultures and their values, beliefs and innovations. The emphasis that neoliberalism has on the market results in

¹¹ <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/30/tigerswan-infiltrator-dakota-access-pipeline-standing-rock/?fbclid=IwAR3qRAnweNz5o0rikerZ7E4v8Zgp73YjJ4Q0IUOWfY9Ptm8i7XtBuhlVraE>

some curious views on human rights “and often champions the freedom of the individual action and the right to own and dispose of property” (Altamirano-Jiménez 2010:195). This a problem for indigenous peoples, because indigenous ideas about what is important and essential for human beings stems from different sets of values, yet when struggling for the recovery of control over their futures they “are often limited to the local construction of human rights ‘universals’, ignoring other place-situated ways of resolving conflict and conferring social responsibilities” (2010:195). This results in a situation where Indigenous peoples relationship to the state are shaped through forms of government that values decentralization, devolution, development, the assertion of basic human rights, social capital and individual freedom and responsibility. Contributing to the redefinition of one of the most important values and components of indigenous communities and societies: history and land tenure (Altamirano-Jiménez 2010:95). From an indigenous point of view, Altamirano-Jiménez says, the connection between land and political power is not just based on the land as a means of production, it is also about maintaining and constituting community. This relationship to the land is what states and market economies are trying to negate due to economic interests (2010:195). And this is a part of the reason why, as Bell says that for neo-liberal states “Indigenous ways of life can only appear in modernity in the form of ‘tradition,’ appropriate for symbolic and ceremonial occasions, but not appropriate to the management of economic life, the organization of social relationships, or the practice of government” (2014:4). To make the indigenous identity as narrow and insignificant as possible so that it is easier to control is a way to diminish Indigenous peoples, their cultures and heir ways of living, including their connection to place and community.

Marie Moran argues that because people engage in market transactions on what often seem to be on daily basis it is easy to understand how we easily can take for granted that it is a natural part of our lives. This facilitates the organization of societies according to market principles (Moran 2015:69; Olsen, K 2010:44). “People may be convinced by a market logic because of its power and presence, and because of the scientific evolution and everyday narratives that points to its ‘natural’ existence, and its compatibility with ‘human nature’” (Moran 2015:69). Moran calls for a shift away from capitalism through a renewed focus on the way it fuels oppressive structures of power. This is something that was a central message of the water protector camp. As you will see below Zintkala Mahpiya Win Blackowl recognizes capitalism as a source of colonialism, connecting it to the way healthcare has

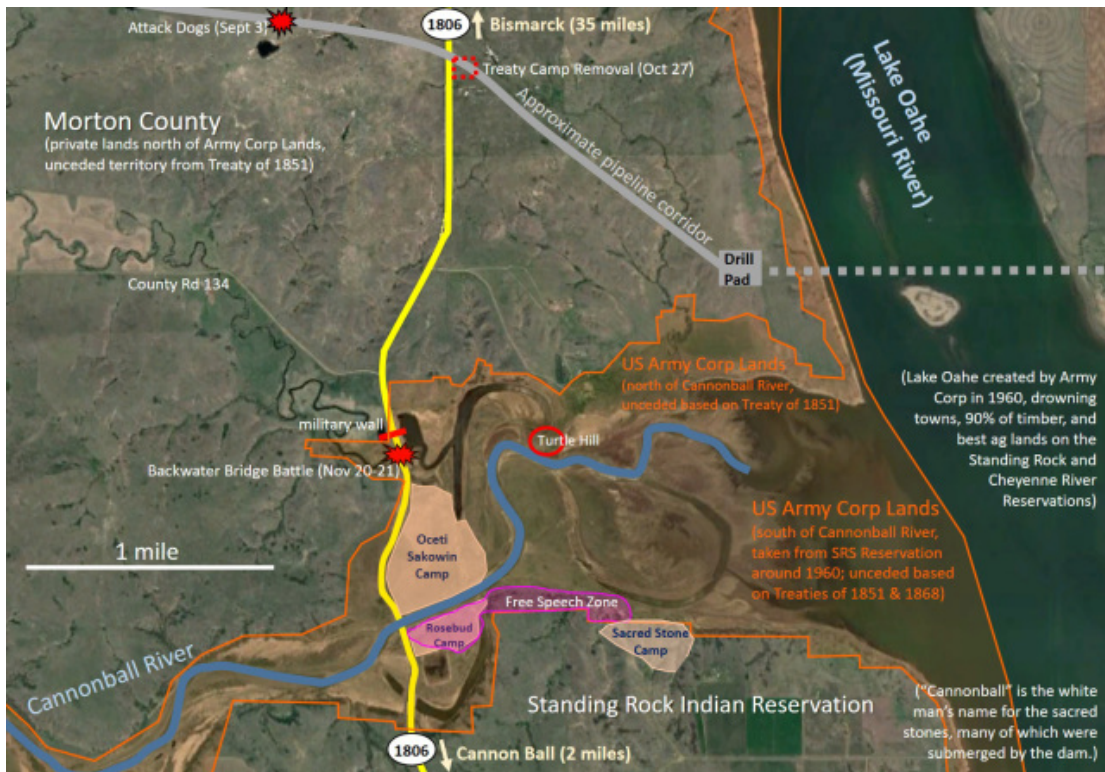
become a part of these structures. Similarly Hehaka Wakan Win is contesting the way indigenous political leadership is entangled in these same oppressive structures of power.



Flagroad at Oceti Sacowin

2.0 Context

In April 2016 members of the One Mind Youth Movement organized a run to protest the 1,168 -mile Dakota Access pipeline, designed to carry crude-oil fracked from North-Dakota's Bakken-formation to Illinois. This run became the beginning of the protest movement at Standing Rock. Starting with a couple tipis by Lake Oahe/Mnisose (or what Settlers named the "Missouri River") in the area of Cannonball, it grew into something that no one had expected. It is estimated that before the first blizzard came early in December over 10 000 people were living at the campsite. Sacred Stone camp was the first camp established, around April of 2016. Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires) camp (Main Camp), Rosebud camp, Red Warrior Camp, Treaty camp and others followed.



12

Map over the Camp areas.

2.1 The beginning

The One Mind Youth Movement started up as a support group initiated by young members of the Lakota Sioux Tribes who had witnessed several waves of suicide epidemics affecting mostly kids and teenagers in the Cheyenne River Reservation, among them some of their best friends took their own lives unexpectedly. These young people had families that struggled with poverty, violence, alcoholism and drug-abuse. These problems were visible but not spoken about. On the Standing Rock reservation over 40 percent of the population live below the poverty line, housing is scarce and the healthcare system is in chaos. For instance, in December 2015, the Indian Health Service shut down the emergency room at the hospital on the Rosebud Reservation, 200 miles from Standing Rock, due to unsafe conditions. Now the only hospital on the Standing Rock reservation is a 12-bed facility in Fort Yates, which is supposed to serve 8200 people scattered across hundreds of miles. According to the former senator Dorgan, the healthcare crisis is connected to inadequate law enforcement. “At one point”, he said, “the entire Standing Rock reservation, an area larger than the state of

12 <https://memoriesofthepople.wordpress.com/2016/11/26/standing-rock-map-tells-a-story/>

Delaware, was served by nine Bureau of Indian Affairs police officers” 13.

2.2 Environmental racism

The more affluent and whiter population in Bismarck, a city a couple hours drive from the campsite at Standing Rock, protested against the pipeline’s earlier route which would have crossed the Missouri River 10 miles north of the city¹⁴. And after consideration and meetings with Bismarck town-representatives the first route was halted. In July 2016, the US Army Corps of Engineers¹⁵ approved the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. According to Dakota Access LLC, a subsidiary of the pipeline company Energy Transfer Partners, “The pipeline is necessary to accommodate oil production from the Bakken Three Forks formations, which has resulted in a five-fold increase in daily oil production in North Dakota the last six years”. “Upon completion,” they further state; “the Pipeline will have capacity to transport nearly half of the oil produced in North Dakota each day.”¹⁶ They also claim that the pipeline is safer and more cost effective than shipping of the oil by truck or rail, the former method, in that it will “ease overcrowding on railways, (...) and will reduce the number of trucks on the road” ¹⁷. The new route now runs underneath the Missouri River reservoir, Lake Oahe, the only source of drinking water, and a granted area for treaty fishing and hunting rights for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

In legal challenges and public demonstrations members of the Sioux nation and their allies have argued that they were not adequately consulted about the route¹⁸. According to High Country News, The US Army Corps of Engineers purposefully withheld documents during the consultation that could have helped the Standing Rock Sioux representatives evaluate the risks of building the pipeline. The withheld reports contained information about

13 “The Youth Group that Launched a Movement at Standing Rock”, The New York Times Magazine, October 4, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/magazine/the-youth-group-that-launched-a-movement-at-standing-rock.html?mcubz=0>

14 “Feds Withheld Key Documents From Standing Rock Sioux”, High Country News, October 4, 2017, <http://www.hcn.org/issues/48.22/feds-admit-they-withheld-key-documents-from-standing-rock-sioux>

¹⁵ An US federal agency under the department of defense and one of the world’s largest public engineering, design and construction management agencies

16 “Dakota Access LLC Countersuit”, Complaint, October 5, 2017, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3460834-170815-DakotaAccessLLC-Countersuit.html>

17 “Dakota Access LLC Countersuit”, Complaint, October 5, 2017, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3460834-170815-DakotaAccessLLC-Countersuit.html>

18 “Key Moments In The Dakota Access Pipeline Fight”, The Two Way: NPR, October 5, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight>

potential damage in the case of spills. Another evaluated the risk of spills and a third discussed possible alternative routes for the pipeline and environmental justice concerns raised by the building of the pipeline¹⁹.

On August 4th 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe sued the US Army Corps of engineers based on the lack of sufficient consultation and violation of the National Historic Preservation Act²⁰. The tribe wrote in its court filing: “The pipeline crosses the Tribe’s ancestral lands, and traverses landscapes that are sacred to the Tribe and carries great historic significance”²¹.

2.3 Not just water

This land historically belongs to the indigenous community and is a part of their sacred landscape. Rosalyn R. Pier, a Blackfoot and Métis writer and environmental historian²² writes in an article that:

The intimate connection between landscape and religion is at the center of Native American societies. It is the reason that thousands of Native Americans from across the United States and Indigenous peoples from around the world have traveled to the windswept prairies of North Dakota²³.

In other words she says that there is another aspect to this protest than water, it is the sacredness of its topography. In Vine Deloria Jr.’s book “The World we Used to Live in: Remembering the powers of the Medicine Men”, he talks about the sacredness of places where Sun dances were held. In 1882 a Sundance was held in Standing Rock by Sitting Bull²⁴, a Hunkpapa and Lakota holy man. In spite of the water protectors’ outrage over the

19 “Feds withheld key documents Standing Rock Sioux”, High Country News, October 5, 2017, <http://www.hcn.org/issues/48.22/feds-admit-they-withheld-key-documents-from-standing-rock-sioux>

20 “Key Moments In The Dakota Access Pipeline Fight”, The Two Way: NPR, October 5, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight>

21 “Motion for preliminary injunction. Request for expedited hearing”, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, October 5, 2017, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3460833-StandingRockSiouxvUSACE-August2016.html>

22”Rosalyn R. LaPier”, The Conversation, October 3, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/profiles/rosalyn-r-lapier-313342>

23 Rosalyn R. LaPier “Why understanding Native American Religion is key to resolving Dakota Access Pipeline crisis”, The Conversation, October 3, 2017, <http://religionnews.com/2016/11/03/why-understanding-native-american-religion-is-important-for-resolving-the-dakota-access-pipeline-crisis/>

24 Vine Deloria Jr. “The World We Used to Live in: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men”, Fulcrum Publishing, 2006.

loss of a sacred landscape they were not listened to²⁵. The Army Corp's senior field archaeologist hired for the project listed "five recorded cultural sights" within the area that would later be affected by construction of the pipeline and more than 30 others that are thought to be within a 1-mile radius. The letter concludes: "No historic properties will be subject to effect"²⁶.

There are differences between western views on religious places compared to many indigenous ones²⁷. Western cultures often build structures to set apart the sacred from nature. This is what the archaeologist Peter Campbell calls a "flag mentality", where ownership and sacredness is signaled by placing a "non-natural" object such as a flag or a church onto the area. A growing body of research about social memory shows that landscapes are places of remembrance and transmission, and that culturally significant landforms often serve as cultural storage-units for knowledge and memories²⁸. In Standing Rock notable landscape features like large boulders, cliffs or springs are places for ceremonies and religious events in themselves. The area have been a place for trading where enemy tribes camped within sight of each other to keep the tensions of the prospect of an unexpected attack at bay. Conflicts were forbidden here, something that was very unusual and reserved for only the most sacred of places, the most important natural formations and watery areas. Because no structures or burial sights were registered by the archaeological assessment previously mentioned, it was argued that this area cannot be defined as "sacred" by western standards. However the report did not include analysis of the topography from the perspective of the indigenous communities cosmology and oral traditions²⁹. The fact that these areas in fact contain several burials and important historical and spiritual sites is ignored.

25 "'Those are our Eiffel Towers, our pyramids': Why Standing Rock is about much more than oil", The Guardian, October 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/may/15/those-are-our-eiffel-towers-our-pyramids-why-standing-rock-is-about-much-more-than-oil>

26 "Key Moments in the Dakota Access Pipeline Fight", The two-way, breaking news from NPR, October 4, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight>

27 Odd Mathis Hætta, "Samene, Nordkalottens urfolk", Høyskoleforlaget AS-Norwegian Academic press, 2002.

28 Julie Cruikshank, "Melting Glaciers and Emerging Histories in the Saint Elias Mountains". In: "Indigenous Experience Today", eds: la Cadena, Marisol and Orin Starn.

29 "'Those are our Eiffel Towers, our pyramids': Why Standing Rock is about much more than oil", The Guardian, October 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/may/15/those-are-our-eiffel-towers-our-pyramids-why-standing-rock-is-about-much-more-than-oil>

2.4 The Water Protectors are gathering

On Wednesday August 10, 2016, representatives of Dakota Access arrived at the Construction Site and were met with resistance by approximately 15 to 30 individuals (...) who were protesting the construction of the Pipeline. By the afternoon, the number of individuals protesting at the Construction Site increased to approximately 100 30.

After the events that took place on the 10th of August Dakota Access LLC countersued leaders of the Standing Rock Sioux. Videos from the protest showed the private security officers hired by Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners threatening the protestors with dogs. Several hundred people gathered to protect the bulldozed area, armed with sticks and flagpoles, transcending the fences and confronting the workers who also did not refrain from using physical force to keep the protectors from interfering. At one point the six bulldozers pulled back, and while more protectors were taking over the building site several security trucks arrived. Later when the activists commented that one of the dogs had blood around its mouth, the guards finally retreated. Allegedly about 30 of the protectors were pepper sprayed and six bitten by the security officer's trained dogs³¹. Later commenting on the episode Standing Rock Sioux Chairman David Archambault II explained that the construction crew had ploughed away topsoil from an area about 150 feet wide that stretched over two miles.

These grounds are the resting places of our ancestors. The cairns and ancient stone prayer rings there cannot be replaced. In one day our sacred land has been turned into hollow ground”³².

This was the first of several violent meetings between the activists and private security forces, police and DAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline)-workers.

On the 9th of September a U.S. district judge rules against the Standing Rock Sioux requests for an injunction except for a small area of land near Lake Oahe. The same day the

30 “Dakota Access LLC Countersuit”, Complaint, October 5, 2017,

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3460834-170815-DakotaAccessLLC-Countersuit.html>

31 “Key Moments in the Dakota Access Pipeline”, The Two Way, breaking news from NPR, October 22, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight>.

32 “Oil pipeline protest turns violent in North Dakota”, NBC News, October 22, 2017,

<https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/dakota-pipeline-protests/oil-pipeline-protest-turns-violent-north-dakota-n642626>.

US Justice and Interior Departments and Army ordered the U.S. Army Corp of engineers to halt the construction near Lake Oahe until additional environmental assessments were conducted³³. However on the 12th Energy Transfer Partners proceeds with construction despite the requests by three federal agencies that it voluntarily halt activities near the Lake Oahe river crossing³⁴. The decision was received with protests on two working sites. Over 200 people participated and 27 were arrested. At this point 123 activists had been arrested since the water protector camp was set up³⁵.

Then president Barack Obama decided commented on the case in an interview on the 2nd of October, saying that they were “examining whether there are ways to reroute this pipeline in a way. So we’re going to let it play out for several more weeks and determine whether or not this can be resolved in a way that I think is properly attentive to the traditions of the first Americans”. This background for his statement may have been extensive national and international news-coverage and large social media-attention. Adding to this was Dave Archambault II’s letter sent to the then U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch requesting an investigation “to protect civil rights” of water protectors.

By the end of November it was estimated that on any given day the population ranged from 1000-3000, with numbers rising on the weekends³⁶. About three weeks later, one of the most violent episodes took place at a bridge, one of the primary access points to the camp³⁷. Police had blocked the public bridge with military equipment and the water protectors attempted to clear access. The police later said that the activists set fires in the area and threw rocks at officers. An activist said in a live stream video that projectiles fired from the police side started the fires and that the water protectors were the ones trying to put them out. The police later claimed that they used the water cannons to put out the fires. In any case the use

33 “How did Dakota Access become the world’s largest pipeline protest?”, USA Today, Okt 23, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/11/21/94249100/>.

