

Resistance in Indigenous Music:

A Continuum of Sound

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine past and present Indigenous music and how both interconnect in a continuum of sound and meaning. This research is intended to address the value and benefits of Indigenous music in today's society based on the past practice of music as an integral aspect of all elements of life. With a main focus on Northern Plains knowledge of music, elements of continuity illustrate how Indigenous music promotes resistance, social change and healing for both rural and urban Indigenous peoples. The research methodology is based on an Indigenous knowledge framework that prioritizes the study of Indigenous music through an Indigenous lens. Interviews with musicians and ceremonialists confirm that Indigenous music relates to and is embedded in the physical, political, economical and spiritual worlds. Through a trans-disciplinary approach, this thesis allows reconsideration of the place and space in which Indigenous music dwells within our current culture. By reassessing the limited definitions of traditional, this study shows that the idea of Indigenous music becomes an emancipatory, evolving and constant stream of consciousness embedded in the adaptations of our people. With the interviewees' knowledge, I have constructed a unique understanding of Indigenous music, how it adapts with modernization, yet maintains an original intention, purpose, meaning and message. Indigenous worldview, consisting of ceremonies, protocols, teachings and knowledge of history, ensures continued existence through song and music. I focused on the drum, women's roles, prayers, language and hip hop as examples of resistance within Indigenous nations. As we begin to consider decolonization strategies within Indigenous communities, musicians and ceremonialists serve an essential role in this process.

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INTRODUCTION

What is Indigenous music? It is an amalgamation of worldviews, ideologies, actions and sound structures based on historical and modern times. Indigenous music can be rooted in, or it can be a combination of, community and people, purpose and intention. It is contextual, always changing and evolving with environments and times. It is both a result of assimilation and a form of resistance. For these complex reasons, Indigenous music cannot be easily defined, compartmentalized or essentialized. Established traditional–contemporary dichotomies devalue the true intent of Indigenous music as it continues to expand and grow in multiple ways of practice, reflecting the complexity of its meaning within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. This thesis will not define Indigenous music; rather, it will demonstrate a multifaceted continuum of sound resistance rooted in worldview, emancipating Indigenous music from the “traditional” ties that bind it to colonial history.

The purpose of this research is to examine past and present Indigenous music and how both interconnect in a continuum of sound and meaning. This research is intended to address the value and benefits of Indigenous music in today’s society based on the past practice of music as an integral aspect of all elements of life. While mainly focusing on Northern Plains knowledge of music, I hope that these findings will resonate and that connections will be drawn within Indigenous knowledge of music from around the world. As a musician myself, I found that my desire to consider an academic approach to the work of musicians grew stronger as my years of experience exposed complex questions within the music industry and its relationship with Indigenous communities. I began to recognize patterns amongst musicians, both beneficial and destructive, in which I determined a need for a more in-depth

analysis of the positive aspects of Indigenous music. This exploration grew into a desire to engage in a full study of past forms of music as a way of both drawing parallels and exposing disconnect in current Indigenous music. The intent of this thesis is not to focus on the detrimental aspects of the music industry or dysfunction within ceremonial communities; rather, it is to develop research by and for Indigenous people based on constructive, positive examples of current musicians and ceremonialists creating and maintaining their music “in a good way.”¹

Elements of continuity illustrate how Indigenous music promotes resistance, social change and healing for both rural and urban Indigenous peoples. For the purpose of this study, resistance will be defined as the work and performance of Indigenous artists who maintain and develop music to resist colonization and to retain expressions of Indigenous identities and worldviews. It also refers to the work of those who promote decolonization and liberation through active social awareness and change. Resistance can take place in a political, ideological and/or cultural context, and from personal to (inter)national perspectives.² I have chosen to interview participants who, by creating and maintaining Indigenous music, understand and disseminate the meaning, purpose and intent of Indigenous music from past to present; they represent the ways that Indigenous music has shifted and developed into the forms/genres that exist today. In different ways, they all resist cultural loss by adhering to ancestral teachings in a modern context. This research will bring forward new interest in and

¹ Marc Longjohn, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, May 12, 2012.

² Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997); Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Gord Hill, *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009); James Tully, “The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom,” in *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, eds. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, & Will Sanders (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

understanding of Indigenous music as a living entity—how it adapts with modernization, yet maintains the original intention and purpose within these contemporary forms.

As the literature reveals, Indigenous music has always been an integral part of social, political, economic and spiritual realities, intended to uphold Creator’s sacred laws.³ It plays a key role in shaping identity, and while Indigenous cultures have been placed under immense pressure from colonization, a study of Indigenous music, in this research focusing on the Northern Plains,⁴ can demonstrate that Indigenous worldviews continue to flourish. As Settee describes,

Music has long been a traditional method of entertainment and ceremonial accompaniment providing soothing sounds and teaching valuable stories for social and community enhancement. Traditional music and songs, some thousands of years old, still bring a community together for social activities, such as powwows, ceremonies, feasts, weddings, births, deaths, and other life events in which our music had a function.⁵

Music is embedded in all aspects of Indigenous culture and life. The goal of this research is to identify and describe artists who create and perform music not simply as separate genres or categories of music, but within an interconnectedness that transcends the boundaries of time and place. Instead of focusing on the traditional–contemporary dichotomy, my intention is to connect common themes of Indigeneity to the practice of each artist, whether the musician sings at a folk festival or a Sundance ceremony. In fact, it is to assert that contemporary

³ Sylvia McAdam, *Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies*, (Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009); Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000).

⁴ I use the term “Northern Plains” when referencing Plains Cree, Lakota/Dakota, Saulteaux, Anishnaabe, Assiniboine and Métis people. It is inaccurate to define a belief or practice as strictly one or the other. Their worldviews are interconnected and closely related. Throughout history each group has built relationships prior to and after contact, and within our cultural backgrounds, we are usually more than one of the above.

⁵ Priscilla Settee, *Pimatisiwin: Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Our Time Has Come* (PhD dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2007), 92.

Indigenous music stems from music of the past, and although adapted and ever-evolving in sound and style, it maintains the customary understanding of songs and music as a part of complex and interrelated relationships with land, spirits and people.

