

**MORE WILL SING THEIR
WAY TO FREEDOM
INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AND RESURGENCE**

edited by Elaine Coburn

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Finally, I hope that these words honour all those who have struggled and all those who continue to struggle for Indigenous freedoms and justice.

PREFACE

Elaine Coburn

And there are some who even after a hundred years continue to struggle for equality and justice for their people.

—*Campbell 1973: 13*

This book is about Indigenous resistance and resurgence across lands and waters claimed by Canada. By “resistance,” I follow Alfred (n.d.) in meaning struggles against an ongoing world colonial–capitalist political economy, including contemporary colonialism within the Canadian state. Resistance is necessary to Indigenous survival against centuries of genocidal policies, and the ongoing dispossession and destruction of Indigenous lands and water by the state, capital and many non-Indigenous persons. Resurgence, however, is Indigenous self-determination: renewing and re-creating diverse, specifically Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing (Alfred 2009: 36).

Of course, some might contest this distinction between resistance and resurgence. As Emma LaRocque (2010: 11) has argued, given the magnitude of the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples, resistance has always meant both deconstruction and reconstruction. Deconstructing the idea of Indigenous peoples as “savages,” for example, is premised on the reconstruction of Indigenous peoples as fully human. In this sense, there is no tension between resistance and resurgence. Instead, both are part of the same overarching project: the full expression of self-determining Indigenous peoples and of each Indigenous individual, who is at once part of Anishinaabe, Métis, Dene, etc. peoplehoods and a unique member of universal humanity (LaRocque 2010: 10–11).

In describing and analyzing — but also celebrating — Indigenous resistance and resurgence, this book suggests “rough pathways to freedom,” as Alfred (2009:

2 More Will Sing Their Way to Freedom

40) might put it, for diverse Indigenous peoples across lands and seas claimed by Canada. In her *Foreword*, Emma LaRocque reminds us of the multiple challenges but also accomplishments of Indigenous scholars. She writes of the political and ethical imperative of Indigenous research that at once resists legacies of centuries-old colonialism and critically innovates from diverse and changing Indigenous perspectives in the academy. My *Introduction* then draws upon a wide range of Indigenous scholars and actors to critically consider what is meant by the concepts “Indigenous,” “Resistance” and “Resurgence,” as well as the roles of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics in Indigenous struggles for justice.

In the first part of the book’s main section, “Telling Stories of Resistance,” contributors James (Sa’ke’j) Youngblood Henderson, Christine Walsh and Jennifer Aarrestad, and Douglas Durst and Elaine Coburn, respectively, consider resistance to colonial law by Indigenous lawyers; resilience by Indigenous women in conflict with the colonial justice system; and the challenges faced by, and activism of, Indigenous persons with disabilities. The last chapter in this section, by Rima Wilkes, describes Indigenous resistance in comparative perspective, across lands claimed by Canada since the 1980s, while offering an autobiographical critique of research about Indigenous peoples undertaken from mainstream sociological perspectives. In so doing, the authors describe and analyze Indigenous resilience and resistance, not least by those who are too often invisible in Indigenous struggles and scholarly appraisals of them. At the same time, there is reflexive consideration of the roles of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in seeking to accompany such resistance.

Chapters in the second part, “Telling Stories about Resurgence,” written by Jennifer Adese, Clifford (Kam’ayaam/Chachim’multhnii) Atleo and Hayden King, are concerned with Indigenous resurgence in the realms of the visual arts, economics and international politics. Each suggests how diverse Indigenous actors are striving to reinvent Indigenous perspectives and practices in ways that are self-determining and transcending instead of reacting against colonial relationships, institutions and ideas. Such self-determination is expressed through works of visual art that are both intensely personal and political; by reinventing everyday economics to honour relationships with other Indigenous peoples and the natural world; and by reimagining international diplomacy in terms that centre Indigenous concepts, including the use of the drum to encourage empathy and compassion, and so bring about peace in a world of conflict.

Finally, in the third part, “Telling Stories of Idle No More,” contributors Kelly Aguirre, Jeff Denis and Jarrett Martineau offer diverse understandings of the Idle No More movement, which began in December 2012 and swept across Indigenous nations in lands claimed by Canada. They consider the multiple dimensions of this struggle as a particular important instance of Indigenous resistance and resurgence,

as well as the movement's transformations up to the present. In so doing, they not only offer insights into Idle No More but also shed light on many Indigenous struggles for justice. As Aguirre suggests, Indigenous resurgence includes joyful storytelling that is once continuous with ancestral knowledge and innovating from this knowledge. Denis explains how a "four directions" analytical model inspired by the Medicine Wheel informs new understandings of the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual elements of Indigenous resurgence. Martineau considers the tensions and ambivalent role played by mediatised activism, while arguing for a place-based Indigenous resurgence that brings into being "a new history of the *Indigenous* present." In the *Afterword*, Alex Wilson challenges Indigenous actors and allies to consider the possibilities of a transformative, even revolutionary Indigenous feminist politics that "enacts love" by developing responsible relationships with all living beings and the natural world.

Importantly, if these chapters together consider issues of state and political economy, culture and technology, activism and research, mobilization and repression, knowledge and being, they are never abstract matters. Instead, they are deeply personal, political and practical questions. Precisely because the political is personal, as well as the reverse (Bannerji 2000: 88), all the chapters emphasize Indigenous voices and perspectives on their own experiences, whether written by Indigenous or non-Indigenous scholars. This "makes real" the facts of colonialization in daily life, but also emphasizes Indigenous resistance and resurgence as practices rather than as abstract theory.