34 “Key Moments in the Dakota Access Pipeline”, The Two Way, breaking news from NPR, October 22, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight>.

35 “27 arrests made at St. Anthony protest sites, Bismarck Tribune, October 23, http://bismarcktribune.com/news/state-and-regional/arrests-made-at-st-anthony-protest-sites/article_ba8d2aab-cf9c-5fa1-a268-46661bb51966.html.

36 “How did Dakota Access become the world’s largest pipeline protest?”, USA Today, October 23, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/11/21/94249100/>.

37 “Police, Protestors Clash Near Dakota Access Pipeline Route”, the two way, breaking news from NPR, October 23, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/21/502865857/police-protesters-clash-near-dakota-access-pipeline-route>.

of pepper spray, rubber bullets and water cannons together with the freezing temperatures (26 degrees) resulted in over a hundred injured activists. People were severely wounded by police-fired rubber bullets, allegedly aimed at the groin and head. Several people lost consciousness and drones used to document the attack were also shot down. Witnesses say one elder went into cardiac arrest and had to be revived on scene by medics sent by the Standing Rock and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes. Witnesses also say people were mazed to the point where they lost bowel function and vomited. "The violent scenes at Standing Rock last night were nothing short of horrific," Greenpeace International said in a statement calling on President Obama to put an end to police violence:

It is clear that the militarized police response has completely disregarded the protection of human life. Law enforcement put people's lives in danger last night as water protectors attempted to clear a path for emergency services to reach the camp.³⁸

On December 4th the Army Corps halted construction of the pipeline saying that it intends to issue an environmental impact statement with "full public input and analysis" before approving the river crossing at Lake Oahe. In a statement from the Army's assistant secretary for civil works, Jo-Ellen Darcy, said after talking with tribal officials and hearing their concerns that the pipeline could affect the drinking water: "The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously it to explore alternate routes for the pipeline crossing". The Army Corps stated that it intended to issue an Environmental Impact Statement with "full public input and analysis".³⁹ The camp erupted in celebrations due to the victory.

On the 5th of December Dave Archamboldt asked people to leave the camp.⁴⁰ The word had also spread that DAPL officials announced their plans to continue construction despite the Corps of Engineers' decision. Dave Archamboldt said that he was worried that the winter storms would put the water protectors in danger, and that DAPL was trying to

38 "Standing Rock: 100+Injured After Police Attack with Water Cannons, Rubber Bullets & Mace", Democracy Now!, October 23, https://www.democracynow.org/2016/11/21/headlines/standing_rock_100_injured_after_police_attack_with_water_cannons_rubber_bullets_mace.

39 "In Victory For Protesters, Army Halts Construction Of Dakota Pipeline", the two way, breaking news from NPR, October 23, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/12/04/504354503/army-corps-denies-easement-for-dakota-access-pipeline-says-tribal-organization>.

40 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pe4aqRu5B_8

provoke the people in the camps by continuing the drilling, crating an even more dangerous situation⁴¹. Shortly the storm arrived, forcing many protesters abandon the camp⁴².

January 24th Trump signs an executive memorandum instructing the Army to expedite the review and approval process for the unbuildt section of the Dakota Access Pipeline⁴³. The camp was evacuated on February the 22nd 2019.

3.0 Marielle: To yoik belonging

Marielle Gaup Beaska (born 1983) and me met in Tromsø at the end of September 2017, ten months after her second trip to Standing Rock and my first. She is a well-known musical artist and indigenous activist working for Saami rights in Norway. She has given out several records with different bands. Marielle is based in Návoutna (Kvenangen) in the north of Norway, but she is often on the move, touring with her own music, workshops or travelling to participate as an activist in different movements for Sámi rights, Indigenous rights or the climate.

We were part of the same group, and lived together in the camp called “Heart of the Wolf” in the Ocheti Sacowin camp. Marielle and her family is the reason why I went there in the first place. She and her husband and kids were planning to go in December and posted on Facebook that they needed a photographer to document their stay. My partner Andreas, a photographer and filmmaker, told me that he had contacted them and planned to go there if they agreed. I felt that this was something that I should do too. During the next couple of weeks we communicated with Marielle and her husband about planning, buying supplies, warm clothes and the necessary gear. At last we met in Minnesota, and drove together to Standing Rock and found a good spot to put up the *lávvus*.

Back in Tromsø, almost a year after our journey, talking about our time together in the camp brings back memories for me, and I imagine, for her as well. She is visiting her sister, and we sit together on the bed she sleeps on in the guestroom in her sister’s house. Downstairs the family is cleaning and tidying the house preparing for the evening’s dinner guests.

41 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/13/dakota-access-pipeline-protest-standing-rock-dave-archambault>

42 <https://medium.com/@martyskovlundjr/the-true-story-of-how-standing-rock-fell-69d0151eb5b2>

43 President Donald Trump, “Memorandum for the Secretary of the Army”, The White House, Office of the Press Secretay, January 24, 2017.

When I first approached Marielle, asking if I could interview her about her experience in Standing Rock I told her that my focus would be on Standing Rock as a place of learning, and recreation and strengthening of indigenous identities. Unique to Marielle, among my interviewees, is the fact that she is a *juoigi* (a yoiker, someone that yoiks. Yoik is the traditional musical tradition of Sámi people). I asked her some questions specifically bringing up her experience there as a *juoigi*. Marielle also talked about her feelings of being a Sámi in a worldwide community of Indigenous people and how *juigama* (yoik) became an important part of her stay in Standing Rock, both the first and second time. This chapter will be based on Marielle's answers, and my experiences from camp. I will focus on what she says about her Sámi identity at Standing Rock and the way that yoiking and spirituality played a role in shaping her experience. The whole interview is translated from Norwegian by me.

3.1 Learning experiences

I start by asking her why she wanted to go to the camp in Standing Rock.

I hoped that I would be able to get there, but I had kind of let that idea go so I tried to support in every way I could from here. I posted a lot about it, wrote to the people who were there, and read everything I could. But then I was invited to do a concert outside New York on Long Island and I said that I would do it if they could pay for my journey back a bit later so I could stop by Standing Rock. And they could. So we did that me and Inger (her sister). And we were so glad that we got that opportunity.

I ask her if she learned anything there.

Yes I did. I felt that I learned a lot and I felt that I had a lot to teach. That is what Standing Rock was; to contribute and be a part of a society, (...) and to learn. And in retrospect I can see that it has been very meaningful on many different levels.

I ask her to elaborate.

I had, without recognizing it, lost faith in people and the belief that we are kind, if you can put it that simply. And then after I went to Standing Rock that faith came back. I discovered that in fact human beings are fundamentally goodhearted and that they

want what's best for each other. And all that is just a bit hard to find in this busy society. It's hard to find it, but it exists. (...) And I also learned that Saami people, a tiny group of indigenous people, far north in Europe, also had a place in the indigenous community. We have a lot to bring about and we have a lot to learn when it comes to being a part of the bigger picture.

A couple months before this interview Marielle and her husband Beaska Niillas had been taking part in initiating and establishing a Sámi activist camp on the Finnish side of the border in Sápmi, to protect the fishing rights of the local community. I asked her if she thinks that the water protector camp at Standing Rock affected Sámi activism in general or her own activism in any way.

Yes, I think so. As a Sámi activist, a Sámi activist, (...) we sometimes feel a bit alone here. And one often feels like we are the only ones struggling with indigenous issues, but that isn't the case at all. We all have the same challenges, to varying degrees. Socially Sámi people are fine We have the same rights as the majority. (...) But in other ways we are suppressed and the Norwegianization-process is still going on. (...) But we have a lot to learn from the people who still live with the very strong racism that is so visible. How they survive as a people and their strength and the love they have for each other and their culture and other people. I think we have a lot to learn from that. So I think Sámi activism have, via me, other Sámi people who were at Standing Rock and people who followed through social media, gained a new energy.

Colonial histories of Sámi differ from those of North America in that colonial processes were typically more insidious, gradual and less physically violent in Scandinavia. There were no "Indian Wars" like in the United States, or specific segregationist legislation like the Indian Act in Canada. Yet other forms of violence – the structural violence of the state – have been equally effective in dispossessing the Sámi from their territories, from governance, political, social and legal orders, and spirituality (Kuokkanen 2019:8).

Marielle says that she also gained new strength when it comes to everyday challenges and larger challenges like culture and identity.

Because in this society I can see that there is an awakening. (...) And we need some guidance. The Saami people don't have a lot of experience with activism. (...) We have a long history of peacefulness and of adaptation and pretending. There has been a great respect for authorities and we kept quiet. And it's been a big part of our history. But now there is a growing wave of people who are speaking up, and this is where I feel that we have a lot to learn from other indigenous people who have been doing that longer than us. And I will keep that, the way of speaking up with love and not anger. Never in hate, not to gain anything, no personal gain. I will always keep that focus in my work. (...) To respect the ones you are working against, to keep respecting those people, while disagreeing.



Main Tent in Oceti Sacowin

3.2 Sámi identities

Because I know Marielle on a more personal level I felt comfortable enough to ask her a more leading question about her identity. Marielle, identify as Saami, not Norwegian, and she grew up with this identity. I'm curious if she had any of the experiences me and my partner Andreas had, with feeling more connected to our Sámi heritage. I ask her if she can relate to the feeling of something changing in connection with her identity as a Sámi person or as an Indigenous person after Standing Rock.

I started my process of a personal decolonization a long time ago, and it's a long process that takes place on many levels. However, after Standing Rock I felt that it's not as complicated as I thought. There are many ways to decolonize oneself and it's not that complicated, really. So I learned a lot from that in Standing Rock. And decolonization for me is a very elementary part of my Sámi identity.

In a later conversation (06.12.17) Marielle explains a bit further what she means with a simpler way of decolonizing. She mentioned the decolonizing of your own kitchen as an example. Getting in touch with local food-costumes will lead to a greater understanding of local ways of living; hunting, foraging and nature-management. But during our interview that fall Marielle also talked about her own insecurities regarding Sámi culture.

It actually started nine years ago when I was on tour in the US, performing as a yoiker. (...) And I didn't know how people would receive me, as an indigenous person because I am white, all of us Sámi are. We aren't that well known internationally. And there has been people commenting stuff like: "Why do you always put the whitest looking people in the photos?" because many people don't understand how you can be white and indigenous.

I have also caught myself thinking: Is our culture still strong enough for us to separate from the majority? Are we just totally Norwegianized? There have been a lot of these questions. But I have definitely felt that I am not (Norwegianized). I don't identify as Norwegian. I identify only as Sámi. But I have been thinking about this, what is it to be Sámi? And during this tour (in the US), nine years ago, I discovered that it was a lot easier for me to communicate with indigenous people than with Americans (non-indigenous). (...) It was easier to communicate with the indigenous people, even if it's also in English. This made me think that there must be something similar in the way we are, and why can it be?

The Sámi have had some difficulties getting accepted as an indigenous people because of their white skin. Whiteness is a privilege. Compared to the situation of many other indigenous

peoples, this makes it easier to hide and undermine ones own Sámi roots and connections. But the fact that it at times have been easier to hide does not mean that people have been able to, or willing to, erase it in themselves. The ease with which many Sámi people could and still can distance themselves from their Sámi roots together with the good living conditions of Sámi people, compared to many other indigenous people, creates a very particular Sámi situation, that may separate Sámi from many other indigenous groups.

During her trip to Standing Rock Marielle found that meeting other indigenous persons strengthened her faith in the independence of Sámi culture and its survival.

I felt that there was a big difference between us (and the non-indigenous majority) because of the experience of a common ground with other indigenous people. And there it wasn't just one indigenous people. It was a mix between many different indigenous peoples and I felt that we had a really good connection between us. And there were a lot of things that were similar, like our tales, our beliefs, the attachment to nature, and the communication between nature and people; very similar. And then I thought that we aren't Norwegianized, we still have our ways.

Siv Ellen Kraft writes in, *Indigenous Religion(s) – In the making and on the move. Sami activism from Alta to Standing Rock* (forthcoming 2020), that Marielle and Inger's first trip to Standing Rock really contributed to an inclusion of the Sámi people into the international indigenous community. And in a very literal sense became a part of the fight against the black snake. This is Inger, Marielles sister account of their first meeting with the people from Standing Rock

All the four colors of the medicine wheel would be gathered and support this case. And the four colors is red, which represents themselves, that is native Indians, and then yellow, which is the Asian indigenous peoples, and then black, the African indigenous peoples, and then there is white. And for a long time, they thought that was the white man, but right away when they saw us, and saw that we are actually white; we are — as far as I know — the only indigenous people that is white. They said “then that explains it, you are the white in the circle”. So, they had in a sense been waiting for us, and that is why they want us to return, since it can only be solved when all the

colors are gathered. The prophecy says that one will then manage to stop the snake (Kraft forthcoming 2020:19-20)

3.3 Vuoŋŋalašvuohta - Spirituality

Before we left for Standing Rock, Marielle talked about how she hoped to be inspired by the indigenous people she would meet there to explore Sámi spirituality further. I take the opportunity to ask her if she feels that her time there inspired her to dig deeper into her spirituality.

I think I would have to say we did, because there is a lot in Sámi spirituality that is unsaid. Sámi spirituality lies in the way we are and what we think. So we don't speak very loudly about it, but it's there. (...) And the camp, it was very spiritual, and all of it was very familiar, the not so familiar part was the vocal aspect of it. That so much was said aloud, like, "Now we're going to have this ceremony." But I think that if its (the Sámi spirituality, vuoŋŋalašvuohta) to survive we'll have to talk about it, because it will disappear if we're not conscious of it. I feel that we're the middle generation who were taught by the elders, who in turn practice it, but never talk about it. We have learned by observing, while not actually practicing it ourselves, so how will the kids learn, right? Then we will actually have to talk about it and do it consciously.

What Marielle says about Sámi spirituality seems to link up with Siv Ellen Kraft's research on this theme (forthcoming 2020:16). In her Chapter in the book *Indigenous Religion(s). Local Grounds. Global Networks* she talks, among other things, about the expressions of Sámi spirituality in activism and how it has changed over time. Many of the interviewees in her texts talk about the differences between Native American ritual practices and the Sámi, almost to the extent of calling the Sámi religious practices nonexistent in public settings. Ánde Somby, a traditional Sámi yoik artist and an associate professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tromsø, says that the Native American tradition of public ritual is superior because of the explicitness of it (forthcoming 2020:16).

Marielle too says she experienced a different kind of spirituality that was more vocal and outward. She sees the benefits of this kind of spirituality for teaching purposes. And she refers especially to her kids and the difference between the three generations she has witnessed, the older that had and have the knowledge about Saami spiritual practices, and her generation that

learned by observing, but have resisted the active usage of it. Marielle wants to change in order to be able to pass the knowledge on to her kids. She felt that both her and the rest of her family had an understanding about the rituals and the values that were central at Standing Rock.

(...) we have many similarities, the deep respect for the earth, for the land, and for other people is important, I have learned about these things too. All people are equally important, and we are all a part of the system.

As Marielle says, the Sámi societies often have a strong tradition of avoidance of, and apparent respect for authority (in this case colonial power figures like priests and the police), may be connected to this. In my own experience from talking to traditional healers from the older generation, there are still many complicated feelings around Sámi ritual practice and spirituality, a still ongoing inheritance from the older strategies of Norwegianization, social Darwinism and racism in the Norwegian communities are inherently connected to this.

During a conversation with a *guvllár* (a Sámi word for someone that can heal and help you solve problems, communicate with spirits and find lost objects) in Guovdageainnu (Kautokeino, Sápmi) she told me how her mother had told her to be careful, and not talk about her powers because they used to burn people like them. It surprised me because to me the witch hunting days seem to be a long time ago. For her it is still a fresh memory and a source of worry and fear. It made me realize how hard the struggle to take back Sámi spirituality still is today, and how present the memories of condemnation against Sámi rituals and spirituality can be, especially in the Sámi core areas, where the connection to elders who have these experiences even fresher in mind, and surely have tried to protect and warn the younger generations. The fact that many Sámi also have a strong connection to Christianity through their elders makes the efforts to take back Sámi spirituality even harder.

All of this have created a complicated situation for people like Marielle who wants to strengthen the traditional non-Christian Saami spirituality. Yoiking has been a part of Sámi culture for a long time. And it is and has been strongly connected to ritual practices and Sámi pre-Christian faith.

3.4 *Juoigan* - Yoiking

The theme of this segment ties Marielle's interview together. It might not be a coincidence as yoiking is essential for Marielle, and integral to the way she talks about and experiences the world, and in this specific case, her stay in Standing Rock. Yoiking, as you will see in this segment, carries with it identity, spirituality and history. At the very end of our conversation I asked Marielle if she could talk about her experience with music in camp, and how it was to go there as a *juoigi* (yoiker), it was not a part of my planned questions, but I'm glad I did.

When we came there, me and Inger, we were the first Sámi people. We wore our *gáktis* and we were just being ourselves, but we were not "approved", in quotation marks, as indigenous people until we had joiked. Then we were. And we got asked a lot of questions (...) people were interested in who we were and where we came from. And we got to share and talk more about that and I think we got to learn other things than we would have if we were non-indigenous. So in that way it was a very good thing to yoik.

