

## Standing Rock Religion(s). Ceremonies, Social Media, and Music Videos

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### Abstract

This article addresses emergent religious formations at protest scenes in the broader context of indigenous organization and identity-building. Our central example is the Standing Rock protest in North Dakota, 2016–2017, a local encampment-based event that quickly expanded into an international indigenous peoples’ movement. We argue that religion was a key register in the camps, during direct actions, and in solidarity actions around the world, primarily expressed through a limited selection of key terms: water is sacred, water is life, Mother Earth, and ceremony. We argue, moreover, that these terms, and “ceremony” in particular, were a crucial medium of inter-group and up-scaled cultural translations, allowing local identities to come forth as a unified front. Invoking *Standing Rock religion(s)* as an instance of the broader category *indigenous religion(s)*, we suggest that these identity formations belong to a globalizing indigenous religious formation, anchored in, yet distinct from, discrete indigenous religions, and today performed and mediated in diverse arenas, crisscrossing and connecting indigenous worlds. We are concerned with the translations and comparisons at play, and with the sentiments and moodiness of religion in this particular case, fueled by the cause (a planned pipeline on ancestral lands), the brutality of police encounters, and the sharing of ceremonies, food, and fires at the camps.

### Key words

Standing Rock – protests – indigeneity – indigenous religion – ceremony – social media – music videos

Standing Rock is a dream. The epicenter for our morality and dignity. A place where dark and light communicate and they work it out. Standing Rock is a vision. The wildest manifestation of our ancestors. The heart of humanity and the blood of the Earth..... This video is a sacred offering to those that are hurting. Because we must remember that love is the root of all good. Because by giving we open up to receiving. Healing. We offer this timepiece on a day that ushers in a new era for all protectors and people alike. An era that will need music to act as the thread between front lines and front doors.

Stay in the prayer.  
We stand with you.  
For all our relations.  
Nahko Bear.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Posted on Facebook 20 January 2017, in connection with the video debut of “Love Letters to God,” a tribute to the

## Standing Rock and Indigenous Religion(s)

This article represents our attempt to work through a puzzle. Based on our experiences at Standing Rock and informed by our respective fieldwork in Sápmi (Kraft) and Hawai'i (Johnson), it can be framed in terms of the following deceptively basic questions: In the context of movements like Standing Rock, how is it that Lakota, Sami, and Hawaiian people, for example, consider one another to be “the same” or at least related in some fundamental regards? How is this “sameness” constructed and affirmed in ritual moments and through religious idioms? Standing Rock came with particularly fertile grounds for the exploration of such questions through its twin foci on environmental protection and sovereign determination, and through its linking of globalizing net-works to a specific local ground.<sup>2</sup>

The Standing Rock protests (aka #NoDAPL)<sup>3</sup> were anchored at the northern edge of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe reservation in North Dakota, United States, between April of 2016 and late February 2017, and emerged as an encampment protest against a planned pipeline. The encampment inspired other protest actions, particularly at banks and government offices around the USA and in Europe. Referred to by activists as “the Black Snake,” the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) would (and now does) transport oil just north of the tribe’s boundary and under the Missouri River immediately upstream of the reservation. As many as 10,000 people joined the camps at their highpoint, with many more tracking the protest online. While it is perhaps premature to make claims about Standing Rock’s historical relevance, it is already clear that #NoDAPL is the largest North American indigenous protest of recent decades, and that it is unprecedented in its international participation and media reach. Furthermore, Standing Rock has already attained paradigmatic status, serving as a stated model for other protest movements taking place in its wake.<sup>4</sup>

The trigger for the protest was failed consultation practices with regard to the pipeline permit. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council claimed that it was not adequately consulted during the permitting process, and that consequently, state and federal approval of the project was invalid. Threats to drinking water were, from the start, a major concern and argument, along with damage

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Standing Rock movement. @nahkoandmedicineforthepeople. [https://www.facebook.com/pg/nahkoandmedicineforthepeople/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/nahkoandmedicineforthepeople/posts/?ref=page_internal) (accessed 6 May 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Following Audra Simpson (2014), movements like Standing Rock are often framed in terms of *refusal* by participants, which we take to be an important contextual clue to the salience of maximal religious discourses in such settings. On recent theorizations of refusal, see also McGranahan 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Short for No Dakota Access Pipeline. DAPL is a project of Energy Transfer Partners.

<sup>4</sup> For literature on Standing Rock generally, see #StandingRockSyllabus (<https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/standingrocksyllabus/>) and <http://www.nodaplarchive.com>.

to sacred places and burial sites. The tribe filed a federal suit to stop the project, sought administrative relief from agencies at the state and federal levels, and on 4 December 2016 secured a temporary victory when the Army Corps of Engineers refused to validate a permit for drilling under the Missouri River, which is under its jurisdiction. Donald Trump's administration reversed this decision in early 2017. Several legal issues remain unresolved, but oil is currently (April 2018) flowing through the pipeline.<sup>5</sup>

As the pipeline protest became publicly visible, protestors expanded the range of their concerns, giving voice to a host of grievances. Claims about indigenous sovereignty were foregrounded, with regard to land rights and treaty histories, but also in a more general and philosophical sense of self-determination vis-à-vis the forces and representatives of settler colonialism, which included nature — in this case water, in particular — among its victims. Inter-connections, rights, and moral standing were continually advanced in the camps, most emphatically in ritual settings at the grounded end of the spectrum, but also through social media going outward from the camps, and including short films and music videos at the electronically mediated end of the spectrum.

Among the striking features of camp life, direct actions, and media circuits as we experienced them, was the prevalent and consistent usage of religious registers, in the form of local terms and traditions as well as global idioms. *Standing Rock religion(s)* is intended as a categorical frame through which to approach and make sense of such usage, and the results thereof. The (s) signals the presence of distinct local traditions, including the Lakota protocols and traditions that governed much of religious life in the camps, and various pan-Native American practices such as sweat lodge purifications and round dances. The singular form (Standing Rock religion) signals the myriad pan-indigenous phenomena instantiated during the protest, especially in contexts of formalized welcoming ceremonies and through direct actions, framed (explicitly and through established markers) as “ceremony.” Our concern is with these locally distinct articulations, in their dynamic relationship to each of the others, and to this broader — unsettled and plastic, yet fairly standardized — formation. Globalizing indigeneity is often regarded as an abstract placeholder, signaling the more-or-less shared political status of the world's highly diverse indigenous peoples. We argue that Standing Rock articulated and contributed to a more textured formation. *Standing Rock religion(s)* is thus an analytic device that names these dynamic frames of religiously marked identity construction and is a specific example of a more general set of relations that we and others have previously theorized in terms of the category *indigenous religion(s)* (Johnson and Kraft 2017a).

