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# Speaking for Ourselves



*Edited by Julian Agyeman, Peter Cole,  
Randolph Haluza-DeLay, and Pat O'Riley*

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**Speaking for Ourselves**  
Environmental Justice in Canada



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Prologue.

# Notes from Prison: Protecting Algonquin Lands from Uranium Mining

*Robert Lovelace*

For a monarch, dictator, or democrat, the dilemma of ruling is this: if rule is accommodating, then the ruled become indolent and ungrateful; if the ruler is harsh, then the ruled become uncooperative and rebellious. In such a paradigm the only way to maintain power is to keep subjects off balance and marginalized through seduction and force. This dilemma in governance arises out of a heritage of colonialism; that is, the process by which a group having exhausted its sustainability options dispossesses another group of its. Using seduction or force, a dominant group undermines the power of multiple others. This is the principle mechanism that separates much of humanity from the sacred relationships with the earth and has become normalized in the governance of nations.

No matter how present-day leaders disguise this process of resolving resource "development," the apparent consequence is a global totalitarian catastrophe in which all possible human resources (and those of most other species) are consumed while the indigenous knowledge to survive in the real world is lost. Determinism, progress, and ideological or theological perfectionism are dead-end illusions on a living planet in this galaxy. Here, the highest achievement for humankind is to exercise our innate ability to adapt to the local. In knowing and using the local environment sustainably, the dilemma is expunged and each individual takes a transactional responsibility, and experiences immediate consequences. Collectives are supported for what individuals give by way of sustenance and knowledge, not just what they can take away for less than they contribute. The question is then, how can humankind achieve such a state of grace.

I am writing this prologue from the Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, Ontario. The name of the institution is misleading. There is little attempt made at corrections here, save the fact that some people believe denying basic human needs and humiliating inmates will in some way change the response to the same kind of alienation and poverty that are the antecedents that bring them in conflict with the law in the first place.

This is a modern “super maximum security” prison designed specifically to house the greatest number of inmates while using the least amount of labour and capital. This efficiency is best illustrated by the fact that although the prison’s worship centre was dedicated five years ago, it has never been used. I have now served seventy-one days of a six-month sentence. I spend sixteen and a half hours a day locked in a two-metre-by-four-metre cell. The overhead light is never turned off. When out of my cell I share a common area with thirty-two other men who use their best instincts to pass the time and get along. This prologue was originally composed using a four-inch-long pencil that had to be sharpened on the abrasive tread of the stairs leading to the second tier of prison cells. Almost everything of value, whether for recreation, communication, or survival, has some component of local invention. The diversity of creation, the alertness of mind, and the indomitable human spirit remains alive even within these prison walls.

I was imprisoned for refusing to purge contempt of an Ontario Superior Court injunction that ordered my community, the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, to abandon a secured entrance protecting an area of our homeland from uranium exploration. In the winter of 2006-2007, a mining exploration company, Frontenac Ventures, had without official notice staked thirty thousand acres, north, east, and south of Crotch Lake, and occupied an old tremelite-processing plant near Robertsville. The Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) registered these claims and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) provided leases for much of the land not privately owned. The Algonquin homeland and Ontario’s claim to jurisdiction overlap in eastern Ontario without any historical treaty or land cession. When Ontario acted unilaterally, without consulting our community, the Province broke the law. Consultation is required before development is contemplated where jurisdictions are shared or in dispute. Along with consultation there must be comprehensive and reasoned accommodation of Aboriginal rights and cultural needs. These principles have been confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada as necessary in preserving the honour of the Crown in relations with Aboriginal communities and nations. The historical practice in Ontario has been to refute Aboriginal claims and address individual issues on a case-by-case basis rather than develop practical policy. The denial of appropriate levels of responsibility has been Ontario’s consistent course of action in meeting constitutional obligations to Aboriginal Canadians. The injunction arose out of this confusion.

When our community protested to Ontario in May of 2007 that staking had taken place and extensive deep-core drilling was imminent, MNDM consented to a meeting. The meeting was attended by six members of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), representatives of Ardoch and Shabot



Members of Ardoch Algonquin First Nation and of the area community protest in 2007 against uranium exploration and mining on Algonquin lands. Photo by Susan DeLisle.

Obaadjiwan First Nations, and a low-level MNDM geologist. The geologist threw half a dozen technical maps on the table, said there was nothing to fear about exploration, and called that consultation. The OPP wanted to know if they should expect conflict to arise. We assured the OPP that we had no intentions to take violent action but that we would use a four-pronged approach of: research, community education, legal action, and direct action in a strategy to protect our interests should Ontario not respond more appropriately.

In mid-June 2007, having heard nothing more from Ontario, the Ardoch Council requested Frontenac Ventures remove its personnel and equipment from Algonquin land. The company complied with this directive and on 28 June Ardoch and neighbouring Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation set up a security barrier at the abandoned Robertsville ore-processing plant. The OPP established a security zone of their own in an effort to minimize conflict. Over the next month, the security barrier developed into a camp, at times with a population of forty residents.

Ontario remained silent. Frontenac Ventures attempted to divide the First Nations by promising Shabot Obaadjiwan money and benefits of

development. When this failed, the mining company offered both First Nations \$10,000, as well as promises of some employment and an archaeological study that would protect burial sites. Ardoch and Shabot refused to take the bait. Two principles were well entrenched for the First Nations: the Crown's duty to consult, and a strong sense of Algonquin values. Both communities recognized that Ontario's duty to consult had not been met. At best, Ontario stated that consultation and accommodations were to be addressed through the Algonquins of Ontario Land Claim, although protection of land from mineral staking had never been raised during fifteen years of dysfunctional negotiations and Ardoch had withdrawn with misgivings from the process some six years earlier. The First Nations knew that the Supreme Court decisions regarding Aboriginal rights and title were clear in directing Canadian governments to consult directly with affected communities. They were not about to surrender what other communities across Canada had fought hard to achieve. If Ontario would not protect Aboriginal rights, then they felt obliged to do it for themselves.

Second, although Shabot and Ardoch are politically separate, they represent a large interdependent and interrelated community with overlapping original jurisdictions covering three watersheds. There is a strong inclination toward tradition in both communities. Although a century of integration has eroded old-time labours and cultural practices, there is still a fierce adherence to the ideals of Algonquin life. Ever since Ardoch fought a twenty-seven-day standoff in 1981 to protect wild rice at Mud Lake from government encroachment, people are diligent in protecting expressions of Algonquin culture that remain. There was no doubt that Ardoch would take a militant stand in protecting the land.

To address the threat of uranium exploration and mining, the leadership of the Ardoch community adopted our four-pronged strategy of research, community education, legal action, and direct action. In concert, these form a dynamic plan. The task of leadership is to coordinate them for efficiency, conservation of resources, and overall impact. Ardoch understood that resistance was not enough. The four-pronged approach was needed to achieve a successful outcome, one in which not only exploration for uranium would be stopped but also existing legal precedents would be strengthened and potentially the long-term struggle for acceptance of Aboriginal rights and title would be advanced.

The four-pronged approach is not new. It emerges organically from grass-roots struggles in defence of community interests. I first heard it articulated among the Cree of the Nelson River in Manitoba. Expressing the strategy logically allows for measurement of process and outcomes, but the force of the plan is also found in imaginative interaction. Almost always there is something among the four activities that individual community members can identify in their own pool of talents. In such a dynamic, leader-

ship needs to be transactional among all participants. A too-structured leadership model will have tendencies to overlook important talents or assign extremely talented people to tasks that they may be ill-equipped to perform. Transactional leadership allows for the emergent forces of a movement to be activated with any one person or group assuming leadership when real situations demand. This is a traditional form of Anishnàbèk leadership. Of course, there are inherent difficulties with such a system, but practice and knowledge can lead to consistent success. There are people who are accustomed to formal structure. Initially, they can feel lost without very clear lines of “responsibility.” There are others who believe they have a right to leadership or that the ideology or strategy they espouse is the only way to go. The shift in paradigms can be tricky. For indigenous communities that have traditional social values, it is not so hard. Some NGOs, settler groups, and indigenous groups long dominated by colonial control through instruments such as the Indian Act have much more difficulty adjusting to situational or transactional leadership. The benefit is that everyone can participate in learning, teaching, and leadership, and leadership as a function becomes better understood and accepted as feelings of mutual respect and benefit develop.

Research is the engine of intelligence, and intelligence is the foundation of a successful movement. The old saying about the strength of an idea whose time has come is true, but the idea must be honest, accurate, and understandable. As a small indigenous community, Ardoch did not know much about uranium. Our first concerns were with a trapline and the failure of Ontario to consult. Research at the beginning stages allowed our community to expand its understanding of the history of uranium mining and the associated social, economic, and environmental consequences. We became knowledgeable and then capable of linking our concerns with the broader world. As well as expanding our knowledge outward, we opened the bundle of traditional knowledge and found within the many coded layers of direct reference to our current situation and the language needed to express our concerns in universal terms. Traditional knowledge illuminates a vision of the way forward that strengthens courage and insight.

Research should also be used to understand the nature of opposition. In today’s world it is easy for people to cover their tracks. As part of our intelligence efforts we like to know “who’s who.” We study academic work, career histories, and photographs in the attempt to understand why proponents and bureaucrats do what they do.

Community education is part of the four-pronged strategy. Action follows enlightenment, and enlightenment comes from knowledge. Community education combines both knowledge and action. Sharing knowledge with the largest number of people is essential to win public opinion and advance long-term change in collective consciousness. A full-page advertisement in

a leading daily newspaper can be impressive as well as costly. However, the best community education takes place around the kitchen table between friends and relatives. The best community education begins on the inside, expanding from there. A knowledgeable community has the capacity to educate others. Ardoch began our community education at a council meeting. The entire council, community members, and representatives of the neighbouring First Nation viewed and discussed the National Film Board documentary *Uranium*. The film is available in libraries and for rent on DVD. Soon the film was being watched in living rooms, community halls, and on personal computers. Guest speakers were joining many community forums. A proliferation of information about uranium mining began to grow as people became hungry for more knowledge. People generally felt comfortable engaging in the discourse no matter what their level of education or walk of life. Men and women shared their perspectives from an informed point of view. Sharing knowledge became a way to heal old wounds, rekindle friendships, and unite the community and the larger concerned public. Results were measurable. The first public meeting at the community hall in Sharbot Lake had drawn only three people. A year later, many thousands of people know about uranium exploration and mining and have voiced their concerns about protecting the environment and Aboriginal interests.

Canadian governments are divided into three separate legal orders. Parliament and legislatures create law, cabinets administer law, and the judiciary decides how laws can be applied. In the four-pronged approach, we take all of these into consideration when engaged in legal action. Contrary to popular opinion, the courts are not very useful in deciding issues relating to Aboriginal people. Poor decisions effect subsequent rulings, building layers of harmful precedent into a tide of history. It can take decades to remedy inadequate decisions made by ill-informed judges. The court process is extremely costly and accentuates the disparity between indigenous communities and colonial governments. Canadian jurisprudence is historically prejudiced in favour of colonial values and aspirations. Finally, although Canadian law has its foundations in the doctrine of continuity in regard to the Aboriginal right of self-governance, Canadian courts are restricted by letter and politics to acknowledge only colonial law. Aboriginal people who choose to defend their own laws must hold Canadian courts in contempt for their failure to uphold natural justice. The dual pretence of fairness and faithfulness to the rule of law makes Canadian courts laughable if not for the serious harm that is perpetuated on Aboriginal people. Lawyers who represent Aboriginal people are caught in the dilemma of trying to provide the best possible representation before courts that deny the validity of their clients' customary laws and culture.

In the absence of the administration of existing laws that protect Aborig-

inal rights and title, indigenous communities are vulnerable to corporate agendas and opposing political interests. This is what has happened in our situation. When Ardoch demanded a previously defined right to consultation, MNDM sloughed off its responsibility. Ardoch was forced to choose the unilateral action of blocking Frontenac Ventures' activities. The corporation countered by suing Ardoch and its leadership for \$77 million. At court, Frontenac Ventures obtained an injunction ordering Ardoch to abandon its security barrier and permit extensive deep-core drilling. Before the court, the Government of Ontario muddled the issue of consultation by refuting its responsibility to "unorganized" Aboriginal communities, and the uninformed judge was reluctant to make substantial constitutional decisions in the early stages of the proceedings. Ontario's tactic of deny and stall was successful. Ardoch refused to respect the injunction and continued to maintain the security barrier. In response the court refused to recognize Ardoch's lawyer and eventually found three of Ardoch's leaders in contempt of court. While Frontenac Ventures prosecuted the contempt charges, the Government of Ontario remained silent about its legal duty. In cross-examination, Ontario's lawyer accused the Ardoch leadership of constructing its own "self-help" remedy.