Also it was a very special thing for a yoiking heart to hear people singing and singing all the time. And that we could fall asleep to the drumming and singing, and waking up to it and to people walking past the *lávvu* singing. It was in the people's pulse that September. Everything was song. (...) So that was proof for me that the traditional music is so crucial when it comes to giving people a sense of community and a common ground. And that also confirms the sorrow I feel for the ongoing disappearance of yoik in the daily life (of Sámi people), because I know it is so important for us as a people and our identity and spirituality. So that is something that we still have. Yoik and traditional singing is a part of the strongest and the most spiritual we have left, and our language of course. So that (the music) was a very beautiful thing and something that made me and Inger feel very much at home.

In the words of the Sámi art activist Anders Sunna, "no one can be bothered to read hundreds of pages, art targets feelings directly" (Kraft and Johnson 2018:20). Sometimes it can be hard to convey the multiple feelings, stories and associations that are necessary for people to meet and understand each other on an emotional level. In this situation Marielle, her sister (and the

third Sámi yoiker⁴⁴) had to communicate a message to a group of people who did not know them, and who might even have been a little skeptical of them and their motives for being there. They did not have the opportunity or time to tell their own life stories or the history of the Sámi people, or at least not before they had caught the attention and the understanding and acceptance of the people listening to them. Through yoik they managed to convey, without words, something that might have been hard to explain in another way. And in this way earned the respect and the willingness of these people to listen⁴⁵.

Yoik in itself is and has been a way to communicate and create bonds between people, to the extent that in some cases, according to written sources, people have been using it instead of speech. In the 1800 Petrus Læstadius, a Swedish priest and missionary, spoke of how joik and speech were blended.

As the conversation becomes more lively, the prose ceases and ‘one begins to talk through song. One’s feelings are expressed in song, people start to hug each other, and one talks and responses to each other with song’ (Læstadius quoted by Graff 2014:71).

Another story about the yoik as means of direct communication is from a text by Ola Graff, a Norwegian researcher specializing in yoik. Here he talks about a Swedish teacher who knew two friends whom at times changed from talking to yoiking when “some strange mood came over them.” Graff quotes the teacher saying: “Now and then it might not be possible to resolve minor conflicts with ordinary prose but ‘with ascending and descending tones of Sámi rhythm, they ‘overwhelmed’ each other with what was in their hearts’” (Graff 2014:71). More than talking about the function of yoik, these stories convey its strong presence in Sámi traditions. Being the daughter of a *juoigi* myself I have grown up with yoik. I have quite recently started to learn yoiking, and have found it challenging at times, the sounds and

⁴⁴ Sofia Jannok, a Sámi yoiker from the Swedish side were also together with them at the time.

⁴⁵ It must be mentioned that this is not the first time yoik has created a room for dialogue between the Sámi and other indigenous peoples. When all the indigenous representatives met for the first time in United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, in 1975, the Sámi and their “indigenoussness” was questioned. The South-American Indigenous representatives “did not want to acknowledge “those rich white Europeans” (Sámi people) as indigenous and protested against the presence of the Sámi people. Anthropologist Helge Kleivan had to “emergency-lecture” on the history of Sámi people in Spanish. However, the one who eventually managed to convince them was Áillohaš, who entered the stage and yoiked for the assemblage – skepticism and distrust was yoiked away and the conference could begin.” (Harald Gaski cited in Angel 2015, translated by me)

melodies hard to master, and many times having the feeling that it is too late for me. But I think this is a feeling that is, not so much grounded in the bodily capacity, but in the psyche. I will go further into this below.

Marielle has been encouraging people around her to yoik, both through youtube-videos and in real life⁴⁶. But I have seen myself that many Sámi people today struggle with it. A very clear example is an experience that I had myself in Guovdageaidnu, where I studied North Saami at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences from the fall of 2018 to spring 2019. I studied with a group of around 20 Sámi students of various ages, many of them around my age, 27, or a bit younger. The class was asked by a teacher to yoik one of our teacher's yoik, as a sign of gratitude towards him during the end of our first term. However, there was some resistance in our class and many of our classmates almost did not make any sound during practice. One of our classmates spoke up, saying that people might be uncomfortable with yoiking, because they don't feel they have the adequate skills and experience to be able to do it properly, at least not in front of others. When we changed the yoiking sounds into more western sounding singing sounds people seemed to feel more comfortable actually singing the yoik-melody out loud.

I understood the feeling of my classmates very well, still struggling to break through these barriers inside that we in some way have been conditioned to put up. I think that many Sámi people that have grown up outside Sámi core areas feel that they don't have the skills or even the permission to do it. This in particular can be connected to the oppressive authenticity that many Indigenous people experience, feeling like they don't fit into the image of who a real Sámi person is; one who speaks a Sámi language, who has knowledge about life in nature, about hunting, fishing and herding reindeer, and who can sew traditional clothes and light a fire outside in the wind. This can stop us mentally and physically from taking parts in activities like yoik.

⁴⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2LhBAi-Q8I>

3.5 Yoiking in the past

The history of yoik is a complex one. 6000 year old rock carvings and written sources from the 12th, 13th, 17th and 18th century support the fact that yoik has been a part of the Sámi societies for a very long time (Graff 2014:67). Many sources talk about the ritual practice of yoiking, but also the everyday importance of it. How kids often learned to yoik before they learned to speak, for example (Graff 2004). Yoik has also been an important way of communicating and connection for Sámi people in the context of norwegianisation As Nils-Aslak Valkeapää said:

In a yoik text the intention can sometimes be to tell a story only to the one who knows. For others its content is obscure (Gaski 2008:351).

His point is that it facilitates a space for mutual understanding between Sámi, “while those on the outside are brought far enough into comprehension that they are no longer completely ignorant, yet not entirely “in the know”” (Gaski 2008:351).

The ritual practice of yoik has been declared dead by some. Personally I have had experiences where I felt it was very much alive, some of them in Standing Rock. However, the strict laws forbidding anyone to yoik from the 17th century and the persecution of Sámi *noaidis* (Sámi men and women who had the power to heal, curse and talk to spirits among other things) have had a great effect on Sámi people. Already in *kristinn rétttr*, Christian laws from the 1200s, anyone who went to the *noaidis* for advice or healing would be outlawed. Christian IV, king over Denmark-Norway decreed in 1609 that those who practiced magic, this practice included yoiking, would be sentenced to death. This decision led to the death of several Sámi during this period (Zachrisson 1997:165). In Sweden the king decided that a systematic process of interrogation and prosecution must be mobilized against this heresy during the 1600s (Graff 2014:68). These views on yoik spread to the Christianized Sámi populations and strong beliefs about yoik being a devilish practice have made many Sámi people wary and even scared of yoik. This can be seen today especially in the older generations. And of course it has left its marks on many people of my generation as well, who might not be as religious, but might have strong feelings about yoik and where it should be practiced and by whom. Even as many known yoikers today are acknowledged and appreciated by the Saami community, we are still seeing a gap in the practice of yoik in

homes. Yoik is, to my knowledge, seldom used in the daily lives of Sámi and many feel that they cannot or should not yoik.

3.6 Yoiking today

Yoik is not only music. The functions of the yoik goes much further than that. They are ways of social contact. A way to calm reindeer. To scare wolves. Yoik was never meant to be presented as art. (Valkeapää quoted in Angel 2015: 95-96)

It seems to me that yoik has been moved out of the private sphere and into the more public one. Yoik is more and more being appreciated in a performative setting, through recordings, concerts and TV-shows than in the private, intimate and practical way. Nils Oskal (2014) a Sámi professor in philosophy, talks about the Sámi *náhppi*, and its use in Sámi reindeer herding communities. The *náhppi* was used by the women to milk their reindeer. By the end of the 1940s the reindeer industry and the communities overall underwent a series of changes, that resulted, among other things, with the end of reindeer dairy production and the economy began to focus solely on meat production. This change happened at the same time as the institutionalization of *doudji*, Sámi handicraft. And as the *náhppi* gradually lost its practical function during the 1950s, and it gained a new life in the *duodji*-tradition as an object of traditional Sámi handicraft (Oskal 2014:88).

Marielle's fear that the yoik is disappearing in the daily life of Sámi people can be compared to the *náhppi*'s situation. Yoik seems to have been moving out of the practical and private sphere into a more institutionalized and formal one. This is a part of a longer process, starting according to many with Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, a multitalented visual artist, yoiker and poet, who became one of the first to merge yoik and rock with great success during the late 60ies. Through him yoik became a strong symbol of Sáminess. yoiking seemed to be ready for stages and recordings, it became a much awaited and needed source of pride and created bonds between many Sámi people (Angel 2008:96). But what happens to yoik when it is brought up on stage? Ánde Somby, a *jouigi*, reflects:

The feature of dialogue becomes a challenge when the yoik came on stage, it became a monologue. That was maybe the part of the negotiation that was central in the Davvi

Šuvva⁴⁷ time, the yoik was now on stage, but how should it be? What kind of form should it have? (Angel 2015:96)

Although I am still seeing many examples of people taking yoik back into their lives the role of yoik on a larger scale seems to have shifted. This is of course a very natural and unsurprising process. Practices change and peoples interests and priorities will always fluctuate. Yet it is also a fact that the reason for this changed relationship is colonialism and the strict assimilation politics, specifically targeting yoik and Sámi spiritual practices.

To Marielle there is more than yoik in itself at stake. For her it also about maintaining and strengthening the core of Sámi culture and spirituality. And while Marielle is working for yoik to become a part of people's lives again, yoiking has also become something that many young Sámi people today feel a distance towards. This is what Oskal says about the institutionalization of duodji and its effects on the role of the náhppi:

The organization Sámi Ätnam appointed a dedicated duodji consultant. This was partly due to a desire to allow those making duodji to earn a living from it. (...) Courses on judging duodji were also held. I find this very interesting. It is something new, and it is the starting point for a new set of autonomous criteria for evaluating the náhppi.

I myself have gone to a yoiking course at the musical conservatory in Tromsø, where our end exam was to perform a yoik that we had caught⁴⁸ ourselves, to which we received a grade based on what is considered a good, traditional yoik and what is not. There has also been two different TV shows ("Muite Mu" and "Stjernekamp") where the participants, most of them with no experience in yoik, have had to learn yoik over a period, guided by competent yoikers and in the end give a performance which were, in some instances, to be evaluated by known yoikers from the Sámi community.

⁴⁷ Dávvi Šuvva was a Sámi festival held for indigenous peoples, first time in 1979. It took place on Kaarevaara, on a hill west of Gáresavvon/Karesuando on the Swedish side, but there were also events taking place on the Finnish side Kaaresuvanto (Angell 2015).

⁴⁸ The way a yoik comes about in our world is by being caught by someone, "it comes from the big everything and will show itself for you. The idea is that the yoik is out there, and will manifest itself to the yoiker." Torgeir Vassvik (2019: private communication), yoiker.

Oskal describes the similarities between the history of the náhppi and the liberation of art. According to Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas, he says, “autonomous art emerges alongside institutions of art critique as a result of division forming within society”(2014:86). From this division, the institution of art, along with a unique expert evaluation system is established. In the same way the yoik courses and TV-shows are creating opportunities for people to learn about yoik and yoiking, one might argue that a tendency toward a separated institutionalization of yoik can contribute to further alienation for many Sámi people. And the risk of institutionalization is, as Kuakkanen says, that

Institutions seem to be path-dependent, meaning that once established, they typically follow a certain, persistent trajectory in decision-making and daily operations that can be hard to alter. Their foundational structures remain relatively unchanged even in reorganization (2019:6).

In other words institutionalization seems to have a binding effect. Facilitating structures of power and authority. However, it needs to be said that for many Sámi people, one of the few opportunities to learn yoiking today might be through these channels. But the question is, inspired by Oskal’s analysis of the evolving náhppi, when has the yoik been taken so far away from its practical and communicative context that it has lost its meaning or purpose, its ability to relate and communicate with people, and with that its connection to the spiritual realm?

3.7 Everchanging traditions

In Marielle’s story from Standing Rock one can say that Marielle brought yoik back to a very immediate connection. She connects her own story of acceptance and connection through yoik with the singing and music that was so present at the camp. And she reflects on how she through that understood her sorrow, that this was not the situation in Sámi societies today.

“Traditions”, as James Clifford observes, “articulate – selectively remember and connect – past and present” (2017:57). Traditions are constantly in the making, engaging with the present, revisiting the past, and exchanging ideas, concepts and motivations with its surroundings. Marielle went to Standing Rock because she wanted to protect the water and stand with the Lakota Community. She came to learn and to share. Yoik was a part of this experience. Through it she and the people around her experienced the yoiking tradition and its

ability to connect people and their histories. Through Marielle and other Sámi activists yoiking has added many new experiences and meanings to itself.

I ask her what she took back from Standing Rock.

There are so many things. (...) But I will always miss Standing Rock. That camp. And I'll always want to go back there. Especially to how it was in September. That was before all the pain came. There was some pain, but it wasn't new, there was only the old pain, if you can put it that way. After October and all that shooting and the mazing and the water terror and the physical and the psychological terror that was happening, the new pain came. So I will always miss being there in September, but December too because the mood in the camp was so different. And in my heart I'll always want to go back to a place like that, where people live as we did at the camp. And I hope we'll get there one day. (...) And I keep in touch with a lot of the people that we got to know there and we'll continue the work together from many parts of the world.

When we came to Standing Rock, for what was Marielles second time, the drums had subdued and the constant sound of melodious voices had quieted. It was bone cold and from what I understood, both then and what I read in articles about it later, people were tired. The hard core was not backing down, but they knew that there were people hired to mask as protectors, infiltrate and harm the community from the inside.⁴⁹ Even us newcomers felt it quite quickly. There were very few people with rose tinted glasses around, and as Marielle said, many had endured violence mentally and physically. Bright floodlights lit up the whole camp all night and there were helicopters, flying low over us several times a day, it felt like. But when I listened to the drumming and singing of our hosts or danced to good music after an amazing meal in the kitchen tent, it felt like the cold and the bright lights and the helicopters disappeared. I remember at least two occasions where Marielle took the floor with her sister, husband and other Sámi from our camp and yoiked. And I felt very proud and very lucky to be there. Not just because it was beautiful. But because of something else that is hard to put into words. As Hehaka, said, the ceremony and prayer were the reason why people still

⁴⁹ <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/30/tigerswan-infiltrator-dakota-access-pipeline-standing-rock/>

were there. That was what they were there for and what kept them there. Singing, yoiking and drumming was central to ceremony and prayer.

The way Marielle connected yoik, with the spiritual activism in Standing Rock shows me the complex processes of learning and strengthening of identities that took place. She brought the yoik with her; one of the most important pillars of Sámi culture and spirituality, and strengthened its meaning for us as Sámi, and as allies to the Native Americans, through an acceptance of the Sámi people as a part of the larger community of Indigenous peoples.



Horses being lead through Oceti Sacowin.

4.0 Zintkala: Birthing resistance

There was a call, specifically from the women (...) that day when they rushed the tractors and shut them down. (...) It was the loud voice of those women after they ran up there and they were like “No more, we’re not gonna let you let this happen”, (...) it made me want to come out and stand with them (Zintkala).

While I was in Standing Rock I heard that a woman had given birth at camp. Many water protectors saw this as a big event and a meaningful act. At the time I had no idea that later I would get to talk with her about her experience. Zintkala Mahpiya Win Blackowl is 38 years

old. She lives on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in South Dakota and is an enrolled member of the Sicangu Lakota Nation. She is a full time mother, birth keeper⁵⁰ and artist.

I first came in contact with Zintkala because I was asked to deliver a letter from the Midwife Association in Finnmark, a Sámi area on the Norwegian side, to the midwives at Standing Rock. During the protest a tent reserved especially for the work of midwives and gynecologists became a very important resource. This was one of the tents residing in the middle of the Oceti Sacowin camp, the camp where my group stayed. During the actions when the police shot at the activists with rubber bullets, often aiming at the groin⁵¹ and at times resulting in serious injuries in the vaginal region, the work of these midwives became extremely important. In the letter from the Sámi midwives they declared their support to the indigenous and ally-midwives who were there to help the water protectors.

Later when I came back from Standing Rock, I was asked by the midwives from Finnmark to get in contact with one of the midwives from Standing Rock and invite her to a conference held in Alta in Finnmark during the summer of 2017. While I was trying to get ahold of one of the midwives from the Water Protector Camp Zintkala contacted me. She said that she was not a midwife, but a “*birth-worker/ keeper*”, and that she gave birth at the camp and would love to come to Alta and talk about her experience. Another woman ended up coming to the conference, but I kept in touch with Zintkala. I told her about my thesis and asked if she would be interested in talking with me.

Zintkala and me were trying for quite some time to schedule a Skype meeting. The time distance, my timetable, her busy days, staying home with her six kids, made it hard to establish a date. The last time I asked, she decided to go ahead and do it while her children were still awake. She took the time to answer my questions elaborately. We talked while her kids were playing in the same room, and at one point looked one of her girls at my face on their mother’s screen and showed me her toys. The interview lasted for 43 minutes. My main

⁵⁰ “BirthKeepers is an open coalition to focus attention on the primal continuum of human development (conception to the end of year 1). We want to transform beliefs and practices related to how human beings are conceived, brought into the world and cared for as they develop. What happens during this period shapes our physical, emotional, intellectual, social, sexual, and spiritual health & well-being and shapes families and societies and how we care for ourselves, each other, and our mother, earth. This is the most critical time in our lives and directly impacts whether human beings think and act from fear-defense-aggression and aloneness OR trust-compassion-cooperation-collaboration and a sense of belonging and community”. <http://www.birthkeepersummit.com>

⁵¹ <https://www.inquisitr.com/3744942/obama-administration-evicting-standing-rock-water-protectors-as-veterans-set-to-arrive-opinion/>

questions where the same three I asked my other interviewees. However, I asked her to clarify and go deeper into the subjects that I felt were especially interesting or relevant for my research. In some sections here I also use quotes from interviews with other water protectors, adding to Zintkalas story.