Finally, one underlying argument across this book is that colonial-capitalism is an historical fact, but not an inevitability. A possible world in which there is justice for Indigenous peoples is prefigured in today's acts of self-determination, small and large, well-known and anonymous. This is true even if these practices of self-determination are incomplete, sometimes contradictory and subject to sustained repression. We turn here to the words of Little Pine Cree Nation poet Beth Cuthand (2001: 136), who envisions resurgence in her own terms. Her words, like this book, do not speak prophecies but only possibilities:

But

More will claim their warrior blood
 More will pray their road to peace
 More will dance under the thunderers' nest
 More will sing their way to freedom.

4 More Will Sing Their Way to Freedom

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Foreword

**“RESIST NO LONGER”
REFLECTIONS ON RESISTANCE
WRITING AND TEACHING**

Emma LaRocque

The words “resist no longer” from the 1986 musical *Phantom of the Opera* run through my mind as I contemplate the changes of focus in research and writing in the discipline and field of study that I have been engaged in for more than three decades. The purpose of this essay is to provide a reflective overview of what I have come to call “resistance scholarship,” an intellectual positionality I have practiced in my research, teaching and writing style. And because most of my academic years have been spent in Native Studies, I, of course, draw on this discipline as one model for resistance and for invention. My objective is not to detail the program of our department but to discuss what Peter Kulchyski (scholar, colleague and veteran of Native Studies) calls “the ethical impulse” (2000: 20). This ethical impulse directs the research and teaching we do and is embedded both in resistance and invention, or what I have elsewhere referred to as both deconstruction and reconstruction (LaRocque 2010).

Situating Myself: Personal and Political Contexts

But first, consistent with my decolonizing approach, I begin by briefly situating (and linking) my personal and political location that forms the context to my thinking and pedagogy. I am Métis¹ and grew up in a land-based, Cree-speaking Métis culture in northeastern Alberta at a time when our socioeconomic conditions as

a family and as a community were very bleak. Indeed, throughout the Depression era and into the 1960s, and really since the days of Red River (1869–70) and Northwest (1884–5) resistances against colonial incursions, the Métis were suffering extensively from land loss and displacement, poverty, and deadly diseases such as tuberculosis. In the aftermath of these resistances,² the Métis in Alberta (and throughout Western Canada) had become so marginalized that neither residential nor public schools were available to most.³ Métis were often stranded between federal and provincial jurisdictions because neither governments wanted to recognize or acknowledge Métis as Indigenous peoples with land and resource rights.⁴ And even though many Métis communities or families such as ours lived near or had access to urban centers, it was not until the 1950s that some small and socially segregated — and characteristically underfunded — public schools for Métis children became available.⁵ Although not going to residential schools served to protect us from cultural and familial severance and the darker horrors of residential schools, we were not protected from psychological, cultural or corporeal abuse in public schools. Much like residential schools, public schools embraced colonial pedagogy, and most teachers engaged in racist practices and punitive treatment of Métis and other Aboriginal children. The vast majority of those of my generation quit school early (usually at around grades four to five) because public schools were so dehumanizing and alienating.

School was not available for my parent's generation (pre-1950s) in our area. Ironically — and thankfully — my parent's lack of formal schooling meant they were able to keep their children, speak their language and practice their land-based culture (which was combined with seasonal wage labour). It was my parents who, despite all odds, not only provided us with love, food and shelter but also shared the beauty and the vitality of their Cree-Métis/Michif cultural literacy. By so doing, they instilled and inspired in me a spirit of determination, independence and a love of knowledge. However, my love of learning was many times badly shaken as my school experiences — which were often pierced with bullying, classicism, racism and colonial denigration of Native histories — became fairly intolerable with each passing grade. But I was lucky: In grade seven, I could go to a new (public) school in which I had the great fortune of having the kindest and most perceptive teacher for grades seven to nine. This teacher helped me regain my confidence in learning and to go on to high school, and from there I finally made it to university. I finished my BA and my first MA in the United States and then came back to Canada to do graduate work in history at the University of Manitoba. While there, and again more by luck than my station in life, I was hired to teach a summer course for a newly established department of Native Studies (in the Faculty of Arts). I have been with the department ever since, rising eventually to the rank of professor.

Developing the Native Studies Canon

Specifically, I have been teaching in the department of Native Studies almost from the very beginning of its inception (1975), and although I am not technically one of its founders in the formal or institutional sense, I developed or redesigned the majority of the core undergraduate courses taught in the early years (at the time, the department offered a BA program). This entailed developing historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to Aboriginal (First Nation, Métis and Inuit) histories, cultures and contemporary experience. Of course, this is quite different from the task usually faced by novice professors who adapt their courses from pre-existing canons. In the 1970s, the Native Studies canon did not exist, but had to be invented, which required an enormous amount of intellectual and practical energies. We were an under-resourced and very small department. There were no role models, and it meant going against the grain in many instances; throughout the 1970s, 1980s and even into the 1990s, Native Studies was largely dismissed as a “cross-cultural” remedial program and not taken seriously as a scholarly unit. However, we were developing Indigenously based critical scholarship and creating courses that not only respected and foregrounded Aboriginal cultures and peoples but also questioned colonial history and knowledge. At the same time, we were aware that we had to make these courses meaningful to Aboriginal students and nonalienating for White Canadian students. These courses (and many more since then that colleagues and I have continued to develop because we now offer a doctoral program) have become critically central to our field and, in effect, have become part of a “Native Studies canon.”