This article unfolds as follows. Before turning to explicate indigenous religion(s) and religious happenings at Standing Rock, we further unpack what we have sketched above, thereby to establish our theoretical grounds and points of departure. Next, we discuss ceremonies and social media in the camps and beyond, followed by a focus on three exemplary music videos that emerged from the Standing Rock experience, and that capture and perform — each in its own way — the work of mediation, translation, sentimental evocation, and identity construction. In closing, we revisit questions about ceremony, social borders, and authority, along with a

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<sup>5</sup> On legal issues at Standing Rock, see Shogren 2016.

reflection on the ritual closure of the camps.

## 2 Theoretical Grounds

Indigenous religion(s) flags the empirical reality of local traditions *and* emergent forms of a globalizing discourse and is intended to make analytical sense of relationships between the two, including gaps and tensions, comparisons and translations, as indigenous actors recognize themselves as and through one another. At Standing Rock and elsewhere, including at Mauna Kea, Hawai'i, the formal qualities of religion seem crucial to the fostering of these dynamics, particularly in ritual contexts that perform solidarity-making, and in mediated genres that announce religious sentiments outside of normative religious frames (Johnson and Kraft 2017b).

One of our motivations for drawing attention to the category indigenous religion(s) is to illuminate the texture and work of globalizing indigeneity, which too often is taken to be a merely political category bereft of material, social, and symbolic content. For example, Francesca Merlan writes of local-global forms and definitions of indigeneity, "Many (indigenous people) still think of themselves first and foremost in terms of attachment to a locality, a set of people, a way of life, and other locally relevant social identities. Globalized indigeneity can be, in this sense, socially shallow, or have varying presence in many places to which it notionally applies" (2009: 306). We do not dispute Merlan's point about localities and variabilities. However, we insist that Standing Rock and related movements offer a poignant counter-example to her suggestion that global indigeneity can be "socially shallow," at least with regard to strong and deep social connections and novel cultural content that are at once driving and resulting from a new generation of indigenous environmental protection movements (see, e.g., Jenkins 2016).

As we began to think through Standing Rock religion(s), what we refer to as scalar translations emerged as key. By scalar translations we mean ways in which locally specific objects and actions gain relevance outside of their site-specific locations and contexts, as belonging to a broader indigenous *we* and *our*, and — vice versa — how globalizing idioms are anchored in the local *we*; for example, with the key slogan "water is life/water is sacred," anchored in a particular river and the threat of a particular pipeline, and simultaneously, to water in general and life as such. To grasp what we mean, think in terms of two metaphors and the dynamics they convey: (1) Russian dolls, with specific reference to their nested quality; (2) optical scopes, with their ability to shift scales and focus accordingly. With regard to Standing Rock, two related yet distinct scalar translations have drawn our attention, both of which will be fleshed out in more detail as we proceed. First are instances entailing the refiguring of micro-local ritual actions and speech in ways that make them open to and relevant for indigenous peoples writ large, whether in specific ritual instances or metonymically, with elements of locative ritual forms gaining translocative reach, as we describe below. Second are scalar translations involving mediatization, whereby performances in real time are reproduced, in whole or in part, in specific details or as memes, and launched into cyberspace.

Working to understand the culturally generative aspect of global indigeneity, we have revisited J. Z. Smith's theorization of religion and social borders, which complements Bruce Lincoln's attention to sentiments of affinity and estrangement, but with a necessary recalibration. When

framed in terms of indigenous religion(s), the global now of indigeneity presents a constructive challenge to Smith's formulation of the "near-other" (2004). Smith draws attention to proximate boundary formations and the friction attendant to identity enunciation in contrastive encounters, arguing that such dynamics are at the very heart of religious generativity. Doing so, he emphasizes closeness: it is the near-other, not the distant-other, that plays the role of antagonist and catalyst. For contemporary indigeneity, we suggest that a different scale and order of othering is at play. The "other" here is not defined only by geographical boundaries and proximities, but also by perceived epistemological, moral, and lifeway similarities, which conduce to political allegiances. Incipient globalizing indigeneities recast the boundary scale, framing colonial nation-states *tout court* and the extractive industries they foster as a threat to all indigenous peoples and, ultimately, to the fate of the Earth itself. This maximally scaled-up framework of othering correlates with an equally scaled-up indigenous identity formation: a "distant-self." In segmentary fashion, as threats and alliances are up-scaled, so too are the core markers of identity — ethnonyms, forms of myth-making, and ritual actions, for example. In this scaled-up frame, "religion" takes on a central role for formal reasons, not least its plasticity, its capacity to trigger, cultivate, and communicate pathos, and its claims to ultimacy.<sup>6</sup> Distant indigenous others may thus come to see each other as related "selves" through performative modes of religious expression vis-à-vis entities fashioned as maximal others.<sup>7</sup>

Ceremonies, social media, and music videos are disparate performative domains, but at Standing Rock they all shared in the mediation of religion(s). We argue that they did so in comparable ways, at least with reference to several key dynamics. Specifically, these domains — each in its own way and in their linkages — gave religious articulation to sentiments of belonging and enabled translations between realms of social identification (ranging from sub-groups of local communities to indigeneity as a global class). Our analytical framework in this regard is inspired by Lincoln's (2014) discussion of sentiment and social borders, and in particular his analysis of sentiments of affiliation and the ways these can be catalyzed at different levels of social organization through appeals to religious claims and authority.<sup>8</sup> We extend Lincoln's insights in the context of Standing Rock in an attempt to gain analytical purchase on an issue as manifestly evident as it is analytically elusive: the discursive and performative transit between local and global forms of indigenous becoming and belonging, a theme Chadwick Allen and other scholars of indigeneity have recently addressed in a range of compelling ways.<sup>9</sup>

Another way we extend Lincoln's framework is by attending to the grit of sentiments of

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<sup>6</sup> On segmentary formations, see Evans-Pritchard 1969 [1940], and Lincoln 2014, the latter with reference to Lakota Sun Dances, among other examples.