4.1 Being a mother – raising activists

Being a mother is a full time job for Zintkala and one that she takes seriously. It means a lot to her that her kids understand and learn what she sees as important skills and values in life. Zintkala is working to sustain traditional knowledge and values and to resist destructive ways of living. Pregnancy and birth is a central part of this process for her personally, but it is also a subject that she is passionate about in general, as I will get back to below. Looking back at her own childhood, Zintkala reflects on her children's experiences of her family's lifestyle.

My kids, they want to buy new stuff or they want to throw things away, and we always have these long conversations. (...) I feel like a big part of the reason why I have these understandings is because of how early I was exposed to them. (...) I grew up, you know, with that instability of moving a lot, and travelling a lot. (...) And here I see myself trying to justify it to my kids in the same way that my parents justified it to me.

Activism has been a part of Zintkala's life since she was a kid. She grew up mainly with her father and aunt who would move between different locations, doing benefits and bringing awareness to Black Mesa and the Big Mountain and their struggle to stop the Peabody Cole Mine, which was forcing the Hopi and the Deni people from their lands due to mining of coal and uranium, a battle that is still going on today. In an interview at Standing Rock, right after the birth of her youngest daughter, she said that:

As a mother, when I look at my daughter, I want to be able to tell her that we did everything we could in the moment that it mattered. That we stood up to corporate greed and racial injustice so that she and her children could live beautiful lives with greater harmony among mankind. It warms my heart to hear my 3-year-old talk about her trip to Standing Rock and how much she enjoyed it ... I believe she could sense a

different spirit in that place; a spirit of peace, love, and justice, which she will learn are the things that matter most.⁵²

4.2 Zintkala's father

My father is Scandinavian, Norwegian and Swedish and Irish I believe. He was adopted from birth. My mother is Lakota and Dakota. She's an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, the Sicangu Nation. And my grandmother was Sichango and Oglala. My grandfather was Yankton from South Dakota. (...) I grew up mostly on the West Coast, but I have always had a very strong rooted tie to my cultural identity as a Lakota woman.

Zintkala grew up mainly with her father. She was her father's only child and the middle of her mother's nine kids. "I don't really think of him as a white man," she said about her father. She explains that her father is aware of his skin tone and the privileges it brings him: "He also spent more time the last ten years exploring and researching about his Scandinavian roots and what that is and what it means."

Zintkala's dad felt a need to connect with his ancestors. It makes me wonder if his need to do this may be connected to his dedication to support Native American communities. Being close to indigenous people who often are conscious of their heritage and committed to protect their lands and their culture might open up for an urge to find out where he is from. I'm also wondering if Zintkala's idea about decolonization for all, not just indigenous peoples but "whites" too, that I will go into below, is an extension of witnessing her dad's experience with the process of connecting to his roots.

Being a non-indigenous ally to indigenous people must be both hard and giving. Especially within the US, where white people often are the descendants of the ones who colonized the people they are trying to help. Redeeming the actions of ones own grandparents and great-grandparents, re-learning the history of colonization, and discovering ones privileged positions are all parts of the work and the journey of these people.

According to scholars within the field on indigenous studies, feelings of discomfort in the settler is an important step on the way to understanding the processes of colonization and

⁵²http://thestir.cafemom.com/good_news/202055/mom_gave_birth_standing_rock

the role of western settlers (Solverson 2018:70). In Canada it has been presented as a necessary step in the way towards reconciliation (Solverson 2018).

Seeing her father going through this close up might have given Zintkala a special insight into the colonial baggage carried by white Americans. It might have given her the outlook that made it possible for her to have the conversations at Standing Rock during the protest, written about below.

4.3 Discovering privileges

Zintkala tells me that one of the most important things she came back with from Standing Rock was a more clear and concrete understanding of her own privileges:

I went there (to Standing Rock) because I'm Lakota and Dakota and some of my bloodline comes from here (...) I essentially have most of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven council fires) in my bloodline.

But at the same time she is clear on the fact that not growing up on the reservations, but in an urban setting, being raised by her Caucasian dad and being a light skinned person, has left her in a somewhat more privileged position than what is often the case for brown indigenous kids who have grown up on reserves. Her experience with facilitating healing conversations at Standing Rock may in addition to her personal experience also have given her a deeper insight into the complex dynamics of colonialism. She told me that she left the camp with a better understanding of why she talks about white privilege, colonialism, and "birth justice" the way that she does. She believes that it is her responsibility to talk about these subjects with the privilege that she has been given access to.

4.4 A tipi for the women – Holding Space for Support and Healing

Zintkala was at Standing Rock during two periods. She was at Sacred Stone for two weeks in the middle of August and came back the second week of September and stayed until January. Right before Blackowl and her family were about to leave after her first stay, some elders, among them her aunt Faith Spotted Eagle, started arranging meetings for the women in the camp. However, they struggled to find a safe place that the men would respect and were they didn't have to worry about being disturbed. Zintkala thought about this on her way back home and ended up organizing a fundraiser to be able to set up a large tipi just for the group. Together with other indigenous women she got the tipi and went back to raise it.

“The tipi, the home always belonged to the woman,”⁵³ she says in the interview with *cafémom.com* at Standing Rock. On the video she sits outside in the sunshine holding *Mni Wiconi*⁵⁴ in her arms. She explains that in her tradition the tipi represents the womb and that the poles that support it represent a woman’s ribs. She said that she came to standing Rock to “hold space for women”⁵⁵. Through the tipi she put up this is exactly what she did. The tipi not only served as a place to gather for the women’s meetings, it also became a shelter for those that needed someone to talk to:

A couple of my aunts were working with security and created a home base for when women had something happen. ‘Cause there was a lot of violence that was going on in camp that wasn’t necessarily talked about. There was like over 22 sexual assaults that were documented and that’s just the ones that people came forward about. And it gave a place for us to bring that to and to... You know, a place for women to be sent to if they needed support, if they needed help. (...) I think as women we need sometimes... Just love. We need that support, we need other women to be able to lean on and to lean in to. And to mirror back to us, you know, our strength, and let us cry, and let us regenerate.

Suzanne O’Brian explores what it means to be “a healthy embodied self” for Native women who gather at the South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency’s annual Intertribal Intergenerational Women and Girl’s Gathering. During her fieldwork she spoke to many women who noted that the strength of this gathering lay in providing a space for them to meet other women, create relationships both within their own communities and inter-tribally:

(E)xperiencing “love and caring” from other women (...) and enjoying the “connection of women”. Several other women said that the new friendships that were made reminded them of “the power of being a woman,” and “the similarities of women from different tribes.” The women also spoke about how inspiring it could be to meet other powerful women and to be reminded of ones own strength. “One woman

⁵³http://thestir.cafemom.com/good_news/202055/mom_gave_birth_standing_rock

⁵⁴ *Mni Wiconi*, meaning water is life, was also the common slogan for the water protectors.

⁵⁵http://thestir.cafemom.com/good_news/202055/mom_gave_birth_standing_rock

pointed to the healing that can occur when “we all come together and teach each other what we know (O’Brien 2008:148).

A sense of belonging and connectedness within one’s community can give the individual a feeling of purpose. At the water protector camp women got to live with and learn about their cultures through conversations with elders and other knowledgeable women, and through meetings with women in similar situations or very different ones. Some women spoke about the strong networks and the many connections and friendships made at Standing Rock⁵⁶(personal communication).

Zintkala recalls how they would stay in the tipi for hours talking, working through difficult subjects of colonialism and trauma. For some these subjects were too painful, or too distant from their own lives to talk about or understand:

It was really good. (...) (T)here were women who were really uncomfortable, there were people that walked out, you know. But there were also a lot of women there who really held their seat and just absorbed the conversations and absorbed the knowledge that was being shared with them. And for me that was perfect. That was exactly why I was there was for that reason right there.

For Zintakala the difficult conversations are the most important ones:

I think that people need to get more uncomfortable, you know, I saw that when we’re comfortable we’re generally not feeling. And I think there is a difference between feeling safe and feeling comfortable. But I think sometimes we think that to feel safe we have to feel comfortable and I think that’s not... For myself that’s not necessarily true. I can be really safe, but feel really uncomfortable and know that I’m doing some really deep healing work.

Healing the wounds of colonialism is an uncanny process that takes a lot of work. At Standing Rock, engaging in the talks in the women’s tipi, experiencing the many internal conflicts of indigenous peoples themselves, but also the tensions between indigenous activists and allies,

⁵⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/opinion-young-latinos-see-unity-hope-standing-rock-protests-n692286>

she saw how much healing work that needed to be done for her own people and for indigenous people in general, but also for humanity as a whole. During our interview she talked about:

(...) how crucial it is to do that healing work for ourselves individually in order to have that unity that people look for. Because when we don't, you know, when we are not doing that work, then we end up just reinventing the same wheel and doing the same things that got us in the situation that we're in already.

Social and supportive spaces for women, like the tipi that Zintkala raised, is a source of community wellness and health. During O'Brien's work with the South Puget Intertribal Agency's Women's Wellness Program she found that individual health is inseparable from communal health. For the women participating in this program their identity seemed to be interwoven with their communities and health is seen by them to be linked to women's abilities to help the community (O'Brian 2008:147).

The women's tipi at Standing Rock served as an arena for difficult conversations, often about colonial trauma connected to the particular experiences of indigenous women, African American women or white women. It became a place for support but also for tearing open old wounds, that had remained unhealed; asking difficult questions and sharing of experiences and knowledge, all crucial parts of healing, in Zintkala's opinion.

Connecting with other indigenous women, building relationships and sharing knowledge about indigenous cultures and strategies for navigating in a society where connecting to ones land and culture is uncommon are all projects of decolonization. Establishing ones belonging and identity as an indigenous person is a crucial part of healing and decolonization.

4.5 Strengthening identities – towards self-definition

Zintkala mentioned how identity was a common subject during these talks and I asked her if she believes that these women's sense of connectedness to their indigenous cultures were strengthened because of the meetings in the women's tipi. She responded that:

I think for sure, definitely. I think that women were strengthened in their identities, both women who maybe were disconnected from their indigenous identities and women who were also very rigid in their indigenous identity.

Moving on, she stresses the importance of self-definition for Indigenous peoples in the US:

We are definitely going through a period where we are having to redefine our identity. Because I think in the last hundred years our identity has been defined to us through colonialism, through the government. What makes you a Lakota woman? (...) What makes you a Cherokee? What makes you a Cheyenne person? (...) ‘Cause there is so much wrong information and a lot of times it’s people looking at us and telling us who we are, rather than us knowing who we are, and projecting that into the world. And so I think that when we are in those spaces it was really powerful to watch those conversations (In the women’s tipi at Standing Rock) start to come out because they’re very difficult conversations to have.

Here Zintkala addresses an issue that is felt by many indigenous people of her generation (Briones 2007:106). The Lakota have been referred to as the “archetypal Indian,” inhabiting the imaginations of American people and still present in western popular culture (Petrillo and Trejo 2008:91). Lakota culture, as it has been constructed by white Americans, have been turned into the commercialized stereotypes of “the noble” or “the drunken Indian”. “There’s a real invisibility when it comes to Indian people,” says Michael Roberts, a Tlingit who leads the Colorado-based institute in an interview with National Geographic Magazine. The following is a section from an interview with him:

“We don’t show up in the media, we don’t show up in textbooks, we don’t show up in everyday conversation. Folks don’t know Indians or anything about Indians. (...) You don’t even really get to begin to tell your story until you’ve dealt with the fact that there’s these weird things walking around as identifiers of native culture,” Sayet says of some popular negative images. “Which is what makes Americans feel like they own native culture in this really twisted way.”⁵⁷

Because colonialist views on indigeneity in many ways still comprises the prototype the need for self-definition continues to be strong. It’s not just popular culture that has affected the way

⁵⁷ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/12/native-americans-recasting-views-indigenous-life/>

Indigenous people identify themselves. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes: “Government legislation and public policy has a tendency to create narrow and rigid definitions that are used as criteria for belonging or for ones identity” (2007:334). Even if the Lakota tradition is strong; surrounded by colonialist views of what a Lakota person is supposed to be, it is hard to get rid of the “white gaze” that have kept many indigenous people in search of their own identity, unsure of who they are and if they are “authentic” enough.

Petrillo and Trejo (2008) write about the internal effects on people who are living under an oppressive government guided by racist colonialism. When told certain things about oneself by the majority for many generations, it can be hard not to listen, and to keep it at a distance. Sometimes indigenous peoples have to fight very hard not to take these words to heart, not to believe in them and to keep those judgments out of their own heads. In some cases they turns in to self-hatred, internalized oppression and the fight against colonialism has to happen inwardly (Petrillo and Trejo 2008:92). Some would argue that this is the most important fight and that getting rid of internalized colonialist ideas is the key to self-determination. Zintkala says that: ”Setting up camps and doing protests are not as effective as folks want to think...The real work is dismantling these structures that live within ourselves.” Strengthening indigenous identities through connecting with indigenous communities and traditions are certainly a part of indigenous resistance against colonialism. Healing colonial wounds may be one of the strongest tools of decolonization. For Zintkala giving birth in camp and putting up the women’s tipi at sacred stone camp became ways to strengthen these connections.

4.6 Working on colonial relations and whiteness

By the end of our interview I asked Zintkala if she had anything to add. She responded by way of her experiences of giving birth to her daughter, Mni Wiconi, at Standing Rock:

I went through my own experience of like anxiety and being triggered. Just being so exposed and experiencing so much consumption. Having the baby there and then having just her image and her identity go viral and having people constantly wanting to come to our space and meet her or send her things or talk about her or talk about me, and it was a weird experience of understanding the culture of consumption, you know, people feeling like they were entitled to her because I had her there. All of a sudden she became something that was for everybody. And so it was a delicate

balance of learning to like: “this is part of her experience, part of her story,” and also being her mother and protecting her. So that was really interesting to experience.

Having just given birth, Zintkala found herself surrounded by people from camp who wanted to see and give gifts to her. Word spread across social media, and more people came for interviews and to take pictures. Many wanted to be a part of Zintkala’s story. In itself this could be positive. However, things took a somewhat more uncomfortable turn for Zintkala:

It was really hard to watch the settler colonialism being reified there by people unintentionally. People⁵⁸ wouldn’t listen to what I had to say. When they would wanna come close to my camp or the camp next to me, or be really close in my space and they wouldn’t listen to me, they would go find another person in camp, another Indian person, and they would give them permission and they didn’t understand how that in itself were settler colonialism, that they were being settlers by doing that. And it’s hard because people don’t necessarily want to talk about that kind of stuff. They just want to celebrate what happened there. And I think that we miss out a lot of the experience of learning so much when we don’t talk about those difficult, maybe more embarrassing or more shameful aspects of camp. And I think that that in itself is what we experienced when white people, when they don’t want to talk about racism and they’re like “Hey, get over it” you know. And we’re like (...) “It’s repeating itself.” Because they don’t want to talk about it, it just keeps being done.

It seemed important for her to talk about this, to bring the negative out in to the light and talk about the complexities of Standing Rock; the way that the camp in itself became its own society, not free of the problems that the camp was put up to fight against. Zintkala’s experience exemplify the mechanisms of colonialism, how it is so hard to get rid of. For Zintkala, this is part of the real struggle: decolonization is about conversation, digging into and uncovering the uncanny and uncomfortable. This is when healing and new strategies for resistance can come about.

⁵⁸ Zintkala Mahpiya Win Blackowl, January 5th 2018, follow up: “*Non native people, “White people” . Well meaning I’m sure, but nonetheless they were still being settlers. Also important to understand that the natives they would go to for permission were also themselves reifying settler colonialism, because that’s how settler colonialism works. When they settle a land and people then pull out to go somewhere else they choose certain ones to assure their settler state is upheld.*”

An example of how Zintkala addressed these tensions were the activities that were taking place in the Women's tipi. Here there was a mix of women, some from indigenous backgrounds, some were African American, and some were white with settler backgrounds. This is how she describes the way these differences were dealt with in the women's tipi:

One of the more interesting, more uncomfortable conversations was like separate and exclusive spaces for those reasons. Because we have these common experiences as human beings, but because of whiteness and the spectrum of white and black and how we all exists somewhere on there, the need for exclusive spaces for healing purposes was brought up, you know (...) we all have our trauma. Everyone who exists has experienced trauma, everyone who's existing in this time right now has experienced trauma, you know, the civilization has created that.

Zintkala is clear on the fact that colonialism has done damage to all involved, including descendants of settlers and colonizers. The white allies at Standing Rock were there to protect the water, but maybe also to connect to something, or to talk about their own guilt and loss. For Zintkala the solution was to acknowledge that the experiences of colonialism differed based on skin tone and heritage. To make it easier for the indigenous women to speak freely it was necessary to have secluded meetings just for them. She explained that:

Exclusive spaces give us the ability to create a safe space, because, you know, when you have been traumatized by whiteness, or white people, and you're a brown or a black person maybe you don't feel safe being in a space where you're working on healing and trauma with a white woman.

