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OPEN RIVERS :
RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY



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### **PERSPECTIVES**

# RESISTANCE AS GROUNDS FOR FUTURITY: PLACEMAKING AND UNSETTLING THROUGH #STOPLINE3

# By Isabel Huot-Link

Protecting the water is protecting life. Two-spirit Anishinaabe activist Taysha Martineau thus insists that Enbridge's Line 3 tar sands pipeline "should scare you so much that you feel called to step into that water" (Pickett et al., 2021).[1] But if that is true, then how did Line 3 succeed in going into operation? Clearly something is missing. Settler colonialism and capitalist cultural legacies have done their best to create division between humans and our

more-than-human relatives. Those of us who live on these lands and benefit as a result of settler colonialism can take our cue from Indigenous-led resistance to extractive industries, resistance which provides a beacon of hope for a future where all people exist in alignment with our more-than-human relatives.

With this piece I hope to share a little about the ways that the Indigenous-led #StopLine3



Detail of Collective Solidarity: During the 2021 Treaty People Gathering, individuals and organizations joined together at the headwaters of the Mississippi River to protest the pipeline river crossing there, and people of diverse faiths made signs to show collective solidarity with Anishinaabe treaty rights. Image courtesy of the author.

movement has shaped my outlook and understanding of social justice. I am a white settler colonizer of Germanic and Ukrainian descent, writing from the traditional and contemporary homelands of Dakota peoples. The University of Minnesota, at which I work, is a land-grant University actively profiting off these stolen Indigenous lands (The TRUTH Project, 2023). I am deeply grateful to the Welcome Water Protector Center, Migizi Will Fly, Red Lake Treaty Camp, Shell River Alliance, and Anishinaabe Agriculture Institute past and present communities for inviting and welcoming me into their spaces through a public call for Water Protector support and later as a researcher and community member.

For as long as Europeans have infiltrated Turtle Island,[2] Indigenous peoples have fought for sovereignty against continual repression by despicable state policies and violence. The United States' settler colonial regime inherently infringes upon the rights of Indigenous peoples, and mainstream discourse has finally started to acknowledge this reality. As the climate disaster proliferates and other movements, such as Black Lives Matter, draw attention to social inequities in the United States, Indigenous rights have risen to the forefront (Kaur, 2020), grounding movements that often integrate human and morethan-human concerns. One such movement, the #StopLine3 movement, demonstrates how a diversity of tactics can address the multi-scalar issue of decolonization (Hughes, 2018).

Decolonization is a term that has contested definitions and has often been misappropriated by relegating it to the intellectual and thereby removing the impetus for action (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Eve Tuck (Unangax ) and K. Wayne Yang (2012) define decolonization as simply "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (21). Yang, under the pseudonym "la paperson,"

expands that, "Decolonization is, put bluntly, the rematriation of land, the regeneration of relations, and the forwarding of Indigenous and Black and queer futures—a process that requires countering what power seems to be up to" (2017: xv). Considering land, relationships, and futurity as key markers of decolonization brings into question how to enact that rematriation, regeneration, and forwarding. Assuming that decolonization is a multi-scalar issue—or something to be addressed at individual, community, and systemic scales of power—requires diverse tactics within movement building to address the issue at all three of those scales. Resistance camps of Indigenous-led movements participate in active land rematriation, actively build and regenerate relationships, and develop collective imagining of Indigenous—as well as Black and queer—futures. Through their demonstrated multi-scalar impact via a diversity of tactics (Burrell et al., 2022), Indigenous-led resistance camps pave the way for self-determination and cross-cultural community building, and for actualizing Indigenous futurity.

Grace Dillon first defined Indigenous futurisms in 2003, a concept which is often associated with science fiction literature, defining "a movement of art, literature, games, and other forms of media which express Indigenous perspectives on the future, present, and past" (Vowel, 2022). Chelsea Vowel (Métis) discusses that, as foundational to Indigenous futurisms, "uncovering Black/ Indigenous presence in the past, then asserting our existence in the present and into the future can be a way of seeing into, or even making, better futures" (2022). While futurisms may exist in literature, futurity may encompass tangible futures. During my time in the Line 3 resistance camps, I witnessed Anishinaabe leaders embodying this Indigenous futurity through speaking publicly about the history of colonization and treaty rights, making incontrovertible their present presence through ceremony and movement

building, building collective imagining of Indigenous futures through art, and demanding security of Indigenous peoples' futures by resisting a pipeline that endangers their ways of life.