<sup>7</sup> On maximalism as intended here, see Lincoln 2003.

<sup>8</sup> For a critical discussion of the lasting relevance of Lincoln's theorization of social borders and religion, see Urban and Johnson (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> On contemporary indigeneity, see, e.g., Allen 2012, Cadena and Starn 2007, Clifford 2013, Niezen 2009, and Tsing 2007. With particular attention to performance, see Graham and Penny 2014 and Wilmer 2009.

affiliation and estrangement at the level of moods. Outrage, passion, and frustration punctuated the Standing Rock experience, as did compassion, love, and generosity. From the camps to the front lines and to the movement's myriad cyber-traces, ritual life and religious idioms channeled and amplified such moods, distilling from them new modes of indigenous religious expression and connection. At Standing Rock, the world gained a view to a moody, charismatic, and highly networked religion in the making. Camp-based ceremonies were the initial sites of this formation; music videos and other mediated genres have been some of its most visible expressions.

### 3 Circuits of Comparison: The Translative Power of Ceremonies and Social Media

Among the striking features of the Standing Rock movement was the amount of communication and feedback between intersecting domains; how the local served as the ground for launching, authorizing, and texturing mediated performances that then took on social lives of their own, occasionally returning to local settings with surprising twists.<sup>10</sup> In order to situate our analysis, we juxtapose the *here* and *there* of camp life as we experienced it. The most Adding to the here and there, as we experienced it, was an overall media awareness and presence. Juxtaposed with the conspicuous absence of mainstream news-media coverage on the ground was an everywhere-sense of filming and of being filmed — of anything being possible objects for mediatization, for better and for worse, including surveillance (by DAPL, the police, and infiltrators), the constant use of smartphones, and rules for when and where not to film. For the latter, the basic logic, as we understood it in September, hinged upon a distinction between private/non-private and sacred/non-sacred, and sacred/no-photos as homologous with privacy/security/ hiddenness in some contexts, as with the partially closed-off Red Warrior-section, which constituted a camp within the camp, and one in which filming was at all times forbidden. By November, camp life and direct actions *were framed* as sacred, along with a lifting of the ban on filming of some ceremony, on a decision of “the elders.” Even here there was a palpable ambiguity in play, concerning “which elders?” and “what ceremonies?” There was then ceremony in the everyday sense of the term, such as morning prayers and water ceremonies on the banks of the Cannonball River, and in a wider sense, as a way of being, behaving, and a moral code, which Nahko Bear — and this is a point we will return to — calls “wearing ceremony.”<sup>11</sup>

These three basic levels of communication came with different forms of ritual activities. Around the camp area, people set up their own fires for cooking, light, and staying warm during evenings, and for enactments of distinct religious traditions. At the main circle, “welcome ceremonies”

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<sup>10</sup> A myriad of media emerged from Standing Rock at a breathtaking pace. This included radio and news reports, coverage in airline and fashion journals, TV segments (e.g., Viceland's *Rise* series, including “Sacred Water: Standing Rock, Part 1”), and documentaries (e.g., *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*). On indigenous media and resistance movements, see Rader 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Nahko Bear is frontman of the musical collective “Medicine for the people”. Of Apache, Puerto Rican, and Filipino descent, he was adopted by and grew up with a white, conservative Christian family. Interviews with him describe a traumatic family history, and music as a way of exploring his past, as well as a path of activism. See, for instance, Nahko Bear on <https://fluence.io/548882940227dd556d679744>.

were a regular feature, structured by a fixed protocol, a brief and enthusiastic introduction by a Master of Ceremonies, performances of indigeneity by visitors (e.g., through displays of language skills, clothes, singing, and dancing), gifts from communities back home to the host community (typically traditional art or textiles), and greetings (“we people X see you,” “stand with you,” “our challenges are the same”). Focusing explicitly on the community that had made the camps their home, and framed as “private” (or at least jointly produced and therefore implying shared mediation rights), such events were occasionally filmed and shared with broader communities.

For instance, during our stay, pictures from the welcome ceremony for three Sami women later featured in news media in Sápmi, on their Facebook pages, and in a TV series covering one of these women, *Verden rundt med Sofia Jannok* (Around the world with Sofia Jannok), shown on Swedish and Norwegian television in 2016. Some ten months later, we came across a filmed version of the entire event, posted to the 1,473 members of the Facebook group “North American Sami Searvi,” which precipitated an emotional interchange between some of the members.<sup>12</sup> An example of shifting scales and of the intricate circuits of contemporary indigeneity, we have in this case a cyberspace diaspora, witnessing performances anchored in their distant homelands, on stages closer to their diaspora setting, yet belonging to a different indigenous community.<sup>13</sup>

Belonging more exclusively to the up-scaled level of cyber-communication, yet similarly tuned towards indigeneity and solidarity, was the YouTube phenomenon “We — people X — Stand with Standing Rock,” performed, filmed, and uploaded by numerous indigenous groups, and circulating between the digital tracks of the Standing Rock media-scape (and elsewhere).<sup>14</sup> Another entirely e-mediated phenomenon took place in October 2016, when approximately one million people checked into the camps on Facebook in a coordinated effort to mislead police, who were rumored to be tracking protestors’ actions via social media.<sup>15</sup> A month later, a synchronized global prayer event took place, through the collaboration of native organizations (including the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe), religious, and environmental organizations, and the UN.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Posted in the Facebook group North American Sami Searvi on 7 August 2017. The Group has since then changed its name to US & Canada Saami. See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/206865919326820/search/?query=standing%20rock> (accessed 6 May 2018).

<sup>13</sup> On the role of social media and cyberspace for indigenous protest-movements, see Hanna *et al.* 2016 and Belton 2010. On indigenous media networks, see Alia 2010.

<sup>14</sup> See, inter alia, Hawaiian musician Liko Martin’s video, “We Stand with Standing Rock!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-1EcJWsbVw>; a Maori-made video, “Maori Stand with Standing Rock” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_g91RHsa-ZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_g91RHsa-ZU); and “We Stand with Standing Rock — Denmark, Jungshoved” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXL6U mLCi\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXL6U mLCi_Y) (all accessed 6 May 2018).

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/31/north-dakota-access-pipeline -protest-mass-facebook-check-in>.

<sup>16</sup> See [globalprayeraction.com](http://globalprayeraction.com) and <http://www.risewithstandingrock.com/>.