In this thesis, I refrain from adhering to the word “traditional.” The term “traditional” is burdened with a notion of being stationary and is commonly used in Indigenous studies, referencing a pre-colonial influence and existence. It is not the word itself that I reject; it is its colonial connotation, in which a set, preferential description creates a “divide and rule”⁶ dimension within Indigenous communities. I am not arguing that there are no traditions or traditional aspects of culture. Rather, I am suggesting that the European constructed notion of tradition promotes comparisons and competition based on power, progress and colonial purity over what is viewed as inferior traditions of the past, specifically Indigenous ones.⁷ Hobsbawm refers to tradition as formalization and ritualization characterized by reference to the past if only by imposing ownership.⁸ Therefore, tradition can only exist by human decisions and actions. Indigenous peoples have a living past and are extremely adaptable to change. Indigenous “traditions” are based on Creator’s Law, meaning that they are not initiated or invented by people. Indigenous ways are determined by the land and universe, always growing, living, and responding to environmental changes. However, our current understanding of “traditional” has been constructed from a European meaning.

Wilson describes a phase in history that references the process of “traditionalizing.” Since the late 1800’s, both the government and research communities have imposed

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 137.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3-4.

⁸ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 4.

traditional and non-traditional identities onto Indigenous people as a form of assimilation.⁹ Currently, through governmental programming and various funding capacities, “traditional” aspects of Indigenous communities are favoured, and therefore Indigenous people, many urbanized and suffering from disparate spiritual, economic and physical circumstances, are left out of the classification. Some commonly acceptable examples are practices such as beading and powwows. And those who do not fit these bureaucratic categories still adhere to their parameters, in effect complicating the natural progression of customs and values. Now that cultural and physical survival for Indigenous people(s) is interdependent with a Western economic system, those who do not adhere to these parameters are rejected and silenced not only by funding regulations, but also by people within their own communities. Therefore, the defined “traditional” aspects of culture are predominantly determined by the colonial powers for the purpose of continued control over all aspects of Indigenous life, which renders the term “traditional” a contradiction to the intention of this thesis, which is to promote decolonization through Indigenous music.

Vine Deloria Jr. describes “traditional” Indigenous life as an evolution and adjustment to changing environments, and he explains that one never stops “learning and gathering insights into the operation of the natural world.”¹⁰ According to Deloria, “traditional” is dynamic and full of change; such an understanding undermines the predominant connotation of “traditional” as something static. Both knowledge keepers and academics confuse the idea of traditional, thereby neutralizing the real intent of Indigenous knowledge within modern contexts. When Indigenous music scholars and musicians frequently use the word

⁹ Sean Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 47–49.

¹⁰ Vine Deloria Jr. *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Man* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), xxxi.

“traditional,” they negate the change and adaptability of Indigenous people that has occurred throughout history. Not only does the word break up a linear timeline, it gives a few chosen experts the right to determine the “traditional” elements of sound and song. In fact, as Indigenous music continues to develop, these harmful categories will create dissent amongst different nations and depreciate the power of the music itself.

This study presents a different understanding of the current forms and styles of sound, with an intention of deconstructing the colonial parameters that entrap Indigenous music into limiting definitions and categories. So while Deloria proposes that “traditional Indigenous life” is about change, I extend this idea and argue that these ongoing processes in Indigenous life should remove the term “traditional” altogether.

Commonly, any Indigenous music that is ceremonial or powwow-related is referred as “traditional.” However, some Indigenous communities consider their Cree hymns to be very traditional, some dating back over 100 years.¹¹ McNally describes Ojibwa hymnody as a form of traditional song that sits “firmly on the tenuous space of culture, spaces that move between the oral and the written, between the Christian and Ojibwa, and between accommodation and resistance.”¹² Setting strict parameters of “tradition” devalues the multifaceted values and beliefs among Indigenous communities.

Powwow culture provides a good example of the tensions that the term “traditional” has created. Older generations will argue that the use of both the hand drum and big drum have adapted immensely; so how do we define the old ways of drum practice embedded

¹¹ Janice Esther Tulk, “Localizing Intertribal Traditions: The Powwow as Mi’kmaq Cultural Expression,” in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges*, ed. Anna Hoefnagels and Beverly Diamond (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012), 82–83.

¹² Michael D. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 44.

within the new ways when the musical expressions are so varied? Within Indigenous nations, defining something as “traditional” also becomes politically detrimental, as a few “traditionalists” may claim that their knowledge is more authentic than the knowledge of others. In reality, there is no such thing as uninfluenced or pure traditional music, as all forms of music have been changed by Western influences. To simplify, any Indigenous music that is created and/or presented and performed today is all a part of a continuum that starts from the beginning of time right into the present.

The effects of colonization of Indigenous music up to the present time are devastating. The economic, spiritual, social and political influences of Europeans have created vast differences in the ways in which music is portrayed, not only by ethnomusicologists and the masses, but also within Indigenous communities themselves. The term “Indigenous music” is used to draw imaginary lines between “contemporary” and “traditional” styles, identifying genres like rock, pop and country as separate from powwow, rounddance and ceremonial music.¹³ Constructing boundaries within the music is harmful because it not only appeals to the western conceptualization of music as a marketable industry, but it also takes away from our past ways of interpreting song and music or the “spirit” within the song. Indigenous artists struggle to fit within these contemporary categories, incorporating Indigenous instrumentation such as drums and rattles into different genres, and while they may receive mainstream mass recognition and accolades for their creativity, without recognizing protocols and boundaries, some may further contribute to the loss of original knowledge of the purpose of music. By

¹³ Beverley Diamond, “Deadly or Not: Indigenous Music Awards in Canada and Australia,” in *Post-Colonial Distances*, ed. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 183.

resisting colonial constraints, artists and ceremonialists acknowledge the purpose and intent of music as a link to the spirit world.

Within research on Indigenous music, I prefer to use the word *continuum* as a way of describing the ongoing changes within Indigenous music and ways of knowing. It is inaccurate to confine my study to the common definition of “traditional” that depicts a fixed, set practice, as Indigenous peoples have been changing and evolving both before and after contact. As a continuum, Indigenous music evolves at different levels and stages depending on nation and musician. The chosen interviewees reflect this endeavor, resisting “traditional” limitations by living and adapting music within current conditions.