Line 3 is a tar sands pipeline expansion project undertaken by multinational corporation Enbridge Energy. Though advertised as a "replacement" project, simply improving and replacing an existing pipeline, the new Line 3 in fact "follow[s] a new corridor and double[s] the original pipeline's capacity" (Wellman,

2022:152). Enbridge has crossed 200 bodies of water—including twenty river crossings—in creating an extended and new route for Line 3 (catwhipple, 2021; Marohn, 2021). The new line carries crude tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada through treaty territories in northern Minnesota to end at the refinery in Superior, Wisconsin from which it will be shipped overseas. Line 3 allegedly became operational on October 1, 2021, concluding a project whose estimated budget of \$8 billion makes it the most expensive pipeline in Enbridge's history (Wellman, 2022:152).



Honor the Earth hosted a concert on a raft by the Indigo Girls to build awareness for #StopLine3 and bring joy to the Water Protector community. Art that community members had built was placed along the shoreline of the Mississippi and audience members watched from the riverbanks or painted canoes in the water, challenging colonial conceptions of how art should be performed and shared. Image courtesy of the author.

Indigenous women- and two spirit-led protests against Line 3 have persisted for over five years, throughout project proposals and construction, continuing despite the flow of oil (Stop Line 3, n.d.).

Indigenous-led pipeline resistance movements center land and place and create diverse, intersectional communities of people building interconnectedness through shared values. This fosters change on the individual level for camp residents and supporters, on the community level through the camp's communal existence, and sets an example for what systemic change

can look like. Pipeline resistance then is a model for confronting systemic inequalities in power structures that persist within and beyond these spaces. While many activists may have their own vision of what liberation looks like, "decolonization is not accountable to settlers" (Tuck & Yang, 2012:35). Through relinquishing power and leadership to Indigenous and other BIPOC communities, settlers can heed the lessons of the pipeline resistance camps on Indigenous sovereignty, placemaking, and community building, to begin the culture shift necessary for environmental justice.

# **#NoDAPL** and a Legacy of Resistance

Scholar activists Nick Estes (Kul Wicasa, Lower Brule Sioux) and Kyle Powys Whyte (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) have positioned pipeline resistance—through their case studies of the #NoDAPL movement—in the historical context of generations of Indigenous resistance efforts (Estes, 2021; Whyte, 2017). Alongside this history of resistance is a history of violent state repression. Dakota peoples' contemporary homelands have been under attack with the construction of Energy Transfer Partner's Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) running from Canada through the Dakotas and Iowa and ending near Illinois. The main resistance camp for the #NoDAPL movement was located at the Missouri River crossing near the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. The prominent environmental organization Indigenous Environmental Network discusses how during the height of #NoDAPL "local and state officials used military tactics to suppress public protest and intimidate water protectors," consistent with historical tactics against Indigenous resistance (Rees, 2021). These overblown tactics against non-violent protesters represent the continued repression and genocide that the United States employs against Indigenous resistance.

#StopLine3 is an extension of this legacy. Charlotte Degener Hughes' (2018) undergraduate thesis positions #StopLine3 in a similar framework as Estes and Whyte did for #NoDAPL, building upon a history of Indigenous resistance. She argues that this movement exemplifies a successful use of a diversity of tactics, ranging from legal to artistic to ceremonial. Hughes elucidates how "Indigenous-led resistance to mega projects all over Turtle Island are not only acts aimed to protect the land, but ultimately work to dismantle settler colonialism through native sovereignty and resurgence" (2018:31). These two go hand in hand, ever inseparable.

Burrell et al (2022) demonstrate through indepth interviewing and participant observation that Line 3 resistance takes the form of forging "legal avenues to shake the petro-state, creating cultures to refuse colonialism and embrace climate justice within Water Protector camps, and building an Indigenous-led renewable energy economy." These three avenues, the authors posit, are critical to consider and expand upon in future resistance projects. Audra Simpson (2014) discusses refusal as a critical tool for Indigenous sovereignty. Despite the surface failure of this

movement—as the pipeline is currently in operation—the cultures of refusal that developed within Water Protector camps are key to the maintenance of the larger context and legacy of Indigenous resistance. Through sustained relationships, I have observed that several of these <u>former camps</u> remain active in various and changing ways, continually engaging in community development.