Zintkala believes that white non-indigenous Americans also have to work through their own experiences with colonialism:

Also white people needing to give themselves that space to work on whiteness and to heal and to grieve the loss of their identities so that they can do the really important healing work of connecting with their own identities. Learning and connecting with their own indigenous roots before they ever came over here. And a lot of times I think they avoid that because it is so damned painful to acknowledge what were lost. And I think that in that process that they can cultivate that empathy and that compassion for

us as indigenous people here on Turtle Island⁵⁹ and what we are, you know, holding on to.

Being a part of a minority gives you a different view of the dominant society. Chris Anderson talks about the extensive knowledge that indigenous people have about white society and culture. The colonial experience that many Indigenous people have in the larger society, historically and today, provides another type of insight into the ways whiteness “operates, what it takes for granted and the gaps, silences and illogicalities of its presumptive truths” (2009:93). For indigenous people, the process of colonialism poses a threat to their existence. Through the colonial policies of the state and international market economies, their existence, their stories and their histories are actively resisted. For non-indigenous white people; it is a problem because they live in a world that denies a fuller perspective of the past including their own potentially traumatic family- history, and the place of unconscious privilege they still live their lives from. The importance of connecting to one’s land and culture is stressed by Leslie Gray:

Don’t participate in the myth of whiteness; there is no such thing. Every single person in the world has an ethnicity. Ethnic does not mean colored or being a person of color. Ethnicity is your culture, and it’s your culture as it relates to a particular place on earth, a particular bioregion, and a particular land. Everyone can trace those roots back to themselves. The most radical thing you can do is to start thinking of yourself as having come from some place on this land. That thought alone is going to be a huge contradiction to the prevailing models (2006:29).

4.7 “Connecting with our bodies”

Reestablishing a connection with one’s body, or a connection between the body and spirit as Nadeau and Young say, is crucial both for healing and decolonizing. In fact, they say healing and decolonizing are two parts of the same process (2008). Taking responsibility for our own health and choosing to be well through traditional medicine and lifestyle, is also to take a stance against assimilation and colonial control (O’Brian 2008:9).

⁵⁹ A Native American and first nations term for the North American continent.

Nadeau and Young came together through an interest in the body as a site of decolonization. They see the process of decolonizing the body as a journey of discovering its voice, innate wisdom and goodness, and to re-connecting with land, culture and community (2008:117).

Zintkala talks about the way hospitals and the institutions of education disassociate women from their bodies. She is critical of the fact that women in the US are brought up to feel like that the responsibility for their bodies and their health lies with the medical establishment:

I feel like whenever you take something like that (knowledge about birth) and commodify it and make it so that people, you know, have to be able to access it through a system of a college like learning. Where there is this certificate at the end (...) that tells the world that you have the stamp of approval to practice this. (...) It makes it less accessible. (...) That's definitely the story with so much of our experiences as women. People in general, the society in general doesn't trust our judgment.

At the water protector camp there were several people who wanted her to sign a contract, giving her all responsibility for her birth, denouncing any connection to the camp in case anything would go wrong:

I just told them, you know: "No! I refuse to do that. And you really should take a look at why you want me to do that. I'm telling you I take full responsibility"... And I think that's part of the problem, we're not socialized to take responsibility for our bodies, were not socialized to take responsibility for our health, were not socialized to take responsibility for our birth.

It might seem like Zintkala is contradicting herself here. But I take it to mean that in her opinion these people were so used to thinking that things would go wrong without the support of a medical team that they could not trust Zintkala in her knowledge and experience. They could not see that she trusted herself and her body enough to be willing to give birth outside the medical establishment.

(...) We want these guarantees, we want these doctors and these hospitals to guarantee us and then when things go wrong, you know, and they tell you what happened and why it went wrong, and they don't necessarily take responsibility for their part in why it went wrong. (...) They don't give you all the information to make informed decisions throughout your pregnancy, I think that that's all purposeful, right? It's all connected to capitalism and keeping control over us as people, and as women especially. It's all connected and systemic.”

Zintkala seem to look at the disconnection between indigenous people's bodies and their traditional knowledge and intuitions as symptoms of a larger systemic fault connected by capitalism and patriarchy. The development and consolidation of capitalism has always been bound up with sexual regulation, family creation and control, female oppression and race based exploitation (Moran 2015:156) The power of capitalism to do this has, moreover, relied on the presentation of the economy as a separate sphere, dissociated from these 'cultural' spaces of gendered domesticity, sexuality and 'race' relations (Moran 2015:156).

Separating culture from health is part of the problem in the case of childbirth. Birth is a powerful psychic and bodily experience, one not to be taken lightly. Birth can be traumatic and disempowering, but it can also be very powerful and strengthening. It can serve as a means of connection; to one's own body, to one's child, to one's community and family, and to the land:

The physiological impact of all forms of violence- be it intimate, sexist, racist, or colonial violence or the intersection of all these in the lives of Native women- is dissociation disembodiment. Dissociation is “the state of being cut off from some aspect of one's process. (...) Dissociation involves being unable to sense or process connection with other living beings, both human and nonhuman. The result is disconnection, which impacts individuals and entire communities that have experienced violence (Nadeau and Young 2008:122).

Nadeau and Young argue that for Native American women there are additional spiritual disconnections. Native American cultures have seen womanhood as a sacred identity that existed within a complex system of relations within societies based on balance. “Due to the ongoing process of sexist and racist colonialism,” they say, “Native American women have lost their collective status as sacred. For the individual the loss of respect for a woman's

tradition and her body is played out as a loss of honor and largely affects the body and spirit.” The racist sexualisation of indigenous women by popular culture has also lead to loss of self-worth and these are attitudes that still exist today. Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez says: “As a legacy of colonialism, bodies, particularly those of indigenous women, were objectified. They not only took the form of property, but were also considered “ugly”, “impure”, “savage” and “sexual” (2010:196).

For Zintkala the medical institution is a part of the colonialist powers that keeps women out of touch with themselves. She believes that sharing knowledge as a collective will make childbearing an empowering experience. These types of knowledges and knowledge sharing, however, are being diminished due to what she identifies as monopolization by medical industry and education institutions.

4.8 Decolonizing pregnancy and the birthing experience

I have six kids and I’ve given birth at home with all of them and I’ve always worked with midwives and taken them to see midwives for their infant and early childhood healthcare. And through that process I have learned a lot about trusting my own intuition, trusting my gut, and trusting our bodies. You know, trusting our bodies to heal themselves, trusting plants to help us heal ourselves. Taking nutrition and (...) really looking at food as medicine and, you know, making it more simple, simplifying it more rather than medicalizing it and complicating it more. What feels like happens to me a lot when it gets commoditized and turned into education.

Zintkala has seen how the institutionalization of knowledge about birth has contributed to a loss of feeling of responsibility and control for women over their bodies.

Institutions set up the rules by which society and people’s relationships are governed. These rules may be written or unwritten, explicit or implicit, codified in laws, mandated by policy, upheld by religion, tradition and convention or embodied in the standards of family, community and society (Altamirano-Jiménez 2011:197).

In an article about Native American midwifery and birth practice called “The Midwives’ Resistance: How Native Women Are Reclaiming Birth on Their Terms”, indigenous midwives reflect on the way that birth has become dangerously medicalized. Because of the separation through colonization from traditional practices and lifestyles, traditional diets,

support networks, and community midwives, many native women have health conditions that are chronic. This means that giving birth can be dangerous and it requires that women travel to well-equipped hospitals.⁶⁰ It has in addition contributed to the mainstream medical narratives surrounding Native women to depict them as all single moms, who don't breastfeed, never exercise, eat unhealthy foods and have diabetes.⁶¹

Native-Americans and First Nations people are more plagued by diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and mental illness compared to non-Indigenous people. And they stress that these conditions often have their origins in early life; through conception, pregnancy, birth, and childhood. They also refer to an Australian study that showed that Aboriginal mothers appear to experience higher rates of stress during pregnancy than the non-Aboriginal women, emphasizing that the result of a stressful pregnancy can be dangerous for both mother and child. It can result in the need for expensive treatments of the newborn child/children and lifelong complications.⁶²

In many western centralized health facilities there is a tendency to remove women from their homes in rural areas to give birth in what was deemed as a safer environment. A study with Indigenous women giving birth in a large tertiary care facility showed that lack of choice in place of birth, type of delivery, and other birth decisions caused them distress, enhanced by lack of support from staff and trauma associated with going through labor without support from their partner, family, or culture.⁶³

The midwives believe that Indigenous women and midwives must re-establish traditional ways of thinking about and working with pregnancy and childbirth:

The practice of forcing Native women to travel to hospitals because their traditional ways of caring for pregnant people were outlawed contributes to an endless cycle of poor outcomes. Despite the public health industry's best attempts at addressing Native women's high-risk status, this cycle can't be addressed by the same Western-style

⁶⁰ <https://rewire.news/article/2018/01/05/midwives-resistance-native-women-reclaiming-birth-terms/>

⁶¹ <https://rewire.news/article/2018/01/05/midwives-resistance-native-women-reclaiming-birth-terms/>

⁶² <https://openpress.usask.ca/northernhealthcare/chapter/chapter-5-indigenous-birth/>

⁶³ <https://openpress.usask.ca/northernhealthcare/chapter/chapter-5-indigenous-birth/>

institutions that are complicit in perpetuating the problems in the first place, according to indigenous midwives including Katsi Cook of the Mohawk Nation.⁶⁴⁶⁵

Hospitals and their staff of medical workers, doctors, nurses and midwives can (unknowingly) contribute to disassociate women from their bodies by causing a lack of trust in their own judgment. This produces a shift of responsibility away from the mother to the medical staff that Zintkala is talking about, causing women to let go of any control over the situation and mistrust their own bodies and intuition. She says that she has

(...) this idea about women being able to access the information (about birth and pregnancy) (...) the way that we did at one time, which I think was more done in those ways that we gathered as women. Those circles that we would sit in. And I feel like misogyny, patriarchy and the way that we are as a society, the way we were socialized. (...) We are not socialized to be in community with each other anymore, were so socialized to be in competition with each other all the time. We're so socialized to uphold that patriarchy⁶⁶ and uphold that misogyny and that takes away from our ability to share that knowledge. (...) If we were able to create a way where the knowledge and the information about our bodies and about birth were shared in a more casual way... And I'm not saying every woman should have a birth at home. I'm saying every woman should understand how her body works.

4.9 Reconnecting body and spirit – uniting with the land

When the old burials and sacred places at Standing Rock were bulldozed on the 10th of April. This was one episode in a long series of harmful actions ultimately connected to politically strategic or monetary goals. Destructions of sacred lands as seen in Standing Rock shows how the knowledge about this connection is still used by the people trying to discourage protests

⁶⁴ The infant mortality rate for Native American and Alaska Native babies is .83 percent, second only to rates for non-Hispanic Black American babies of 1.13 percent. (<https://rewire.news/article/2018/01/05/midwives-resistance-native-women-reclaiming-birth-terms/>)

⁶⁵ <https://rewire.news/article/2018/01/05/midwives-resistance-native-women-reclaiming-birth-terms/>

⁶⁶ Heidi Hartmann (1979), Sylvia Walby (1990) and other feminists have demonstrated the interlinked nature of capitalism and patriarchy, showing how they operate together in complex and intertwined ways. And John D'Emilio (1983) and David T. Evans (1993) have traced the co-evolution of sexual norms with the development of capitalism (Moran 2015).

against the monetary interests. Indigenous peoples pose a significant threat to the marketing forces of natural resources because of their connections to land (Mander 2006:4, 5; Dahl 2009:21, Tauli-Corpus 2006:15, Altamirano-Jiménez 2011:195).

For many Indigenous people re-claiming identity has to do with a return to tradition (O'Brien 2008:9). Tradition is what can be found at home, in the communities, in the elder's stories and knowledge, in the language, in the customs and in the connections to land and nature. Traditions are dynamic and constantly reworked to suit the contexts of daily life. In connection with indigenous health and healing, traditions are seen as the right path toward living a healthy life physically and mentally (O'Brien 2008:11).

Very few people understood the symbolism of me as a Lakota woman giving birth outside the dominant medical establishment on my own homeland, you know, next to the water and alone. (...) When we are not even supposed to exist anymore, you know? When indigenous women were not supposed to be having babies anymore⁶⁷, when they wanted us gone. And how powerful that was. Like it was even hard for me to understand, I'm still processing it, you know. Like I still have moments when I'm like: 'Wow.'

Not only did Zintkala create and give birth to a newly made human being, her daughter Mni Wiconi, she also created a deep connection between her and her ancestors, on the land of Standing Rock. In this way she inserted herself and Mni Wiconi into a long history of Lakota tradition and resistance on these grounds, while strengthening the links between her and her ancestors and their land. At the same time she reinforced the symbolic meaning of the water protector Camp at Standing Rock.

Giving birth at Standing Rock by her self and outside the establishment of the health system was an act of resistance, continuity, connections and new life that probably will become a part of her people's history. The movement at Standing Rock may not have reached its ultimate goal, but the stories of resistance and the relationships that were made there cannot be diminished.

⁶⁷ From 1973 to 1976, more than 3,400 indigenous women in the care of the U.S. Indian Health Service were sterilized without their consent. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/12/native-americans-recasting-views-indigenous-life/>

4.10 Conclusion

While reading through the transcription of the interview with Zintkala I was struck by how her own story about Standing Rock and her thoughts on decolonization seems clearly to have been shaped by her upbringing and background. Her upbringing is unique in the way that it gives an insider-view into several different worlds, living mostly with her dad, and off reserve, but still keeping very much in touch with her mother and her aunts. She has a broad view of what decolonization is and believes that each individual, indigenous or settler, needs to heal the wounds of colonialism. At Standing Rock Zintkala facilitated conversations and meetings that lead some of the women toward a path of healing and understanding of their own identity and sense of place.

Through mainstream medical practice, many indigenous women have been disconnected from cultural practices connected with birth. Research shows how crucial it is for women to be comfortable and free of unnecessary stress throughout pregnancy and birth. The effects of a stressful pregnancy and birthing experience ripple through lives and generations of indigenous people and have been proven to have serious effects on the mental and physical health both for the woman and her child. Zintkala believes in the empowerment of indigenous women through a re-connection with their bodies and their traditional customs connected to pregnancy and childbirth, including reintegrating a healthy diet and a deeper knowledge about food as medicine. The connections between Indigenous women and the land have always been important. By giving birth to her sixth child by the river at Standing Rock she strengthened her relations with the land, and with traditional ways of giving birth, for herself and for the people who belong to Standing Rock.



Water protectors by Turtle Hill (see map page 19)

5.0 Hehaka (Holy Elk) – becoming a leader

Reiki healer and activist, Hehaka Wakan Win, came to the water protector camp to protect the water and pray. She is a Lakota woman from South-Dakota in her thirties, and she is the mother of two daughters and is a trained Reiki Healer. She opens up our interview by explaining that she felt that she could not walk away without knowing that she had done everything in her power to prevent the pipeline from being built. She was just a mom, just a daughter, she says, but she felt it was her duty to protect her land from the pipeline. Hehaka witnessed two very different “eras” of the water protector camp. When she came to Standing Rock, with her two daughters and her mother, the camp was structured and people knew who to go to for advice and guidance. There was leadership and people stood together against DAPL. After the 4th of December however, there was a shift. People started to leave, including many elders and leaders who had created a common ground and framework. Suddenly all of it was gone and it was a time of pessimism. The water protectors that remained needed new leaders. Hehaka became one of them.

Hehaka and I met on a summers day in 2017, in Sápmi (on the Norwegian side) at a Sámi festival called Riddu Riđđu. I got to ask her my questions, and found that Hehaka had been asked a lot about SR. My impression is that she had a story that she wanted to tell me, and that she shaped it so that I would get a bigger picture of her life, and of her stay at

Standing Rock. I glad she did since it probably made me understand her in a deeper sense than my three questions could achieve. The interview lasted for 59 minutes. This chapter will be structured around Hehaka's story. I will be discussing some of her experiences in more detail, using relevant research as a guide for my analysis while also including the voices of other water protectors. My focus will be on Hehaka's role as a leader, her experience with activism and how this relates to other indigenous women. Finally I will be discussing her relationship with prayer and spirituality and how it affected her stay in the camp.

Sitting down with Hehaka by the river I felt the nervousness that had been churning in my stomach in the anticipation of this interview leaving me. We were both taking a break from a hectic day; Hehaka worrying that she wouldn't be able to say goodbye properly to her friends, spread out all over the festival area before she left, and me running around in circles looking for Hehaka at the festival grounds. After a while we moved to a more sheltered place. People walking by were throwing us curious glances as we sat on the lawn with my recorder in between us. When I asked her, Hehaka confirmed that people at the festival recognized her. And I assume that they, like me, must have been following the final months at the water protector Camp closely via Facebook, where Hehaka often could be seen.

Talking about Facebook, one of the platforms that make it possible for Hehaka to reach out to indigenous people and allies world-wide, she reflected on the risks and benefits of taking such a public role.