Both the government and the corporation were able to manipulate the court process into minimizing the ability of the First Nation to protect itself and avoid their own liabilities. With an emphasis on Ardoch as a "law breaker," they avoided close scrutiny of their own obligations. In reality, the Government of Ontario was liable to Frontenac Ventures for issuing permits and registering claims before meeting its legal duty to Ardoch, and Frontenac Ventures had proceeded with its activities even after it was aware of the Government of Ontario's obligations. The court ruling on contempt charges reinforced colonial values that hold corporations and governments above clear constitutional commitments. A neutral observer might have suggested that Ardoch have trusted more in the court for a fair and unbiased hearing before choosing to ignore the injunction issued by Judge Thompson. However, neutrality never existed. During the first days' hearings when Shabot Obaadjiwan's lawyer raised the Royal Proclamation of 1763 as a guide to understanding title issues, the judge had waved his arm and pronounced that he was not interested in the past, only the "here and now."

Challenging the tide of history in Ontario courts results more often than not in long and costly litigation that frustrates justice. When defence in court fails or bogs down, legal action needs to shift weight to the arena of law in practice. This is the domain of politicians. Understanding the principles and history of legislation is of prime importance in shifting policy on the application of laws. In Ontario, environmental protection and the ideals of environmental justice are weak. Legislation finds its substance

more in policy than in the letter of the law. In Ontario, even the quasi-legal tribunal decisions are subject to the interpretive vagaries of partisan politics. Even less substantial is the Government of Ontario's commitment to Aboriginal justice. To their credit, many Ontario ministries have developed policies of inclusion and accommodation for Aboriginal people; however, there is always a caveat that such policies are not an affirmation of an Aboriginal right. The MNDM has no policy at all and benefits from legislation minted at a time when Aboriginal people were expected to be erased from the Canadian landscape. MNDM has no written protocol or directives that instruct field technicians or administrators on provincial obligations to Aboriginal people. MNDM enjoys a closed constituency. The mining industry is its client. The Government of Ontario receives revenue from mining with almost no immediate reciprocal costs. Internationally (and this includes Canada), the mining industry is able to externalize its overhead by degenerating environments and impoverishing indigenous cultures. Not only does mining operate within a set of laws that are outside common propriety, the regulations governing the industry promote speculation for profit based on the ability to escape human and environmental liability. Although politicians and law makers can enjoy the profitability of mining, they are also trapped in a quandary of promoting one set of democratic principles for the general population and another very different set of principles based on unearned privilege for the mining industry. This is certainly a call for action in all three orders of Canadian law and represents the political vulnerability that gets people thinking.

Among traditional Algonquin healers it is said that a single plant's medicinal properties are strengthened when combined with other complementary medicines. At the beginning of this prologue I mention four prongs: research, community education, legal action, and direct action. I say that in concert they become a formidable strategy. Although navigating the Canadian legal system seems treacherous for Aboriginal peoples, when supported by research, community education, and direct action, legal remedies can be achieved through persistence. Court rulings though are often only peripheral to law in practice and strong legal activity can produce substantial progress through negotiations. Among forward-thinking Canadian politicians there is a movement toward establishing accords that are legally binding, respectful of cultural differences, and reviewable. Through this practice, the experience of mutual respect and benefit through the life of an accord can lead to substantial changes in legislation.

Shifting colonial ideology from its present foundations in Canadian law requires much more than changing the words. Bill-C31 is a good example of how legal redefinition can undermine the strength of indigenous identity in the name of human rights and give colonial powers just another avenue to terminate rights and title. Action, doing, becoming, growing –



these are the vital processes that bring about lasting change. Such processes of change cannot be imposed but rather must emerge at a local level and represent the innate principles of the living cultures from which they find ascendancy. This is the power of direct action. Often mistaken as impromptu, violent exhaustion, or last-resort anger, direct action is able to draw attention to a cause. However, to be effective, direct action must not be an end in itself for the attention, then it works against those who use it. Direct action must be considered, planned, purposeful, and controlled. Energized through evolving forces, direct action is best channelled through collective self-discipline, self-awareness, and clear objectives. Like other initiatives in the four-pronged strategy, direct action should be integrated throughout all activities. It is the primary tool for building momentum and often the signature of the underlying philosophy of a movement.

Idleness in a population is preferred by leaders who subscribe to privilege and by commercial interests that depend on political acquiescence. Both find populations that begin to think and act on their own interests as threats. Rather than using outright suppression, Western governments and markets have learned to co-opt emergent ideas and energy. Direct action with a philosophical core becomes at once a threat to them and an opportunity. Rebranding direct action becomes their strategy for deflecting honest criticism. For a variety of reasons, Aboriginal people's direct action more often than not has taken on the characteristics of resistance. For their own reasons, media enhances the image of Aboriginal activists as radical, savage, and warlike. Some Aboriginal activists have adopted this image as a sure way of drawing attention to their cause. However, as indigenous people who must oppose colonialism to protect our homelands and way of life, we run the risk of becoming largely cultures of resistance or, worse, perpetual victims. The very essence of living in harmony with the environment, sharing with others, and reducing conflict is undermined by persistent defence of these values. Because of this, strategic direct action should be mindful not only to project indigenous values but to enliven them as well. Indigenous activists need to stay close to the land and community to draw continuing insight and energy, and to reinforce traditional attitudes and beliefs. Direct action should take its shape and purposes from the intrinsic goodness embedded in indigenous epistemologies.

Environmental and Aboriginal justice converge on many levels and often share ground during direct-action events. At the heart of the injustices that these groups hope to eliminate are the tenets of colonialism. Colonialism supports the Canadian dominion as a system that claims the privilege of pillaging the earth and displacing the original human beings for its own wealth and security. It is accepted that Canadian citizens will benefit from such a system. Environmentalists and indigenous people understand that this kind of privilege will eventually destroy real wealth and make living

on this earth intolerable. In the struggle for justice there are sometimes issues that divide natural allies. Individual and collective interpretations and interests will arbitrarily separate goals. The very process of adapting locally has the tendency to create parochial attitudes and loyalties. Direct action is a positive way to unite people and educate communities around shared principles. As trite as it may sound, working together, sharing responsibility, and having fun together are the best antidotes for the misery of separation and internal violence. Direct action in its finest form is about discovery, trial and error, imagination, and celebration. Peace is not a goal, it is a process.

In times past, indigenous cultures tended not to be centred on material wealth. Certainly, personal belongings were meaningful. Technological devices and goods made survival surer and adaptation easier. But these were largely knowledge-based cultures. Understanding indigenous languages tells us this. Our indigenous knowledge systems are complex, holding generations of information about land, ecological processes, human relations, and spiritual realms. Our cultures were resilient and resourceful because individuals had access to the collective knowledge and wisdom of their family, clan, and people. Communities computed their own needs and portioned out resources with a sustainable logic that insured an equitable share for everyone. Equity was not a moral question; it was an assurance of mutual benefit and protection. While our indigenous cultures were uniquely generous and complete, they were not invincible. Their very ability to adapt when confronted with western European economic hegemony may well have been a prime cause in their eventual submission. Today we live with the consequences – impoverished and confined with our resources controlled by foreign powers, corporations, or governments. Resistance by opposition alone cannot succeed in preventing our final destruction. Stepping out of the shadow of the *Windigò* and becoming one with *Windigò* is not the answer either. Communities that survive will be those that reverse the loss of traditional knowledge and belief by reinvigorating individual talents and collective interests in living again in real relationship with the land. For it is the land that shapes us. It is the land that gives us our name. It is the land that defines our boundaries. We begin by taking care of our Elders and taking back our Children.

It is easy to identify a threat against Aboriginal people when it takes the shape of a company exploring for uranium. And in many ways, defeating such a threat is easier than overcoming substance abuse, addictions, corruption, and greed. But as surely as it will take restoring the land to health, to return to creation, people must restore themselves. Aboriginal people cannot turn to money or foreign governments to do it for them. The four-pronged strategy and transactional leadership are key tools for fighting exploitation, but they can also be used to restore our physical,

emotional, intellectual, and spiritual integrity. Warriors must think and act beyond the barricades to be really effective. Warriors who build community and culture, protect the young and old, and strive for peace with their neighbours will bring about positive growth in our communities.

As long as democracy and colonialism can exist hand in hand, human life for the vast majority of human beings will be a misery. Even when fighting against colonialism and in favour of environmental protection, the costs are high. Although individual victories are cause for celebration, the price in community resources is extensive. Fractures in social relationships and the traumatic effects of isolation and abuse and exposure to political injustice remain long after success. Community healing needs to be a core principle for education and action in communities that engage in the struggle to restore their independence and culture. The warriors' responsibility is to encourage and protect the healing process in their communities.

I have come to understand that the struggle for environmental justice is rooted in the hearts of people of all races and cultures. It finds its original impulse in the inherent sense of indigeneity that cannot be extinguished. For Aboriginal people in Canada, that impulse is still raw, a scar that has yet to close. Because of this we are at once a symbol and lamp in the battle to save the planet. We still hold legal tenure to the land. Our knowledge systems, although compromised, continue to form the structure and hold a vast content of information that supports sustainable living. Our epistemologies continue to bear witness to the goodness of humanity and the love of a Creator and beautiful Creation. As I sit here writing in the early morning in my cell I know that my friends and neighbours are awakening to the task at hand. I am humbled and assured that the tide of change is rising.

*On 28 May 2008, Robert Lovelace was released from prison after a successful appeal of his sentence. He had served 104 days of a six-month sentence for peaceful protest. The written appeal decision set important precedents for courts in dealing with political dissent and the inclusion of customary Aboriginal law in the Canadian legal system. Frontenac Ventures Corporation filed a leave to appeal the Ontario Appellate Court decision to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the Ontario Appellate Court decision on 4 December 2008 and awarded costs to the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation.*



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# Speaking for Ourselves



Introduction.

# Speaking for Ourselves, Speaking Together: Environmental Justice in Canada

*Randolph Haluza-DeLay, Pat O'Riley, Peter Cole,  
and Julian Agyeman*

Images of First Nations canoes entering New York City Harbor were newsworthy around the world in 1991. Grand Chief of the Northern Quebec Cree, and later national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Matthew Coon Come led James Bay Cree and Inuit paddlers from Quebec, starting at James Bay, through Ontario and down the Hudson River. The voyage was to protest the State of New York's agreement to purchase electricity from the Province of Quebec, which had dammed the rivers of their homeland and built hydroelectric projects on unceded lands without consultation or permission from the James Bay Cree. The massive hydroelectric project – known as the James Bay Project because it had primarily dammed or diverted rivers that flowed into this large arm of Hudson's Bay – covered an area the size of the state of New York. Construction had begun in 1971, with no notification to those who would be most affected, including non-human forms of life. It is no exaggeration to argue that the invisibilization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada as contemporary stewards and keepers of the land is a consistent tendency (if not policy) within the Canadian cultural imaginary as co-constructed by government, media, and various transnational corporate entities.

Between 1971 and 1990, the effects of earlier hydroelectric projects included reservoirs and other kinds of water diversions that flooded and fouled huge tracts of lands and waterways used by Aboriginal peoples for hunting and trapping and gathering, while also negatively impacting the animal and plant nations. Meanwhile, permanent new roads connected Cree and Inuit communities with the south, bringing great social change to formerly isolated sustainable communities. Cultural contact with the south, together with untoward environmental changes, disrupted local economies, replacing sustainable subsistence with poverty, welfare, and social breakdown. Few Cree people were employed by construction or other infrastructure operations of local economic developments.

The first James Bay Project announcement catalyzed Aboriginal activism

in Quebec and across the country. By 1973, a court decision had forced the Quebec government to negotiate agreements with Native peoples in the affected lands. The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement of 1975 became one of the first “modern” Aboriginal land claim settlements in Canada. This project was only the first stage of extensive hydroelectric diversion of waterways in northern Quebec. The second phase of the project received even more vocal protest, especially after the Great Whale River project was proposed. The canoe protest in 1991 was part of this campaign (Grand Council of the Crees, 1998).