Between #StopLine3 and #NoDAPL, it becomes clear that pipeline resistance is about more than a single project. Each resistance coalition builds toward an Indigenized future. "The #NoDAPL camps didn't just imagine a future without settler colonialism and the oppressive institution of the

state, but created that future in the here and now" (Estes, 2021:253). By creating Indigenous-led spaces where Indigenous and settler peoples came together for a common goal of Indigenous sovereignty, #NoDAPL put decolonization into action according to Tuck and Yang's (2012) framework of decolonization as land back. The resistance camps for #StopLine3 built a similar legacy, intending to stay active despite the pipeline's construction. Although both companies completed their construction and began to transport oil, the Indigenous-led #StopLine3 and #NoDAPL movements are proof that decolonization is possible, as well as necessary, for a just future for all.



Water protectors walking down to the river to pray at Honor the Earth's former resistance camp. During the height of the #StopLine3 movement, the Welcome Water Protector Center was open for education, movement building, and spiritual healing.

Image courtesy of the author.

# **Line 3 Community Impacts**

Extractive industry projects like Line 3 disproportionately affect Indigenous women and two-spirit relatives, and they are related to increased rates of violence against Indigenous women by non-community members. A 2019 report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics confirmed that in a region of Montana and North Dakota where oil and gas production increased, rates of violence, disproportionately affecting Native American women, increased in parallel (Barrick et al., 2019). This example is not an exception, but the rule. Living on Earth, an environmental journalism program on public radio, reported that a majority of the 4,200 Line 3 pipeline construction workers came from outside Minnesota (2021). Their lack of a local connection can promote disregard for local peoples' well-being and increase violence. To this point, two Enbridge workers were arrested in a sex trafficking sting in northern Minnesota in June 2021 (Zoledzioski, 2021).

This relationship between extractive industry and gender-based violence, drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1991), is part of why it is important that the resistance movement is led by Indigenous women. The conversation about Indigenous sovereignty is not only about protecting the water: "for Native women, sovereignty often marks the difference between life and death" (Deer & Nagle, 2018). The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement centers the high rates of Indigenous women who go missing (MMIW USA, 2023), highlighting the danger of permitting industries like oil production that are known to correlate

with increased violence. Anishinaabe women and two-spirit leaders including Taysha Martineau, Sasha Bealieau, Winona LaDuke, Tania Aubid, and Tara Houska among others, continue to lead Water Protector communities in opposition to Line 3 and other extractive arms of colonialism.

#NoDAPL and #StopLine3, in resisting the fossil fuel industry, have mobilized people of many races, ethnicities, and other identities around the movement to decolonize. The climate crisis, while affecting Indigenous peoples to the highest degree, does affect *everybody*. Melanie Yazzie (Diné) reminds her <u>Red Nation podcast</u> audience of the common knowledge that "reducing carbon emissions is the number one thing we all gotta get behind if we don't want to die from climate change" (Red Media, 2021). Furthermore, she argues that the way to reduce those emissions isn't by new technological innovations or capitalist imperialist power schemes; the way is through Indigenous-led resistance.

It has been proven on numerous occasions that Indigenous-led movements are critical for reducing carbon emissions. The Indigenous Environmental Network published a report that indicated "Indigenous campaigns are resisting projects equal to at least 1/4 of U.S. & Canadian greenhouse gas pollution" (Rees, 2021). In mitigating the climate crisis, Indigenous-led resistance movements thus contribute to the futurity of the human species by resisting the extractive way of life that threatens our continued existence.

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# The Resistance Camp as a Point of Encounter

Resistance camps for #StopLine3 on Anishinaabe lands were short-term residences of ever-changing, diverse communities—including Anishinaabeg, citizens and descendents of other Indigenous nations, Black folks and other people of color, as well as white folks; gueer and trans folks; babies, children, adults, and elders; and multitudes of other kinds of diversity—joining together in allied resistance to the Line 3 pipeline. Quechua scholar Sandy Grande (2004) explicates how, to "understand the complex and intersecting vectors of power shaping the historical-material conditions of indigenous [sic] schools and communities," one might start "at the point of 'encounter,' examining the various dimensions of conflict and contradiction between the sovereign

peoples of the Americas and the colonizers" (29). As "points of encounter," or spaces of multifaceted diversity, the #StopLine3 and #NoDAPL resistance camps act as space for dissecting and toppling oppressive power dynamics and structures within American society. Nick Estes (2021) posits that justice may be achieved through "the kinship relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous and the lands we both inhabit" (Estes, 2021:256). These kinship relations may destabilize structures of power, build momentum behind decolonization, and open space for Indigenous self-determination that may propel a broader cultural shift away from white supremacy.