But what is a canon? In the context of academic disciplines, Joyce Green, Métis scholar in political science, describes a canon as “that core of material which is viewed as foundational to the discipline ... and is considered essential reading for students, and is considered to be the base on which newer knowledge is based” (2001: 39). Green is quick to point out that the canon was “constructed primarily by Western European intellectuals, was imbued with and propagated the dominant philosophies, ideologies and analytical forms of the dominators” (39). In other words, the “canon” privileged European knowledge while it justified the colonial project. In contrast, the very basis of Native Studies depends on Indigenous knowledges and experiences that considerably expand upon, and in many crucial ways contradict or confront, traditional Western notions of what constitutes “knowledge” or “literature,” and so radically transforms the idea of the “canon.” In short, and among many other ways we can know outside of textbooks, we can create oral-based literatures and we can “read” in multiple, not singular (Western) ways. As decolonizing professors, we were engaged in an interpretative undertaking, bringing our worldviews, our colonial experience, our modes of understanding

and research, and, of course, our personal styles into the curriculum and into our university classrooms. Some of us also brought our languages and our “lands,” the epistemological bases to our cultures, into the classrooms. In my case, however, I was not doing any ordinary “cultural” or “cross-cultural” teaching; instead I was “combining cultural ethos with critical ‘resistance’ analysis” (LaRocque 2001a: 71) — that is, I was deconstructing colonial records and building Indigenous presence.⁶ As Peter Kulchyski explains, “Native Studies can be seen as an interpretive practice, a mode and an ethics of reading that depends upon an exploded concept of text” (2000: 23). We “exploded” the concept of text in a wide variety of ways, and in so doing, we also challenged what it means to know and that what we “know” is culturally and politically informed.

Knowledge and Resistance Scholarship

It is particularly important in Native Studies that students appreciate the environment in which scholarship develops. Most of us have been led to believe that scholarship is objective, impartial and apolitical (Said 1979: 9–10). But in fact, knowledge is culturally and politically produced, perhaps especially in the so-called Social Sciences. More specifically, we now understand that much of archival “knowledge” about Indigenous peoples was saturated with ideological content, to say nothing about distortion and just plain racism. Ethnohistorian Francis Jennings bluntly points out what Aboriginal scholars know so well: that the historical labeling and anthropological classifications of “the Indian,” as Savage juxtaposed against the European as Civilized, “reflect words and concepts which have evolved from centuries of conquest and have been created for the purposes of conquest rather than the purposes of knowledge” (1976: 12).

In *The Colonizer’s Model of the World*, J.M. Blaut argues that scholarly beliefs are “shaped by culture” (1993: 10) and “the ethnography of beliefs” or “belieflicensing” (30–43, 59), and that Eurocentric scholars have shaped knowledge from a single theory (the “European Miracle”), in fact, a “super theory” from which other smaller theories have evolved that were and continue to be instrumental for colonialism. In brief, the “European Miracle” is the powerfully legitimating colonizer’s belief that

European civilization — “The West” — has had some unique historical advantage, some special quality of race or culture or environment or mind or spirit, which gives this human community a permanent superiority over all other communities, at all times in history and down to the present ... Europeans are seen as the “makers of history.” Europe eternally advances, progresses, modernizes. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: it is “traditional society.” (1)

This belief is at the same time “Eurocentric diffusionism,” a related theory “about the way cultural processes tend to move over the surface of the world as a whole. They tend to flow out of the European sector and toward the non-European sector” (1). Colonialism then “must mean for the Africans, Asians and Americans, not spoilation and cultural destruction but, rather, the receipt by diffusion of European civilization: modernization” (2). Colonialism is refashioned as progress and enlightenment. Further, “the development of a body of Eurocentric beliefs, justifying and assisting Europe’s colonial activities has been and still is, of very great importance. Eurocentrism is quite simply the colonizer’s model of the world” (10). What’s more, all other European ideas and philosophies have been advanced as universal truths, not as ideas bound to and limited by specifically European cultures and places. Such Eurocentric approaches and theories, embedded in Western scholarship, have been promoted as empirical and scientific, and until recently have enjoyed uncontested dominance.

The dominant Western narrative is knowledge that has been selected, assembled and arranged to facilitate and advance the heroification of the European in the Americas (and everywhere else), much to the expense of Indigenous peoples, including Canada’s Aboriginal peoples (Duchemin 1990; LaRocque 2010). Clearly, and as so many scholars have long documented, there are ways to see the European/Indigenous encounter as other than the super theory of “civilization” conquering “savagery.” Exploring these “other ways to see” is one of the critical tasks of Native Studies.

Native Studies, then, challenges dominant and hegemonic knowledge and theories. In Canada, the history, the diversity and the complexity of Aboriginal cultures has, until quite recently, been ignored or simply infantilized. The colonial project has been glossed over. And in terms of representation, Native peoples have been universally stereotyped and savagely dehumanized. On a more material level, there is virtually no end to the list of all the ways Indigenous peoples have lost entire populations, cultures, communities, lands and resources.

