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### M2.3 Environmental and Justice

In recent years, the injustices of environmental racism and the hidden disadvantages people of color have been subjected to in regards to equal rights such as access to resources and the vocalization against degradation has slowly become a topic that is being brought to light. The relationship pertaining to the response and treatment between spaces that are mainly comprised of POC and contain environmental issues like climate change, pollution, and natural disasters are the driving forces in focusing on discrimination and abuse on a large scale. What has been ignored and brushed aside is the intersection of ecofeminism and the marginalization of women of color in modern environmentalism. Women, specifically women of color, are not being **represented in the environmental discussion yet are on the front line of being negatively impacted** by issues that have devastating minority communities -- issues like exposure to hazardous pollutants, metal and water poisoning, and industrial dumping, as well as are in the struggle of advocating for resolution. Ecofeminism is the movement that aims to uplift the needs of women in the social-ecological spectrum and provide a platform for the voice of women to be heard. The exploitation of nature and environmental destruction is viewed as being rooted in the same capitalist, patriarchal and dominant culture that many women find themselves

stuck in. Women themselves play an important role in the fight for climate stability. **It boils down to one central theory -- climate change is a women's issue.**

According to the Women's Earth & Climate Action Network (WECAN), women compose up to 80% of farmers involved with food production in developing countries. **These responsibilities to provide and work in labor doesn't just involve grown women, it involves young girls as well.** In many third and second world countries, adolescent girls are taught to be accountable for gathering food and water and in many cases expose themselves to great physical risks like harassment and rape by doing so. **Dangers aren't limited to developing countries, in 2014 reports of mass scale water contamination in Flint, Michigan, the United States were leaked. Soon it was discovered that over 100,000 residents were being exposed to high levels of lead in drinking water after the state created the Flint River the only water source for the city (CNN).** It only got progressively worse as fecal coliform bacteria and industrial toxins were detected in the water supply. Flint is a city located 70 miles north of Detroit, where according to the US Census Bureau, 41.2% of residents live below the poverty line, the general income is 24 thousand, and where 56.6% of the population is African-American. Would an injustice and crisis like this be handled the same way if it were to happen to a white suburb outside of Detroit? The communities being affected by these travesties are left voiceless. The land around them is used as properties for incinerators, industrial factories, and garbage disposal. The people living in these areas don't have the political clout to block them. **They are expected to keep quiet by the same companies that are poisoning them and those who decide to fight back are slapped with expensive lawsuits that are seemingly difficult to sustain.**

The people of Flint are not alone in the fight for environmental equality. In the writing, “Water is Life: A Poem For The Standing Rock” by Demian DineYazhi, the author brings an emotional and personal account of his experience with the controversy surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline project. **Protests against the pipeline, a 1,172-mile long underground oil proposal running through North Dakota and Illinois, began in 2016 after Native American tribes spoke of the cultural and spiritual divide the project would cause on sacred indigenous burial ground for the Standing Rock Sioux (Huffington Post).** The fight against the Pipeline also became a symbol of modern environmentalism as the project would not only contaminate and destroy the only major source of water for the communities residing in the area -- Lake Oahe, but “reshape the national conversation about any [future] environmental project that would cross the Native American land” DineYazhi begins his writing with a powerful image:

google: moskva river fire after oil spill 2015

google: cuyahoga river fire 1969

google: wounded knee 1973

google: churchrock uranium mill spill 1979

google: david standard american holocaust death toll

In this short snippet of Demian DineYazhi’s work, he uses just five lines to present an extremely strong and daunting concept of the severity of the abuse and violence Indigenous people have gone through both environmentally and socially. Listing events like the Cuyahoga

River Fire of 1969, where the Cuyahoga river caught a fire due to the amount of pollutants it contained. The river itself once provided refuge to the Native Americans as it was used for food and transportation, making living near the body of water a valuable resource. The great demise of the river began with European settlement. As time progressed, the advancement of European society and colonizers soon brought industrialization and development of warehouses and ship building. The once beautiful and powerful river was now a dump for sludge and pollution.

DineYazhi not only uses this example of environmental degradation as an injustice to Indigenous people but as well as to mention David Stannard's, a historian and professor, theory and argument that the genocide against the Native American population, as known as the American Holocaust, is the largest genocide in history with an estimation to be between 95,000,00 and 114,000,000 victims.

Filled with rage and disappointment, DineYazhi successfully allows the reader to connect with the raw sentiments he is promoting. By exposing his worries and thoughts about his identity, both being indigenous and queer, he creates an environmental issue multi-dimensional and turns it into a relatable movement instead of another headline on your social media feed. Demian ends with his opinion that we should build a monument in honor of the sacred fight against not only the pipeline but for the pain and travesties indigenous people have gone through - "with all this positive energy / ancestral memory / and sacred medicine, I think we all just might [build that monument]".

What Demian DineYazhi's poem accomplishes is that it gives a personal insight into the weight a relationship with land and mother earth holds in indigenous culture. In the environmental movement against the government's project for the Dakota Access Pipeline, indigenous women have been the backbone of creating national awareness. These women of color have served the movement with emotional, physical, and spiritual guidance and support. The whole movement has been centered around respecting female entities like water and earth. At Standing Rock, these women are bringing recognition to the significance of fighting back, challenging norms, and creating your own space within an interest group that supports marginalization. The dynamic of respect revolving earth and its intersection with Native American women in DineYazhi's poem transitions into Sherman Alexie's writing "The Powwow at the End of the World" which highlights the anger from indigenous people against the Europeans for destroying their culture.

Although these two writings focus on similar topics of the emotional effects of colonization and mistreatment, the first sentence in Alexie's poem brings light to the harsh bias Native American woman face in their communities -- "I am told by many of you that I must forgive and so I shall after an Indian woman puts her shoulder to the Grand Coulee Dam and topples it.". Alexie's strong statements allow the reader to begin to understand the pure anger he has towards those who have destroyed indigenous culture by insinuating that **he will think about forgiveness** once a single Native American woman is able to knock down a dam by herself. The obvious impossibility of this act not only tell us that he will never provide absolution, but also shows us the power dynamic of inferiority that Indian women face. He goes on to explain the

desire to release the caged nature has been placed into by destroying these man-made objects, dams, and allowing the salmon within the rivers to flow genuinely and freely.

The insight Sherman Alexie's writing can provide is that even with a unique environmental-social travesty in discussion such as the restriction of sacrality and its effect on nature, women are still not included in the conversation but instead used as a negative example. Similarly, in "Sea Story" by AS Byatt, the plotline centers around the main character reacting to the unrequited love of a woman and the environmental repercussions of his actions. The main protagonist then begins writing love letters and sends them to her in plastic bottles in foolish attempts to reach her after she chose her career over him.

There she was, Laura, sleekly black-clad, bright-haired like some marine goddess  
gathering in the tears, the beads, the microscopic living things.

Laura, the woman in question, is used almost as a prop to support the main characters' disillusion instead of involving her in a meaningful and impactful way in the environmental dialogue that is unfolding in the story. Laura is then tossed aside and killed off as Harold, the main character, gets over his crush and marries another woman. **Tragically, she is used until her purpose to highlight the dangers of polluting is fulfilled in the story arch. Just as AS Byatt, Demian Dineyazhi, and Sherman Alexie's writing emphasize is the lack of representation women and WOC have in the environmental discussion. How far can society expand without realizing and pointing out the injustices women face in the**

**environmental realm? The responsibility to uplift women starts to become more of a large scale dilemma as more progress through more difficult political and socio times.**

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