This thesis is divided into four chapters that describe resistance in Northern Plains music. The first chapter is an overview of methodology, a literature review and theoretical framework. The second is a discussion about themes of Indigenous resistance and worldview based on interviews with musicians who explain their expertise, worldview, philosophies and knowledge of music from past to present. This second chapter will detail the results of the interviews; it will distill common themes of resistance and factor in the musicians’ connections to the music community as well as their understanding of the practices, protocols and processes for instruments such as the drum. The third chapter delves into intercultural adaptations of Indigenous music, predominantly focusing on hip hop as the newest example of resistance music. It also defines past styles of music in present offerings, considering the continuum of sound. Finally, the fourth chapter summarizes the research findings through a theoretical review of the evolution of Indigenous music based on a Northern Plains worldview. Liberating Indigenous music from the rigid construct of “traditional” vs. contemporary becomes a vital aspect of decolonization. By the conclusion, the reader will

have an understanding of how Indigenous music revitalizes characteristics of worldview based on Indigenous knowledge systems to further strengthen decolonization strategies. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to benefit Indigenous communities by re-evaluating the current stance on Indigenous music and recovering knowledge of music, its purpose, meaning and message. By focusing on artists who resist colonial interpretations of Indigenous music, this research reminds us of the most important purpose of songs and music: a conduit that connects the physical and spiritual worlds.

CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGY, LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Methodology and Methods

In the context of methodology, I am aware of some biases that may arise as a result of my being a part of the community I am researching. Unlike the outsider coming in, I approached this research from within. The people I have interviewed are all peers with whom I have had the opportunity to either share the stage or ceremonial lodge. For example, I grew up around the Elder interviewed in this thesis, and I was aware of his profound knowledge of Plains Cree (Nehiyaw) ceremonial music. In the musical community we consider each other family, and our sense of relatedness is strong. Until recent times, academic research was considered more valid when one used an etic approach to research, encouraged to maintain the position of the outsider.¹⁴ However, outsiders have long engaged in researching Indigenous communities and many have spent many years trying to become a part of the community, yet their findings may still reflect their non-Indigenous perception or worldview, which continues to reiterate a lack of understanding and a notion of superiority in their resulting data analysis. While any respectful research can be beneficial, biases occur in research done by both community insiders and outsiders.

In the case of this research, I strongly feel that being a part of the community one is researching contributes to the growing construction of the discipline, as the importance of learning and teaching amongst relatives and family is embedded in Indigenous worldviews.

¹⁴ Raymond Madden, *Being Ethnographic: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2010), 20.

Wilson refers to a shift in the ways in which Indigenous scholars are conducting research within their own communities as “shaping, redefining and explaining knowledge systems in academia”¹⁵ to reflect a contribution to self-determination and liberation. As a Nehiyaw researcher, I wish to learn and share Indigenous knowledge of music as a means of resistance to definitions that may be inaccurate or uninformed, as academic history has revealed to often be the case. I have also approached this research with an awareness of my linguistic and experiential limitations, knowing very little about the deeper intellectual intricacies existing within the use, purpose and meaning of Indigenous music. So while I am a part of the family, in many ways I am still an outsider attempting to understand this area of study. Yet, as a Plains Cree woman, I know that sharing a similar worldview with the participants further promotes a sense of balance in the resulting data.

My research methodology is based on an Indigenous knowledge framework that prioritizes the study of Indigenous music through an Indigenous lens. It is also my cultural background and most familiar to me. I refer to Margaret Kovach’s approach of establishing research based on Indigenous knowledge as she describes a common value and commitment that the research must be done in a holistic way.¹⁶ Kovach’s work addresses the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of epistemology, and explains that it will come from story, as she describes further in her discussion of oral tradition. Kovach’s method is also based on experiential learning, with an overall consideration of the effects of colonization within the understanding and practice of Indigenous music.¹⁷ The foundation of this study are the interviewees and the stories that they share. Indigenous research should be based on an

¹⁵ Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 54.

¹⁶ Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 43.

¹⁷ Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 44.

Indigenous knowledge framework, and in this study, the majority of participants and sources are centered on the Northern Plains.

This research will adhere to the understanding of Indigenous Law in practice. Sylvia McAdam describes the process of conducting research within Indigenous communities:

The principles of First Nations' laws affect and are a part of all aspects of First Nations life including ceremonies and activities. The laws were given to the First Nations people to follow and to abide by. These laws are the protocols and etiquettes in place to guide and direct people to appropriate access to traditional ethical conduct. These protocols are foundational for the First Nations people to communicate and live.¹⁸

In the developmental stages of my research, I reflected on the importance and role of Indigenous Laws in my methodology. I continued to actively pursue ceremonies throughout the journey to remind myself of these Laws. It is also essential to enter a research project “in a clean way,” and Elders suggest involvement in ceremony as a means of preparing for work with an Indigenous community.¹⁹ Specifically, in the summer of 2010, I prepared for this learning process by partaking in a fasting ceremony, to ask spiritual beings for guidance and success in the research process. For four days I humbled myself and gave prayers of thanks and gratitude. I then reflected on the benefits of learning and sharing knowledge about music, while maintaining ongoing communication with ceremonial people. I had limited access to certain forms of music, as some knowledge is not meant to be public or may be intended for only some people. There are certain sacred customs within Indigenous culture that remain hidden from mainstream society in order to protect and ensure their longevity and survival. All of this knowledge is based on and in Indigenous Law.

¹⁸ McAdam, *Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies*, 6.

¹⁹ McAdam, *Cultural Teachings*, 7.

In researching current Indigenous music, part of my methodology was to incorporate written historical sources as they serve to explain phenomena that are no longer remembered or practiced in the same way. It was my intention to respectfully draw upon these adaptations through time as a way of verifying aspects that exist in contemporary music. Also, various conversations with knowledge, language and drum keepers at ceremonies and events validated many of the historical points and offered insight into various aspects of the research that remained unclear to me. Combined, both oral and written sources provided well-informed research for this study.

The research methods used here are qualitative and include participant observation, conversations, journaling and semi-structured interviews with participants. Interviews are essential to this research as they not only reflect an ongoing consideration of Indigenous music as a living, adapting and growing component of contemporary Indigenous life, but they also embody oral tradition. The initial stage of the interviews consisted of contacting available and willing participants who are involved in Indigenous music in different capacities. I used the protocol of offering tobacco as part of my request to interview. From a Northern Plains perspective, offering tobacco displays a respectful and reciprocal relationship between the participant and interviewer, and also the spiritual elements involved. Ideally the tobacco offering is smoked, placed in a fire or placed in a “clean place”²⁰ upon completion of the interview. By following this protocol, I adhered to my commitment to an Indigenous knowledge framework. In fact, all of the methods were grounded in ceremony.