Overall, these types of low-risk actions allowed people — indigenous and others — to participate and feel connected, while at the same time adding visibility to the movement and the cause, on — and off-line. Such visibility came with the religious frames and registers that have been sent out from the camps and the actions (action being shorthand for direct-action protests at the pipe-line site). The “Stand With” format, along with camp and direct-action rituals, offered occasions for articulating indigeneity in a particular way, and one in which religion played a main part, along with vocabularies for expressing distinctiveness within the broader frames of pan-indigenous identity.

Direct actions took place at the margins of the camps and aimed for global audiences. Like most non-violent protests, the direct-action repertoire at Standing Rock was scripted in the sense of main tactics and performances (e.g., roadblocks and sit-ins by the construction site), while allowing for (and dependent on) improvisation and creativity. What was commonly referred to as “protocol” positioned protesters in the role of protectors, insisted on non-violent tactics and responses, and drew heavily on religious forms and registers: “this is ceremony, act accordingly,” “we are prayersome and peaceful,” “go in ceremony,” “act in ceremony,” “be in ceremony.” Repeated on banners, on action guidelines posted around the camps, in speeches by elders, and in social media stories, references to ceremony in this context, as at the camps, came in a narrow and a broad sense (see Figure 5).

Ritual behavior in the narrow sense took place regularly during actions, with chanting, dancing, offering gifts to the police, and burning of sage (a widely used means of ritual purification and solidarity construction among Native American groups), and signaled by clothes and material objects (e.g., feathers, drums, and rattles). Equally important was ritual (or ceremony) in the double sense of “being” and “behaving,” of “finding your spiritual warrior,” as one of the elders in the video “Black Snake” (discussed below) phrases it, and acting like one. Nahko Bear, the author of our introductory quotation and the main figure behind one of the three videos we analyze, speaks of “wearing ceremony” in this sense, as a way of being, becoming, and performing indigeneity. Implied in ceremonial slogans at the camps and during actions, such sensibilities were cultivated by the videos we explore. Wearing ceremony is understood as to take on a persona of perpetual sanctity. It frames attacks from outside — e.g., police brutality or development without consultation — as sacrilege, both to the individual and the movement for which they stand, and it frames the water protectors as heroes, as having passed the moral test referred to by Nahko Bear, making him feel proud of his people as never before, according to the lyrics.

It is likely that the ceremonial protocol supported the non-violent strategy of elders and protest organizers. It is also clear, judging from the videos and from mediation tactics more generally, that these were images they wanted to display. Direct actions were filmed more or less in full: through live streaming, allowing for real time (or later) viewing, in edited versions, and as still pictures. Mainstream news media were not among the key contributors to such coverage. Rather, digital mediation was mainly in the hands of the protectors themselves, many of whom carried smartphones, including professional activist photographers, equipped with advanced technologies and having access to independent media networks.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The NoDAPL archive lists a number of indigenous media sources, including Digital Smoke Signals, Honor the



Another key point for understanding actions and representations at Standing Rock involves physical presence on ancestral lands. We are “protectors, not protesters,” a Hawaiian friend corrected us on our first day at the camp. To become a part of the main slogans, the language of protection framed the pipe- line construction (and police responses to protectors) as attacks, invasions, and continued colonialism. They framed the embodied presence of protectors as assertions of sovereignty, and they performed such acts of sovereignty through enacting ancestral scripts. Whatever else they may involve, rituals reference, enact, and bring to life traditions, thus offering links between the *now* and *then*, and in this case with the added dimension of a *here*: these particular grounds, on which we are now standing, as our ancestors once did.

There is a universal ring to these logics, recognizable to other indigenous peoples with their distinct experiences of colonial suppression, and implied in statements by such others, near and distant, many of whom *did* make the fight against the Black Snake their own. In the words of Sofia Jannok during her welcome ceremony at Standing Rock: “we [the Sami] are one, we hear you, we see you, the fight you have is also the fight we have.”<sup>18</sup> Her official Facebook site has the music video “We are still here” (with the activist artist Anders Sunna and dedicated to Sami struggles) situated next to images of her at Standing Rock,<sup>19</sup> thus linking these struggles in digital space, and on the grounds they refer to.

We know little of lasting effects: whether images will be remembered, slogans will stick, bonds will remain strong and networks kept up, and whether new group identities will survive, like with the prayersome warriors, dressed in ceremony. But some of these things kept on happening, at least in some places, to some extent, also after Standing Rock. Standing Rock frontliners visited Sápmi in the summer of 2017, and met with Sami friends from the camps, at places like the annual Riddu Riddu festival (in July 2017), at a conference for social workers in Alta (in June), and for events in Oslo over the winter (2017), including the Nobel Peace Prize Forum Oslo 2017, “Across Dividing Lines,” which addressed indigenous rights within the context of social justice and environmental protection and organized a panel on Standing Rock and a current protest in Sápmi.

Standing Rock allies have also provided digital support for at least one ongoing conflict, a (still) small, encampment-based protection of the Tana River in Finnmark County, Norway, in the wake of new legislation over fishing rights.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, in the midst of ongoing conflicts over

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Earth, Indigenous Rising Media, Women’s Indigenous Media, and the (non-indigenous) Unicorn Riot. A visible example of indigenous media presence in the camps was the Indigenous Environmental Network, whose spokesperson, Dallas Goldtooth, had a regular presence on various social media platforms during the movement. See <http://www.ienearth.org>.

<sup>18</sup> YouTube: Sami Ceremony at Standing Rock, published by Mavis Matila, 6 August 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS0G5\\_pGjFE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS0G5_pGjFE), 3:40/47 (accessed 6 May 2018).

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/search/videos/?q=sofia%20jannok> (accessed 6 May 2018).

<sup>20</sup> See the movement’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ellosdeatnu/>.

telescope construction on Mauna Kea and Haleakalā, numerous Hawaiian *Kia'i* (protectors) visited the Standing Rock camps, some for nearly the duration, and a group of *Kia'i* were among the last to leave the original camp, Sacred Stone, helping LaDonna Brave Bull Allard and others conduct parting ceremonies and clean up the site. It was no coincidence that they were on the ground then, as Hawaiians had formed numerous bonds with Native American groups, historically and in more recent times, facilitated by cyber-connectivity (what Hawaiian activist and ritual expert Pua Case calls “Sacred Facebook”). In the summer of 2017, a group of Lakota and other Native Americans travelled to Mauna Kea with Arvol Looking Horse, a renowned Lakota spiritual leader, to celebrate World Peace and Prayer Day with the *Kia'i*.