When the State of New York cancelled its plans to purchase more hydroelectric power from Quebec – citing concerns over Native rights and environmental impacts – construction was halted. A new arrangement had to be made with the First Peoples of northern Quebec. In 2002, the Cree and the Government of Quebec signed the landmark Paix des Braves, or Agreement Concerning a New Relationship. It is widely described as a nation-to-nation agreement, a far cry from the invisibilization of a people who just thirty years before had been ignored and treated as anachronisms, holdovers from prehistoric or at least premodern times to be swept aside by the hubris and dismissal of modern Canadian government-industrial development partnerships.<sup>1</sup>

This case represents important processes in Canadian history, and in environmental and social analysis, bringing together many conversations and many ways of knowing and being. Like many other Canadian cases, the James Bay Project has not been perceived to be one of environmental justice but one of racism as practised by the state and its corporate institutional partners. The James Bay fiasco has also been seen to exemplify attitudes and practices of ongoing colonization of First Peoples, and dismissal of the other forms of nonhuman life on the land and in the waters and skies. Yet, while land and energy are usually considered environmental issues, the account of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is usually described as social injustice.

In contrast to the visibility of the environmental justice movement in the United States, Canada’s environmental justice movement has been labelled and contextualized within the purview of social justice and human rights advocacy movements. There *have been* environmental justice movements in Canada for centuries (if not millennia), just as there have been struggles over the ownership and use of land and resources throughout Canadian history – and before the boats came. The struggles of Aboriginal peoples over the loss and destruction of their traditional homelands, as well as of their traditional ways (including economies) of living, are clear examples of land and freedom movements. A number of scholars argue in this book that advocacy in Canada for what is called “environmental justice” has



taken different forms (see also MacGregor, 2006). This is especially the case with Aboriginal movements.

For the most part, the voices of Aboriginal peoples have been ignored, dismissed, or overridden since contact by the various levels of government within the country now called Canada. Similar stories to that of the Eeyouch (Cree) of James Bay have played out in Canadian history. In fact, much the same story is being played out now in northern Manitoba as hydroelectric development is being proposed, constructed, and opposed. Activist Sophia Rabliauskas of Poplar River First Nation (Manitoba) won international recognition and the 2007 Goldman Environmental Prize for North America for her work, to almost no mainstream media attention in Canada. (Former Grand Chief Coon Come won the same prize in 1994.) As Deacon and Baxter point out in their chapter, institutions such as the media have helped to make environmental injustice in Canada and those who oppose it less visible.

With respect to the Arctic and Subarctic, the Inuit have begun using the term “climate justice” to label climate change as a human rights issue (Watt-Cloutier, 2004). Chemical pollutants produced in industrial and energy production far to the south adversely affect northern food chains, as well as human and animal subsistence, and well-being. Northern peoples bear a disproportionate burden from economic development and natural resource extraction, since they do not benefit from the conveniences of mass industrial production as their southern neighbours do, yet experience deleterious changes to their economies, environments, and ways of life.

In this Introduction, we explore the context of environmental justice in at least two senses: as a conversation for community understanding, advocacy, and mobilization; and as a political principle that no self-identified group should bear a disproportionate burden of injustice (Agyeman and Evans, 2004). Canada is unique in that while it shares a continent with the United States and Mexico, it differs in many ways from these countries, including how environmental justice is imagined, manifested, (de)constructed, and shapeshifted from a predominantly Eurocentric/Eurogenic discourse (O’Riley and Cole, this volume) to alter-native ones.

*Speaking for Ourselves* is one coming-together of scholars on the relationship between environment and justice. We highlight the conversations relating to environmental justice espoused by the contributors rather than attempting to denote all that environmental justice can be, because we do not wish to define the parameters of the environmental justice discussion in Canada. No collection can be *the* definitive statement on the relationships between land, resources, nature, history, power relations, society, peoples, inequity, and all our (human and other-than-human)

relations. Nevertheless, we hope that the stories shared will be part of a larger conversation in which the relations between humans, nonhumans, the environment, and social justice on the ground (and in the air and water) can be moved in a good way toward more equitable relations. In particular, *Speaking for Ourselves* takes its shape from the experiences and broad themes we have tried to incorporate as the collection developed.

#### **Our Orientation as Editors**

Environmental justice in Canada – as a transdiscipline in academia or a framing strategy in social policy and protest movements – acknowledges the particular relationships of the peoples of Canada with the land and with one another. From time immemorial (time before time, time before memory), First Peoples have been the inhabitants and stewards of what is now called Canada, with varied ways of conceiving of the relations of the beings of the land. From early European contact/invasion/occupation to the establishment of the Government of Canada as a sovereign nation in 1867 founded in the European tradition, imperial and colonial philosophies, policies, and practices have decimated First Peoples and their lands. The production of academically specific knowledge (“research” and “scholarship”) has been carried out and used by socially dominant newcomers to further their social positions and agendas, and to shape and direct the trajectory of relations between all people in the cultural and social ecology of Canadian society. Western knowledge forms are very often treated by their creators as constituting the one true story of how the world works and what counts as legitimate knowledge. Whose knowledge counts? Whose intellectual and cultural properties are protected, and whose are not? Unwittingly or deliberately, academic scholarship subverts the very justice sought by so-called liberal societies, especially if elite and powerful actors within the mainstream are inconvenienced or discounted by it. From some perspectives, epistemological dominance manifests as social pre-eminence, and the exchange value of particular cultural capital is related to social and economic dominance and domination (Bourdieu, 1990). From an Aboriginal perspective, there is no “equivalency of epistemologies” (Grillo, 1998) on the Canadian landscape; academic, religious, and governmental Eurocentrism has made itself the default position of what counts as being legitimate knowledge and practice, dismissing or marginalizing “other”ed epistemologies, bodies, stories, and practices. Awareness of this inequity has led to the way that we have written this Introduction, and some of the choices we have made of chapters for inclusion in this book and contributions not selected.

Within the space of this book, we are striving to ensure that environmental justice is enacted – including that authors “speak for ourselves” rather than for/instead of others. This is one of the Principles of Environmental

Justice as established by the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991.<sup>2</sup> There are as many environmental stories as there are storytellers. But who has been telling those stories? Whose voices have been heard, whose have been silenced? Who has copyrighted and published whose intellectual property (data/research findings) under the aegis of freedom of speech, academic freedom, and academic research (as an objectifying praxis)? How have these factors shaped the issues of social injustices and relationships to our environment(s)? Similar questions come up over and over. We felt that these issues needed to be told by people who are a part of the peoples and lands featured in the narratives.

Because of the pre-eminence Western nations place on the value of the written word, the written text becomes the *de facto* account. “Other” is cited and thereby fixed within a grasp/gaze. Each epistemologically facilitated research narrative comes from or through the particular cultural and social location, language, lenses, filters, memories, experiences, values, and accumulated cultural capital of the researcher-writer, and it is embedded in its society – its institutions and socially acceptable ways of knowing and doing things. We seek to unsettle such embeddedness, just as after hundreds of years of being designated as being nothing more than hearsay or unsubstantiated anecdotal evidence, oral narratives are becoming recognized by legal systems around the world as court case after court case affirms their legitimacy and validity.

There are many other voices that could have been included in this book, but as an editorial group, we chose at the outset to bring forward certain stories told by voices often made invisible by privileged outsider-experts and specifically by Western academic ways of knowing. This was especially so with regard to the circumstances of Aboriginal peoples. To allow space in which people can speak for themselves encourages a mutual intercultural conversation (Grillo, 1998), a culturally reciprocal space of speaking/listening. Working in respectful ways requires more time. The academy has existed for 150 years or so within the Canadian context and has been based on an unbalanced Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal power differential, with the latter being treated by the former as a source of data. There have long been requests that non-Aboriginal peoples walk beside or behind – but not in front of – Aboriginal peoples. Co-creating a space of shared storying not only brings a different kind of relationality within academia, it also encourages more equitable, diverse, complex, and complicating narrative engagements (Cole, 2006; O’Riley, 2004).

Environmentalism may be just a new word to describe an old concept or practice – caring for and about the world we live in. The social movement known as environmentalism has been very much implicated in new forms of colonialism and oppression globally, including within Canada. The prescriptive solutions of an expert, activist, or researcher not from

the community suffering from environmental injustice may reproduce or magnify existing inequities, thereby contributing to disabling practices and disempowerment. Appropriation of voice by outsiders contributes to community and individual disempowerment. Aboriginal peoples have experienced this in abundance, to the extent that all academic research is considered highly suspect and, more often than not, disrespectful by many Aboriginal community members. Other communities have also felt the weight of the privileged academic and his (usually) epistemic dominance.

So, who are we to collect these stories here? A disparate crew to be sure, but not so disparate – we are academics all, each with a different activist background. Pat O'Riley was born in Quebec and is of Haudenosaunee, French, and Irish heritage; Julian Agyeman is of British and Ghanaian heritage, working in the United States; Peter Cole is Stl'atl'imx (British Columbia), with Welsh-Scottish heritage; Randy Haluzá-DeLay is an American who traces his ancestry through Plymouth Plantation a decade after the first Pilgrims arrived from England; he immigrated to Canada two decades ago. We all teach at universities, and come to environmental justice through lived experience as well as through fields of study such as sociology, education, environmental studies, geography, Aboriginal and northern studies, theatre, and poetry. We have all lived and worked internationally. Agyeman has been active in urban sustainability issues on two sides of the Atlantic. O'Riley and Cole are partners and have lived and taught at universities in Canada, Aotearoa-New Zealand, and the United States. They have been working on language and cultural regeneration, economic renewal, and self-determination with Stl'atl'imx communities. Haluzá-DeLay has lived in ten states and three provinces, has been a wilderness guide, and has worked for church-based peace and justice projects. O'Riley was involved in building design, labour, and human rights long before she did any post-secondary education. Since the 1960s, Cole has worked in all areas of landscaping and as a journalist and builder-renovator. Some of us are parents; all of us have families.

These social and cultural locators may hint at the variety of influences but do not even begin to describe the orientations we bring to this work. They affect the topics that have been collected, the processes by which we have selected and (hopefully) nurtured the contributors and the ways that we see environment, justice, and the joining together of those concepts and practices into the focus and momentum of this book: environmental justice.

### **Conceptualizing and Contesting Environmental Justice**

The Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) of 1999 (the most recent incarnation of CEPA) states that the protection of the environment is essential to every Canadian's well-being. "Well-being" encompasses the

provision of and access to environmental benefits such as good air quality, safe water, access to parks, natural spaces, public-transit options, quality housing, and reclamation of unceded First Nations' traditional lands and territories.

The laws of the land, along with individual and collective ethical responsibilities, also demand that Canadians be protected from environmental risks such as poor air quality, toxic chemicals, hazardous waste sites, and other environmental "bads." Research from many national contexts has consistently shown that exposure to these risks and externalities is disproportionately borne by poor and racialized peoples and communities (e.g., Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans, 2003). This has come to be known as "environmental injustice." Environmental well-being means access to aesthetic and healthy environments rather than just the avoidance of deprivation or harm. Thus, environmental concerns are *relative* to the population rather than universal or definitive standards of well-being or deprivation and exposure to harm.

One standard narrative is that community outrage at government policies and practices and industrially produced environmental hazards has been organized and mobilized in the form of civil society groups and joined by academic researchers, leading to the rise of the environmental justice (EJ) movement worldwide. This standard story needs contesting, as many of these movements have existed long before their (re)conceptualization as the EJ movement. Taylor (2000) notes that the field of *environmental justice* developed as a way of expressing environment-related social inequities. The term focuses on a wider range of social groups and issues than that covered by *environmental racism* (ER), which primarily names the disproportional impacts on communities of colour and indigenous communities in the United States. Numerous Canadian scholars believe that there has been little environmental justice-related research in Canada (Gosine, 2003; Draper and Mitchell, 2001; Teelucksingh, 2007) and very few Canadian books have been published using the environmental justice concept as a central analytic focus (Fletcher, 2003; Van Wynsberghe, 2002). One journal special issue (Haluza-DeLay, 2007) and a magazine issue (Gosine, 2003) have also been produced. This does not mean that the essence of EJ or ER has not been a focus of great concern for a very long time in this country. For example, since European contact, Aboriginal peoples have been articulating environmental injustices in relation to loss of land, Aboriginal title, and devastation of their traditional territories and the life forms they support. However, Aboriginal voices have rarely been heard amid the din of academic environmental theorizing. In their chapters, Keil, Ollevier, and Tsang, and Rahder show how EJ organizing has also occurred without explicit labelling as "environmental justice."