²⁰ “Unused or inhabited by human beings, such as under a tree or beside a river or rock.” Bill Ermine, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, March 29, 2012.

The participants for this study predominantly consisted of Indigenous musicians from the Northern Plains, with the exception of Os12, a Sto:lo from Vancouver, British Columbia. A renowned rapper, Os12 also works with Revolutions Per Minute, an online radio/blog/news site that keeps the most up-to-date information on Indigenous artists from North America. Because of his lengthy artistic resumé and in-depth and on-going research and analysis of contemporary Indigenous music, Os12's perspective, knowledge and theories of Indigenous music were essential. Bill Ermine, a ceremonial Elder from Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan is well known as a Plains Cree knowledge keeper and has been engaged in ceremonies for many years. Albert Berland from Frog Lake, Saskatchewan is a Plains Cree Sundance maker. Marc Longjohn, from Saskatoon, is the lead of a rounddance group called the Youngscouts, who have considerably re-invigorated the rounddance community with a contemporary style of performing the songs, which were originally sung in an Indigenous language, yet are now mixed with English. Lastly, including the perspective of a woman, Violet Naytowhow, both ceremonialist and folk artist also from Sturgeon Lake First Nation, was extremely helpful in this research process.

I chose each of these interviewees as they are all related through the use of Indigenous music as a form of resistance. They display an array of experience and knowledge of Indigenous musical practice that, through example, will allow further advancement of the understanding of Indigenous music as a part of decolonization. In various ways, they facilitate the act of music as a basis for knowledge in ceremony and social life, drawing old practice into contemporary experience. Unfortunately, the ratio of women to men involved in Indigenous music is much smaller and it was therefore more difficult to obtain participants from this category. My eager attempts to contact Buffy St. Marie and Shoshonna Kish of

Digging Roots were unsuccessful as their schedules were very full. Regardless, Violet Naytowhow's knowledge and willingness to participate completed a necessary balance for my research.

Upon completion of data collection, the analysis displayed connecting themes of resistance, which will be further articulated throughout this thesis. By following a methodology based on a Northern Plains knowledge framework, my interpretation of these related concepts is within the understanding of Indigenous music from a Northern Plains perspective and as an Indigenous process based on Indigenous worldview. Through the use of these methods and methodology, the outcome of this research has proven to be consistent with a growing body of work by and for Indigenous people, securing place, space and time within the mainstream knowledge systems that are dominant in academia.

1.2. Literature Review

Common themes emerged in both historical and contemporary literature. These themes include the previously discussed conflicting definitions of "traditional" and contemporary art and music, forms of resistance, and the use of the arts to influence and define culture and identity versus to create entertainment based on popular culture and media. In regards to resistance, much of the more recent literature reflects overall changes in the Canadian socio-political climate such as *Indian Act* and its amendments, restrictions, and institutionalized racism, which sparked Indigenous activism that grew in the 1950s and continues in the present. However, historical documentation provides a more precise examination of Indigenous arts as customary practice, so both are beneficial to researching a continuum of resistance within Indigenous music. While the literature defines Indigenous

music and the arts from past to present, it fails to bring forward the concept of authentic knowledge within contemporary music, where the same intention, purpose and meaning exist within the songs that are foundational to maintenance of culture and identity and resistance to colonization. The intention of my thesis is to fill this gap.

1.2.1. Definitions of Indigenous Music

Indigenous music is both ideologically and cosmologically different from most Western Euro-American compositions. Since contact, European newcomers have been appropriating the ways that Indigenous people create and perform music, failing to understand the context and meaning behind the pieces. As recently as the late 1980's, researchers have been writing anthropological accounts of Indian music throughout North America.²¹ John Bierhorst, who spent years working on his text *A Cry from the Earth*, describes Indian songs and instruments in great detail, while failing to comprehend the meaning of music within each tribe. Referring to Indigenous people's musical non-conformity in drumming, dancing, and singing, he concludes:

Music like this in which two or more parts, though heard together, have no connection with each other, is typical of the Indian way of thinking. There are even Indian dances

²¹ Theodore Baker, *On the Music of the North American Indians* (New York: Da Capo Press), 1977; John Bierhorst, *A Cry From the Earth: Music of the North American Indians* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1979), 26; Franz Boas, "Ethnology of the Kwakiutl, Based on Data Collected by George Hunt," in *U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology. Thirty Fifth Annual Report, 1913-1914* (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology), 41-794; Frances Densmore, "Technique in the Music of the American Indian," in *Anthropological Papers, No.36 of Smithsonian Institution: Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 151* (United States Government Printing Office, 1953), 211-223; Frances Densmore, *The American Indians and Their Music* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1926); Helen H. Roberts, *Form in Primitive Music: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Melodic Form of Some Ancient Songs* (New York: American Library of Musicology, 1993).

in which the steps are executed in a rhythm entirely independent of the accompanying song. Indian mythmakers do the same kind of thing.²²

In the midst of their studies, many researchers failed to capture the reasoning behind Indigenous music and that the way in which it is performed is not as relevant as the purpose of the performance. The difference lies in the Euro-American desire to compartmentalize music, when the process of Indigenous music is actually immersed within the greater whole of Indigenous knowledge and identity. As contemporary Indigenous writers and academics include knowledge of Indigenous music in their works, they are also responsible for recognizing and reframing this misconstrued interpretation and promoting respectful and more intelligent accounts of Indigenous music, from an Indigenous perspective.

It is essential to note the most updated academic perspective on Canadian Indigenous music, titled *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges*,²³ which is a useful collection of musicians and academics who interpret the current state of Indigenous music in Canada. The value of this text is its approach towards modernity and how innovation affects all forms of music. While utilizing the terminology throughout the text, instead of limiting discussions of “traditional” vs. “contemporary,” editors Beverley Diamond and Anna Hoefnagels acknowledge the fluidity of Indigenous music by selecting writers who speak to such changes.²⁴ With reflections on contemporary powwow, Dene Dreamers’ Dance, technology and intercultural exchanges, this text is the most up to date and functional for the purpose of this study. While considering new innovations and musical outcomes, much of the articles still reflect the historical approach of presenting Indigenous music from an

²² Bierhorst. *A Cry From the Earth*, 26.

²³ Anna Hoefnagels and Beverly Diamond, eds., *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2012).

