

Three Sisters: Women of High Degree

“Come to the Kimberley, come and support us, because we are standing up for humanity”.

At the end of this absorbing and beautiful film about the lives of three Nyikina ‘women of high degree’, Anne Poelina reworks an ancient songline to invite the whole world to visit the Mardoowarra (Fitzroy River) in Western Australia and to discover the new global citizenship emerging in the sisters’ struggle against the multi-national mining corporations threatening the rich ecology and cultural landscapes of their country. After 48 minutes spent learning courage, hope and gaiety in the company of these women and their community members, Poelina’s invitation feels irresistible. If you can’t actually go to the river, you will want to—and a shift in the horizon of human desires is what this film sets out to achieve.

The product of several years of collaboration between the filmmaker Magali McDuffie, Poelina and Nyikina Elders Lucy Marshall and Jeannie Wabi, *Three Sisters: Women of High Degree* is absorbing in a special way. It does not simply offer us visually ravishing river-scapes and startling lessons in indigenous law and knowledge of the land, although it has these in abundance—along with memories of brutal colonial times survived by some participants. Rather, the film absorbs us wholly into a way of life where the strength of indigenous law as affirmed by Lucy Marshall is continuous with the miracle of “living water” that Jeannie Wabi produces from a hole under some bark; with her memories of unpaid domestic labour and the heart-stopping stories of imprisonment told with a radiant grin by Walmajarri Elder Mick Michael; and with the warm, sassy political style of Anne Poelina whose outfits gloriously match the vibrancy of her world. No doubt because of the deep collaboration underlying the film, all of these rich elements fuse to give us experience of a living culture that feels, for all the violence that its people have suffered, deeply welcoming and peaceful.

Indigenous people everywhere are bringing their knowledge of land and water management to the forefront of the struggle for human survival in the face of climate change and the ever more predatory colonialism of resource industries. In *Three Sisters, Women of High Degree*, we are invited to discover how joining that struggle can be an experience of joy, beauty and strength. This film is a gift.

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