It's been an amazing tool for awareness and for consciousness and for the work that we do. (...) You have to be really careful with it and use it in a good way and respect the power if it (...) in that it reaches so many people. (...) I have a lot of big dreams and a lot of big goals for all of humanity and, you know, it's such a useful tool in achieving those things, so I'm like, I have to just come to a place where I'm ok with it, where I'm ok with certain parts of my world being for everyone to see, and you know like, this is amazing, like people seeing me here and people are really supportive and It's inspiring to see this kind of work being done between nations.

5.1 Walking in two worlds: a traditional way of life

After turning on the recorder I asked Hehaka why she decided to travel to Standing Rock.

This is a part of her answer which was wide-ranging. It consisted of her family background, her upbringing, and her learning experiences at Standing Rock, a 500 year old Lakota “prophecy” (for lack of a better word. also described by Hehaka as a message from spirits), and the importance of learning more about Lakota traditions. I have spread the whole answer out in this chapter because it is so extensive and touches on many central themes. This, however is where I will start:

I am Lakota from South Dakota, but I am Miniconjou⁶⁸ Lakota from my father’s side, from Iron Lightening which is in Cheyenne River Reservation. My mothers side she is also Miniconjou but she is also Oglala⁶⁹ and from a few generations back Sicangu⁷⁰. So, many different bands of Lakota⁷¹.

Many times when I was growing up, we lived in tents, my dad tells the story often of when I was born, after they released us from the hospital, my very first home was a tent. And we just lived out on the reservation. We pumped water and we just lived day in and day out on the land. So that was the life that I was born into and it was just a life of survival. And every other family that I knew growing up were the same. The saying goes that it’s very hard to be Lakota. It’s a hard life, but a very beautiful one. And we’re extremely rich in our ways, in our culture in our identity. And we are a very proud people. But it’s also because we’re Lakota that the world is hard to survive in. It’s hard to hold on to our identity as strongly as we have. And adapt to the modern way of living and the system that exists of going to school, getting a job – operating in that world while being strong in who you are. And it is not impossible, it is possible, but it’s a very hard path.

⁶⁸ in Lakota Mnikhówožu Hokwoju, meaning “plants by the water”.

⁶⁹ in Lakota Oglála meaning “to scatter one's own”.

⁷⁰ in Lakota Sičhánǵu Oyáte meaning “Burnt Thighs Nation”.

⁷¹ There are seven subtribes of the Lakota people. Oglala, Miniconjou and Sicangu are three of the seven subtribes of the Lakota people who, along with the Dakota, make up the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Seven Council Fires).

Life on the reservations was hard at the time she grew up and as she grew older her family moved to Minnesota, North Dakota to find jobs. “It was more of a survival,” Hehaka says. “My mom worked at the casinos and stuff like that. (...) You go where you can survive.”

She explains that it can be difficult to “be strong in who you are” while at the same time navigating, surviving and thriving in the American modern society. She talks about the huge amount of energy it can take for indigenous people to hold on to their ways in today’s society, and about ignoring your ideas and dreams since achieving them seems impossible “Even a dysfunctional way of being if it’s all you know, it’s comfortable. And you’re ok. You cling to it because: ‘it’s all I know, and it feels safe.’” The stress of just making ends meet may for many be enough. Others work hard to keep in touch with family- members who might have had to stay behind or moved elsewhere, and to maintain connections with the land. Hehaka describes what it feels like for her to be Lakota as an experience of walking in the modern society while carrying her prayer and the traditional way of life. Her traditions and ways of life is something that feels private and are integrated seamlessly into her life.

It is not something that we necessarily have felt the need to promote. You know, it’s just a way of being. Its not a culture, it’s not saying: “I am Christian and I go to church” (...) It’s very organic and it’s built into our everyday moments (...) It’s a way of being rather than something we do, you know; motions we go through to show that we believe this way. We just are that way.

5.2 Relearning ways of living

While still answering my first question (why she went to Standing Rock) Hehaka recounts something that her father told her.

The spirits came and talked to the people when the very first white men came to our land and said that for 500 years people are going to suffer, and (...) for 500 years (...) you’ll go through many hard things. But at the end of that 500 years the generation will be born that are curious, that will want to know who they are, that are seeking to remember and to live that way. And so that generation they are going to stand up and they are going start walking back, and its going to take 500 years to get back to this moment where your people will walk barefooted on this ground, and they will eat from the land and survive, and everything will be back in balance.

Hehaka believes that her parents' generation is the one that was "born with a hunger for their identity, for who they are and what that means and what that looks like." She explains how practicing the traditional Lakota ways of spirituality was outlawed; that people would be sent to jail if they were caught praying.

It wasn't until, I think, the late seventies⁷² that it actually became legal for us to have our ceremonies (...) But you know, they had to fight for that right, and in the meantime of it, all being illegal, there were people, elders and traditional people that continued and preserved those ceremonies, and we held them in the dark, in the nighttime (...) covering all the windows and everything. And so it was still preserved and we have those because of the way that we adapted and we carried them to what we have now.

People have been free to perform their ceremonies out in the open for a little over 40 years. But only as a result of a hard battle. During the seventies, in the youth of her parents' generation, many formative happenings took place, like the formation of A.I.M (American Indian Movement) and the occupation of Alcatraz⁷³. The Native American movements became an inspiration for indigenous peoples in many parts of the world.

Hehaka talks about the importance of reclaiming her language, the ceremonies, social traditions, and the old ways of living together in a society. But it is also a stressful situation to be in because they are running out of time. There are few many people left who has this knowledge she says. Many from her grandparents generation, have lived a large part of their life in fear; being shamed, beaten, and threatened into silence, both as kids and as teenagers, at boarding schools and later by majority society.

5.3 Becoming a leader in a time of conflict

While emphasizing her gratefulness towards the people who did so, Hehaka points out the importance of not going to Standing Rock as allies:

⁷² Throughout most of its history the federal government had outlawed Native religious practices, enacting legislation that suppressed native religious practices, enacting legislation that suppressed Native traditions through imprisonment, restriction of rations and military might. These included the Indian Civilization Found Act (1819), the Rules for Indian Courts (1882), the Indian religious Crimes Code (1883), and Circular 1665 (1922). These policies were not overturned until the Wheeler Howard Act of 1934 (which did so in part), and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (which did so in essence) (O'Brian 2008:2-3).

⁷³ In 1969-61 (19 months) Alcatraz Island Prison in San Fransisco Bay was occupied by a group of Native Americans enacting an "Indians of All Tribes" protest movement (Kelley 2008:74)

we went because those lands historically belong to our people. And I consider, you know, the Standing Rock people my relatives (...) my reservation is right next to it, and so they are my people. So I did go to stand with them for our lands, Not so much for the slogan, and just to uphold them.

Her voice cracks when she talks about her memories:

I went to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. To say: “I’m doing my part because you’re doing your part.” And it was a very proud moment when we got to all stand together like that and we got to look at each other and know that our ancestors are so proud of us.

But it was also equally hurtful when Standing Rock chose to withdraw. I didn’t understand it and originally I wanted to support the leadership.

She adds while drying her eyes. That on the fifth of December 2016, Dave Archambault, head of the Standing Rock tribal government, sent out a video recording of himself, telling people to leave the camp⁷⁴.

So we heard the announcement, and we saw the video of Dave saying “Go home,” and after I double-checked if it was real, we said “Ok, we’ll go home.” And so we went back to camp and that night was very sad and we prayed and we talked about it as a family and we were like: “Wait a minute, we are home, this belongs to us also. We have never asked from permission from Standing Rock to be here and we don’t feel that we need their invitation to stay. Or their permission.” And this, when I say Standing Rock I’m speaking specifically of the tribal government. Not of the Nation of Standing Rock, the Hunkpapa Oyate, who are the people of Standing Rock.

Hehaka and her family came to camp with an intention to provide help wherever they were needed. They spent the first months preparing for the harsh winter, praying and supporting others. They had the benefit of an established leadership and the structure and the stability that this provided. After the 4th of December things changed radically.

⁷⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pe4aqRu5B_8

there was no leadership. There were people who wanted to do leadership things and I did my best to support those people. You know, I went to all the meetings and (...) it was a time of great conflict. (...) A lot of confusion (...) a lot of anger and a lot of emotions and a lot of people hurting each other (...) verbally and spiritually and mentally and emotionally and physically. (...) Watching it happen was very concerning and very hard.

She talks about the way the camp changed, how people went from being unified with a “common enemy” (DAPL), to divided and insecure.

There was a lot of divide and conquer-techniques in camp and from outside camp. And what went from a beautiful unified camp to, you know, we always had the same common enemy, we always had DAPL to watch out for. Now we know we had Tiger Swan⁷⁵ to watch out for, we had Morton County. We had the federal government to watch out for, we always had a common enemy, and then after December 4th there was this division and now we had enemies on this side too. Of our own people. And that was most hurtful, to have enemies of our own people⁷⁶.

(...) (A)ll these people that believed in this and the purpose that we were there they didn't have it in them, in their hearts, like myself, to stop. All of a sudden all the leadership was gone all the people who were giving direction (...). All of that was gone. And so... A lot of confusion.. (...) And, you know, everyone's spirit was really low; everybody was having a hard time mentally and spiritually. And so I committed to just doing what I could do to help the people.

⁷⁵ Accessed 15. October 2019 <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/30/tigerswan-infiltrator-dakota-access-pipeline-standing-rock/?fbclid=IwAR0xrrOfRK-UaFCy1A246b-aC4J2NnVFGJaapNxBA5-ejecRyUxFCOrtyo>

⁷⁶ Hehaka was making it clear several times during the interview that many of the people of Standing Rock were disagreeing with Dave Archambault: *Not all of Standing Rock felt the way that the government office did. You know there were a lot of Standing Rock tribal members from the Hunkpapa Oyate in camp with us. (...) (T)hey would come there, and they would say: “We don't feel that way, you know. We don't want you to leave. We still believe in what you're doing here” and (...) they would bring food or they would just show up and pray with us, and so, or they would stand with us, you know.*

The camp was not shy of people who called people to meetings trying to establish new platforms for communication and leadership, but somehow it seemed to always fall through.

The people needed reliability. We all needed stability. So I just decided if I tell people I'm gonna do something I'm gonna do it. So I started to make plans and have ideas and talk with other people. And ideas were born out of those conversations and then they were like, "Ok, so we're gonna do this." And we would do it, and it just became a pattern of like (...) being among the voices that were like "this is what we should do" and following through with it and doing it. And it grew and it grew. We were still a camp of leaders; we were still all of us being leaders. But I don't know, I guess the people felt that I carried myself well enough that when the time came to have one person to speak and to interact with the outside, they chose me to speak. And so it was very like traditional, you know.

Listening to the recording of the interview I noticed how hesitant Hehaka were when talking about her role as a leader. Her voice is hesitant. There are a lot of pauses, and she seems to be weighing her words.

I do carry it in a humble way, and when outside people have asked me about my leadership-role, I hesitate to talk about it, because that belongs to the people. And in our tradition, you know we don't brag about things, you know, we don't boast because we are taught to be humble. And we leave it for our relatives to speak of those things and to say: "yes she did this and she did that." (...) People have asked me about my leadership role but I really, I couldn't... I attribute it to the people, because they chose me, they honored me, they chose me to do those things.

In the final weeks, before the eviction on February 22nd, Hehaka became one of the most familiar faces, representing the water protectors. Her juggling of her position as a host and a leader and also as a rebel against other leaders was challenging. "It was really hard," she says, partly because of allies on the ground:

we were the ones that were left, it was up to us to be a good host. (...) To live that protocol that is so important for us as allies from nation to nation because there is a certain way we were supposed to interact and carry ourselves and hold ourselves and

contribute and stand next to each other. (...) So it was really taking that position of saying: “Yes,” you know, ”As a Lakota-woman I’m asking you to stand here.” And many people did. And I will always appreciate that, you know. The Sámi people came and they stood with us, and the Hawai’ians came and they stood with us, or the Kanaka Mali from Hawai’i came and they stood with us and (...) many other nations. There were Standing Rock women that were still standing in the frontlines until the very end, and so... That’s why, you know, I’m very careful when I do speak about it. That it’s the Standing Rock Government that I speak of when I talk about the things that were hurtful. Because the people, the Oyate of Hunkpapa were still standing with us. And I think it was especially hurtful to them, that their government operated the way they did after December fourth because they made it a very, they made a very dangerous situation extremely dangerous for all of us. Because now we had to really be careful anytime we left camp. (...) We were told we were not wanted and it had already been dangerous to go to Bismarck and to Mandan and to get supplies and stuff. (...) We were like surrounded by people who did not want us to be there.

5.4 Women decolonizing leadership

Many of the videos from Standing Rock show men building shelters, chopping wood, taking parts in actions on the frontlines, and the veterans (often men) in military gear coming to help out and take a stand. But there are also several articles about women and their roles there. They were often on the frontlines, but they were also cooking, working in the medicine tent, midwifery tent and herbal tent. They were taking shifts at the public bathrooms, and providing social support through meetings. Many of them who were leading ceremonies and strategic meetings, and a group took turns patrolling, looking after and protecting the women in the camps. According to Hehaka there was a feeling of imbalance when it came to the number of men in the camp during the last period. It was hurtful, she says, to observe that so many Lakota men chose not to stand with the women.

The community activists are often the indigenous women (Kuokkanen 2019: 157). Across the world we keep seeing aboriginal women; organizing on the local community level, with a focus on particular issues often connected to the protection of land or communities. While not often claiming to be feminists, the initiatives of these groups are nevertheless consistent with certain feminist objectives (Green 2007:154). The resistance towards feminism by many indigenous women might be not just that indigenous women stigmatized

as feminists have been ostracized from politics and in social life, but their indigenous authenticity is also questioned (Green 2007:24, Kuokkanen 2019:220). Indigenous women often recognize how colonialism is a fundamentally gendered process, closely tied to sexism but also to racism (Kuokkanen 2019, Green 2007).

The sámi researcher Rauna Kuokkanen in a comparative study of self-determination, governance and gender in Sápmi (the Scandinavian Peninsula), Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), and Kanata or Turtle Island (Canada), found that women are often excluded from discussions of “hard issues”, like land-rights, resources and governance during fights for indigenous self-determination. “Soft issues”, like the wellbeing and welfare of people and communities, is often viewed as a field for the women, but are commonly considered less important by the most prominent male politicians who still to a large extent control the debates about indigenous rights and self-determination (Kuokkanen 2019).

Kuokkanen argues that the soft issues should be considered equally important in the issue of self-determination. Further she observes that the female water protectors at Standing Rock and the women who started the Idle no More-movement⁷⁷ proved through their actions that the hard and the soft issues cannot be separated, nor attributed to any gender (2019: 17, 117).

As a figure of leadership Hehaka challenges the institutionalized power structures and dynamics in her own community, both by being a woman and by going against the established ways of fighting for self-determination. In my interview with her she reflected on how Native American communities are affected by the Settler-American ways of governance and how the Lakota bands are expected to participate in the same system of politics. Hehaka finds that her community needs to change when it comes to leadership:

Participating in the American Government system that was put on us is what we need to change. We need to change how our leadership looks to more of what is natural for us. Because, you know, traditionally we don't just have a voting session, you know. (...) How our leadership usually works is that the leaders are chosen by the people

⁷⁷ Idle No More grew from a grassroots action in Canada, in 2012 to oppose Bill C-45 (Kuokkanen 2019:17), Jobs and Growth Act (Omnibus Bill) which has lowered the protective threshold of reserve land “surrenders” and dropped protected waterways from 2.8 million to less than 100 in Canada, extinguishing Canada’s duty to consult First Nations when developments will affect First Nation communities (accessed: 15th October 2019 http://www.idlenomore.ca/idle_no_more_sees_bigger_issues_than_c_45)

based on what they have done for the people and how they have carried themselves. How they have led the people. So it's not a: "I'm gonna promise you this and then hope it can come through", it's: "I know that person has done all of these things and so, let's choose them for our leader." (...) We chose them because they carried the values that we were taught upon creation. To be humble and to be compassionate, and to be honest and to, you know, have integrity and courage, and so we need to empower ourselves and take back that way of having leadership.

At Standing Rock Hehaka must have felt more able than ever to observe the effects of institutionalized political power up close. What happened on the 4th of December, when Archambault told people to leave the camp, was not explained to the ones most affected by the decision:

We could guess all day and create (...) fictional stories about what could be and what maybe was, but in the end nobody really knew for a fact what happened. (...) I have respect for Dave. I'm very close with his family. (...) I just saw it more in the way of not him specifically, but as the IRA (Indian Reorganization Act) Government and my lack of faith and belief in them. And it's nothing new. He's a politician; I know that, they have to do things for whatever reasons. I have never really cared to pursue the knowledge of politics or how all that works, any political area, like American government or state government or tribal government, because they've never directly impacted my life in a positive way. But I'm finding now on my path that I need to gain some knowledge on how to interact with the politics of life because there are a lot of decisions that need to be made in the political world that will affect my people. So I'm hesitantly, almost begrudgingly like: "Fine, then I'll learn to navigate this."

When Hehaka says that no government has ever made a good impact on her life I think it says a great deal. She feels no motivation to engage with politics (in the institutionalized sense) but has found lately that it is a world that she will have to step into at some point. Even though she with time accepted the role of a leader, she does not see this as belonging to the realm of politics. A big part of the problem is that there is a felt barrier for women like Hehaka, between knowing how to pray for the people and the land, take care of people, speak with

integrity and lead a movement, and the “political world” of offices and meetings, lobbying and debating.