EJ and ER research has shown a clear pattern of racial and class

demographics and a corresponding distribution of environmental risks or exposures (discussed below), but such distributive inequity is only one aspect of conceptualizing environmental justice. In (Eurocentric) legal theory, *procedural* justice – unequal participation in democratic processes as articulated in this volume by Ali, Reed, Ominayak, and Thomas – is another major type of justice. Those with limited access to information, participatory opportunities, and/or the power to shape discourse(s) or decisions are less able to defend themselves and their communities from negative distributional environmental effects, and less prepared to advocate successfully for better environmental conditions. For example, Pushchak (2002) detailed the process by which the federal government repeatedly conducted environmental impact assessments about the low-level military flights in Labrador that have caused hardship for Innu residents until an assessment favourable to the government's predetermined desires was finally reached. In yet another case, Hanson (2007) reported on farmers struggling against the power of a corporation's interests and resources in a manner that resonates with the tropes and modalities of procedural justice. As Agyeman (2005) comments, "The purveyors of environmental bads, such as large multinationals, are favored in pluralistic decision-making processes because of their disproportionate influence, economic muscle, and knowledge" (p. 3).

These examples illustrate the importance of what is called "procedural justice" as an integral facet of environmental inequity. Procedural justice theories can help to clarify the practices of "democratic" participation, including how social hierarchies participate in the construction of environmental injustice. Procedural inequities are more difficult to explain and measure – and change through policy and practice – than substantive or material inequities, so much so that Draper and Mitchell (2001) decided intentionally *not* to address it in a brief review of environmental justice in Canada.

Mainstream social justice literature has increasingly pointed out a third dimension beyond distributive and procedural justice issues (Barry and Eckersley, 2005; Schlosberg, 2004). This is the issue of *recognition* – such questions as Who has standing? On what concerns? What are the legitimation processes by which social and symbolic meaning are attributed to these questions? What constitutes power, and what are the contexts with respect to those with power and those without? These questions are fundamental to the quest for justice and equity but challenge the very foundations of legal process and often legal theory, which, as we have noted, is founded in particular cultural conditions such as those of the British or other European traditions. Several contributors in this book base their quest for justice on different foundations.

Justice as a Western construction sometimes includes the recognition of perceived differences, including how these perceived differences came to

be constituted and how they are sometimes constitutive components of the issues themselves. For example, the perception of the Alberta prairies will differ for farmers several generations on the land (yet who do not “own” the subsurface rights), corporate transnational coal-bed methane producers, the provincial government, and Aboriginal communities that have been required to migrate from their traditional homelands to some other place which is already another community’s (often unacknowledged) homeland.

Environmental justice issues do not involve only documentable technical data and scientific assumptions about the world but also fairness of treatment and the participatory ability of all marginalized peoples to be able to make substantive qualitative changes to the impositions of the larger society, especially those that adversely affect their rights and freedoms. Justice is broader than the liberal understanding of distributive equity (Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990; McGregor, this volume). “If differences are constituted in part by social, cultural, economic, and political processes, any examination of justice needs to include discussions of the structures, practices, rules, norms, language, and symbols that mediate social relations” (Schlosberg, 2004, p. 99). “Justice” should no longer be limited to Western legal concepts (though the word and the practice have deep Western roots) because Canada, as well as being Aboriginal land, is also a land of people who increasingly do not come only from the North Atlantic regions.

Environmental matters and justice matters are to a large extent about who gets to ask the questions, who gets to be heard (and listened to), and who benefits from how and if the questions are answered, researched, or considered relevant. For example, public transportation can be promoted as green – in terms of it being efficient and an environmental good – or as an equity issue – servicing people who require transportation but do not have automobiles. Is lack of public transit an environmental problem? Is it social? Is it injustice? How many levels and definitions of *(un)sustainable* are there and for whom are they (un)sustainable? Is a bus or subway sustainable for a bicyclist or committed pedestrian commuter? How big an ecological footprint is too big? Are economic growth and environmental sustainability mutually exclusive or reclusive? How are these concepts constituted and by whom?

Such questions are vital ones to ask. Although distributional inequality is an important conversation, exclusive focus on it narrows the scope and dynamic of justice. Similarly, inclusion of procedural justice dimensions – while an improvement – still limits participation to those who are allowed by the system itself to participate. It does not ask the more basic questions of who is the system, and how did the system come to be this way? Applying modern liberal rights discourse to the environment as an entity other than resources is difficult. The classic question, “do trees have

legal standing?" challenges the common sense of modern anthropocentric "democracies" and modern systems that name nature in such a way as to reify it and make it into a commodity (a resource) for the benefit of the corporate entity (which has been given the legal status of "person"). In many Aboriginal cultures, rocks are persons, as are salmon and all of our relations. To whom does the oxygen produced by our photosynthesizing sisters and brothers belong and where is that negotiation taking place? In this regard, Anishnaabeg scholar and lawyer John Borrows (2002) asserts that "procedural realignments, through institutional reform and interest group reconfiguration," (p. 46) require not only the environmental knowledge of Aboriginal peoples to be taken into account, but also full participation of Aboriginal peoples, so that it is less a (Western) legal discourse and more a conversation of interrelationship and interdependency of spirit, law, and cultural conventions. For true environmental justice, when will the West catch up?

Environmental discourse by those who care for and about the land has sought to extend recognition of value beyond narrow prescriptions/descriptions/inscriptions. It is no accident that Aboriginal peoples themselves have had to similarly battle for their survival and need to continually challenge the ongoing colonial system that has removed them from their traditional lands, as well as destroyed it through resource extraction, damming, and settler encroachment, to name a few injustices. As in most industrialized countries, history as taught in schools as a history of Canada ignores the tens of thousands of years Aboriginal peoples have inhabited this country (Dickason, 2006) and elaborates that history through white, Western, and Eurocentric eyes. Deliberately set-out state-enforced assimilationist policies and practices, unilateral erasure of treaty guarantees, denial of legal representation, denial or criminalization of spiritual practices, and other legalized and socialized forms of systemic violence amount to government-sanctioned (and often initiated) cultural and biological genocide. Aboriginal peoples have been rewriting these histories (e.g., Bird, 2007; Cole, 2006; Cole and O'Riley, 2007; Dickason, 2006; Lawrence, 2002; McMillan and Yellowhorn, 2004), thereby contributing to a conversation that has until recently been a monochrome monologue with an occasional dash of multicultural phrase or clause for colour.

Although "the environment" may seem, *prima facie*, obvious and self-explanatory, it is not so simple. What constitutes the "environment" in the contributions of this book varies considerably, as well as what constitutes "justice." Some EJ scholars feel that the notion of justice is under-theorized and, as a result, is weak in application. It must be noted that these conversations about land and justice have in large part been written using Eurocentric ways of thinking. Only in the past few decades have Canadians of non-European heritage been acknowledged in the environ-



mental justice conversation (Cole, 1998; Gosine, 2003; Jafri, this volume; McGregor, this volume). Nor have economically disadvantaged people usually had the resources or contacts to write extensively on environment and justice – except, perhaps, in letters to the editor or as informants (rather than co-researchers) in academic research projects. The discussion already presented in this Introduction should help readers ponder the different ways that contributors are “linguaging the land” (Cole, 2002). Finally, how contributors unite these concepts into claims about environmental justice is equally varied. We consider these variations an important part of the ongoing conversation on environmental justice in Canada.

### **Overview of Research on Environmental Justice in Canada**

Most research in Canada is carried out by universities, governments, and transnational corporations (including media). The intellectual and cultural foundation of the bulk of publicly funded research in Canada needs to be questioned. How does it reinscribe culturally hegemonic (Eurocentric) standards of validity and legitimacy? What is the relationship between universities, academic journals, major funding councils, and transnational corporations, and what might this do to fundamental questions of economic-environmental justice? Which demographic groups have shaped the academy and retain power within it and the academic industry? Where do governments fit into this equation? Where do equity-seeking groups fit into the research processes? How is transparency and accountability ensured (or ignored)? Such questions are fundamental to the quest for social and environmental justice.

Canada has a unique ongoing colonial and racial history and social institutions. The patterns and relationships of academic and civil society discourses and dynamics are also unique. Aboriginal peoples, the most racially marginalized peoples in Canada, are most often left out of these “post”-colonial/anti-racist conversations. The very existence of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada is a challenge to the legitimacy of the Canadian state and its imported and imposed laws. Power determines legitimacy in law, especially when the law is itself derived almost wholly from European laws and values.

Canadian governmental policies impact patterns of exposure that particular groups have to environmental hazards, as well as just consideration within the justice system. The “social safety net” for the people of Canada should (in theory) mitigate some effects of environmental exposure; however, it has long been in the process of being dismantled (Carroll and Ratner, 2005) or replaced by a social safety net for transnational corporations. An official commitment (in practice) by the federal government to multiculturalism may affect the concentration of environmental risks, but there is little historical evidence for this because of the gulf between policy

and practice. On the other hand, many Aboriginal peoples and other racialized groups in Canada see multiculturalism as being problematic – often little more than a pretense or diversion based on nebulous conceptions of equality (Das Gupta, 1999; Isin and Siemiatycki, 2002; Phillip, 1992).

The federal system of governance, with its delineation of responsibilities between provincial and federal jurisdiction, affects organizing for environmental well-being and social justice. The environment (natural resources, land management, endangered species, water quality) are provincial responsibilities. Health care is mandated as a national responsibility although delivered provincially. This division can affect the effectiveness of addressing environmental health issues. There are also many areas relating to human health and wellness that are lost in a limbo of inter-jurisdiction or layered jurisdiction, which cause a stalemate in terms of action on pressing environmental health issues. According to Rahder, Jafri, McGregor, Lawrence, Reed, and Cole and O'Riley in this book, traditional de/re/constructions of what counts as “environment” affects opportunities for organizing an environmental justice movement or addressing how and if environmental inequality occurs.

Global research has shown varied relationships between ethnic, racial, and class demographics and environmental inequality. Such research should be handled carefully in terms of its direct applicability to Canada or any other country. For example, Canada has different racial discourses and dynamics than the United States, our continental neighbour. Canada does not show such strong patterns of racial segregation, either regionally or in urban areas. Such urban dynamics may be changing, however, leading to the racializing of spaces and the concomitant potential for increased spatial inequality (Razack, 2002; Walks and Bourne, 2006).

The specific history of resource development and its place in regional and national economies also makes for specifically Canadian forms of environmental justice issues (Ali, this volume). Still, most prevalent of the environmental inequities within Canada may be the political and cultural position of First Nations. Aboriginal peoples are faced with systemic environmental injustice in terms of treaty and land claims processes; the siting of energy projects on or near their traditional territories; air, water, and land pollution; deplorable drinking-water quality issues (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003), resource extraction by outsiders on unceded territories by government-sanctioned contracts (Lovelace, this volume); the lack of ready and affordable access to economic development where they live; poor quality of life conditions, including access to education and health care; the failure by the Canadian state to recognize underlying and unalienable Aboriginal title and rights; and the unwillingness of the Canadian state to right historical wrongs to First Peoples.

Aboriginal peoples make up approximately 5 percent of the Canadian

population. On nearly every marker of social inclusion or equity, they fare far worse than all other Canadians, with higher poverty rates, poorer housing, lower levels of formal education, lower employment levels, lower retention and promotion in employment, higher suicide and incarceration rates, and poorer health. There are, however, some indications that the situation is improving for some Aboriginal people (Ponting and Voyageur, 2001), at least in part because of increased political mobilization of Aboriginal groups and repeatedly winning legal and court recognition that treaty arrangements and unceded land holdings are still valid in contemporary Canada. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1995) was yet another study documenting the inequities, injustices, ongoing oppression, and structural violence experienced by Aboriginal peoples across Canada and throughout Canada's history. Disappointingly, more than ten years after the commission's report, there has been "a clear lack of action on the key foundational recommendations of RCAP and a resultant lack of progress on key socio-economic indicators" (Assembly of First Nations, 2006, p. 2). Such social processes affect environmental matters, with consequences that are key to contemporary environmental justice contestations and continuing social conditions. If a group is treated systemically and historically in such a way as amounts to the enactment of genocide against them, a foundation has been laid for dysfunctionality within that group owing to the damage done over successive generations.

Finally, there is the environmental injustice that Canada, a wealthy nation (overall, but not for all) in the global North, wreaks on poorer countries and peoples in the global South. By having one of the world's largest per capita ecological footprints, Canadians are incurring an enormous ecological debt. Canada's global economic and political position indicates historical, contemporary, and future environmental injustice to the planet, its peoples, and all their/our relations. Social institutions such as transnational corporations, and so-called liberalization of trade policies, coupled with media reflecting corporate interests and promoting consumerist culture, combine to addle the citizenry. Some Canadians may be addicted to automobiles, big TVs, cheap fast-food from afar, and available energy, and some of us may allow environmental exploitation to occur because of those addictions, but the responsibility and the power to act differently are not equally distributed; therefore, the assumption of consumer sovereignty should be critiqued if it lacks a more comprehensive social analysis (Hanson, this volume).