²⁴ Hoefnagels and Diamond, *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada*, 12.

ethnomusicologist's perspective rooted in anthropological understanding. The interviewees, musicians and academics touch on the healing aspects of learning and performing music, yet there is limited acknowledgement of music as foundational within spiritual, political and economic realms. While this text reveals a new approach to the study of Indigenous music, it serves a basis to more in-depth research on philosophical and conceptual interpretations of songs and music.

As much as ethnomusicologists endeavor to do so, it is not easy to categorize Indigenous music. Numerous authors refer to “traditional” and contemporary/popular forms of music as separate in purpose and intent. They specify that older music is based in customary practice and ceremonialism whereas new forms are more politically and socially charged, embedded in the theme of resistance.²⁵ There is no shortage of literature on the differences between historical and contemporary music, areas which have remained worlds apart. What is limited is the discussion of amalgamation of both historical and current forms of music in terms of a temporal and evolutionary continuum. Certain forms of Indigenous

²⁵ David R. M. Beck, “Developing a Voice: The Evolution of Self-Determination in an Urban Indian Community,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 17 (2002): 117–141; Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*; Peter Dunbar-Hall and Chris Gibson, *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places: Contemporary Aboriginal Music* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd., 2004); Peter Dunbar-Hall and Chris Gibson, “Nitmiluk: Place and Empowerment in Australian Aboriginal Popular Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 44 (Winter 2000): 39–64; Chris Gibson, “‘We Sing Our Home, We Dance our Land’: Indigenous Self-Determination and Contemporary Geopolitics in Australian Popular Music,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16 (1998): 163–184; Jo-Ann Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy and Healing* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009); Donald L. Fixico, *American Indians in a Modern World* (New York: Altamira Press, 2006); Hill, First Name, *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance*; Lois Meyer and Benjamin Maldonado Alvarado, *New World of Indigenous Resistance: Noam Chomsky and Voices From North, South and Central America* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2010); Christopher Alton Scales, *First Nations Popular Music in Canada: Identity, Politics and Musical Meaning* (MA thesis, Vancouver: The University of British Columbia, 1990); John William Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879–1934* (Morman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

music, such as powwow, are more readily discussed, as there is an obvious and popular dichotomy within Indian communities as to what is defined as “traditional” and “contemporary” music and dance.²⁶ This study begins to explore newer forms of Indigenous music, in which historical aspects are immersed within the contemporary sounds. To summarize, there is a desire to determine the changes within not only powwow, but also all forms of Indigenous music today, although this effort is in its early stages and still does not effectively reflect constant adaptations in Indigenous society.

Contemporary scholars like Jennifer Brown, Robert Brightman, Neal McLeod and Sharon Venne provide the most unconventional views of the historical definitions of Indigenous music to date.²⁷ They recognize the importance of older, deeply entrenched practices and the meaning behind ceremonies as those that define a people and their relationship to the land. They examine Indigenous worldviews and decolonization, which is necessary for research on traditional knowledge, and recognize that these practices cannot be respected and appreciated by those who do not understand the history of the oppression of Indigenous music. For example, in *Grateful Prey*, Robert Brightman defines the different types of songs and how some connect to the spirit beings and some are more “secular” and not

²⁶ Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, ed., “Dance Me Inside: Powwow and Being Indian,” in *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005), 152; Anna Hoefnagels, “The Dynamism and Transformation of ‘Tradition’: Factors Affecting the Development of Powwows in Southwestern Ontario,” *Ethnologies* 29 (2005): 107–141.

²⁷ Robert A. Brightman, *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human Animal Relationships* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2002); McLeod, Neal, *Cree Narrative Memory* (Purich Publishing Limited: Saskatoon, 2007); Sharon Venne, “Treaties Made in Good Faith,” in *Natives and Settlers—Now and Then: Historical Issues and Current Perspectives on Treaties and Land Claims in Canada*, ed. Paul W. DePasquale (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2007), 7; Michael Detmold, “Law and Difference: Reflections on Mabo’s Case,” in *Essays on the Mabo Decision* (Sydney: Law Book Company, 1993), 39–47.

intended to be more than social music.²⁸ His research reflects the words and understanding of the Rock Cree Elders and the importance of reflections on these practices within the current generation of people. Various authors utilize knowledge of Indigenous music within the contemporary context to describe treaty issues, land issues and maintenance of culture.²⁹ Because of their acknowledgement of the interrelated use of music within all contexts along with decolonial perspectives, they are useful in exploring historical roots within contemporary music.

1.2.2. Resistance in the Indigenous Arts

The theme of resistance is constant throughout most of the recent literature pertaining to Indigenous music and the arts. Critics draw upon audio, visual, multimedia, and performance arts to illustrate resistance within Indigenous groups. While some literature compares historical and current purposes of art,³⁰ most is focused on resistance to colonialism in new works: music as a revolutionary, socio-political act.³¹ As Diamond argues, resistance is based on the impact of socio-political movements, rooted in representation of traditional knowledge and decolonization initiatives.³² Resistance is a popular term that is incorporated within Indigenous peoples' experience in the arts, yet the descriptions of such resistance are

²⁸ Brightman, *Grateful Prey*, 104–105; Scales, *First Nations Popular Music in Canada: Identity, Politics and Musical Meaning*; Hoefnagels, *Aboriginal Music in Canada*; Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits*.

²⁹ Venne, "Treaties Made in Good Faith," 47.

³⁰ Beverly Diamond. *Native American Music In Eastern North America: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Robert Layton, "From Clan Symbol to Ethnic Emblem: Indigenous Creativity in a Connected World," in *Indigenous Cultures in an Interconnected World*, ed. Claire Smith and Graeme K. Ward (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000); Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance*.

³¹ Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*; Fixico, *American Indians in a Modern World*; Meyer, *New World of Indigenous Resistance*.

³² Hoefnagels, *Aboriginal Music in Canada*, 12; Alannah Earl Young and Denise Nadeau, "Decolonising the Body: Restoring Sacred Vitality," *Atlantis* 29 (2002): 1–13.

brief references without an in-depth analysis of the connection between historical and recent examples of artistic resistance. In describing this connection, David P. McAllester adds,

Perhaps the only perspective in American Indian music today that is not “new” is that of the traditionalist who refuses to record the ceremonies he has learned or even to countenance the presence of outsiders at their performance. This view is by no means uncommon in Native North America and has ... become more prevalent in recent times. ... Three hundred years of Indian resistance have finally begun to teach the Anglo world a new perspective, too.³³

McAllester asserts that Indigenous peoples have resisted colonialism by hiding sacred music—meant to stay within the ceremonial circle and tribe—from colonizers. Such active resistance in Indigenous music is prominent throughout history.

