Trainor, S.F., F.S. Chapin III, H.P. Huntington, G. Kofinas, and D.C. Natcher. 2007. Arctic Climate Impacts and Cross-Scale Linkages: Environmental Justice in Canada and the United States. *Local Environment, 14*(6).

VanNijnattan, D.L. 1999. Participation and Environmental Policy in Canada and the United States: Trends over Time. *Policy Studies Journal, 27*(2), 267-87.

Van Wynsberghe, R.M. 2002. *Alternatives: Community, Identity and Environmental Justice on Walpole Island*. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

Veenstra, G., and S. Kelly. 2007. Comparing Objective and Subjective Status: Gender and Space (and Environmental Justice?). *Health and Place, 13*(1), 57-71.

Walks, R.A., and L.S. Bourne. 2006. Ghettos in Canada's Cities? Racial Segregation, Ethnic Enclaves and Poverty Concentrations in Canadian Urban Areas. *Canadian Geographer, 50*(3), 273-97.

Warrnier, G.K., K. McSpurren, and A. Nabalamba. 2001. Social Justice and Environmental Equity: Distributing Environmental Quality. *Environments, 29*(1), 85-99.

Watt-Cloutier, S. 2004. Climate Change and Human Rights. In *Human Rights Dialogue: Environmental Rights Series, 2*(11). http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/resources/publications/dialogue/2_11/section_1/4445.html.

Wharf, B. 1999. Editorial Introduction: Community Development in Canada. *Community Development Journal, 34*(4), 267-69.

Young, I.M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. London: Routledge.

# 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).[1] 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,

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. Anishinaabe 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 relatives 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 "Minobimaatisiiwin," 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 Minobimaatisiiwin, 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).

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



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

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 prophesy 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 syncopation), and the debate on standardization is ongoing (Corbiere, 2007, 2008). For ease of reading, I use the spellings "Anishnaabe" and "Anishnaabeg."

## References


Akii Kwe. 1998. *Minobimaatisiiwin: We Are to Care for Her.* Position paper from Women of Bkejwanong (Walpole Island) First Nation, ON.

Ashini, D. 1995. The Innu Struggle. In B. Hodgins and K. Cannon (Eds.), *On the Land: Confronting the Challenges to Aboriginal Self-Determination in Northern Quebec and Labrador* (pp. 29-42). Toronto: Betelgeuse Books.

Assembly of First Nations. 1993. Environment. In *Assembly of First Nations: Reclaiming Our Nationhood; Strengthening Our Heritage* (pp. 39-50). Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations.

Auditor General of Canada. 2005. Drinking Water in First Nations Communities. In *Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons* (Chapter 5). Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

Benton-Banai, E. 1988. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway.* Hayward, WI: Indian Country Communications.

Borrows, J. 2002. *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Coon Come, M. 1995. Clearing the Smoke Screen. In B. Hodgins and K. Cannon (Eds.), *On the Land: Confronting the Challenges to Aboriginal Self-Determination in Northern Quebec and Labrador* (pp. 5-17). Toronto: Betelgeuse Books.

Corbiere, A. 2008. Personal correspondence (e-mail) from Alan Corbiere, operations manager and cultural/historical research, Ojibway Cultural Foundation, M'Chigeeng, ON. 2 December.

–. 2007. Personal correspondence (email) from Alan Corbiere, operations manager and cultural/historical researcher, Ojibway Cultural Foundation, M'Chigeeng, ON. 8 May.

Fixico, D. 1998. *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources.* Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado.

Gedicks, A. 1994. *The New Resource Wars: Native and Environmental Struggles against Multinational Corporations.* Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. 2007. *Plan of Action for Drinking Water in First Nations Communities* (Progress report, 22 March 2007). Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs





Johnston, B. 2003. *Honour Earth Mother.* Wiarton, ON: Kegedonce Press.

–. 1976. *Ojibway Heritage.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Johnston, D. 2006. *Connecting People to Place: The Power and Relevance of Origin Stories.* (Unpublished lecture notes.) University of Toronto.

Kamanga, D., J. Kahn, D. McGregor, M. Sherry, and A. Thornton (Contributors). 2001. *Drinking Water in Ontario First Nation Communities: Present Challenges and Future Directions for On-Reserve Water Treatment in the Province of Ontario* (Submission to Part 2 of the Walkerton Inquiry Commission). Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

Kassi, N. 1996. A Legacy of Maldevelopment: Environmental Devastation in the Arctic. In J. Weaver (Ed.), *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (pp. 72-84). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

LaDuke, W. 2005. *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming.* Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

–. 1999. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life.* Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

–. 1994. Foreword: A Society Based on Conquest Cannot Be Sustained. In A. Gedicks (Ed.), *The New Resource Wars: Native and Environmental Struggles against Multinational Corporations* (pp. ix-xv). Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Lavalley, G. 2006. *Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and Source Water Protection: First Nations' Views on Taking Care of Water.* Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario and Environment Canada.

Mandamin, J. 2007. *Women and Water.* Presentation at Honouring Water Teachings, workshop by Chiefs of Ontario, Toronto.

McGregor, D. 2004. Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment and Our Future. *American Indian Quarterly, 28*(3/4), 385-410.

McGregor, D., and S. Whitaker. 2001. *Water Quality in the Province of Ontario: An Aboriginal Knowledge Perspective.* Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

Means, R. 1996. Foreword. In J. Weaver (Ed.), *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (pp. xi-xiii). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Metatawabin, E. 2007. Presentation at Honouring Water Teachings, workshop by Chiefs of Ontario, Toronto.

Noojimawin Health Authority. 2006. *Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and Source Water Protection.* Paper presented at First Nations House workshop, University of Toronto, 25 March 2006.

O'Connor, D. 2002. *Part Two: Report of the Walkerton Inquiry; A Strategy for Safe Drinking Water.* Toronto: Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General.

Porter-Locklear, F. 2001. Water and Water Quality Issues in and for American Indian Communities. In K. James (Ed.), *Science and Native American Communities* (pp. 111-18). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Pushchak, R. 2002. Environmental Justice and EIS: Low-Level Military Flights in Canada. *International Journal of Public Administration, 5*(2), 169-91.

Ransom, J. 1999. The Waters. In *Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force: Words That Come Before All Else: Environmental Philosophies of the Haudenosaunee* (pp. 25-43). Cornwall Island, ON: Native North American Traveling College.

RCAP (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples). 1996. Lands and Resources. In *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Restructuring the Relationship* (Vol. 2) (pp. 421-685). Ottawa: Canada Communication Group.

Sam-Cromarty, M. 1996. Family Closeness: Will James Bay Be Only a Memory for My Grandchildren? In J. Weaver (Ed.), *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (pp. 99-106). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Swain, H., S. Louttit, and S. Hrudey. 2006. *Report of the Expert Panel on Safe Drinking Water for First Nations.* (Vol. 1). Ottawa: Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Washington Office of Environmental Justice. 1991. Principles of Environmental Justice. http://www.ejnet.org/ej/princples.html.

Weaver, J. (Ed.). 1996. *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.