### **Existing Canadian Environmental Justice Research**

The existing research on Canadian environmental justice takes several forms. Most of it relies on government, industry, and university research data, but an increasing amount is done by NGO and ENGOs (environmental

NGOs) as well.<sup>3</sup> The first form of research is that of the aforementioned comparison of demographic markers (race, ethnicity, income, immigrant status, housing values, etc.) with proximity to known environmental exposure sites (identified toxics, polluting facilities, etc.). Generally, this line of research compares census data with databases such as the National Pollution Release Inventory for the same geographic unit, or tries to clarify potential relationships between health indicators such as asthma or cancer with environmental exposure locations. Such research is useful because it illuminates presence, prevalence, or absence of patterns of inequity and could communicate the breadth of potential problems in ways that may mobilize political support for addressing them. Such research, however, should not displace attention to impacts on individuals and communities in favour of the epistemic screen sometimes cast by the effort to have statistical science as the final arbiter. Furthermore, such exposures are typically multifactorial, which makes evidence gathering a methodologically difficult task (and this is not even problematizing the lack of information on what methods and methodologies were used in the gathering of statistical and polled data and how such data might be categorized and filtered). Such “public science” may have “unwittingly conservative effects” because it reproduces existing reliance on certain types of methodologies and denies others and establishes highly limiting understanding of satisfactory evidence and proof (Stacey, 2004, p. 131). In many ways, the methodological debates in social science correspond to recent legal debates in which oral history has been accorded legal standing, or the processes by which traditional ecological knowledge has reached some level of acceptability by bodies such as Environment Canada.

Other methodological problems abound in this demographic-proximity style of research. For example, census tracts do not match wind patterns, meaning that populations downstream or downwind from industrial releases and thus at greatest risk are not specifically captured by any currently collected data. Moreover, distribution correlations do not show the processes by which such disproportionality may have occurred, nor do they address fundamental questions of rights or power differentials. Much research of this nature has been done in the Hamilton area (Buzzelli, Jerrett, Burnett, and Finklestein, 2003; Buzzelli and Jerrett, 2004; Jerrett, Eyles, Cole, and Reader, 1997; Jerrett et al., 2001) and more recently Vancouver (Veenstra and Kelly, 2007), although Nabalamba (2005) also conducted a comparative study of three cities in the Golden Horseshoe area of Ontario. Finally, the environmental effects are usually those associated with human health, as Eyles discusses in his chapter, rather than a more comprehensive understanding of socio-environmental relationships.

These studies are highly limited in the number of studies completed, regions studied, and types of environmental exposure. Most importantly,

these studies do not demonstrate causation, nor the social processes at work. Correlation of demographics with exposure could mean, for example, that the neighbourhood was already marginal, which then led to the siting of the offending facility (for the perceived economic benefit, or because of inability to mount a Not in My Backyard [NIMBY] campaign). Alternatively, the siting could have caused the lowering of property values. Despite these problems, we do see systemic patterns of environmental inequity, structured along dominant/dominating social patterns. Some socio-economic factors and environmental exposure seem related. These include poor housing (measured by housing value and state of repair relative to rental cost) and income. However, racial identification and immigrant status are contradictory, with some studies finding correlation and others finding none.

One response to these findings is that more studies of potentially patterned environmental risk with wider regional distribution are needed. However, another argument is that, although broad patterns discernible by quantitative measurement using databases not designed for such data extraction do not present definitive results, numerous case studies do illustrate environmental inequality in and between Canadian communities. Since environmental effects are primarily experienced in localities, case studies are useful to uncover these effects, including a grounded understanding of local places, their regional or global context, and the relations that link them. These relations can take the form of global air currents transporting pollutants from far-off production facilities, ideas about consumerism or conservation, governmental policies that allow environmental degradation to occur in local sites, or transnational economic systems that foreground profit over responsibility and stewardship. Inequalities also occur across localities, such as the 600-plus First Nations reserves, many of which do not have safe drinking water (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003). As they accumulate, the case studies are showing several foci.

First, much of the Canadian research has been *about* Aboriginal peoples (Cole, 2004; O'Riley, 2004). A pattern persists, from the mercury poisoning of the residents of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog reserves in northern Ontario (Erikson, 1995; Shkilnyk, 1985) to the toxic blob that affects Walpole Island in southern Ontario (Van Wynsberghe, 2002) to the preponderance of First Nations communities that have water-quality problems (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003). Mascarenhas (2007) assessed the intolerably poor water systems on Canadian reserves as a facet of neo-liberal colonization within the trajectory of historical oppression as government agencies have allowed their environmental duties to become privatized or otherwise off-loaded. Numerous researchers have pointed out how resource management (a Western take on environmental relations)

ignores Aboriginal people's traditional fishing or land-use practices and cultural knowledge such that Western and scientific management practices are command-and-control impositions of power, leaving Aboriginal peoples still fighting regulation and marginalization (Braun, 2002; Gerwing and McDaniel, 2006; Page, 2007). Furthermore, Aboriginal lands, including forests, were never ceded to the Crown in British Columbia. Braun (2002) shows the discursive representations of the forest by environmentalists and the timber industry also exclude Aboriginal peoples, writing, "Struggles over the forests' cultural meaning are central to producing socially just post-colonial natures on Canada's west coast" (p. 25). From an Aboriginal perspective, there is no "post" in post-colonial. As Ominayak and Thomas and Lawrence write in their chapters, the marginalization of First Nations is an effect of state and corporate (including media and educational) strategies for appropriating land and exploiting or diverting natural resources from land use and occupancy to extraction and sale.

The pattern continues in the North, where chemical pollutants produced in industrial and energy production far to the south magnify and affect northern food chains, subsistence, and health and wellness (Trainor, Chapin III, Huntington, Kofinas, and Natcher, 2007; Trainor et al., this volume). Northern peoples bear a disproportionate burden, especially since they do not benefit directly from the industrial production yet experience the changes to their mixed economies. Specifically, the Inuit have organized against climate change in a campaign focusing on climate justice (Watt-Cloutier, 2004). Trainor et al. (2007) note that the policy regime in Canada allows the Inuit in Canada a better political position to shape federal policy than the Inuit in Alaska. "Better" is relative, however, and most would agree that Northerners wield little to no clout in the halls of Canadian power or over the implementation of policies decided in Ottawa, on Bay Street, or elsewhere nationally or internationally.

A second theme in Canadian environmental justice research is the *recognition* of Aboriginal difference, that is, that First Nations and other indigenous peoples have practices and epistemologies and relations with the land that bear little relationship to that of contemporary, *Westernized* Canadian society. This is especially prevalent in scholarship done by Aboriginal scholars and is among the reasons that this book takes the stand that it does regarding "speaking for ourselves." Furthermore, there is, and has long been, an ambiguous relationship between environmentalists and Aboriginal peoples. While environmentalists often appropriate Aboriginality as an exemplar of environmental praxis, this stereotypes Aboriginal peoples as well as essentializes them (Borrows, 2002). In this way, environmentalist discourse has a race-making element. Furthermore, environmentalist support does not necessarily extend to campaigns for land claims, treaty rights, or economic development, thus undermining cultural and social justice for

Aboriginal peoples (Ballamingie, 2006; Lawrence, this volume; Robinson, Tindall, Seldat, and Pechlaner, 2007; Stoddart, 2007).

A third theme in Canadian environmental justice research is the connection of race with the physical and social landscape (Jafri and Okamoto, 2007; Peake and Ray, 2001; Teelucksingh, 2002). As McCurdy (1995) reports it, the case of the dissolution of the black community of Africville in Nova Scotia is an example of racialized environmental injustice (see also Nelson, 2008). The North, the Canadian Shield, and “wilderness” play a significant narrative role in the Canadian imaginary. Analyses of the racialized colonial and neo-colonial construction of the land as empty requires continuing scrutiny of the often-ignored “whiteness” of Canadian national narratives and resource development (Baldwin, 2004; Cole, 2006).

A fourth theme is associated with health and safety, often involving toxic contamination. Canadian case studies of toxic contamination have often focused on industrial sites rather than on human bodies as repositories of industrial toxins. Reviewing six cases on toxic exposures, one set of researchers concluded that regardless of racialized environmental inequity, “the factor of class is invariably present” (Warrnier, McSpurren, and Nabalamba, 2001). In the Canadian tradition, class factors are predominated by location in the structures of the political economy and are not always separate from race issues. The case of the Sydney Tar Ponds in Halifax demonstrates this feature clearly. Working-class neighbourhoods experienced toxic loads far in excess of acceptable levels, while government authorities and their bureaucracies stalled, denied, asked for more research, and generally abrogated regulatory responsibility in favour of capital accumulation (Barlow and May, 2001; Thompson, 2003). Ali (2002, this volume) locates contamination in the workings of risk society and political economics, as do Haalboom, Elliott, Eyles, and Muggah (2006). Other cases involve uranium mining, most famously that of the Eldorado Mine at Port Radium on Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories. Documented in the video *A Village of Widows* (Blow, 1999), workers and their relatives in the Dene community of Deline claim that inadequate safety precautions have led to high cancer mortality, which is denied by government and corporate authorities.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, the effects of the extraction of oil from the Athabasca tar sands in northern Alberta has been claimed as a cause of health complications downstream. Aboriginal activists and the Prairie chapter of the Sierra Club have begun to use the term *environmental justice* to frame that issue, particularly as the provincial government has refused to conduct independent and peer-reviewed health studies. Although such cases often focus on health dimensions, there are other dimensions of social justice. Both Jackson and Curry (2004) and Harter (2004) argue that environmental struggles involve class interests, with asymmetrically situated procedural justice being part of the alternative to

technocratic management of both people and resources. The social dislocation experienced by the swelling population in the tar sands-serving city of Fort McMurray seems to cry out for a political-ecological analysis that draws on the environmental justice and political economy literatures. These latter cases demonstrate how the intersection of environment and social considerations are part of larger political-economic and ecologic processes, especially in the increasingly global economy.

A fifth environmental justice research theme attempts to show the interplay between local environmental social issues and economic processes at larger scales. Debbané and Keil (2004) compare the provision of water services in South Africa and Canada. They highlight the rolling back of state services, specifically in moves to privatize water provision, which results in privatizing the water itself so that those less able to pay for services have less "right" to the water. They point out that environmental justice is not just abrogation of individual rights to environmental well-being but includes the ways that the state decides socio-environmental participation should occur.

Canadian scholars have a long political economy tradition, so it is little surprise that Canadian environmental justice scholarship includes a macroscopic analysis/restorying of societal restructuring in advanced capitalism. Such restructuring has included the retrenchment of governmental involvement in service provision, such as environmental protection (Paehlke, 2000). Another facet of this shrinkage includes the contracting out of services, and the off-loading of services onto other sectors of society, while increasing bureaucratic entanglements. Draper and Mitchell (2001) ask if the deficit in water quality that led to seven deaths and thousands of illnesses in Walkerton, Ontario, in 2000 is a case of environmental injustice. In Walkerton, the rights of citizens collided with the corporate agenda of profitability, with reduced governmental services even further reduced when handed to the private sector (Prudham, 2004). These are not random or accidental occurrences. Environmental regulation and public participation in development that impacts the environment have diminished in recent years (Carroll and Ratner, 2005; VanNijnattan, 1999). Environmental effects have increased as regulation and monitoring have been replaced by deregulation and "voluntary compliance," illuminating the state's compromised camaraderie with capital and "development."

Carroll and Ratner (2005) and their collaborators outline this capital-state partnership by drawing on numerous provincial case studies of social democracy in neoliberal times. The analyses specifically include environmental effects in the cases of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Ontario, reinforcing the possibility that the modern state is interested only in providing environmental protection insofar as this allows the treadmill of production to proceed without catastrophic ecological collapse (Foster, 2002). Carroll and Ratner show how this has proceeded in Canada under



assumptions of global competitiveness and a fatalistic sense of “we had to do it” in order to maintain sustained economic growth. Sustained, but not sustainable. The result is capital accumulation by those who own the means of production, rather than dispersion through the population of the presumed benefits of this economic activity. Governments have targeted ministries of environment for cutbacks – for all intents and purposes eliminating their ability to monitor corporate practices, much less provide proactive, distributive strategies for environmental improvements.