While there is much more written in academic form, it is useful to include Indigenous authors’ and poets’ perspectives, such as those of Louise Halfe, Louise Erdrich, Richard Wagamese and Tomson Highway, as many of these writers resist colonialism through the transmission of traditional teachings of Indigenous music and the arts in fictional literature and poetry.³⁴ Storytellers acquire knowledge through research and connections to Elders within communities, thereby drawing ideas for their own works based on teachings. All have a lived experience of Indigeneity and artistry, and therefore their writing brings forth knowledge beneficial to this research on Indigenous music from an artist’s perspective. Although I do not focus on fictional literature throughout my thesis, I recognize their contribution to the creative Indigenous world as knowledge keepers and promoters of

³³ David P. McAllester, “New Perspectives in Native American Music,” *Perspectives of New Music*, 20 (1981–1982): 440.

³⁴ Louise Halfe, *Blue Marrow* (Saskatoon: McClelland and Stewart, 2004); Richard Wagamese, *One Story, One Song* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011); Tomson Highway, *The Kiss of the Fur Queen* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 1998).

decolonization. They have helped shape my ideas and desire to study Indigenous truth through story.

Lastly, oral tradition is the fundamental form of transmission for Indigenous people, as stories relay the meaning, message and purpose of songs. Current literature postulates that contemporary storytellers in the arts are valued in a similar way that visual arts are respected. Episkenew claims that stories, dance and song were considered beautiful in their own right and served spiritual functions within communities.³⁵ This becomes apparent within international literature, particularly through post-colonial literature of women, which is a vast and intricate area of study that can include the experience of Indigenous women within music. As Australian Aboriginal writer Ruby Langford articulates,

Our Ancient tribal people sat down and sang the spirits into this land giving it its physical form. Whiteman called our dreamtime a myth. Our people know it as fact, it was before creationtime! They sang the trees, they sang the mountains, they sang the valleys, they sang the rivers and streams ... they sang life in its vastness, into this brown land; and the spirit lives still, never has it been silenced, by whiteman or his restrictive ways, and the song had a beginning, and there will never be an ending until justice is returned to the singers of songs, our ancient tribal people.³⁶

This passage reflects the depth of the theoretical concepts that exist within Indigenous music: music as a part of creation stories and the creative function for continued relationships with physical and spiritual beings. By reflecting on the oral accounts of Indigenous people, we can embrace this resistance and begin to re-establish a framework that includes this history of music and song as a connector to all of creation.

³⁵ Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits*, 192.

³⁶ Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Real Deadly* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1992), 36.

The most common reference to resistance exists in hip hop culture and music.³⁷ In hip hop, an oppressed group (Indigenous youth) connects to and borrows from other oppressed peoples (African American and Latino youth in the inner city) who are working through the effects of colonization. Similar to the American Indian Movement (AIM) in relation to the Black Panthers of the 1970s, young Indigenous people are utilizing and recreating modernized African American culture as a way of understanding their own socio-economic position in society. Scholar Brett Lashua gives an example of an arts-based method called “remixology” to articulate the importance of hip hop music in the lives of young urban Indigenous people. He provided the technical equipment and space to allow the participants to create lyrics and beats to capture their stories.³⁸ Lashua became part of the process without dictating the results to the participants. When the young people used technology to create hip hop, they defined their own movement.

While much of Indigenous hip hop is a space for positive expression and decolonization, the other side, like gangster rap, includes embellishment of colonial effects. Although this can still be titled as resistance to the mainstream, these themes are detrimental to the role of Indigenous music as a tool for decolonization and individual and community healing. Although hip hop as a growing phenomenon is drawing interest on academic levels, there is yet to be a well-formed theoretical perspective on the purpose of hip hop and other

³⁷ David R. M. Beck, “Developing a Voice,” 117–141; Brett Lashua, “The Art of the Remix: Ethnography and Rap.” *Anthropology Matters* 8 (2006): 1–10; Brett Lashua, “Just Another Native? Soundscapes, Chorasters, and Borderlands in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada,” *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies* 6 (2006): 391; David Leonard, “Young, Black (& Brown) and Don’t Give a Fuck: Virtual Gangstas in the Era of State Violence,” *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies* 9 (2009): 248; Karyn Recollet, *Aural Traditions: Indigenous Youth and the Hip-hop Movement in Canada* (PhD dissertation, Trent University, 2010); Diane Wishart Leard and Brett Lashua, “Popular Media, Critical Pedagogy, and Inner City Youth,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 29 (2006): 244–264.

³⁸ Lashua, “The Art of the Remix,” 2.

non-Indigenous genres of music being used by Indigenous musicians as means of Indigenized resistance music. This thesis will further explore the intersection of genres in Chapter Three.

Literature available on Indigenous music demonstrates that the arts play a fundamental role in influencing, defining and maintaining Indigenous cultures. Mainstream media promotes Indigenous popular music merely as entertainment; for decades academics have been arguing about the importance of the contemporary arts as a strong indicator of cultural survival.³⁹ Popular Indigenous media continue to emerge and are most apparent in the virtual world, where dialogue and artistic collaborations create space for identity building through popular culture.⁴⁰ So while older forms of Indigenous music become difficult to maintain due to loss of language, land and globalization, contemporary Indigenous music not only brings forward new ways of practicing cosmology, but encourages interest in and dedication to maintaining the customary practices of music.

Indigenous music is a part of complex relationships and connections to land, spirits and other people. Anthropologists and musicologists provide historical context around these definitions of music, but there are few discussions of contemporary Indigenous songs and music and their continued connection to cosmologies. Contemporary Indigenous artists are successfully expressing Indigenous epistemologies in the space of resistance movements.

Previously, academics studied Indigenous art forms in superficial ways as those that existed in

³⁹ Tara Browner, “‘Breathing the Indian Spirit’: Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the ‘Indianist’ Movement in American Music,” *American Music* 15 (Autumn 1997): 265–284; Bryan Burton, *Moving Within the Circle: Contemporary Native American Music and Dance* (Danbury: World Music Press, 1993); Dunbar-Hall and Gibson, *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places*, 63; Dunbar-Hall, “Nitmiluk,” 39–64; Darren Jorgensen, “On Cross-Cultural Interpretations of Aboriginal Art,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29 (2008): 413–426; Layton, “From Clan Symbol to Ethnic Emblem,” 422

⁴⁰ Kyra Landzelius, ed., *Native on the Net: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples in the Virtual Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 143.

primitive cultures and were on the verge of “vanishing.” Today, Indigenous researchers are revisiting these arts forms and researching their purpose and meaning in a new, positive space that is and will continue to expand, although there is still much more work needed in this area.