Back-and-forth deep engagement of this sort has another telltale consequence that is helping us understand the circuitry of global indigeneity. Namely, in a number of cases that we are aware of it is clear that participating in each other’s causes has had a credentializing effect back home. For example, commenting on the arrest of Hawaiian activist Jojo Henderson for attempting to stop a construction vehicle in the latest iteration of the telescope struggles, Pua Case remarked, “He’s one of our *Kia'i* [Protectors] who went to Standing Rock.”<sup>21</sup> These e-connections do not remain idle but rather stand at the ready for catalyzation, for a call. This, of course, is not true for all protectors all of the time. People fall in and out of the movement, demands of everyday life intervene, and so forth. But contact with a number of protectors convinces us of their readiness to act. This, we are persuaded, has much to do with the experiential component of encampment-based movements. People share campfires, food, and struggles. They are characters in one another’s radical liminality,<sup>22</sup> a kind of experience that at once fastens and loosens identities and that — however harsh — beckons to be lived anew. In this way, online but also viscerally linked, a new group of highly mobile warriors is intimately connected and prepared for action. Among the frontliners, many have moved on to new sites of protective actions. Standing Rock, then, has established a model for a new wave of indigenous activism that is taking hold in a range of ways. Since the early winter of 2017 it has been referred to in the news media as a model and as a point of reference for protests in its wake. The mood is spreading. And it has a music video soundtrack.

#### **4 Love, Anger, Action: The Videos**

We turn here to analyze three music videos that are in their own ways paradigmatic, and even iconic, of Standing Rock as a movement and of the emotions it laid bare, especially with regard to expanded sentiments of affiliation between indigenous peoples, even when at a considerable distance. At this juncture, we wish to emphasize that we regard these videos and others like them

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<sup>21</sup> Personal communication (Johnson). For a news report on Henderson’s arrest and the protest in general, see: <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/36022915/officials-gear-up-for-potential-protests-ahead-of-telescope-construction-atop-haleakala>

<sup>22</sup> On liminality, a state of being betwixt and between social roles, and its relationship to a sense of communal solidarity that some ceremonial settings foster, see Turner 1974.

as central to the broader story of contemporary indigenous religion(s). They are not incidental or marginal to living indigenous tradition. A generation of activists who are in their 20s and 30s are integrally responsible for catalyzing a religiously oriented movement, and their ways of instantiating, expressing, and perpetuating tradition demand being taken seriously (Johnson 2017). This is at once an analytical and a political point about what counts as religion. A combination of narrow understandings of religion and repetitions of authenticity discourses, which often trap indigenous peoples as caricatures of themselves, are widespread in and outside of academia (see also Tafjord 2017). Limiting frames of this sort fail at numerous levels, not the least of which is failure to imagine the contours of nascent religious formations in their making. This is not to argue that the music videos we turn to now are through-and-through full of religious sentiment or were intended primarily to convey a religious message. We are making a more modest claim: voices like these point to the cutting edge of contemporary indigenous religious sentiments, moods, and actions, if only partially and provisionally so. They do the work of religious heavy lifting: of defining communities, cultivating sentiment, charting horizons, fathoming costs, and simple celebration. Moreover, these videos give us a glimpse of how expressive forms take hold in a context shared by the majority of indigenous peoples around the planet. That is, they express the intimate poetics of facing down forces capable of tremendous violence. We are drawn to the remainder. What is left when force is off the table?

**4.1 “Love Letters to God”** Nahko Bear and Medicine for the People’s “Love letters to God”<sup>23</sup> was written in Indonesia in 2015 and released on YouTube as a video tribute to Standing Rock on 20 January 2017, in the midst of harsh winter conditions at the camps, and in the ominous context of Trump’s inauguration. The video opens with a written quotation by the poet, author, activist, and leading advocate of Native American rights, John Trudell (1946–2015): “No matter what they ever do to us, we must always act out of the love of our people and the Earth. We must not react out of hatred against those who have no sense” (02/5:37). Next, we hear drum beats and clapping as the music starts. We see a short glimpse of the Oceti Sakowin camp at Standing Rock, followed by footage from confrontations by the Missouri River: armed police in combat gear using water cannons on unarmed protesters, some of them with their hands in the air, and one of them wounded. The camera moves briefly to a road barricade, an upside down American flag (a symbol of distress), then to Nahko, now situated between the long lines of indigenous flags that from the start have marked the camps as a global, indigenous site. Indicative of a recurrent theme, the lyrics start with a call to “Give, always give what you can.”<sup>24</sup>

The video plays on contrasts at various levels, first and foremost through the display of disturbing police brutality juxtaposed with Nahko’s low-key insistence on peaceful resistance. We see glimpses of hope, such as a child walking up to policemen and shaking their hands and a clip of a core protector dancing powwow-style with a police officer, but mainly violence and despair: protectors being maced, pushed, provoked, humiliated, wounded, and threatened; war-like scenes with tanks, and heavily armed police in combat gear. Protesters are recognizably indigenous

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-QGkYNc0Ls> (accessed 6 April 2018).

<sup>24</sup> For a transcription of the song’s lyrics, see <https://genius.com/Nahko-and-medicine-for-the-people-love-letters-to-god-lyrics> (assessed 6 April 2018).

through performative and material markers (such as clothes, tipis, canoes, and feathers), and include indigenous people from beyond North America, as seen, for example, in a clip of Nahko's *hanai* (related through ceremony) relative Hawaiian activist Pua Case, and her daughter and musician, Hāwane Rios, dancing hula at the Oceti Sakowin sacred fire (1:14/5:37). Colonial history is invoked through concepts such as "trail of tears" and "holocaust," its ongoing reality through the presence of out-of-place looking police and equipment on ancestral lands, their faces hidden behind helmets and their bodies covered by identical uniforms. Juxtaposed against the lack of individuality — and humanity — in images of the police, protectors come across as a community and as individuals: through clothes, regalia, and movements, through caring gestures, and through close-ups revealing their faces and emotions. We see the fear in their eyes, the pain of individuals being maced, the dignity of elders in ceremony. This same emotional register is expressed through Nahko's low-key performance and lyrics, with moral ground represented through prayer and ceremony, rather than the primitive violence of offenders ("provoke us to fight, so we burn a little sage"), and with individual strength and resilience juxtaposed to group covers behind tanks and military gear (1:44/5:37).