The Ethical Imperative of Native Studies

In such a context, there is no way we can avoid taking ethical positions; as decolonizing scholars, and not just from Native Studies, we must interrogate false history that is on one hand, the glorification of Euro-resettlement of Canada, and on the other, the denigration of Aboriginal cultures. We must also respond to the ongoing injustices and other urgent needs as well as the resilience of Aboriginal communities. Therefore, central to Native Studies is the manifold task of challenging the resettler text and repositioning the place of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian (and international) history and society. For example, we hold that the construction of

Canada was a political act, and equally that the construction of Canadian historical and literary knowledge with respect to Aboriginal peoples was, and largely remains, a political act. In part, and as Joyce Green (2001) argues, “Native Studies exists because of relations of oppression. It exists because of the historical colonial relationship, in which the oppressor constructed knowledge as first, its own cultural and intellectual production; and second, as that which legitimated the colonial enterprise” (40).

And precisely because of such constructions, both in political life and in the production of knowledge, and in many ways as a corrective response, Native Studies places Aboriginal peoples at the centre of our inquiry and investigation, from which we challenge hegemonic canons and/or reassert Indigenous life, or totally create new theories and methodologies. It is in this sense that Native Studies appears as a form of “resistance scholarship.” Of course, as scholars, we include a variety of meanings and interpretations; as scholars, we must constantly modify our data base, our understanding, our research methods and theories. In contrast with the European Miracle tunnel vision, or “tunnel history,” that views non-European peoples as “rockbound” by supposedly “timeless, changeless tradition” (Blaut 1993: 5),⁷ I have always understood our intellectual and scholarly lives as dynamic, dialogical and creative — much like how Native cultures have always approached life.

Green has also pointed out that Native Studies exists because other disciplines in universities have failed to treat adequately or fairly either Indigenous knowledge or the Native experience (2001: 42). Given this, a large part of our Native Studies efforts has necessarily involved the legitimation of Aboriginal cultures, knowledges and experience. However, more recently, focus has shifted from the more explanatory position of “legitimation” to the more proactive stance of cultural affirmation. Today’s younger Aboriginal scholars are not so heavily burdened as my generation was to correct misinformation and to deconstruct racist portrayals and language; today’s generation can and is moving on to more “positive” and (self) affirmative work.

But the differences in approach are actually slight because, as I have just noted, resistance work that perhaps characterizes previous generations has always been affirmative work. Doing a critique of archival or Hollywood stereotypes is asserting and affirming the integrity of Aboriginal cultures and the humanity of Aboriginal peoples. And really, in the context of this discourse, any validation of Aboriginal cultures is, in the final analysis, also a form of challenge to the mainstream canon. In any case, all this has been exciting because not only are we rebuilding our cultures by establishing new intellectual traditions for future generations but also because we are pushing the margins of Western academia as well as redefining it.

Not only do we seek to dismantle colonial paradigms and stereotypes but we also create new genres and languages. For instance, take the concept of “settler.”

Within what I have called the “civ/sav’ dichotomy” (1983: 86; 2010), Europeans used the concept of “settlers/settlement” as a mark of civilization (assumed to be European) in direct opposition to the “nomadic” “Indians,” nomadism being a sign of savagism.⁸ So in archival literature, “Indians” are often described as “roaming” or “ranging rather than inhabiting” — an early colonialist mantra that rationalized and soon legalized dispossession of Native lands, resources and communities. The stereotype of the underpopulated, wandering and warring savage Indian on “empty lands” became the Cowboy/Indian genre in the comic book and movie industry. In courts in which the colonizers are at once party and judge, Native people have had to prove their “occupancy and use” of ancestral lands in order to win back portions of their stolen lands! The concept of “settlement/settler” became a moral argument eagerly advanced by European justifiers of colonization. Settlement, along with agriculture, became associated with “progress” and cultural evolution, with the nifty notion that farmers had prior land rights over hunters because they used and “settled” the land; hunters, or “savages,” merely roamed over it (Pearce 1965: 70–71). This is one of many examples of how Aboriginal histories and cultures were/are falsified or grossly distorted.

In fact, there were a great variety of cultures, with many Indigenous groups engaging in forms of agriculture (Jennings 1976; Weatherford 1988, 1991; Wright 1993). But more importantly, those who were not farmers (in the European sense), such as the coastal, Plains and northern peoples, used and occupied and variously cultivated and harvested their resources, lands and waters. They had their own forms of territorial usage and settlements (Dickason 1992; Morrison and Wilson 1995). As we now know, pre-Columbian Indigenous peoples of the Americas were very heavily populated (Blaut 1993: 184; Jennings 1976: 30)⁹ with extensive settlements and other modes and lifeways of rootedness to certain domains of lands. Those Native peoples, such as the Plains and some Northern peoples, who did migrate did so for resource management reasons and within bounded areas of lands; they were not aimlessly “wandering”¹⁰ (which is Webster’s original meaning for the word “nomadic”). Mobilization and rootedness within the context of land use by Indigenous peoples are not mutually exclusive — as European colonists very well knew, given they were often dependent on Native geographical expertise and/or produce.¹¹ The ultimate irony is that Europeans were just as mobile as anyone else, yet they claimed ownership of the concept of civilization/settlement for obvious political interests. There is no objective moral basis for the idea that those who built permanent settlements or practiced certain styles of farming had/have prior rights to those who have other relational uses, methods and attachments to lands. Frankly, I am not enamoured with the concepts or words “settler” or “settlement,” given their colonial utility; but to make an obvious statement: Indigenous peoples were the original settlers of the Americas, whether they lived in city states or commuted