During the 2021 Treaty People Gathering, individuals and organizations joined together at the headwaters of the Mississippi River to protest the pipeline river crossing there, and people of diverse faiths made signs to show collective solidarity with Anishinaabe treaty rights.

Image courtesy of the author.

# **Placemaking toward Self-Determination**

Beyond mitigating ecological destruction, Indigenous-led pipeline resistance involves relationship building that, in their leadership and through their Indigenous worldviews and practices, requires mainstream culture to shift. Michelle Daigle (2016) discusses Indigenous geographies of self-determination in refusal of colonial spatio-legal identities. Daigle (2016) illuminates how Omushkegowuk Cree are "confronting the violence, pain, and fear that has been inflicted on our communities, bodies, and lands" (265) through everyday kinship relations. Recognizing the plurality of pathways to Indigenous self-determination, Daigle's (2016) study shows how

according to Omushkegowuk Cree ontologies, place is shaped by local people, knowledge systems, and land-based practices as well as by colonial-capitalist structures of power. More than this, however, place has meaning precisely because of the agency that lives within our ancestral lands, including animal and plant nations, and thus what can be learned about governance and self-determination through intimate relationships with our non-human kin. (268)

In this way, relational geographies of Indigenous self-determination shape and are shaped by place. Through the building of community space to address colonial violence, relational geographies of Indigenous self-determination may create a theoretical framework for Indigenous space-making as self-determination.

Frontlines camps for #NoDAPL and #StopLine3 developed particular geographies by addressing colonial harm within resistance camp space.

Residents built relationships with and around particular places through art-making, cultivating gardens, skill-sharing, sharing stories, educating youth, and organizing resistance strategy in response to the geographies of treaty territories, reservations, and pipeline corridors (Estes, 2021; Welcome Water Protectors, n.d.).

In my time in community in some of these camps, I observed the way building art to decorate the space transformed its narrative and grounded the community. At the Welcome Center in Palisade, Minnesota, posters depicting native animals with their Anishinaabemowin names written on them lined the side of the highway along the camp property. This interruption of Minnesota highway driving with a highlight of more-than-human relatives paired with their names in the language of the 1855 Treaty holders in this land highlighted this place's intent and purpose, going beyond simply resisting one pipeline. These little actions in facilitating placemaking transformed these communities.[3]

Through Anishinaabe leadership and placemaking, the resistance camps built toward self-determination, as developed by Tuck and Yang's (2012) definition of decolonization as land back. Through occupying Anishinaabe treaty territories and Indigenizing public spaces, the ideals of land rematriation became, if only for short periods, realized. This relationship with land rematriation exemplifies on a small scale how pipeline resistance brought together a community oriented around various connections to place, and through the maintenance and transformation of camp space, developed the grounds for Indigenous futurity.

## **Conclusion**

#StopLine3 is one point on a timeline of Indigenous resistance and self-determination reaching far in all directions. This fight points activists toward consciousness building beyond what has been previously developed in white communities, signaling a potential for future justice. However, it is imperative to highlight that Indigenous leadership in the movement towards justice is critical. #StopLine3's connection to the land-back movement reminds settlers that environmental justice is not only intersectional, but inherently centers Indigenous sovereignty as exemplified by Indigenous placemaking. One

Iñupiaq and Chicana Water Protector attests through a digital art piece that "Land Back is the most practical and efficient strategy to combat climate change" (Uksrunna 2021). Decolonization does require settlers to unsettle—to reimagine our concepts of ownership, land, progress, and comfort—because only through framing the land as a relative rather than a resource will any futurity where people exist alongside the Earth be possible. I offer as next steps to consider: What are Indigenous leaders and activists in your area asking for? How can you become more involved?

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### **Footnotes**

[1] The Enbridge Energy Line 93 replacement pipeline is known locally as Line 3 in reference to the name of the old pipeline upon which the new project expands (Hassanzadeh, 2023).

[2] A term used by many (but not all) Indigenous nations to refer to what is known as North America that I have learned through colleagues' use and discussion.

[3] According to Project for Public Spaces, "Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value," ("What is Placemaking?" 2007).

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