**4.2 "Black Snakes"** "Black Snakes" was released on YouTube on 21 September 2016, by the Canada-based A Tribe Called Red (music) and Prolific the Rapper (lyrics).<sup>25</sup> The video starts with a screen display:

Turtle Island is waking up.  
Oceti Sakowin,  
Indigenous Nations,  
People of all colors

have united in prayer  
with Standing Rock.  
It began with the youth. (0:02/5:53)

The film starts with a Lakota elder (woman) telling viewers to "Find your warrior spirit and get here" (0:18/5:53), and with images suggesting the broader ethos of the movement, namely that warriors on the ground remain peaceful. Next, the lyrics mix Lakota and Christian imagery, hinting in the direction of a battle between good and evil: between the medicine wheel and the death-bringing horsemen of the Apocalypse of St. John, and perhaps also the biblical snake and the evil and temptations associated with it: "The wind comes in 4 corners — 4 directions, 4 colors — and death rides on 4 horsemen — a Black Snake with some black tanks" (0:57/5:53). As in "Love Letters to God," we have lines of flags indexing the global scope of the protest, later supplemented by way of a mixture of protectors at the camps. The video remains in the camps, the only exceptions being regular aerial shots of the open, natural landscapes of the area, and

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<sup>25</sup> See the video at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nh\\_HCqp3sd0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nh_HCqp3sd0) (accessed 6 April 2018). "Prolific the Rapper" is the stage name of musician and filmmaker Aaron Shawn Turgeon. In addition to his musical tribute, Prolific the Rapper was on the front lines during direct actions. In October 2016, he was arrested for flying a drone over crowds in order to document the actions but was later acquitted of all charges. For the song's lyrics, see <https://genius.com/Prolific-the-rapper-black-snakes-lyrics>.

brief shots from oil industry contexts, a business the lead singer confesses to having been a part of: “I used to be in the oil fields, getting paid — but I quit, cause oil water I can’t drink” (1:16/5:53).

The water protectors are not physically assaulted. Rather, we see them opposing a system and its guardians; policemen lined up in front of the construction site and equipment, as if protecting it and the capitalist system it belongs to:

How much money does these companies need to make — Some things worth more than gold — Some things they can’t be sold — Some things can’t be replaced. She is your mother, the fresh water is her veins. What is going on? Have we all lost our minds? Every human needs clean water to survive (1:37/5:53).

The second verse provides a colonial background to capitalist threats and destructions, and with colonialism as a story of overall decline, one in which the killing of (indigenous) people and nature is connected. Set in the context of this broader story, the Black Snake emerges as but the latest episode, yet one hinting toward a point of no return, not only for indigenous people and their lands, but for all human beings and Mother Earth as such. Up-scaled from a particular river to the earth as such, the video also moves between a focus on the local Lakota people and the broader concept of indigenous people, and on the shared fate of humanity.

I’m Mexicano, ma Lakota, and I’m white, too — I’m mixed with every- one so part of me’s just like you. Every group of human beings shares the same stars — and if the earth is not your mother, Are you from Mars? (3:06/5:53)

The vocals end with a final reference to peaceful strategies: “We’re a peaceful people — that’s why we walk with prayer” (4:17/5:53), and with a warning or promise (depending on position and perspective), that “change is coming now” (4:28/5:53), before sliding into Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song” (from 1980), amidst images of a relaxed and light atmosphere at the camp, shot at night. Those familiar with the camp might find the brief glimpse of the Red Warrior camp ironic. Known for a favoring of more aggressive tactics and for conflicts with the Standing Rock Tribe leadership over this issue, the Red Warrior clip may be intentional, as a subtle display of other forces at hand, of warriors *with* physical strength, yet choosing to withhold it.

**4.3 *Stand Up/Stand N Rock #NoDAPL*** “Stand Up” was released in December 2016 by a group of established native musicians and allies, all of whom had already been vocal about their support of the NoDAPL movement: Taboo (solo hip-hop artist and member of the Black Eyed Peas),<sup>26</sup> (non-native) actress Shailene Woodley, Tony Duncan (an Apache flutist who is also a member of the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Nation), MC Drezus (Plains Cree), Supaman (Crow rapper), Kahara Hodges (Navajo vocalist), Seminole singer Spencer Battiest, and Emcee One (aka Marcus Anthony Quinn; rapper, DJ, and youth advocate), and directed by Johnny Lee.<sup>27</sup> The video

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<sup>26</sup> For an interview with Taboo focusing on the song and video, see Jackson 2016.

<sup>27</sup> See the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onyk7guvHK8>. For the song’s lyrics, see

combines footage (selectively) with staged performances from the camps and starts with a spoken-word intro by Woodley, like the previous video with a prophetic ring:

They call it a pipeline, but those on the frontline know that Black Snake was sent for us to grow ... so that we may unite, unity our tool ... The salmon will run, the Mauna will breathe, the rivers will flow, the rainbow is here and prophecy tells us all generations will hear (0:39/5:13).

The need to “stand up” is a recurrent theme, in the refrain and towards the end of the video, and through individual stand-up declarations as well as references to collective action: “one nation, one cause, one people, one tribe” (2:19/5:13). As with both of the videos introduced thus far, a colonial history is invoked, here through references to heroes and battles, massacres, and protest sites from Native American histories (e.g., Geronimo, Wounded Knee, Alcatraz), and to the protest as “a Malcolm X moment,” “Martin Luther King with a dream” (2:19/5:13) and “history on a sad repeat” (4:35/5:13). Brought together, these references speak to a shared colonial history, for the Native American and First Nation contexts, and seemingly for indigenous people in general, referenced in the refrain as “all my native people recognize yourself, stand up ... all my tribal people ... my original people ... my indigenous people” (1:45/5:13). Though calling people to collective action, in line with the other videos we analyze and the general ethic at Standing Rock, “Stand Up” encourages non-violence even while challenging the jurisdictional frame of the protests: “No weapons found in this court of rule” (0:19/5:13).<sup>28</sup>