between satellite camp sites. For this reason I cannot call Europeans “settlers” — to do so is to imply as well as to entrench the idea that Aboriginal peoples were not! In actuality, colonizers dispossessed and displaced Native (including Métis) settlers and settlements (as well as other relational attachments to lands) and resettled the lands. In the words of Jennings, “The so-called settlement of America was a *resettlement*” (30, his emphasis). This is why I refer to Euro-White North Americans as “resettlers.”

There are many other colonial words and descriptions of Native life in areas of organization, governance, leadership, gender, spirituality and so forth, that serve to downgrade the cultures and dehumanize Native peoples (LaRocque 2010: 50).¹² Indeed, as Ronald Wright puts it, “An entire vocabulary is tainted with prejudice and condescension” (1993: xi). Such colonial texts invite “explosion,” yet our challenge to such tendentious, sexist and racist use of words has been slow and uneven. One response has been to “reclaim” words (e.g., “squaw”) that were meant to debase Native women and men. Another response is to use Native words and concepts, which in many contexts is a much needed cultural and political sign, and in literature is a thing of beauty. However, it is French and English words (within which we work in North America) as well as some ideological and/or discipline-bound phraseologies (i.e., tribal, traditional, hunters and gatherers, subsistence, chief, warrior) and concepts that, at the very least, require rethinking. Much work remains to be done in these areas of stereotyping, belittlement and disempowerment through language manipulation. We are now in the process of reworking and establishing new vocabularies, languages and canons in our fields. Of course, such struggles at the level of language and institutionalized canons are connected with material and legal struggles, given that the “subjectifying nature” (Coulthard 2007: 455) of colonial languages serves to undermine our humanity as well as our inherent rights to lands and governance, which are, of course, based on our settlement/s and continued occupation, use and relationship of lands since time immemorial.

Reworking and Establishing New Canons

In Native Studies, “reworking and establishing new canons” is actually a very fluid process, one that requires respectful disagreements with colleagues because we are not uniform in this work and development. Because Native Studies is meta-disciplinary in nature, our faculties represent a wide variety of disciplines, research directions, methodologies and even ideologies. Our own department reflects such diversity. Some of our faculty emphasize community research; some tend to “traditional knowledge”; others focus on law and legislation or other urgent issues such as racism, poverty, violence against women, urbanization; while still others do archival, historical or literary work. But all of us concern ourselves with (as Peter

Kulchyski put it) “the righting of” and “the writing of...” (2000: 3) the names and places erased, lands and resources stolen, or beliefs, stories and visual arts distorted by both resettler colonial renderings and colonial governments.

Naturally, we each work in the areas we specialize in. While I have focused on the deconstruction of colonial misrepresentation in Canadian historiography, literature and popular culture, particularly the civ/sav paradigm, I have also advanced an Indigenous-based critical voice and theory (1990). For example, I have demonstrated that it is possible to appreciate the Aboriginal “voice,” rooted in Indigenous and colonial experience, without compromising either that voice or scholarly protocols. This kind of critical positionality is an outgrowth of my “resistance” research in Native/White relations, an area of discourse and study that cannot be dealt with effectively only by standard Western models or by a unidisciplinary approach. Others may refer to such approaches as “engaged research.” It depends somewhat on our respective disciplines, but again all of us in Native (or Indigenous) Studies do not accept without challenge the massive falsification of our histories, or all the insults to our cultures and intelligence extant in colonial records and literatures, and in the media and marketplace, for that matter.

It is the legacy of colonization that makes us resistance scholars. But this work is not un scholarly, parochial or blindly subjective; nor is it merely defensive (or offensive). It is not insular, simplistic or necessarily culturalist or nationalist in basis. Native Studies is an ambitious project. Our knowledge of the fields involved is wide-ranging, spanning five centuries of archival material, historical, anthropological and/or literary scholarship. We pursue our investigations and our arguments through the discourse of colonizer fur traders, explorers, missionaries, jurists, historians, anthropologists, playwrights, poets and novelists from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries; and through the counterdiscourse of Aboriginal intellectuals, including artists, writers and the growing numbers of Aboriginal scholars who have perforce challenged old imperialist schools of thought that continue even today to stereotype, ignore or discredit us. Needless to say, we are complex and diverse in our research, approaches and argumentations. Resistance scholarship entails and requires ethical and critical study, engaged research and intellectual freedom.