1.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The emerging theoretical study of Indigenous arts draws from existing theories and ideologies that explore the concept of resistance and act as a tool for decolonization within contemporary Indigenous communities.⁴¹ As a means of conceptualizing the resistance work of Indigenous musicians, my research embraces a trans-disciplinary approach, using post-colonial theory and theory of critical consciousness/oppression, which are foundational to the goals of anti-colonialist, emancipatory and community-based research. My goal is to acknowledge these theories from an Indigenous perspective to reflect the current colonial reality that Indigenous musicians continue to resist. As discussed in the methodology section, the use of Northern Plains, particularly Nehiyaw epistemology is included as a part of the theoretical framework, considering concepts such as *Wahkotowin* and *Miyo-Pimachesowin* as a knowledge base.⁴² As a theoretical perspective in the Indigenous arts continues to grow, my research will contribute to a stronger understanding of Indigenous music.

⁴¹ Stephen R. Barnard, and Jesse P. Van Gerven, “A People’s Method(ology): A Dialogical Approach,” *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies* 9 (2009): 816; Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits*; Harlow, *Resistance Literature*; Tamara E. Livingston “Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory,” *Ethnomusicology* 43 (Winter 1999): 66–85; Scales, *First Nations Popular Music in Canada*, 12.

⁴² Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000); Brenda MacDougall. “Wahkootowin: Family and Cultural Identity in Northwestern Saskatchewan Métis Communities,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 87 (September 2006): 431–462; Settee, *Pimatisiswin*, 2007.

Post-colonial, critical consciousness/oppression theories are derived from a need to recognize, analyze and resist dominant power structures within colonized societies.⁴³ These theories are used quite extensively in research on cultures reconstructing identities that have been ravaged by a colonial history, and they are useful for a study on Indigenous music as a form of resistance because the theories emphasize decolonization as a process that builds from within a culture. The interviewees' examples reflect this practice. These theories are not specific to the experiences of Indigenous peoples, yet they provide insight into possible ways of constructing an Indigenous theoretical framework for decolonization. Therefore, through this trans-disciplinary approach, based on current academic literature that highlights spaces of resistance in the margins, along with an analysis of Northern Plains epistemologies of music and song, I begin to construct a theoretical framework that is inherent in Indigenous music today yet rooted in historical forms. Indigenous knowledge is the foundation of this study. Post-colonial theory serves as a general frame of reference that assists with universal similarities within the discussion of Indigenous music as a form of resistance to colonization.

To highlight an example of theory in relation to Indigenous knowledge, scholar Angela Wilson has developed a theoretical framework based on Paulo Freire's theory of oppression and Franz Fanon's critical consciousness by recognizing the need for Indigenous people to liberate themselves from their colonized state.⁴⁴ She explains that although Freire

⁴³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End, 1989); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Kalpana Sheshadri-Crooks, "At the Margins of Postcolonial Studies," *Ariel* 26 (November 1995): 212–214; Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

⁴⁴ Angela Wilson, "Reclaiming Our Humanity," in *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*, ed. Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Angela Cavendar Wilson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 71.

and Fanon's theories are based on the assertion that marginalized societies need to decolonize in order to become empowered, she also makes it clear that we cannot establish anti-colonial goals on broad theories of cultural emancipation. Rather, we must recognize that our freedom must come from within our own traditional knowledge bases. So we derive knowledge from the old ways of practicing music to accommodate decolonization strategies. As Winona Wheeler explains,

A large part of decolonization entails developing a critical consciousness about the cause(s) of our oppression, the distortion of history, our own collaboration and the degrees in which we have internalized our own colonialist ideas and practices. Decolonization requires auto-criticism, self-reflection and a rejection of victimage.⁴⁵

Wheeler argues that there is a need for both a reflection on the current condition of Indigenous individuals and communities, and the development of methods and a theoretical framework based on the levels of colonization within their environment, history and traditional knowledge base.

Language carries Indigenous knowledge in its essence, as it contains complex philosophical concepts. It is essential, therefore, to communicate these concepts in the Indigenous language and culture to which they belong. Language is foundational to Indigeneity. Indigenous music, both ceremonial and social, includes the use of language to explain concepts and/or to pay respect to the spiritual elements of the universe. Most ceremonial Indigenous forms of song are not sung in English, and therefore much of the meaning is lost in verbal and written translations. The meaning of songs that are sung in English may be easier to discuss within the post-colonial frame, yet discussion of intention is restricted. This is why a trans-disciplinary approach allows for consideration of language

⁴⁵ Ibid.

restrictions. It also allows Indigenous researchers with a limited knowledge of their language base, like me, to contribute to the discourse.

A theoretical framework for research about Indigenous music as resistance must emerge from a place of Indigenous identity, thought, knowledge and expression. The theoretical and linguistic frameworks that exist in the historical forms of music must be examined to serve as the current foundation. As my research is predominantly based on Northern Plains songs and music, all encompassing Nehiyaw terms, such as *Wahkotowin* and *Miyo-Pimachesowin*,⁴⁶ work towards development of Indigenous theory based on Indigenous epistemology. The language explains Indigenous epistemologies, which is an indispensable research method. Indigenous concepts are a part of this analysis because they come from within the Nehiyaw culture of most of the interviewees. From a larger perspective, this will be a part of the “ground up” approach of international Indigenous resistance through the arts, which is integral to the development of Indigenous theories of identity, survival and place.

To clarify, *Wahkotowin* speaks to relationships between Indigenous people and environment, including kinship and connection and commitment to the land.⁴⁷ The historical concept of *Miyo-Pimachesowin*, or “living in a good way,” means having strong relationships with the land and universe, which is achieved by following First Nations’ Laws.⁴⁸ In the Plains Cree “y” dialect, *Pimachesowin*, or “making one’s own living,” is based on a strong value system and particular ways of maintaining self-sufficiency.⁴⁹ *Miyo* refers to “good” or

⁴⁶ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan*, 22.

⁴⁷ Settee, *Pimatisiwin*, 12.