With government as capital’s partner (willingly or “reluctantly,” as Carroll and Ratner [2005] summarize), civil society groups, as well as racialized and Aboriginal peoples and communities, are left in the precarious situation of opposing powerful actors with even less means to do so. Community development is taking place in an increasingly inhospitable environment (Wharf, 1999, p. 267), which has only deteriorated at an accelerated rate. Procedural justice issues, then, are not just in the case of less educated or resourced citizens but are a facet of declining public access to political levers. The discussion of procedural justice scales up into the larger questions of the democratic deficit. Given this relationship between government and capital, and government’s support of so-called economic development while conceding to its citizens a level of environmental protection only as necessary for the maintenance of the economic growth engine, it is increasingly unlikely for governments to adequately defend against environmental degradation (Pellow and Brulle, 2005). Nevertheless, many believe that the state still has more ability than any other actor or force to regulate the actions of other actors and the treadmills of consumption and production (Barry and Eckersley, 2005). To address environmental degradation and how it disproportionately affects some social groups more than others, we need a sound assessment of the macroscopic forces in operation. Canada has long been a follower (at best) rather than a leader in terms of environmental responsibility and action, even though such inaction causes much hardship or even death for significant numbers of its population.

These themes, as well as others, are represented in this book. Many of the contributors do not use the explicit language of environmental justice. We have deliberately allowed that, as our intention is to demonstrate environmental justice in Canada as being a dynamic and organic conversation rather than one using a prescribed rhetoric; certainly, this conversation has been going on since European contact and no doubt before. This process also facilitates dialogue on the diversity and multiplicity of intersections of environmental matters and social justice that is specific to the Canadian context. In this manner and in many other ways, a more global, inclusive, reflexive, and polyvocal approach can be put into practice. As citizens of the world, Canadians are directly affected by environmental injustice of sisters and brothers elsewhere in the world.

### **Introducing the Chapters**

This book begins with the voices of the Original Peoples of what is now called Canada. Robert Lovelace, retired chief of Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, Deborah McGregor (Anishnaabe), and Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaq) share what "environment" and "justice" mean from Aboriginal perspectives and how they are enacted, as well as elaborating on struggles by Aboriginal peoples to reclaim and protect their traditional lands from imperialist, colonialist, and capitalist exploitation. Bob Lovelace wrote his "Notes from Prison" while serving in a maximum-security prison his sentence for trying to peacefully protect Algonquin lands from uranium mining. Ironically, only when imprisoned did Bob have the time to write, scribing his piece with a four-inch-long pencil sharpened on the side of a metal staircase. Bob, along with several other potential contributors, could not write chapters in time for the deadline for this book because they were too busy on the front lines of environmental justice.

McGregor writes that "relationships based on environmental justice are not limited to relations between people but consist of those among all beings of creation." McGregor roots this perspective in natural law as understood within the Anishnaabe world view. This view is rooted in creation and re-creation, which requires both the Creator and an ongoing process of relationship between all parts of creation.

Lawrence details Mi'kmaq land relationships in Newfoundland. Through the use of interviews, she explains how land is central to identity for indigenous peoples – often in ways difficult for non-Aboriginal Canadians to understand. Until 2008, Newfoundland Mi'kmaq communities were not "recognized" by the federal government under the Indian Act. More trenchantly, Lawrence contests the popular and academic history that asserts that Mi'kmaq are not "native" to Newfoundland. This contested history is part of the environmental injustice.

Roger Keil, Melissa Ollevier, and Erica Tsang begin their chapter by contesting the typical story that there is little of a social movement for environmental justice in Canada. In particular, they address that narrative by narrowing their scope to a detailed analysis of the City of Toronto. They conclude that "there are – substantially, if not by name – many environmental justice initiatives underway in Toronto."

In her chapter on gender and the environment, Barbara Rahder makes a similar argument. Rahder considers that environmental justice issues are feminist concerns and that women do not self-identify exclusively with an "environmental" label. She argues that their involvement in intersected social-environmental activism is an application of more thorough-going citizenship that overcomes other forms of social exclusion.

The Sydney, Nova Scotia, tar ponds are the primary case study for S. Harris Ali. He develops a theoretical account of environmental injustice that attends

to the particular manifestations of this case but places them in larger socio-historical and political-economic contexts. “The broader forces involved in the Canadian political economy expose those in particular regions to harm,” Ali writes. As his case study shows, criticisms of policies and practices that give rise to environmental harm are often muted by claiming them as localized manifestations rather than part of a systemic problem.

Similar processes are occurring with the Lubicon Cree First Nation of central Alberta. The account, by Chief Bernard Ominayak and Kevin Thomas, generates key questions for conceptualizing the processes of Canadian environmental justice: When did the manifestation of environmental injustice begin? The years 1979, 1939, and 1899, and even centuries past, are all potential answers. The rapid expansion of oil and gas drilling on Lubicon traditional-use lands continues to produce dramatic degradation in Lubicon social sustainability, economic well-being, and health, along with large-scale changes of the land.

Environmental justice activism has often revolved around health concerns. Good health is not equally distributed across the population. John Eyles situates environmental justice within the domain of population health, and its practitioners’ approach to improving health by focusing on the social determinants that reduce healthiness. Although public health agencies consider physical environment as among the important determinants of health for population groups, Eyles argues that they do not consider it enough. He refers to the methodological assumptions of Western science and concludes that methodological and conceptual innovation is needed.

In many ways, Sarah Fleisher Trainor and her collaborators pick up where Eyles leaves off. Focusing on the Arctic, their chapter also addresses health and environmental injustice. The presence of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and warming from global climate change mean that “the longevity and integrity of cultural traditions are thus intimately linked to the integrity and health of a functioning ecosystem,” the authors point out.

There are few easy answers to combining justice and sustainability, as Maureen G. Reed shows in her chapter comparing community-based management systems at two Canadian UNESCO Biosphere Reserves: Redberry Lake in Saskatchewan and Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia. Reed’s narrative shows the importance of considering participatory injustice, power relations (even among ENGOS), and local context in order to improve justice and equity in environmental management.

The media shape and sometimes distort public understanding of the world, so any imagining of environmental justice might begin with an understanding of how environment and inequity are presented in public media. Leith Deacon and Jamie Baxter provide the results of their content analysis of the two main national newspapers from 1986 to 2006. Their

data also provide insight into what sources of information are cited and valued, all of which are important to raising the public profile of intersections of justice and the environment.

Lorelei Hanson considers the food system as part of the agenda of environmental justice and scrutinizes the five biggest Canadian ENGOs to see how they address food issues. Her assessment shows they have some recognition of the social and environmental implications of the food-production system but that “the examination of the overall system . . . is largely missing.” The result is an over-reliance on advocating for personal lifestyle choices and consumer sovereignty, which cannot address the corporatization of agriculture that affects both people and land.

Beenash Jafri, a seasoned anti-racist activist, articulates some of the race erasing that occurs in environmental organizations. By examining the discourses of three ENGOs and interviewing staff (all in Toronto), Jafri shows how multiculturalism and “diversity” are substituted for anti-racism and lack analysis of the structural conditions of ENGO member homogeneity, white privilege, or colonialism follows. Jafri concludes that crucial for the re-imagining of environmental justice is to look “beyond the issue of the exclusion of people of colour within the environmental movement . . . to the multifarious ways in which environmental organizing strategies might be supporting relations of domination and subordination.”

The last words in this section, and the book, are those of tricksters, Coyote and Raven (a.k.a. Pat O'Riley and Peter Cole). This chapter enacts an Aboriginal storytelling of environment and justice, a quite different storytelling from Western discourses. Cole and O'Riley join the circle begun by Lovelace in the prologue of *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada*.

As the chapters in the book fold and unfold, join and diverge, readers are offered an expanded, many-faceted, and polyvocal appreciation of and effort for environmental justice in Canada. We invite other positions and advocates, even as we position ourselves with the assertion that advocacy and scholarship must both be performed to make a world that is just and sustainable, for all of human and more-than-human peoples. Woe be unto us who unthinkingly add field to field, house to house, and carbon atom and POP to atmosphere and water until we find we live alone in a despoiled land. Let the ravens cry out, the coyotes howl, and the trees clap their hands that the humans might come to their senses.

### Notes

- 1 See the archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation at [http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-69-94/life\\_society/james\\_bay/](http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-69-94/life_society/james_bay/).
- 2 The list of seventeen principles is widely available, see <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>.
- 3 NGO research, which may be funded from the public purse, should not automatically be considered either neutral or circumspect.
- 4 See also <http://www.sombake-themoneyplace.com/>.

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# 1

## Honouring Our Relations: An Anishnaabe Perspective on Environmental Justice

*Deborah McGregor*

My goal in this chapter is to discuss environmental justice from a First Nations perspective, using water issues as a specific example. I wish to do so from my own standpoint as an Anishnaabe woman from Wiigwaaskinga (Birch Island, Ontario).<sup>1</sup> As I learn more teachings about water and the concept of “all our relations” I have come to understand that relationships based on environmental justice are not limited to relations between people but consist of those among all beings of Creation. From the perspective of the world view within which I am embedded, environmental justice is most certainly about power relationships among people and between people and various institutions of colonization. It concerns issues of cultural dominance, of environmental destruction, and of inequity in terms of how certain groups of people are impacted differently by environmental destruction from others, sometimes by design. But environmental justice from an Aboriginal perspective is more than all of these. It is about justice for all beings of Creation, not only because threats to their existence threaten ours but because from an Aboriginal perspective justice among beings of Creation is life-affirming. Aboriginal authors such as Anishnaabe environmental activist Winona LaDuke refer to this as “natural law” (LaDuke, 1994). While people certainly have a responsibility for justice, so do other beings (e.g., water and medicinal plants).

This aspect of relationships has not been adequately explored in contemporary discourse on environmental justice, although it is discussed at length in traditional teachings. The environmental justice literature instead assumes a certain ideology about “environment” – one with a focus on how certain groups of people (especially those bearing labels such as “minority,” “poor,” “disadvantaged,” or “Native”) are impacted by environmental destruction, as if the environment were somehow separate from us. Current discourse, and policy direction now in place (in the United States, at least; Canada as yet has no environmental justice policy), ignore Creation’s responsibilities and duties to ensure justice. In the Anishnaabe world view, all beings of Creation have spirit, with duties and responsibilities to each

other to ensure the continuation of Creation. Environmental justice in this context is much broader than “impacts” on people. There are responsibilities beyond those of people that also must be fulfilled to ensure the processes of Creation will continue.

Environmental justice is frequently presented as a relatively new concept, both in North America and internationally. Aboriginal people, however, hold ancient and highly developed ideas of justice that have significant applicability in this area. This chapter will explore concepts of environmental justice from such an Indigenous knowledge perspective.

The main theme of this chapter involves explaining the concept of environmental justice from an Anishnaabe point of view. An Anishnaabe understanding of environmental justice considers relationships not only among people but also among *all our relations* (including all living things and our ancestors). Environmental *in-justice*, then, is not only inflicted by dominant society upon Aboriginal peoples, people of colour, and people in low-income neighbourhoods but also upon Creation itself. To say that there is no recognition in the environmental justice discourse of this understanding would be incorrect. For example, the Principles of Environmental Justice developed by delegates at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in October 1991 proclaim the right of all species, not just people, to be free from ecological destruction. This highlights the fact that both people and other species are impacted by environmental destruction. These principles also recognize the unique situation of Native peoples in the United States in terms of their legal relationship to the US government (Washington Office of Environmental Justice, 1991). Despite such proclamations, the topic of environmental justice with respect to Creation is not adequately addressed. Exploring an Anishnaabe perspective of environmental justice offers a unique opportunity to broaden discussion and understanding of this subject.

To adequately consider environmental justice from an Anishnaabe or other Indigenous knowledge framework, we must go beyond conventional discourse on environmental justice. Some of the best examples of work that begins to do this include Jace Weaver's *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*. Based on a conference on the same topic, this work illustrates unique aspects of Indigenous peoples' struggles in relation to assaults on Mother Earth. Weaver (1996) notes that, in contrast to mainstream discourse, “discussion of environmental justice from a Native perspective requires an analysis of sovereignty and the legal framework that governs environmental matters in Indian country” (p. 108). For Native people, environmental justice is about colonization and racism, and not only about continued assaults on the environment (p. 107). It is recognized that Aboriginal people have responsibilities to fulfil that will ensure harmonious relationships with Creation. As Russell Means (1996)

states, “We are the children of the Earth. She is our Mother, and it’s our right and duty to protect her . . . From our traditional ways, we know that we do not have the right to degrade our Mother and that we must live in harmony with all of Creation” (p. xii).