Playing Defense, Playing Offense

However, not everyone agrees or is comfortable with the word “resistance,” and some may find the phrase “resistance scholarship” an oxymoron. This may partly indicate the shift from having to play defense to being able to play offense. In the literary world, for instance, some Aboriginal novelists or poets and literary critics have turned to “writing home” (McLeod 2001) rather than “writing back” at the proverbial “Empire” (Ashcroft et al. 1989). Other scholars (both Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal, including some grad students) in various fields have turned their attention to the retrieval and foregrounding of cultural knowledge, both traditional and contemporary, with a focus on languages, literatures, land ways, epistemologies and philosophies, kinship and political systems, ideas of treaties, use of resources, or material art and so forth. In these contexts, if the meaning of the word “resistance” is taken literally (i.e., “striving against”), perhaps the notion of resistance research may be limiting. But it is also the case that many students and some scholars associate the word “resistance” as only oppositional and negative, whereas cultural matters or cultural portraiture is seen as inherently constructive, hence, positive. Some find that the word “resistance” is too “postcolonial” and as such, unbalanced and singular in its scope, and neglects centuries of Indigenous knowledge prior to colonial incursions. Aboriginal novelist and scholar Thomas King, in “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial,” finds the term “postcolonial” problematic for a number of reasons:

And worst of all, the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from *our* traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. (1997: 242–43)

Indigenous knowledge has indeed existed eons prior to European invasions, and Thomas King, of course, makes a very important observation. To what extent colonization has impacted on Indigenous knowledge, and whether this is even any longer important to consider, especially within postcolonial theory (or theories), remain issues of debate and perhaps some contention. More recently, Anishinaabe (Ojibway) scholar and colleague Niigonwedom James Sinclair has argued:

Critical lenses of protest and resistance in Aboriginal literatures have now become so commonplace they are beginning to mirror the one-dimensional treatment Indigenous peoples receive in mainstream media ... The issue is not that Indigenous peoples resist, for they must and do, but that these acts are fetishized, romanticized, and commodified into comfortable and consumable narratives. (2010: 26)

Sinclair goes on to advocate for an interpretive lens of “continuance” as a “methodology that considers Indigenous literatures not only as narratives of resistance but engages the other countless activities Native authors undertake as active and responsible members of communities and creation” (28). Such engagements and “lens” “opens up Indigenous literatures (and arguably Indigenous cultures)

as expansive and adaptive, growing and innovative, instead of only staving off a colonial tidal wave” (28).

There has also been a thought that resistance work (associated with postcolonial criticism) necessarily recenters the colonizer. J. Edward Chamberlin, for example, has stated that postcolonial theories “reinforce the dominance it seeks to replace” (as quoted in Sinclair 2010: 26). In a very thoughtful essay, “Native Writing, Academic Theory, Post-colonialism across the Cultural Divide,” Judith Leggat states that in an instance of unequal power relations between an Aboriginal writer and White academic, “The act of literary analysis can reinscribe colonialism” (Moss 2003: 120). In some ways and in certain contexts, all these cautionary arguments about the uses or abuses of postcolonial theories (under which resistance theory is often subsumed) have merit, of course. It may be true that for every theory and frame of interpretation Aboriginal artists, scholars and other intellectuals invent, there will be those who will not comprehend or who will oversimplify and form new stereotypes. And it may be true that in some cases our work will be used to “reinscribe” or recentre colonialism. Given the magnitude of Western arrogance and ignorance about Indigenous peoples and cultures, we should perhaps expect these sorts of obtuse and defensive manoeuvres. But surely such obstructive devices cannot block our work; nor should they in any way limit our scholarship and our right to theorize ourselves (or anyone else), our cultures and our experience, or to employ (always reflexively and critically, of course) or create whatever theories best assist in our work of deconstructing and reconstructing. Or simply because we love scholarship. It seems to me that there is a “European miracle” diffusionist assumption to all these obstructions, and the implications are unsettling. Is it that every time we Indigenous scholars and artists employ so-called Western tools or concepts, we are no longer who we are? Or that we recolonize or enslave ourselves just by using certain terms, languages or schools of thought? That we have none of our own thoughts? Obviously, this is a dead-end road to go on. This is to buy into the European diffusionist notion that everything originates or comes from Europe. That nothing belongs to us! That all we can ever do is borrow “the master’s tools”! Intellectually speaking, there is no master here — unless we give it that power. “Borrowing” is a two-way street — if Indigenous peoples “borrowed” European tools, Europeans did so as well, more than amply at that (Axtell 2001; Jennings 1976; Weatherford 1988; Wright 1993). But there is another perhaps more important point here — we not only have dynamic cultural heritages but we also have a birthright to this contemporary world. And these two aspects, cultural heritage and contemporaneity is a matter of imbrication, not a matter of absolute ontological or fathomless chasm. We all have blended heritages, Europeans no less so, but it has obviously been to the advantage of colonizers to emphasize our differences, those real and those imagined or constructed.

I am not minimizing the challenges that confront us; the “master narrative” is powerful because it exercises what Said calls “flexible positional superiority” (1979: 7). That is, Eurocentric perspectives do have tendencies to absorb counterknowledges and reframe them within their own perspectives and for their own purposes. Or to shift terms of arguments or definitions both as “techniques of mastery” (Duchemin 55) and as a means of maintaining their super theory of civilization/savagery (LaRocque, 2010: 47–55). And it is still largely the case that the “globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of “civilized knowledge” (Smith 1999: 63). However, we cannot keep giving power away by acquiescing to the popular but mistaken notion that all things belong to Europeans!! Or that “everything that belongs to the colonizer is not appropriate for the colonized,” which Memmi deduces is “a confused and misleading conviction” (1967: 138). As far as I am concerned, Shakespeare is as much my heritage as a human being as is *Wehsakehcha*, the central Cree comic-psychologist, shape-shifting character in the numerous stories my mother entertained her children with. To believe otherwise or to in any way limit ourselves in our use of theory or terminology is to fall into the colonizer’s model of the world, which is exactly where neo-imperialist thinkers would contain us. Moreover, we have our own tools. We have our languages, our literatures, our concepts, our theories, our ways of knowing and of discovering and arranging knowledge. And our knowledge cannot be defined by or confined to some old colonial stereotypes of “Native culture” or “traditional (now “Indigenous”) knowledge.” Our knowledges are transcolonial, expansive, unsedimented, and both ancient and contemporary. In many ways, Indigenous scholars can speak many languages; we too can exercise flexible positionality!