Kuokkanen’s book she describes a similar attitude among the women she talked with (2019:174). In addition to this alienation from political power, women are often discouraged when moving into the established institutions of indigenous politics where “hard issues” of self-determination are prioritized. Feeling alienated from politics like Hehaka does might be the effect of these processes. Men are often the one’s to get recognition from the post settler states as representatives for their communities. Therefore they often end up heading the national organizations put in place by these same governments (Sissons 2005: 68). If indigenous women get to work in political positions they are often ignored or belittled, and many end up losing confidence in their abilities (Kuokkanen 2019).

Ignoring and subjugating women often goes hand in hand with the neglect of the needs of the community, leading to a greater distance between of the political world and what really goes on in the lives of kids, young people, elders, two spirits, gender non-binary, queer people and women. Many seem to get the feeling that politicians are secretive. They are not open, they don’t engage with the people. And even worse: that they don’t care, or evade responsibility. In the words of Kuokkanen, “Rather than relegating all gender references to the sphere of “women’s issues,” the political and academic discourses of Indigenous governance needs to engage in a systematic investigation of not only the logic of masculinity but more importantly, heteronormativity about Indigenous self-government as it is currently constructed.” (2019:115)

Hehaka is not alone in noticing how gender inequality shapes the politics of indigenous communities. “Since breaking the ranks of the early self-determination movement, Kuokkanen writes, ”an increasing number of Indigenous women have been critical of male politics and masculine political structures. ” She adds that there has more recently been a call for changes, for ”alternative politics that would mark a radical departure from organizational hierarchies, boardroom meetings, backroom lobbying, and “dirty deals” (2019:116). Most US Indian tribal administrations are male dominated and the situation is the same in Indigenous political organs in other regions, meaning, as Jeffrey Sissons points out, that not only does women have to struggle against the state; they have to struggle to be heard and taken seriously by the indigenous men who has the power to influence (2005:69). Linda

Tuihwei Smith writes that that the idea of indigenous leadership as in a state of crisis is often an “effect of governments and government agencies,” which:

have a long tradition of dividing the leadership of minority communities by selecting to hear only those leaders that are seen as palatable to the dominant group in society. Community activists are often viewed by the media, by politicians and officials as troublemakers intent on being destructive (2007:347).

When Archemboult told people to leave camp and Hehaka chose to stay the division between the leadership and the activists became apparent. Hehaka and the others choosing to stay took a choice that put them in the role of “the troublemakers”, also in the eyes of many of their own people.

Hehaka felt that he should have been open about his feelings and the reason for his decision with the people. She also says that she does not understand why the men from her own community seemed to be more interested in the politics of it than staying at camp, helping out and protecting the women who were standing on the frontlines.

I felt that any Lakota-man had the responsibility of standing next to women that were refusing to leave and to protect them and to, you know, not let them stand alone. And so I was really disappointed in a lot of the, the Lakota and Dakota men of my people that... (...) I believe (...) they had other responsibilities, instead of the politics of it. (...) (T)he Indian people that stayed, we believed that we had every right, and we had a good position and strategically we were relevant, all though we were told often that we were irrelevant strategically.

5.5 Decolonizing gender roles

Emphasis on gender-roles and what that means in Lakota culture is something that Hehaka values: “We raise our children in that way, we teach them how to pray and how to believe and how to, you know, different protocols and different ceremonies and their gender roles and different expectations of boys and girls as they go through life, and you know, prepare to become men and women.” Many Indigenous women argue that the low status of women in indigenous societies today is a result of colonialism (Green 2007:22). And that a way of reversing this process is the restoration of what is seen as the traditional roles, rights and responsibilities. Yet one should not forget that for some indigenous societies, male-dominated or patriarchal structures have been part of their pre-colonial histories. Dealing with this is

another important project of Indigenous feminism and the constantly changing traditions (Green 2007:22, 23).

At the camp I participated in a few women's meetings. During these it became clear that many of the Indigenous women at Standing Rock didn't feel as safe in camp as I had felt. There had been many episodes of sexual assault and rape and women were eventually advised not to go anywhere alone. Sadly this is not a unique phenomenon when talking about large semi-permanent camps with many people packed together. It is well known that violence against indigenous women in personal relations is a global concern (Kuokkanen 2019:185-186). However, it was unusual for me to hear about women's safety issues and in the same meeting listening to women talking about learning and respecting "traditional ways" of being a woman. My background is that of a leftwing, Norwegian and typically urban Scandinavian upbringing, where your sex is not supposed to have any say on how you live your life, and where it would have been frowned upon to talk about "traditional gender roles" in a positive way. In this context the most immediate reference of "traditional gender roles" are the deeply patriarchal and repressive ideas from the Victorian era that still shape our view of gender in more or less subconscious ways (Green 2007:34). These Victorian gender roles also shaped the Indian Act causing "women to be removed from positions of authority" and undermining "Indigenous women's traditional roles and responsibilities" (Kuokkanen 2019:42).

Western feminism seems to be struggling to understand the value of retaining, and learning about gender-roles for indigenous communities. The fact is, however, that many believe indigenous cultures, before meetings with colonialism, had an understanding of gender-roles as separate from the biological sex and that with colonialism came heteronormativity and patriarchal attitudes towards gender, shaping the way people were expected to behave in society (Kuokkanen 2019:16-17). That the Lakota had space in their societies for two spirit people, non-gender conforming and queer individuals before the European settlers came seems to be clear (Kuokkanen 2019:51) and as noted above, two spirit people were an important part of the water protector camp.

Quite a few indigenous women contest the feminist claim that male domination is universal and challenge this by referring to historical Aboriginal cultural beliefs and practices which gave high status to women in their societies (James and Halsey 1997; Monture-Angus 1995; Turpel 1993 (In: Denis 2007:37), Bataille and Sands 1984, Smith 1999). "Some First Nations historically placed a high value on women's roles in society; Indeed, women in most

aboriginal cultures historically enjoyed far more respect, power and autonomy than did their European settler counterparts,” (2007:21) says Joyce Green.

When Hehaka told me about the gendered upbringing of kids in Lakota culture I debated whether this was something I should discuss here. I didn't get the chance to ask Hehaka to elaborate on her views of traditional gender-roles specifically. However, I will try to shed some light on this subject in a more general sense through the lens of Standing Rock. While Hehaka seem to lay weight on the importance of traditional Lakota gender-roles, she is also very aware of and critical towards the power structures of the American society and how they affect their communities.

In an article called "At Standing Rock, women lead fight in face of Mace, arrests and strip searches"⁷⁸ by *the Guardian*, focus on how the fight for the water became "a larger fight against a history of misogyny, racism and abuse by law enforcement." The article highlights the long history of police brutality against Native Americans. It also talks about the serious threats that pipelines pose for women through the arrival of male workers who settle in the communities in so called "man camps"⁷⁹. The man camps have been found by law enforcement officials "to lead to upticks in human trafficking, assault, rape and drug crimes." Advocacy organizations like First Nations Women's Alliance have also noted that man camps often become a danger to the local community as the camps become centres for drug use and that often disperse into the permanent residence society. Especially dangerous for women and young girls is the violence and sex trafficking⁸⁰.

The stories told are shocking to read. They describe very violent committed by law enforcement during the actions at Standing Rock. The women being interviewed have witnessed and experienced the actions of the police force. They tell stories of forced stripping, shootings of people close up with rubber bullets and other brutal behavior. According to the article, however, this is nothing new. "Indigenous women have long had a fraught relationship with American police – whether in the form of questionable fatal shootings or

⁷⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/dakota-access-pipeline-protest-standing-rock-women-police-abuse>

⁷⁹ According to Zintkala Mahpia Win Blackowl, one of my other interviewees from this project, there was a man camp less than an hour from Standing Rock connected to the Bakken Oil company.

⁸⁰ Accessed 15. October 2019 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/09/29/sexual-assault-pipeline/3jQscLWRcmD12cfefQTNsL/story.html>, <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2014/05/26/sexual-assault-in-the-bakken-shale-man-camps/>

law enforcement inaction in the face of human trafficking crisis and sexual assault epidemics.’⁸¹

Kuokkanen writes that

The encroachment on Indigenous lands is always connected to the assault on Indigenous bodies, especially those of women. Violence against women is common in circumstances where Indigenous people are engaged in protecting their territories from disruptive economic development projects. (...) Dehumanizing Indigenous women and degrading their bodies was a means to undermine and fragment indigenous societies, which in turn enable access to and dispossession of their territories (2019).

The fact that women felt unsafe at Standing Rock also bears witness to many of the problems plaguing indigenous communities in many parts of the world (violence, drug addiction and alcoholism, youth-suicide, imprisonment and family breakdown). And sadly many of these have their roots in destructive male behavior (Sissons 2005:69). In other words what Hehaka witnessed at Standing Rock is part of a pattern. Women seems to be targeted by law enforcement and other authorities hired by the state, while also often not feeling safe in their homes or communities. It is argued by many that the targeting of women is because they pose a threat to those with an interest in indigenous lands and resources.

“While previously “our cultures promoted womanhood as a sacred identity, an identity that existed within a complex system of relations of societies that were based on balance,” now through the process of a sexist and racist colonialism, Native women have lost their collective status as sacred,” (2008:122) writes Alannah Young and Denise Nadeu. This sacred identity structured by the many connections, to land, to plants, to history and to their community might have been the reason for this targeting.

Kuokkanen argues that “Regardless the region, Indigenous people commonly describe self-determination as a relation with the land” (40:2019). It has been established that the relationship to land is often considered to be central to the identity and with that the wellbeing and survival of indigenous people and communities. What is less talked about is how this

⁸¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/dakota-access-pipeline-protest-standing-rock-women-police-abuse>

relationship is gendered, says Kuokkanen (2019:41). “Many Indigenous women maintain that it is the role of women to look after the relations with the land, the water, and the medicines” (Kuokkanen 2019:41). Many women, both in the media interviews from Standing Rock, and in indigenous research in general, talk about a deep sense of responsibility for the land. Jeanette Armstrong from Okanagan, a part of British Columbia introduce herself and her sense of belonging to her family and land in this way:

My mother is a river Indian. She is from Kettle falls. (...) My great-grandmother's husband was salmon a chief and caretaker of the river in the north. My father's people are mountain people. (...) My father's people were hunters – the people in Okanagan who don't live in the river basin. (...) So that's who I am and where I take my identity from. I know the mountains, and by birth, the river is my responsibility: They are part of me. I cannot be separated from my place or my land. When I introduce myself to my own people in my own language, I describe these things because it tells them what my responsibilities are and what my goal is (Armstrong 2006:35).

By emphasizing the fact that women were central to the water protector camp, not just in starting and sustaining it, but in leadership, in maintaining the security of other women in camp and on the frontlines, the women there got to see themselves taking roles and responsibilities that connected them to the community and to their identity as native women in new ways. And although many women were injured and traumatized while in service for their water and their community at Standing Rock I argue that taking part in the water protector movement might also have been a healing process on many levels.

5.6 Reestablishing connections – prayer as survivance

Hehaka says that she went to Standing Rock

thinking that all that I have ever known in my life is to pray and I'm not trained in any special way for a lot of the things that I felt they probably needed, but I know how to pray. That's my way of life and from birth that's all I've ever known. And I knew that that would be enough. In our way of life, that's what's most important.

Prayer and spirituality has always been present in Hehaka's life. When in Standing Rock, she prayed everyday. Through prayer she managed to stay focused on the central issue that the

camp was set up for: saving the water. This focus may have been why Hehaka was chosen as a leader in the time of confusion after the fourth of December. They were maintaining the relationship to the land that had been so close for many months⁸², and that also represented a continuation of the relationship with the sacred sites and graves in the area. Nadeu and Young writes:

The physiological impact of all forms of violence – be it intimate, sexist, racist, or colonial violence or the intersection of all of these in the lives of Native women – is dissociation or disembodiment. Dissociation is “the state of being cut off from some aspect of one’s process.” (...) Dissociation involves being unable to sense or process connection with other living beings, both human and nonhuman.

O’Brien emphasizes how the Native Women from the South Puget Sound area she talked to valued healthy relationships with people, spirits, nature and the dead for the maintenance of a healthy self. The rupture of relationships led to the dissolution of the self (2008:138). In the text called *Restoring Sacred Connection with Native Women in the Inner City* Alanna Young and Denise Nadeau use the term “psychosocial trauma” to talk about the experiences of many urban Native Americans. This concept of trauma focuses, not on the individual, but on the social network which they are a part of (2008:121). They argue that for the women they worked with the relationship with the land and all living beings have been disrupted, causing a spiritual separation. For many, they say, this disconnection led to a feeling of “loss of awareness of connection to both those in their communities and to the land” (2008:121). They argue that by finding a sense of connection with relations and integrating an identity that opens for self-definition and self-naming, and in “re-experiencing the distinct quality of aliveness in one’s body – its sacred vitality – one can find one’s own truth and resist and challenge imposed structures of thinking and being that have become incorporated in the body” (2008:132). In essence, the establishment of a self-defined identity through connections with ones community, “the sacred”, and the land, it is easier to challenge racism, sexism and colonialism from a place of confidence and “collective power” (2008:132).

The act of protecting the water and the land at Standing Rock in itself was an ongoing establishment and strengthening of their own belonging. And with it came the affirmation of

⁸² <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/standing-rock-last-stand-at-oceti-sakowin-camp/>

the self and its invaluable role in the community and their rights. Taking back their connections to community and the land and re-creating and strengthening their identity as indigenous women. Kuokkanen summarizes Anishinaabe student and activist from Aamjiwnaang First Nation (Ontario), Sylvia Plain's experience, participating in what is called a Mother Earth Walk, like this:

Plain suggests that by learning first-hand about her own people's and other First Nations' teachings of and relationship with water indirectly leads to a restructuring of colonial relations of political power and governance. In gaining a personal understanding of the various traditional teachings of land and water as a relation, she was able to grasp in concrete ways how indigenous governance practices derive from the relationship Indigenous people have with their territories (2019:42).

Plain's experience shows the power of connection to the land and what this connection can do. This connection is what Hehaka nourished by praying.

Every day I would pray and I would think of all my relatives that drink from the water that comes from that river everyday. You know, the babies, and the children and the grandmas and the grandpas, they are gonna be the first to be poisoned when the pipeline breaks.

Hehaka explained that she would start each day by taking rounds in the camp, checking up on people, to see if she could help in any way. Both her actions and her prayer, I think, might have led to a deeper sense of understanding of her community and what they needed, and of the role of the land and the water. Like Zintkala, her actions in the camp connected her with her ancestors and the history of Standing Rock, while also driving her forward and motivating her to meet the challenges of her community in new ways, taking the lead and witnessing others act in ways that she might not have believed possible before Standing Rock.

Hehaka gained a new sense of confidence at Standing Rock, not just for herself but also for everyone else there:

I learned many things (at Standing Rock). (...) Above all I learned that I am powerful, and that no other human being alive is more or less powerful than me. (...) If we could inspire each other to just understand how powerful we each are, that we could do anything. That's what I believe is the most valuable lesson I have taken from Standing

Rock. Because all of us that came, everyone that supported from the outside, we had those moments where we jumped off, we jumped off the cliff and we were like... I'm just gonna believe, I don't care what odds are against me, and I'm just gonna do what I can do.

Hehaka and the others who stayed at Standing Rock believed, contrary to Dave Archambault and many others, that their presence had purpose in many ways;

What they forgot was that, we created an energy and a spirit there in that land (...) That was the biggest factor and any success of anything that was done was the energy and the power of the spirit that we created there. And those of us that were still there, we were tending to that still. (...) The power that was created there through all that prayer, you can't just walk away, you can't just sign a paper, (...) you can't just go and throw water on a sacred fire and say: "Ok, it's out, time to go home". You can't do that.

Strengthening the connections to land and community seems to have been an important effect of the camp, intentional or not. It seems like Hehaka and Zintkala, saw the immense potential at Standing Rock, Hehaka through prayer, and Zintkala through birth and conversation.

5.7 Doing things differently – walking alone

While grateful for the people who came to stand with them at Standing Rock the low number of Lakota people had an impact on Hehaka.

We still had Lakota People in there that were strong and that were warriors to the end, but the small number was hurtful because we're a huge nation and to have so few of us was really sad. And I believe it's very symbolic of our current modern situation. And everything that we are, we have such great potential in our blood, in our DNA is warrior, is fierce, is proud, is strong, but we have allowed the division to make us weak. And it continues, it continues to this very moment. I haven't spoken on record at all about... I've had just private conversations with other people that have been involved, of the division, and it is truly what is holding us back at this point in moving forward. (...) I have people in my inner circle that were leaders in camp, prior to December 4th, and that really disagreed with me staying.

Hehaka lives her life according to what has been “*shown and told*” her through spiritual practices. It is something that connects her to her community, but also something that has guided her on her own path. In this way prayer and spirituality is something very private and personal to her, and something that at times makes her make decisions that seem to be “different”. The experience of staying, while so many of her people told her to go, made her reflect on the different kinds of spiritual paths people have. Many of the people who left Standing Rock had been told to do so through ceremonies.

You get those answers in that ceremony, but they are specific to you, and so maybe... I don't think it's so out of line to think: “Maybe that message was for you?” And maybe like: “I honor you. I honor you, for listening to that answer and for going home. But I haven't been told to go home and so I'm gonna honor what I'm being told.”