Winona LaDuke has produced a variety of works in this area. *All Our Relations* (1999) celebrates Native environmentalism by chronicling various environmental injustice issues in Canada and the United States. *Recovering the Sacred* (2005), expands the scope of environmental justice in relation to Indigenous peoples by addressing such topics as biopiracy, exploitive research, theft of Aboriginal culture, and repatriation. Back in the 1990s, she wrote the Foreword, “A Society Based on Conquest Cannot Be Sustained,” to Al Gedicks’ book *The New Resource Wars: Native and Environmental Struggles against Multinational Corporations*, which is devoted to the topic of environmental racism. In it, LaDuke (1994) states that Native people “find themselves the target of industrialism’s struggle to dominate the natural world; [Native people] are possessed of resources, lands and waters, now demanded by urban areas and industrial machinery often thousands of miles distant” (p. x). Other examples of environmental injustice issues relating to Aboriginal people in Canada involve hydroelectric development, mining, nuclear-waste siting, and low-level military flying. Aboriginal people continue to battle these issues, often with few allies. As Matthew Coon Come states, “We will be a voice for social and environmental justice for Aboriginal peoples, and for the animals and the land. We will be a voice for honour in dealings between governments and indigenous peoples. And we will be a voice against racist double standards that continue to oppress us, and continue to dishonour those in whose names they are used against us” (Coon Come, 1995, p. 16).

These issues are not always placed specifically in the environmental justice literature (though there are noteworthy examples that do, for example, Ashini, 1995; Pushchak, 2002).

### **Natural Law and Environmental Justice**

Current environmental laws are inadequate for protecting what is important to Aboriginal peoples (Assembly of First Nations, 1993; RCAP, 1996). This is reflected in LaDuke’s work (1994, p. x), where she argues that natural law, which has existed for thousands of years, is a source of justice that has served Aboriginal people for thousands of years and that can continue to do so. Anishnaabe legal scholar John Borrows (2002), in his book *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*, states that “Aboriginal peoples developed spiritual, political and social conventions to guide their relationships with each other and with the natural environment. These customs and conventions became the foundations of many complex systems of government and law” (p. 47). Referring specifically to

the Anishnaabe, Borrows indicates the seriousness of failing to abide by such natural laws: “If the Anishnabek do not honour and respect their promises, relations and environments, the eventual consequence is that these resources will disappear. When these resources are gone, no matter what they are, the people will no longer be able to sustain themselves because . . . while the resources have an existence without us, we have no existence without them” (p. 20). From an Aboriginal perspective, there is a clear need to reaffirm our understanding of natural laws to ensure the continued existence of all of Creation. Exploring these natural laws, where they come from, and the insights that can be gained from particularly the Anishnaabe tradition in this case is the focus of the remainder of this chapter. My chapter will draw upon a number of Anishnaabe thinkers who have influenced my work and helped frame my thinking around natural law, Indigenous knowledge, and environmental justice.

### **Environmental Justice and the Anishnaabe**

Environmental justice is not a new concept in Anishnaabe culture. Natural laws have existed for generations that ensure justice for “all our relations.” In contrast to perhaps more mainstream writings of environmental justice, all beings of Creation will be described in this chapter as having agency and entitlement, according to Anishnaabe tradition. As well, the ancestors of current beings and those yet to come (at least as far ahead as seven generations from now) also have entitlement to environmental justice. From an Anishnaabe perspective, the spirit world and all beings of Creation, including people, have relationships and responsibilities. Anishnaabe legal scholar Darlene Johnston (2006) states: “In Anishnaabeg culture, there is an ongoing relationship between the Dead and the Living; between Ancestors and Descendants” (p. 17). Anishnaabeg have to routinely consider questions such as, What is our relationship with our ancestors? Are we honouring our relationships with our ancestors? Are we doing justice to our ancestors and to those yet to come? The Anishnaabeg had codes of conduct and practices that ensured such relations would remain harmonious. To explore these questions, it is important to understand the Anishnaabe world view. This chapter will therefore begin at the beginning, with Anishnaabe Creation stories. There is more than one Anishnaabe point of view.

### **Creation**

Origin stories say a great deal about how people understand their place in the universe and their relationships to other living things. I have been taught by Anishnaabeg Elders that all Creation Stories are true.

– D. Johnston,  
*Connecting People to Place*, p. 7

The Anishnaabe Creation and Re-Creation stories inform us of our beginnings and provide the conceptual frameworks for an Indigenous understanding of our relationship to Creation and its many beings. Anishnaabe storytellers Basil Johnston, author of *Ojibway Heritage*, and Edward Benton-Banai, author of *The Mishomis Book*, both begin their books with Creation. Here is part of the story as told by Johnston:

Kitche Manitou (The Great Spirit) beheld a vision. In this vision he saw a vast sky filled with stars, sun, moon, and earth. He saw an earth made of mountains and valleys, islands and lakes, plains and forests. He saw trees and flowers, grasses and vegetables. He saw walking, flying, swimming, and crawling beings. He witnessed the birth, growth and the end of things. At the same time he saw other things live on. Amidst change there was constancy. Kitche Manitou heard songs, wailings and stories. He touched wind and rain. He felt love and hate, fear and courage, joy, sadness. Kitche Manitou meditated to understand his vision. In his vision, Kitche Manitou understood that his vision had to be fulfilled. Kitche Manitou was to bring into being and existence what he had seen, heard and felt. (1976, p. 12)

In Anishnaabe world view, then, Creation comes originally from *vision*. We, as people, come from the spirit world. In addition to generating living beings, the Creation process begins to lay out the key ideas and principles that constitute the foundation for our laws and codes of conduct: how we will relate to the Creator and all beings in Creation. These laws do not apply just to people but to all of Creation (sun, moon, stars, etc). The laws apply to Creation and we are simply part of it. The cycles described in this view of creation (e.g., birth, growth, and death) are all necessary for Creation to continue. In this world there are many *elements*, such as love, hate, fear, and courage. It is not a one-dimensional world. All things require acknowledgement, whether happy or sad, positive or negative. It is a world that strives for balance and harmony.

The laws that govern all beings of Creation and their relationships with each other, including people, come from the Creator. All beings in this version of Creation are to share its gifts. Each has equal entitlement. Kitche Manitou then goes about realizing his vision – the process of Creation: “Kitche Manitou then made the ‘Great Laws of Nature’ for the well being and harmony of all things and all creatures. The Great Laws governed the place and movement of the sun, moon, earth and stars; governed the power of the wind, water, fire, and rock; governed the rhythm and continuity of life, birth, growth and decay. All things lived and worked by these laws. Kitche Manitou had brought into existence his vision” (B. Johnston, 1976, p. 12).

**Re-Creation**

In the Re-Creation story, these teachings are reinforced. There has been a great flood and most of life on earth has perished, with the exception of birds and water creatures. Sky-woman survives and comes to rest on the back of a great turtle. She asks the water creatures to bring her soil from the bottom of the waters so that she may use it to make new land. The water animals (the beaver, the marten, the loon) all try to help her and fail. Finally, the muskrat volunteers, much to the scorn of the other water creatures. Although ridiculed, muskrat, the most humble of the water creatures, is determined to help. So he dives down, while the animals and sky-woman wait: "They waited for the muskrat to emerge as empty handed as they had done. Time passed. Smiles turned to worried frowns. The small hope that each had nurtured for the success of the muskrat turned into despair. When the waiting creatures had given up, the muskrat floated to the surface more dead than alive, but he clutched in his paws a small morsel of soil. Where the great had failed, the small succeeded" (B. Johnston, 1976, p. 12). There are many values and lessons to be learned from this story, but one of the most compelling is that all of Creation is important, all must be respected. If we lose or disrespect even the tiniest and seemingly most insignificant being, our own survival becomes threatened. In this story we learn of courage, sacrifice, and determination. We learn that all beings of Creation, including people, must work together to ensure the continuance of Creation. The Great Laws of Nature are reinforced. All beings of Creation are interdependent; we are related and we all have special gifts to contribute to the process of Creation. An important theme that emerges from this Re-Creation story and that is central to this chapter is the law that *people, too, must cooperate with all beings of Creation in order to survive*. Sustaining Creation requires cooperation and justice not among people only but among all beings of Creation.

In the Creation and Re-Creation stories, instructions are given by the Creator on how to relate appropriately with all beings of Creation. In the Anishnaabe world view, these instructions are often related to people in the form of stories, although there are other forms. Such instructions or knowledge is obtained by people from many sources, including Creation itself (B. Johnston, 2003; McGregor, 2004). Many stories and teachings are obtained from animals, plants, the moon, the stars, water, wind, and the spirit world. Knowledge is also gained through visions, ceremonies, prayers, intuitions, dreams, and personal experience. Basil Johnston (2003) writes: "Our ancestors learned what they knew directly from the plants, insects, birds and animals, the daily changes in the weather, the motion of the wind and the waters, and the complexion of the stars, the moon and the sun. They didn't write these down but kept them in their hearts" (p. vii). The stories tell the Anishnaabe that all our human and nonhuman rela-

tives have roles and responsibilities that must be respected. Our stories also tell us that when balance and harmony are not respected among beings (including the spirit world), injustice will result and sustainability will be threatened. Teachings that emerge from Creation stories uphold ideas of holism and the importance of interrelationships among all elements of Creation. The earth is described as a living entity, bearing special responsibilities toward supporting the continuation of life.

Creation stories are fundamental to understanding the scope of environmental justice from an Anishnaabe point of view. We have to rethink what the terms *we* and *our* mean in this context. Environmental justice includes our relationships with each other, including all plants and animals, the sun, the moon, the stars, the Creator, and so on. It is necessary to move beyond the human-centred approach to one of understanding, accepting, enacting, respecting, and honouring relationships with all of Creation.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Framework**

Traditionally, Anishnaabe people understood their relationship with Creation and assumed the responsibilities given to them by the Creator. The relationship with Creation and its beings was meant to be maintained and enhanced, and the knowledge that would ensure this was passed on for generations over thousands of years. The responsibilities assumed by individuals, communities, and nations as a result of having this knowledge ensured the continuation of Creation (what academics now refer to as “sustainability”). This knowledge I call Indigenous, or Aboriginal, knowledge. Indigenous knowledge can also be characterized as a *process*. As Anishnaabe storyteller Basil Johnston writes in his book *Honour Earth Mother* (2003), “Learning comes not only from books but from the earth and our surroundings as well . . . What our people know about life and living, good and evil, laws and purposes of insects, birds, animals and fish comes from the earth, the weather, the seasons and plants and other beings. The earth is our book . . . alive with events that occur over and over for our benefit. Mother Earth has formed our beliefs, attitudes, insights, outlooks, values and institutions” (p. v). LaDuke (1999) refers to the concept of “Minobimaatisiwin,” which means “the good life” and involves concepts of revival, rebirth, and renewal. Life is thus understood in terms of cycles and relationships within and among these cycles. A critical point in LaDuke’s view is that, in order to understand Minobimaatisiwin, and in order for the Aboriginal knowledge inherent in this way of life to have any real meaning, you must live it. In living such a life, people acted according to the tenets they perceived to be obtained from the Creator. Johnston (2003) continues: “What our ancestors learned of the land, the wind, the fire and the waters . . . is revelation, no less than is dream . . . Kitchi-Manitou shows us, speaks to us. Our ancestors watched and listened. The

land was their book. The land has given us our understandings, beliefs, perceptions, laws, customs. It has bent and shaped our notions of human nature, conduct and the Great Laws. And our ancestors tried to abide by those laws" (p. xi). Aboriginal knowledge, then, comes from the Creator, from the earth, from Spirit, from our relationships with our ancestors. As Johnston (1976) puts it, these "truths must be lived out and become part of the being of a person" (p. 7). This is the "lifeway" that has sustained, and will continue to sustain, Anishnaabe nations (McGregor, 2004).

### **Environmental Justice and Water Quality in First Nations Communities**

Just as the Creation and Re-Creation stories tell us, change is continually occurring; transformation and cycles are normal. Times are now very different from what they once were as we struggle to establish political relationships with the "newcomers" through seemingly endless processes of conflict and negotiation. Change, however, does not spell the end of Indigenous knowledge or of the requirement to respect traditional laws. What, then, can traditional Anishnaabe concepts bring to the current discourse on environmental justice?

An example currently facing Indigenous peoples all over the world relates to water. As such, Indigenous people have declared 22 March Indigenous World Water Day and have produced an Indigenous peoples' declaration on water (see [www.indigenouswater.org](http://www.indigenouswater.org)).

In Ontario, numerous events over the past few years have generated much interest in protecting water quality. Of particular concern is the challenge of ensuring that First Nations receive the same measure of water quality protection as non-Native communities. However, non-Aboriginal communities have also begun to experience serious water quality issues. In 2000, the southern Ontario community of Walkerton saw seven people die from the contamination of the local drinking-water supply. This, of course, drew national attention to the seriousness of the problem of adequately protecting water. This same issue has been a serious environmental issue for First Nations since long before the events at Walkerton (Assembly of First Nations, 1993).