It is very true that Indigenous peoples’ histories, languages, literatures, religions, worldviews, political systems, technologies, architectures, sciences and the arts did not begin with European arrivals! And amazingly, much has survived. To be sure, survival has not been universal or even in texture, but what has not survived in whole, we have and continue to reinvent. As I have long argued, pre-Columbian Indigenous peoples were dynamic and adaptive, and have continued to be, despite all the invasions and the massive depopulation and dispossession that go with it. Of course, we are not who we were, but neither is Europe: it is not as though the world that Shakespeare lived in hundreds of years ago —inhabited by monsters, witches and countless other religious beliefs and secular speculations that had no basis in observational truths (Dickason 1984) — is the world of contemporary Europeans. Both Indigenous and Western cultures, hence scholars, are confronted with the historical realities of continuance and discontinuance.

But it is European-based scholarship that has traditionally treated Indigenous

cultures as stagnant, primitive clay pots into which progressive varnished European cultures infuse their “European miracle” through colonial diffusion. Such a view constantly measures Indigenous change and difference solely from Western cultural tenets that are assumed to be “the hub of the human wheel out of which emanate all things progressive in culture and intellect” (LaRocque 2010: 163). This sort of neocolonial thinking places Indigenous peoples yet again in an absolutely no-win situation. In fact, it translates to intellectual genocide because it demands that Indigenous peoples remain “traditional,” that is, fixed and frozen in time; and when they change, they are charged with “assimilation” (even when assimilation is forced) — one way or another we are consigned to irrelevance, a modern version for the Vanishing Indian (Francis 1992; LaRocque 2010). Meanwhile, the Western world, which has more than liberally taken from the Indigenous (both materially and conceptually), acts as if it has neither been acculturated, indigenized, hybridized nor colonized by its own colonial globe-trotting.

Resistance Scholarship as Critical Inquiry

Some may also assume that the very nature of “resistance” cannot be used in the same breath as “scholarship.” Those who believe this are those who carry on old colonial ideas of scholarship as pure and uncontaminated by “the mud of politics” (Said 1979: 13). But as Said has argued, now echoed by numerous other decolonizing scholars since, scholars are products of their societies and as such are never free of their culturally formed perspectives and political locations. This is not to say that this renders scholarship useless or a joke. Arguably, no one was more passionate about scholarship than Edward Said. He practiced and advocated intellectual rigour, critical awareness and self-reflexivity in the pursuit of knowledge. What he understood is the intimate connection between “knowledge” and power. It is this connection that we seek to expose through our scholarship.

I for one believe strongly in critical scholarship; otherwise, I would not be in this vocation. There are protocols of research and study in the best of scholarly activity and dialogue that I believe have the capacity to enhance humanity. On a more personal note, my own resistance research approach has never been confined to Western knowledge, presuppositions or methodologies, or to Western definitions or theories. But again, I do not believe scholarship or science or technologies or any other cultural acquirements belong solely to the West. Innovation and learning have never been alien to Indigenous cultures; scholarship is as much my birthright as anything else, period.

I am in this work not only because I love knowledge and, obviously, all the complexities and nuances and questions of knowledge production but also because I am ethically committed to the vocation of humanization; that is, both to the ending

of injustice and oppression, whether social or intellectual, and at the same time, to the reconstruction of Indigenous humanity. And ultimately, all humanity. I do not know how we can study colonization and all its manifestations through mass media stereotypes, or the ongoing destruction and invasion of Indigenous lands, or the daily indecencies of sexism and racism, without addressing the ethical, social and political ramifications of such study. To study any kind of human violation is *ipso facto* to be challenged in our ethics, and to be called into resistance! In this, Native Studies is decidedly and unavoidably political.

However, there is also much that we can and must celebrate. Decades — centuries really — of Indigenous resistance has produced many positive political, socioeconomic and cultural changes. In Canada, a number of our original languages are still in use; our philosophies, worldviews and narratives are increasingly studied and understood; spiritual beliefs and protocols are being practiced; we are reinventing many aspects of our arts, including song, storytelling, sculpture and many other forms of material and visual art; our written literatures are flourishing; our scholars are increasing, as is our largely excellent scholarship; some socioeconomic conditions have certainly improved, relatively speaking;¹³ and our populations are rising. We are winning some significant battles over land and resource rights in courts, even as we face ongoing incursions in the form of industrial encroachments, legitimized by governments and “the national interest.” Our presence in the culture and politics of Canada can no longer be dismissed or ignored. We are always resurfacing. And what may be called “resurgence” today is actually a continuation of Indigenous resistance and resilience. Take the 1970s. How well I remember reading Harold Cardinal’s book *The Unjust Society* (1969) as a university student. It had a revolutionary effect on me. As did the many protests held by various Native (both First Nation and Métis) communities in northern Alberta. In that era, I witnessed and was part of the political awakening of Aboriginal peoples across Canada. If there is resurgence today, it is because of previous generations who refused to give up, who believed in the value of who they were/are, and who took their aspirations to the streets, to the courts and to the cameras for all Canadians to see. Some of us took to schools and scholarship.