She tells me that even speaking about these matters, who was leaving or staying at the camp, will stir up emotions.

There is so much trauma right now and people are really hurting and I feel like, they're not ready to have those conversations yet. There is a lot of anger and blame and destruction going on right now. Maybe it would help if I did have those conversations. Maybe I should. But whatever it is, you know, we're at a point now where it's like “Them against us.” And (...) I'm never trying to be them or us, I'm just me and I do things differently and (...) It causes me to walk alone very often (...) But I'm ok with that, because I'm following my prayer and I'm following my path. And it does not have to look like everybody else's. And they don't always agree with it or have to agree with it. I just have to know that I can sleep every night knowing I was true to what I'm being shown and told.

Hehaka came to Standing Rock like many of the others, wanting to stand with her community for the water and for the people, and she left having left a bigger impact on the camp than she could have imagined. Her story touches not only upon some very central themes and challenges for Indigenous women world wide, but also on a path leading towards change through decolonization, survivance and ways of re-connection.



Oceti Sacowin

6.0 Methodology

I chose to focus on Standing Rock as a place of learning and for strengthening Indigenous identities, because this is where I found that my interests laid. The learning experience was something I observed in camp, but also something I experienced myself. I decided to talk to people who came to Standing Rock about their stay there and to go into indigenous identities through their experiences. I was advised not to ask people directly about identity, because it is a concept that is complex, hard to define, and maybe not a word people use a lot.

The frame for our conversations were unstructured interviews where I had three questions that I asked them; “Why did you go to Standing Rock?” “What did you learn at Standing Rock?” and “What did you take from it?” I realized later that the two last questions are quite similar, but I got different answers from the two with all the participants. And in hindsight, the questions were mostly a way to structure the conversation around their stay there and the effect (if any) it had had on their lives. My assumption here was that they had learned something, and my belief was also that I would be able to talk about identity through their conversations. This was because I knew, to varying degrees, something about their experiences as water protectors before we set up the interviews.

6.1 Respect, responsibility, relevance and reciprocity

Indigenous research is primarily for indigenous peoples. The main principle of indigenous research is “that ethics and value beliefs that define relations and responsibilities of researchers to the researched should be addressed before ontological and epistemological questions and should drive the research process from formulation of research proposal to dissemination of findings” (Chilisa 2012:20).

To understand the way indigenous people often are connected to their communities in many ways is essential to the understanding of indigenous **ontologies**⁸³ (Chilisa 2012:20). This knowing became the basis for many of my analyses, both in the fact that I sought to acknowledge indigenous peoples connections to community, and because community was a frequent theme in all three interviews.

Valuing a relational **epistemology**⁸⁴ is an important part of the indigenous research paradigm. That means appreciating and accepting the fact that there are many ways of knowing, and that indigenous ways of knowing is based on relationality: the connection and relationships of all things and beings. Looking at a flower in a laboratory is different from studying it where it grows. Indigenous ways of knowing are based on connections. And this is also my focus in the thesis; integrating and connecting as many threads as possible, through the centering of my interviewees in a net of relations with community, spirituality, music, the land, ancestors, family, spirits and knowledge (Chilisa 2012:21).

A relational **axiology**⁸⁵ bases itself on the theory of relational accountability which means that it embraces the fact that all parts of the research process are related and that the researcher is responsible for and obligated to all relations. I approached the beginning stages of my thesis with an outline set up by the four R’s; respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (or rights and regulations (Chilisa 2012:22)), which all embody a relational axiology (Chilisa 2012:22).

It was important for me, right from the beginning to take the trust these women showed me seriously, especially for Hehaka and Zintkala, since I was an outsider for them. However, they knew that I was an indigenous person, who had been to Standing Rock, which I think

⁸³ “Ontology is the body of knowledge that deal with the essential characteristics of what it means to exist” (Chilisa 2012:20).

⁸⁴ “Epistemology inquires into the nature of knowledge and truth” (Chilisa 2012:21).

⁸⁵ “Axiology refers to the analysis of value to better understand their meanings, characteristics, their origins, their purpose, their acceptance as true knowledge, and their influence on people’s daily lives” (Chilisa 2012:21)

opened up for another level of trust from their side, and of understanding from my side. When first contacting them about the interview I made sure to introduce myself, stating clearly who I was, where I came from, and what I wanted to talk to them about. This, as Kovach says, is important to establish a reciprocal relationship between researcher and participants (2009:98) For Hehaka, the introduction and request for an interview happened via Facebook, and the interview took place at the Sámi festival Riddu Riđđu. Zintkala and I had our interview via video call.

Contacting and interviewing Marielle was different because I knew her better, and I had more knowledge about Sámi culture and history than I had about Native American cultures. In that situation I felt more like an insider, but there were many things that I had to learn about Sámi culture, and many things that one can't really read up on in books.

Overall I wanted to be as respectful as I could during my interviews. And I made sure to make a calm environment, where I assured that I was understood as being in the role of the listener, letting them speak for as long as they wanted on any subject that they wanted. I knew that their stories might touch upon emotional subjects and memories for them and I wanted them to feel like they could share without the fear of judgment or critical questioning (Kovach 2009:98). This of course was the least I could do in this situation.

I added on to their stories through other research, and with my reflections, in what I hoped would be a helpful way, so that I, and hopefully other people, might understand more about where these stories were coming from. Of course I will never know exactly where that was, but as a researcher it is my job to try and contextualize and convey different stories and perspectives in an understandable manner. Kovak writes

Along with a choice of method to hearing others' stories, there are implications for a co-creation process that interpretive narrative invites. In co-creating knowledge, story is not only a means for hearing another's narrative; it also invites reflexivity into research. Through reflexive story there is opportunity to express the researcher's inward knowing (2009:100).

It was also out of respect and as a part of my responsibility that I shared the interview with each interviewee, asking if they still felt ok about me writing about their experiences. Sometimes I got a response and sometimes not, but I at least I had confirmation from all of them that I could use their names and all the material from the interviews (which I checked with Hehaka and Zintkala in particular, because they touch upon personal and what might be

seen as controversial themes). I also wanted to make sure that I had gotten facts and personal information; age, occupation and so on right (Kovak 2009:99). I integrated them in the process, sharing the transcriptions and ultimately sharing each of their chapters with them so that they would be able to read and comment on it if they thought it needed any changes. At the time of writing I have not gotten the final comments from Marielle and Hehaka. Through talking with Zintkala about her chapter, it became clear that I have not informed myself properly on the topic of settler colonialism. She felt that I should have addressed the intentional and strategic ways of colonialism as grounded in a “logic of elimination”, not as “ignoring”, as I previously had written. I changed the wording of the section in question, but regrettably did not have the time to include more relevant research. (Zintkala recommended looking into Glen Coulthard, Yellowknives Dene and an associate professor in the First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program and the Departments of Political Science at the University of British Columbia).

6.2 I wrote about Standing Rock as a place of learning- so what?

There has been many Indigenous scholars who have worked to recreate types of research that center on indigenous peoples and their knowledge (Chelisa 2012:13). The two main goals of this decolonization process is: 1) To create a space for individuals to move out of the colonized ways of thinking, and to hold that space for the creations of strategies to move out of or change the structures that marginalize non-western voices. And 2) To restore and develop indigenous cultural practices, ways of thinking, beliefs and values that were subjugated but still are important and useful to the sustainment and recreation of ideas, techniques and ways of living that contribute to the strengthening and empowerment of Indigenous peoples, their communities and their cultures (Chelisa 2012:14).

The purpose and aim of a reasearch project should be to give back to the research participants. My aim was to talk about Standing Rock as the place for learning and strenghtening indigenous identities that I percieved it to be, and to see what other people felt about this. Did Zintkala, Hehaka and Marielle learn anything during their stay at Standing Rock? And did it have an effect on the way they percieve themselves as indigenous people?

These questions centers my thesis within a self-reflecting way of looking at indigeneity and the ways we move around our identities as Indigenous peoples. As mentioned in the introduction, Indigeneity within research is a contested phenomenon, because it stands in the

middle of what I hope we might call a paradigm shift; away from a western viewpoint as the norm and away from trusting the validity and the importance of objectivity, to opening up for the possibility that research is just as subjective as anything else. And seeing how other ways of thinking and being is just as valid. The inheritance of research is an important one and a valuable one, but not one that should be seen as the monolith of knowledge. Also the damage research has caused, devaluing women and their bodies, indigenous peoples, and their cultures and knowledges must be acknowledged.

To answer the questions outlined above, which serve as a central thread through my thesis, is a difficult task. Hopefully the chapters speak for themselves. I believe that Marielle's, Zintkala's and Hehaka's experiences at Standing Rock were important, both to them as individuals and for their communities. And I think their experiences opened up for changes in the way they see themselves and their indigenous identities.

The two central goals of decolonization have been in the back of my head throughout the process of reading for, and the writing of, this thesis. I wanted to make space for indigenous women's stories and their ways of decolonizing, and to explore other ways of thinking about belonging and identity. I created separate chapters, focusing in on each of the interviewees interests and stories, and I tried to write about it in a way that they might be able to use in their own work. I also wanted to move away from what I came to recognize as colonized ways of thinking about myself and my identity. Through all of this the thesis became a personal project, one that I felt I learned a lot from. I attest this to the interesting reflections and the knowledge that Zintkala, Hehaka and Marielle have generously shared with me.

During the process of writing and analyzing I was constantly asking myself why this was relevant or important to my interviewees and their communities. I was often unsure, and still am. What I know is that I tried to write in a way that strengthened their stories, more than analyzed them to pieces. My hope is that this text can serve as a kind of memorial, and testament for a part of their processes. I hope that these women's knowledge about decolonization can be an inspiration for anyone reading this, and who might need it.

7.0 Bibliography

Altamirano-Jiménez, Isabel 2010. "Neoliberalism, Racialized Gender and Indigeneity." In: *Indigenous Identity and Resistance. Researching the Diversity of Knowledge*, eds:

Hokowhitu, Brendan; Nathalie Kermoal; Chris Andersen; Michael Reilly; Anna Peterson; Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez and Poia Rewi. Otago University Press, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Anderson, Chris 2009. "Critical indigenous studies. From Difference to Density." In: *Cultural Studies Review* 15:2.

Angel, Synnøve 2015. *Vocal and Musical Manifestation of Sámi and Indigenous Movement Being Sámi, Becoming Indigenous*. Thesis Submitted for the Degree: Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies Faculty of Social Science, University of Tromsø.

Armstrong, Jeanette 2006. "Community: "Sharing One Skin."" In: *Paradigm Wars. Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization*, eds: Mander, Jerry and Victoria Tauli-Corpus. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California.

Bataille M. Gretchen and Sands M. Kathleen 1984. *American Indian Women. Telling their lives*. University of Nebraska Press.

Bell, Avril 2014. *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities Beyond Identities. Beyond domination*. Palgrave MacMillan, Department of Sociology, Auckland University, New Zealand.

Briones, Claudia 2007. "Experiences of Belonging and Mapuche Formation of Self." In: *Indigenous Experience Today*, eds: la Cadena, Marisol and Orin Starn Berg. Oxford, UK.

Coates, Ken 2004. *A global history of indigenous peoples. Struggle and Survival*. Palgrave MacMillan, UK.

Denis, St. Verna 2007. "Feminism is for everybody" In: *Making space for feminism*, ed: Joyce Green. Fernwood publishing, Nova Scotia and Manitoba.

Douglas, Mary 1966. *Purity and danger. An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. Routledge, London and New York.

Feigenbaum, Anna, Fabian Frenzel and Patrick McCurdy 2014. "Protest camps: an emerging field of social movement research." In: *The Sociological Review*, 62:3.

Gaski, Harald 2008. "Yoik- Sami Music in a Global World." In: *Indigenous Peoples. Self-determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity*. ed: Minde, Henry. Eburon Academic Publishers, Delft, The Netherlands.

Graff, Ola 2004. "Om kjæresten min vil jeg joike" undersøkelser over en utdødd joiketradisjon, Davvi Girji.

Graff, Ola 2014. "Sámi yoik." In: *Sámi Stories*, ed: Marit Anne Hauan. Tromsø University Museum, Orkana Forlag AS.

Gray, Leslie 2006. "The Whole Planet Is Holy Land." In: *Paradigm Wars. Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization*, eds: Mander, Jerry and Victoria Tauli-Corpus. University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, California.

Hale, Charles, 2006. "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology." In: *Cultural Anthropology* 21:1.

Hall D. Thomas, James V. Fenelon 2008. "Indigenous Movements and Globalization: What is Different? What is the Same?" In: *Globalizations*, 5:1, (pp.1-11).

Hovland, Arild 1996. *Moderne Urfolk. Samisk ungdom i bevegelse*. Cappelen Akademisk forlag, Gjøvik.

Kuokkanen, Rauna, 2019. *Restructuring Relations. Indigenous Self-Determination, Governance and Gender*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Mander, Jerry and Victoria Tauli-Corpus, 2006. *Paradigm Wars. Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization*, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, California

Mander, Jerry 2006. "Epilogue: Summary and Final Comments." In: *Paradigm Wars. Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization*, ed: Mander, Jerry and Victoria Tauli-Corpus. University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, California.

Mander, Jerry 2006. "Introduction: Globalization and the Assault on Indigenous Resources." In: *Paradigm Wars. Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization*, eds: Mander, Jerry and Victoria Tauli-Corpus. Sierra Club Books, San Fransisco.

Nadeau, Denise and Alannah Young 2008. "Restoring Sacred Connection with Native Women." In: *Religion and Healing in Native America: Pathways and Renewal*, ed: Suzanne J. Crawford O'Brien. Preager Publishers, Westport, US.

O'Brien, J. C. Suzanne 2008. "Introduction." In: *Religion and Healing in Native America: Pathways and Renewal*, ed: Suzanne J. Crawford O'Brien. Prager, Westport, Conneticut, London.

O'Brien, J. C. Suzanne 2008. "Healing Generations in the South Puget Sund." In: *Religion and Healing in Native America: Pathways and Renewal*, ed: Suzanne J. Crawford O'Brien. Preager Publishers, Westport, US.

O'Brien, J. C. Suzanne 2008. "Introduction." In: *Religion and Healing in Native America: Pathways and Renewal*, ed: Suzanne J. Crawford O'Brien. Preager Publishers, Westport, US.

Olsen, Bjørnar 2010. *In Defense of Things. Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects*. AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD.

Olsen, Kjell, 2010. *Identities, Ethnicities and Borderzones: Exemples from Finnmark, Northern Norway*. Orkana Akademisk, Stamsund.

Oskal, Nils 2014. "The character of the milkbowl as a separate world, and the world as a multitudinous totality of references." In: *Sámi Stories*, ed: Marit Anne Hauan. Tromsø University Museum, Orkana Forlag AS.

Petrillo, Larissa with Melda Trejo 2008, "Figuring It Out: Sundancing and Storytelling in the Lakota Tradition." In: *Religion and Healing in Native America: Pathways and Renewal*, ed: Suzanne J. Crawford O'Brien. Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, London.

Rewi, Poia 2011. "Culture: Compromise or Perish!" In: *Indigenous Identity and Resistance. Researching the diversity of knowledge*, eds: Hokowhitu, Brendan; Nathalie Kermoal, Chris Andresen, Michael Reilly, Anna Petersen, Isabel Altamirano-Jeménez and Poia Rewi. University of Otago, Dunedin.

Sissons, Jeffrey 2005. *First Peoples: Indigenous cultures and their futures*. Chicago University Press.

Smith, T. Linda 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books Ltd. London & New York, University of Otago Press, Dunedin.

Smith, T. Linda 2007 "Neoliberalism and "Endangered Authenticities." In: *Indigenous Experience Today*, eds: De la Cadena, Marisol and Orin Starn. Berg, Oxford, UK, New York, USA.

Smith, T. Linda 2007. "The Native and the Neoliberal Down Under." In: *Indigenous Experiences Today*, eds: De la Cadena and Orin Starn. Berg, Oxford.

Solverson, Elizabeth 2018. *Education for Reconciliation. A study of the draft curriculum for mainstream social studies in Alberta, Canada*. Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies. University of Tromsø.

Somby, I. Liv 2016. Mus lea ollu mitalit, muhto dus nu unnán áigi. *Life-stories told by elder Sámi women-A critical social analysis*. Master's Thesis in Indigenous Journalism. Sámi allaskuvla, Sámi University of Applied Sciences.

Somerville, Te Punga, Alice 2011. 'My Poetry is a Fire.' In: *Indigenous Identity and Resistance. Researching the diversity of knowledge*. eds: Hokowhitu, Brendan; Nathalie Kermoal, Chris Andresen, Michael Reilly, Anna Petersen, Isabel Altamirano-Jeménez and Poia Rewi. University of Otago, Dunedin.

Tauli-Corpus, Victoria 2006. "Our Right to Remain Separate and Distinct." In: *Paradigm Wars. Indigenous People's Resistance to Globalization*, eds: Mander, Jerry and Victoria Tauli-Corpus. Sierra Club Books, San Fransisco.

Zachrisson, Inger 1997. "8.1. Skrivna källor." In: *Möten i Gränsländ. Samer och germaner i Mellanskandinavien*, ed: Inger Zachrisson. Centraltryckeriet, Borås.

All photographs/videostills by Andreas Daugstad Leonardsen