Building on its call for pan-indigenous engagement, the macro-level message of “Stand Up” is global unity. The Black Snake, the lyrics declare, was “sent for us to grow ... unity is our tool.” The inclusion of Shailene Woodley as a lead performer suggests the aspirational reach of the video to extend beyond indigenous peoples to include the world as a whole. As Emcee One sings, “This is for the rock, with prayers we stand on it” (2:26/5:13). The diminutive trope — Earth as but a rock — has considerable relativizing force, particularly for the generation that has come of age in a time of pop culture irony and wordplay. “The Rock” also indexes Standing Rock as the most recent occupation protest in a lineage extending back to the Alcatraz occupation of the 1960s (Rader 2011). Calling on a historical sense of injustice and protest while appealing to many youth and young adults and their popular culture sensibilities by means of rap lyrics and hip-hop beats is central to the message of “Stand Up.” In this way, form enables content. As noted above, the lyrics insist that “Prophecy tells us all generations will hear.” Although initiated by local youth, the reach of the movement depended on getting the message to other teenagers at a remove from the protests and who might not have had ears to hear had the story not been conveyed by means of their preferred genre (Elben 2017). Nodding to the video’s role in social mediation of the event, Emcee One lays down his rhymes: “We cater to these internet memes, internet streams, it seems them streams aren’t clean” (2:12/5:13). Catering paid off, at least in one register. In August 2017, “Stand Up” won an MTV music award in a new category, “Best Fight

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<https://genius.com/Taboo-stand-up-stand-n-rock-lyrics> (accessed 6 May 2018).

<sup>28</sup> For a provocative analysis of indigenous jurisdiction, see Pasternak 2017.

Against the System.”<sup>29</sup> Reacting to the song’s nomination, Taboo said, “It’s more than just an award. It’s an acknowledgement of Native artists having a seat at the round table to change the narrative and break down the walls of what hip-hop is all about. It has nothing to do with my group or with me as an artist, it has to do with a movement that is about our people and celebrating indigenous culture” (quoted in Luger 2017). As earlier comments by Taboo makes clear, it also has to do with spreading the movement: “We don’t really have many songs that can cross into international waters ... because I’m a Black Eyed Pea, I’m able to speak to Germany and Japan and Mexico. They’ll now ask [about] what’s going on.”

## 5 Dig a Little Deeper

Indigenous traditions do not, as a general rule, proselytize. They are not about spreading “the good word” to anyone but one’s own, which is often understood by insiders and outsiders alike to signal the coextensive boundaries of geography, kinship, and religion.<sup>30</sup> But the contemporary context challenges such formulations, especially in moments of struggle wherein allies are both important and uninvited. Managing allies in the camps was a major issue, and how this task was performed varied significantly depending on the moment and the prevailing mood. Generally speaking, the pervasive sense on the ground was that allies were welcome, but with spoken and unspoken conditions. The videos we have presented performed some of this work: of letting allies know they were needed and wanted, but also where and how to stand. This was not free-wheeling New Age-ism, no matter how much the tropes and gestures of Nahko Bear, for example, might suggest as much. The difference has to do primarily with place and history. For all of their gestures of inclusiveness, the videos demand acknowledgement that this is an indigenous issue playing out from the asymmetrical effects of colonial policies and prejudices. Care for Mother Earth, sure, but only if, as Nahko sings, you can “dig, dig a little deeper.”

More precisely, how do these videos achieve their affective purchase, both within and beyond indigenous audiences? On an overall level, the meeting of cool and traditional would seem to be central, through the sounds and images of some of the hippest indigenous musicians and musical genres, through musicians wearing, performing, and articulating traditions, mixing old and new, and displaying confidence, control, and potential. Still on an overall level, urban meets outback in these videos, thereby acknowledging diverse forms and spaces of indigeneity. The musicians embody this position, as city boys anchored in and fighting for their homelands, and through the mixing of styles and genres: powwow and pop, rap as storytelling. There is a sense of indigeneity as being *in* but not fully *of* the modern world, in the negative sense of ongoing colonialism and settler state racism, and in the sense of seeing more clearly its problems and ways to solve them, as with Nahko’s low key plea for bravery, “Stand Up’s” repeated call for action, and Prolific the Rapper’s seeing through the immoral craziness of the oil-industry: “if we don’t stand, who will?”

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<sup>29</sup> See <http://digitaldrum.ca/taboo-nodapl-anthem-scores-mtv-vm-nomination/> (accessed 6 May 2018).

<sup>30</sup> On this way of framing indigenous religions, see, e.g., Cox 2007.

(0:42/5:53).

Adding to these overall factors is a rhetorical dimension of recognizability and inclusiveness. There are shock effects, but few surprises in the stories performed and presented, thus maximizing recognizability and inclusiveness among highly diverse audiences, in and out of Native American contexts, as well as contributing to the image consolidation of a movement that from the start has been based on the simplicity of core symbols (water is life — *mni wiconi* in Lakota), core messages (#NoDAPL), core frames (ongoing colonialism and environmental destruction), and a core script (spiritual warriors protecting themselves and Mother Earth).<sup>31</sup> The videos repeat established movement repertoires, but with the added power of music, poetry, and film combined. Basic to such telling is the combination of at least three traits. First, their stories are lifted above the messy complexity of everyday life and community tensions: at the camps, between leadership on various levels, and among supporters, near and far, thereby allowing for clarity and unity of ranks. Second, they respond to an era in which “the power dynamics between words and images have changed” (Brunner and DeLuca 2016: 286), in which the argumentative force of images (and sound) is stronger, more immediate, more direct. In the words of the Sami art activist Anders Sunna, “through art you reach emotions directly. No one can bear to read a bunch of papers.”<sup>32</sup> It does so, in this case, by way of showing and potentially triggering a powerful range of emotions: hope and fear, anger and joy, pride and shame, pain and pleasure, along with the extremes of relational behavior: from disturbing brutality to kindness and with beauty and ugliness juxtaposed.