We Cannot Be Owned

Today, as always, the topic of Native peoples is politically charged. This renders scholars in Native Studies vulnerable to multiple criticisms or attacks, not only from Westernist intellectuals or societal conflicts that wind their way into our classrooms but also from cultural and political interests that come from the Native communities.

Although we want to be supportive to the work of reconstruction that Aboriginal

nations are undertaking, we must be careful; we cannot become mouthpieces for any particular political or ethnic group, nor propagandists for any movement. We cannot be owned or dictated by any organization or constituencies, be they communities or universities.

Said reminds us:

Loyalty to the group’s fight for survival cannot draw in the intellectual so far as to narcotize the critical sense, or reduce its imperatives, which are always to go beyond survival to questions of political liberation, to critiques of the leadership, to presenting alternatives that are too often marginalized or pushed aside as irrelevant to the main battle at hand. (1996: 41)

Many of us in Native Studies or other resistance-based studies have made a living deconstructing Western hegemonic canons and ideologies; but we must also have the right to exercise our analytical skills and training in the service of advancing Aboriginal humanity, and sometimes this means we must offer some critical reflections. There are no flawless cultures in the world, even those that have been oppressed. Naturally, our analyses or criticisms may not be welcomed or understood. Indeed, given the educational and socioeconomic gap between Aboriginal scholars and the wider community, our critiques may be experienced as hurtful. The university culture of criticism is a very particular if not esoteric culture that many nonuniversity people, Native and non-Native alike, may misunderstand as simply “too negative.” Put another way, there is tension between our critical, analytical commitments and the need to support Native struggles for social justice. Nonetheless, we must maintain our freedoms to practice our scholarship, our mandates to review information and to evaluate it, and if necessary, to debate and to disagree.

As may be appreciated, intellectual freedom ranks as one of my most cherished treasures, and indeed, practicing this freedom is one reason I have been a lifelong scholar. But this is not only because of my profession; it is also because I believe our freedom to research and to reflect is requisite to advancing our humanity. However, I hasten to add, such freedoms are not without context or social responsibilities. As a decolonizing Indigenously situated feminist scholar, I believe in the social purpose of knowledge, and further that my knowledge gained from intellectual freedom is informed by my cultural and social responsibilities.

The effects of colonization on both White and Native scholars and scholarship in Canada are just beginning to be appreciated; and indeed, in the area of scholarship, much has improved since the 1970s! There are now works in North America (too numerous to reference) from almost all disciplines that reflect appreciation of our

cultural heritages as well as sound understanding of our colonial experiences. But as long as all the racist and dehumanizing archival, historical and literary portrayals continue to circulate in our library and publication systems as they do, we are put in a situation of having to continually address this material, especially as each new generation of students enter our classrooms. In addition, it is clear that we do still face misunderstanding and some resistance in the way our knowledge base and cultural information, as well as our decolonized methodologies, are received. For all these reasons and more, we are not in a position to “resist no longer.”

However, although we have a significant role to play in resisting oppression, in theorizing its origins and demonstrating its social consequences as well as assisting in reconstruction, we cannot be distracted from our vocation as critical thinkers. Our research must be rigorous, but it cannot be aloof. Our research must be thorough, thoughtful and thought-provoking; and our scholarship must exude the highest of standards, but also be “transgressive” and humanized with a compassionate voice. As an intellectual and a scholar, I often call for that “critical and relatively independent spirit of analysis and judgement,” which Edward Said argues “ought to be the intellectual’s contribution” (1996: 86). This is the primary contribution that we can all make; this is the spirit in which I carry out my scholarly studies within a Native Studies mandate and program that is as open, vibrant and international in scope as any critical human inquiry. For me, this is the meaning of “resistance” scholarship.

NOTES

1. Métis are one of three Indigenous groups recognized as Aboriginal in the Canadian Constitution. Métis’ dual (First Nation–European) ancestry emerged out of the First Nation, French and English fur trade during the seventeenth century. However, these first “half-breed” peoples evolved into a distinct Indigenous ethnic culture; by the early 1800s, the majority of Métis located in the Red River area and developed a sense of nationhood. Although there are a number of different Métis communities across Canada, the Red River Métis, now known as Métis Nation, the majority of whom live in Western Canada, remain the most prominent. For more on the development of Métis identity, see Peterson and Brown (1985); see also my essay, “Native Identity and the Métis” (2001b).
2. For a detailed study of the two resistances, see Doug Sprague (1988); see also Sawchuk et al. (1981).
3. Although some Métis — or those arbitrarily identified as Métis by colonial agents such as priests, police or treaty commissioners — did attend residential schools, most Métis could not because legally they were excluded from the *Indian Act*. Residential schools were established for “registered Indians,” as defined by the *Indian Act*, a federal statute. For more on Métis and residential schools, see Chartrand, Logan, and Daniels (2006).
4. For a useful survey of the different Aboriginal groups in relation to legal distinctions and exclusions in Canada, see James Frideres and Rene Gadacz (2001). For a good