An inquiry was subsequently held into the Walkerton tragedy, with a mandate to address water quality concerns across the province. Following two years of study, including many community consultations and invited submissions, Commissioner Dennis O'Connor released a report containing 121 recommendations. One of the findings of this work was that First Nations do not enjoy the same level of protection as non-Aboriginal communities. The O'Connor report recognized that First Nations face serious problems in relation to water quality and that jurisdictional issues among federal, provincial, and First Nations governments present particular challenges in attempting to resolve such issues (O'Connor, 2002; Auditor



General, 2005). Additional issues raised in works by Weaver (1996), LaDuke (1999), and Gedicks (1994) around colonial history and ongoing institutionalized racism make resolving First Nations water quality concerns even more complex. The O'Connor report therefore called for cooperation among these governments in working out an approach to ensuring safe drinking water for all.

Walkerton served as a catalyst in mobilizing the Province of Ontario to initiate water protection legislation. In the fall of 2005, however, a drinking-water crisis in a remote First Nation community in northern Ontario drew further national attention. The First Nation community of Kashechewan had been under a boil water advisory for two years because of *E. coli* contamination of drinking water. In October of that year, the Ontario government declared a state of emergency at Kashechewan, and hundreds of people were evacuated from the community, with many others requiring medical attention. This event served as a further catalyst for bringing national attention to a long-standing problem in First Nations communities. The Government of Canada had previously established a First Nations Water Management Strategy (a five-year plan that began in 2003) aimed at improving the safety of water supplies in First Nations communities. Judging by the events at Kashechewan, however, this clearly was not enough. Within a few months, the minister for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada announced the Plan of Action for Drinking Water in First Nations Communities that included two noteworthy aspects: the Protocol for Safe Drinking Water in First Nations Communities and the commitment to appoint a panel of experts to advise on the appropriate regulatory framework required to ensure clean water in First Nations communities (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2007).

The work of the experts panel is to date the only component of the action plan that has addressed the critical issue of Indigenous knowledge with respect to water quality. The panel, established in May 2006, was given a mandate to develop options for a regulatory framework for water quality in First Nations communities. The panel was charged with gathering information from a variety of sources, including public hearings and written submissions. Public hearings took place throughout the country in the summer of 2006 and in December of the same year, and the panel has since released its recommendations in a two-volume report. Although it remains to be seen what the final outcome will be in relation to how exactly water quality protection will occur in First Nations and their traditional territories, Indigenous knowledge does appear to be under consideration, albeit in a limited manner. For example, in the *Report of the Expert Panel on Safe Drinking Water for First Nations* (Swain, Louttit, and Hrudey, 2006), it is noted that "traditional attitudes toward water are holistic and spiritual" (p. 32). Although not explicit in recognizing Indigenous knowledge, the

expert panel makes recommendations for the development of regulations that respect “customary law,” recognized due to the “strong stewardship role for First Nations where water is concerned” (p. 57). Customary law is based on traditional world view, philosophy, principles, values, and knowledge.

This recognition of Indigenous knowledge remains limited, and there is as yet little if any guidance on how the consideration of Indigenous knowledge is actually to occur and who might be involved in such a process. It is increasingly obvious that input is required at the grassroots level from holders of Indigenous knowledge (Elders, traditional teachers, hunters, trappers, etc.) to answer the questions of the value and appropriate consideration of Indigenous knowledge in protecting water in these contexts. The following insights are gained from various initiatives (see Kamanga, Kahn, McGregor, Sherry, and Thornton, 2001; Lavalley, 2006; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; Noojimawin Health Authority, 2006, for more detail) undertaken by the Chiefs of Ontario that offer a unique Indigenous knowledge perspective on appropriate relationships with water.

#### **The Importance of Water**

Water is a sacred thing. This is reflected in many traditional beliefs, values and practices.

– Elder Ann Wilson, quoted in  
McGregor and Whitaker, 2001, p. 17

The following pages express teachings and understandings shared by First Nations people who have participated in various water-related initiatives I have been involved with over the past eight years. My formal involvement in this topic began with work I undertook on traditional knowledge and water in preparation for the Chiefs of Ontario submission to the Walkerton Inquiry in 2000, along with workshops and presentations since, and a two-day Honouring Water Teachings workshop held in Garden River First Nation and which began on Indigenous World Water Day, 22 March 2007.

From a First Nations perspective, water quality is not just an environmental or ecological issue. One of the main features of Aboriginal knowledge, based on thousands of years of living sustainably with Creation, is its holism: the recognition that all aspects of Creation are interrelated. Thus, degradation of water quality directly impacts the people, with the effects permeating every aspect of their lives. It threatens their very survival. Aboriginal land-use activities and ways of life are still very much a part of First Nations peoples' lives today. Such ways of life and the values they support depend heavily upon healthy ecosystems, including clean water. It has been shown time and time again in the history of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations in Canada that environmental destruction (of forests, lands, animals, waters) threatens the existence of First Nations peoples (Assembly of First Nations, 1993; Kassi, 1996; RCAP, 1996). Water qual-

ity, then, is not just an environmental concern; it is a matter of cultural survival (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). Among Native peoples, water is recognized as the lifeblood of the earth (a living and conscious being). In turn, water is therefore the lifeblood of the people in numerous ways (physically, mentally/intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally). Water is integrally tied to the cultural survival of the people. First Nations activists who have formed alliances to advocate and “speak for the water” are at the same time resisting the genocide of their people (Fixico, 1998; Porter-Locklear, 2001; Ransom, 1999; Sam-Cromarty, 1996).

Water is, and always has been, viewed as precious by Indigenous people. Concern for water is not new in our communities. It hasn’t just come about because of the pollution we face today. Water has always been, and continues to be, recognized as a fundamental life-giving force. Perhaps the most telling expression of this is the phrase “Water *is* life.” Water is not just closely associated with life, or merely part of life, but rather water is life itself (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). Benton-Banai (1988), states that “the Earth is said to be a woman. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from her come all living things. Water is her life blood. It flows through her, nourishes her, and purifies her” (p. 2). Furthermore, water itself is understood to be alive. “Water is a relation,” connecting us to all of Creation; “We humans co-exist with water, we have to care for the water in order for water to be clean” (Lavalley, 2006, p. 39). We need to respect and treat water as a relative, not a resource.

Water plays an important part in the spiritual life of the Anishnaabe people. It is an integral component of many ceremonies held to show respect for water and to assist with its life-giving force. These ceremonies are conducted as one way to maintain and remind the people of their intimate connection with water. For example, Akii Kwe, a group of Anishnaabe women from Bkejwanong Territory speaking for water, write in its position paper on water quality:

We use the sacred water in our Purification Lodge, in ceremonies of healing, rites of passage, naming ceremonies and especially in women’s ceremonies. At these times, the teachings are spoken to the water and then it is passed around from one to another in the circle to be shared . . . At the change of the seasons, a pilgrimage to the water is carried out in order to honour the Spirit of the Water. Our people have always understood that this sacred and powerful water gives life, and can take it away. (1998, p. 3)

To understand our relationship to water, we must look at the whole ecosystem. A holistic approach is required. We must look at the life that water supports (plants/medicines, animals, people, birds, etc.) and the life that supports water (e.g., the earth, the rain, the fish). Water has a role and

a responsibility to fulfil, just as people do. We do not have the right to interfere with water's duties to the rest of Creation. Indigenous knowledge tells us that water is the blood of Mother Earth and that water itself is considered a living entity with just as much right to live as we have (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001).

Josephine Mandamin, Anishnaabe Elder and inspiration for the Mother Earth Water Walk, is currently leading a walk around the entire Great Lakes Basin to raise awareness of the importance of water and our responsibility for it. Between 2003 and 2008, Josephine walked around Lakes Superior, Huron, Michigan, Ontario, and Erie. Based on her knowledge and experiences, Josephine refers to water as having personality, stating that each body of water has its own (Mandamin, 2007). Edward Metatawabin, from the James Bay area in northeastern Ontario, echoed this same message at the Honouring Water Teachings workshop, presented by the Chiefs of Ontario, when he referred to water as a "little brother" who was present at the meeting convened with Elders to talk about water. Edward remarked that respecting water as we talk about it requires not referring to it in the third person. Water is here listening and we need to respect it (Metatawabin, 2007).

### **Water and Women**

Everyone has a responsibility to care for the water. Women, however, carry the responsibility to talk for the water.

– Elder Ann Wilson, quoted in  
McGregor and Whitaker, 2001, p. 20

As water is a giver of life, women, also life givers, have a special relationship and responsibility to water (Lavalley, 2006; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). The first environment for new life is within a woman's body, and water continues to be a crucial component throughout one's life. The recognition of women's role in creating life along with water means that women and water have a special bond. This bond is often expressed in ceremonies, where the role of Anishnaabe women is to speak for the water. As Akii Kwe explains, "In the water ceremony we make an offering to water, to acknowledge its life-giving forces and to pay respect. We have a responsibility to take care of the water and this ceremony reminds us to do it. Women bring forth life, the life of the people. Water brings forth life also, and we have a special role to play in this responsibility that we share with water" (in McGregor and Whitaker, 2001, p. 24). For many years, Indigenous women have noticed changes in water quality, particularly because they have a close and special relationship to the water. In the process of rediscovery, revitalization, and healing, the women of Bkejwanong Territory (Walpole Island, Ontario) have organized themselves to speak for the water. Akii

Kwe is an informally organized grassroots group of women speaking only from what they know. They began by protesting what was happening to the water, especially pollution contaminating the waters flowing around Bkejwanong Territory. The women decided to speak for the water and try to stop such actions. In a 1998 submission on water quality issues, Akii Kwe members stated that in Bkejwanong, nature provides the foundation of Anishnaabe culture and the ways in which the people conduct themselves (systems of governance). As part of this, the people have a responsibility to act on behalf of the water (Akii Kwe, 1998).

As introduced above, Josephine Mandamin is a Grandmother fulfilling a prophecy of a woman who will walk around the Great Lakes to remind people of their responsibility to water. Each walk begins in the spring with a water ceremony, feast, and celebration and is led by a Grandmother. Routinely covering distances of over a thousand kilometres, each walk has the goal of raising awareness about water and trying to change the perception of water from that of a resource to that of a sacred entity that must be treated as such. On these journeys the Grandmothers carry a vessel of water and an eagle staff, which they take turns carrying. The beauty of this effort is that it is led by women who are fulfilling their role and trying to engage as many people as they can in raising awareness of the spiritual and cultural significance of water. The walks have inspired Anishnaabe women in other communities to organize their own water walks.

### **Conclusion**

As an Anishnaabe woman, I have a responsibility to speak for water and address equity issues in relation to water. Sharing my work over the years, advocating for the inclusion of the Anishnaabe perspective in various capacities, has been and continues to be part of my responsibility to all my relations and to Creation as a whole.

In this chapter, I hope I have offered insights into how concepts of environmental justice are understood from an Aboriginal perspective. I would never argue that environmental justice is *not* about injustice among peoples; however, it is certainly more than that. It is about injustices among all beings of Creation as well. It is our responsibility to ensure that our actions result in environmental justice and not the opposite.

It is not just people who have responsibilities, however. All beings have responsibilities to fulfil, and recognizing this contributes to a holistic understanding of justice. Our interference with other beings' ability to fulfil their responsibilities is an example of a great environmental injustice, an injustice to Creation. As an example, water is a living, spiritual being with its own responsibilities to fulfil. The sun and moon are also our relatives that in turn have their responsibilities. To restrict our discussion of environmental justice to relations among people results in a limited discourse.

Similarly, it can be argued that because of their intimate relationship with the land, any injustice to Aboriginal people is an environmental injustice to the extent that it impairs the ability of Aboriginal people to fulfil their responsibilities to Creation. Conversely, any injustice to the environment that impedes the ability of Creation to fulfil its duties to Aboriginal people is an injustice to Aboriginal people. Of course, this is true of all people: we cannot survive without an environment that fulfils our needs for survival. It is simply time for all peoples of the world to recognize this explicitly and to act accordingly.

*Miigwetch*

(Thank you)

### Note

- 1 *Anishnaabe* is the noun used to denote a person from that culture, the culture itself, or an adjective used to describe things related to that culture (similarly, a “Canadian”; Canadian culture; from a Canadian perspective). “Anishnaabeg” and “Anishnaabek” are alternative spellings of the plural of *Anishnaabe*. *Anishnaabe* itself is also variously spelled “Anishnabe,” “Anishinaabe,” and even “Nishnaabe.” There are reasons behind each of these spellings (for example, the Manitoulin dialect is undergoing the process of syncope), and the debate on standardization is ongoing (Corbiere, 2007, 2008). For ease of reading, I use the spellings “Anishnaabe” and “Anishnaabeg.”

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