Third, and based partly on such grounding in affect, partly on the key symbols used, is the potential for travel and translation. The pipeline looks like a snake and comes with the characteristics attached to it (danger, creepiness, and unpredictability), here moved from the domain of nature to culture (capitalism, colonialism, and environmental destruction). If colonialism constitutes the historical framing of indigeneity, then threats to homelands have emerged as the number one concern of indigenous politics. The “*mni wiconi* — water is life/sacred water” formula combines concreteness (this river) and up-scaled universality (water in general), with an ultimate and existential dimension that is — again — obvious, immediate, and universally comprehensible. In the lyrics of “Black Snake”: “have we all lost our minds? Every human needs clean water to survive” (1:37/5:53). “Water is life” and “sacred water” mean the same in this context, yet with slightly different connotations. “Water is life” signals conditions for all life; “water is sacred” reminds us, that for this reason it must be set apart, lifted above the level of politics as usual. The prophecy adds ultimacy and historical momentum, along with conviction, hope, and promise, yet depending on the ability of the good side to rise, unite, and stick to the path laid out for them. What was until recently a local prophecy, was in this context

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<sup>31</sup> For comparative analyses of Native American protest rhetoric in a religious key from earlier contexts, see Lake 1983, 1991. On Mother Earth discourses, see Gill 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Interviewed in the Swedish TV series *Verden rundt med Sofia Jannok* (Around the world with Sofia Jannok), shown on Swedish and Norwegian TV in 2017. SVT Världens Sofia Jannok, Säsong 1, Avsnitt 2, publ. 5 Febr. 2016, svtplay.se <https://www.svtplay.se/video/11191969/Varldens-sofia-jannok/varldens-sofia-jannok>, 18:41/53 (accessed 6 May 2018).



up-scaled to the level of global indigeneity, “sent for us to grow ... so that we may unite,” according to the spoken-word intro of “Stand Up/Stand N Rock” (0:39/5:13).

“Ceremony” and “prayer” operate along similar lines. Basic to both notions, as they have been used in the Standing Rock context, is the combination of semantic openness and ultimate authority, along with shape-shifts between specific acts and distinct traditions, and more general ways of animating indigeneity as such. Nahko’s poetical formulations hint at a deeper level of indigeneity, to a past in which life was ceremonial, in his sense of the term. Partly covered and lost through colonization, this deeper level is presented as still there, for those willing to “dig deeper,” to follow ceremonial scripts from the past, thereby gradually to reconnect with latent and fractured links to indigenous identities. Further supporting the spread of this broader notion of “ceremony” is an emerging willingness to experiment in expansive fashions with liturgical form and content among younger generations of Native Americans and their indigenous collaborators. A parallel to the favoring of “spirituality” over “religion” (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), this shift in moods and modes favors the pan-indigenous dimensions to which we have been referring. Without de-emphasizing the role of locally specific religions, indigenous religion (in the singular) some of the time takes center stage, and may to some people have become their main religious home and anchor. This double life of ceremony suggests to us a distinct and emergent quality of contemporary indigenous religion(s), at least in some places some of the time. In the contexts described above, we have been surprised by the (apparent) lack of surface tension between localized (and therefore patrolled) and more generalized (and acephalous) modalities of ceremony.

We close with a reflection on ritual forms at Standing Rock. If “ceremony” was at times re-engineered and re-cast in blanket terms, as we suggest, so too was one of the most pointed manifestations of ceremony, prayer. As Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Councilman Dana Yellow Fat said, “We began this with prayer, and we look at this whole movement as a ceremony. It began with prayers before we left, and in the end, it will close with prayers. We’re fighting the pipeline with prayer” (quoted in Miller 2016). Pua Case called Standing Rock “a prayer camp. It is where prayers are done” (quoted in Jenkins 2016). Nahko Bear has also made vocal appeals to prayer in an earthy register, as in his words from our epigraph, “Stay in the prayer. We stand with you.” In a more blunt formulation, Caro “Guarding Red Tarantula” Gonzales said, “When people are chaining themselves to bulldozers, that is prayer” (quoted in Jenkins 2016). Such ways of talking about prayer have a tactile edge that nonetheless holds open tremendous space for navigating differences and eliding them. Prayerful moments such as these are at once concrete (standing and fighting) and extremely open-ended, as seem to be the futures of indigenous religion(s).

## **6 Coda: Cyber Fires**

Our inner fire continues to burn.

We are everywhere!

We stand!

Mni Wiconi — Water is Life! #NoDAPL

(<http://www.nodaplarchive.com>, frontpage)

On 22 February 2017, the world witnessed the forced evacuation of the Standing Rock camps. Burning structures were featured in much footage, echoing the ritual burning of weapons at the end of the Oka and Gustafsen Lake conflicts in Canada during the 1990s.<sup>33</sup> Savvy live-streamers reported that the fires were lit in ceremony, a traditional means of purification, often performed in mortuary contexts. The smoke and ashes that smoldered eerily reinforced the latter signification. Had we witnessed the death of a movement? As Thomas says in a famous line from the movie *Smoke Signals*, “You know there are some children who aren’t really children at all, they’re just pillars of flame that burn everything they touch. And there are some children who are just pillars of ash, that fall apart when you touch them ... Victor and me, we were children of flame and ash.”<sup>34</sup> Standing Rock, we suggest, is likewise born of smoke, ash, and flame, as will be its descendants if current trends hold. By this we mean that the smoke signaled loss and trauma, but also communication and purification; the ash suggested futility but also fertility; the fire a force that keeps burning, uniting people around its heat. And precisely here is one of the ongoing functions of the videos we have engaged. They form an e-place of gathering, of remembrance, of mood-stoking. They are visited and revisited for insight, for kindling passions, for remembering and reinterpreting. This last piece is key, we conjecture. Video and other mediated and reproduced e-memories perform the role of an emotional reservoir. They remain even while the camps are gone, becoming sites of possibility and place-holding. While retaining the emotive capacity of the recent past, they point forward for the actors: Where will the new (physical) grounds of protection be? What will our new grounds — foundations — of spirit and (self)-determination be? How will the Black Snake manifest, and how will we take it on this time? What have we learned, who will we become?

Answers to such questions are never obvious, of course, not least to outsiders. Even within the songs we have explored, however, there are signposts for facing futures. So we close where we began, with lyrics from “Love Letters to God,” Nahko Bear’s gut-wrenching indigenous theodicy and advice for channeling anger in the face of belligerence and the bellicose bravado of our times:

write poetry — wiser than the enemy will ever be ...  
a pattern, a physics, a road ...  
We got this ...  
Focus!

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<sup>33</sup> On the Gustafsen Lake and Oka conflicts, see Hill 2009; for accounts of US conflicts that pre-figure Standing Rock, see Cobb 2015.

<sup>34</sup> A Canadian-American independent film, released in 1998, *Smoke Signals* was directed and co-produced by Chris Eyre, and is based on Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993).

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