⁴⁸ Michael Hart, *Seeking Mitho-Pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal Approach to Healing* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing Ltd., 2002), 27; Settee, *Pimatisiwin*, 10–11; Randy Morin, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, November 7, 2012.

⁴⁹ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders*, 44–45.

“well” and commonly prefixes Cree concepts. As Gail MacKay articulates, “*Pimachesowin* is in the mind of the people. Inherent in the term is the notion of self-direction, autonomous application of one’s energy, of surviving, competence and reciprocal relationships.”⁵⁰ This term is applicable to all aspects of Nehiyaw life, but is not restricted to just one way of life; rather, the manifestation depends on how an individual wishes to exercise their autonomy and self-determination. By living *Miyo-Pimachesowin*, musicians and ceremonialists speak to the essence of resistance in Indigenous music. By following the teachings embedded in *Miyo-Pimachesowin*, musicians are positioning themselves within their worldview, maintaining the original intent of songs and instruments.

To summarize, my theoretical framework consists of philosophies integral to decolonial strategies, such as post-colonial, critical consciousness and anti-oppressive theories. These emancipatory theories strengthen a trans-disciplinary approach to revitalizing the Indigenous perspective of Indigenous music, which is grounded in a historical theoretical framework. I incorporate primarily Nehiyaw concepts that contextualize worldview from within Indigenous music; the heart of my research comes from the interviewees and their experiences. In addition, I expand the analysis through the use of Western theories that focus on anti-colonial considerations. As I have discovered through my research, resistance comes from both historical and current environments; Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Indigenous music not only unifies Indigenous cosmological worlds, it also effectively bridges decolonial philosophies within both Western and Indigenous worldviews.

⁵⁰ Gail MacKay, “Pimachesowin and Education” (unpublished essay, NS 898, University of Saskatchewan, 2010), 13.

CHAPTER 2

RESISTANCE IN NORTHERN PLAINS MUSIC

2.1. BACKGROUND OF RESISTANCE AND WORLDVIEW

Indigenous music contains a strong resistance movement based in Indigenous worldview. As discussed in the methodology section, the use of oral sources is a vital aspect of Indigenous research within Indigenous communities. By seeking participants who are established within the Indigenous community as musicians, ceremonialists and Elders, this research presents a perspective that speaks to the original purpose and intent of songs and music, which still exist within contemporary forms. Through resistance, Indigenous music embodies worldview by revitalizing ancestral teachings and establishing current concepts of Indigeneity.

Furthermore, in a Northern Plains worldview, other beings play a large role. For example, Neal McLeod describes what Plains Cree people call the “little people.”⁵¹ The little people were at one time quite well known amongst Cree people as allies and stewards of the land. With the influence of Christian thought, they began to retreat from the discussions of Cree people. These little people were well respected and many of the stories we hear from Elders today involve little people.⁵² Important to this research, the little people used to play water drums. The music they played symbolized their existence and they were recognized and

⁵¹ Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd., 2007), 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 28.

honored as spiritual beings.⁵³ McLeod goes on to mention that by 1940, the Cree people of Qu'Appelle Valley River claimed that they no longer heard the water drums of the little people and that they had gone away. When he asked Elders about their whereabouts, many said that they did not die, they just went away. This is common for many Indigenous songs and music, which, through colonial influence, have been suppressed.⁵⁴ For the purpose of decolonization, it is necessary to revitalize teachings that encompass other beings as a part of Northern Plains worldview.

In this chapter, to gain an understanding of the musicians and their practice, a historical background of Indigenous music is necessary. Along with acquired rights to songs and instruments, the ways in which music was processed and presented differs from western approaches of structure and theory within musical compositions. The most obvious difference is in the purpose and meaning of music as a connector to the spirit world. Music is an essential component of survival: it is through music that people communicate with the spirit world. For example, as a young boy, a Cree hunter may have been taught hunting songs by his father or grandfather. He also may have been given one of these songs from an animal spirit in a dream or ceremony.⁵⁵ Once given the song, it would not be permissible to sing until the young hunter would know the exact way in which the song was to be sung, as this was imperative for the hunt.⁵⁶ Singing and performing songs in the proper way was the essence of

⁵³ As a child, I recall my Kokum, Lillian Knight, told this story in reference to my home community of Muskoday First Nation. She said that these little people lived in the banks of the Saskatchewan River.

⁵⁴ McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 29.

⁵⁵ Brightman, *Grateful Prey*, 106.

⁵⁶ Lynn Whidden. *Essential Song: Three Decades of Northern Cree Music* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2007), xiv.

survival; it was what kept people in balance with the universe. This idea will be fleshed out in the analysis of the participant interviews.

There is no word for “art” in the Indigenous language, as the concept itself does not exist as separate from survival.⁵⁷ Songs, dances, and music are all parts of a way of life. As Agnes Grant interprets,

Music was a vehicle through which words were conveyed to an unseen power and it was essential that the words of prayer, supplication or coercion reach the positive creative forces in the world. Help from these forces was needed in order for tribal members to achieve anything beyond individual human strength.⁵⁸

Therefore, it becomes difficult to compartmentalize music and song within Indigenous cultural understanding. The closest concept of categories within Indigenous music is through song types. These include, but are not limited to, dream, birth, death, medicine, hunting, cradle (lullaby), and love songs. As the interviewees confirm, Indigenous music is a practice and process that is connected to all ways of knowing.

2.1.1. Indigenous Song Origins

It can be observed throughout the history of the Northern Plains people that there is a fundamental and pervasive involvement of spirits within music and songs. Spirits played a very real part in everyday life, and they were always conjured or invited through the use of songs and the drumbeat in ceremonies. Spirits are embedded in the Northern Plains worldview and communication with them is initiated through the use of music. The songs invite or call them into the physical world of human beings.

⁵⁷ Bill Ermine, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, March 16, 2012.

⁵⁸ Agnes Grant, “Traditional Native Poetry,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 5 (1985), 77.

According to the literature, spirit songs are either obtained through dreams or they are gifted to a person.⁵⁹ As an element of ritualism, every important ceremonial activity includes the use of received songs.⁶⁰ Some of these songs are owned by one person and cannot be sung without permission by the owner. Alex Wolfe cautions, “There are two things in life that must not be taken without consent. One is the family story and the other is a song.”⁶¹ Many secular songs, however, can be sung by anyone as long as song protocols are followed.⁶² These protocols vary based on each tribe and they will be discussed in greater detail throughout this thesis. The songs are imprinted in the person’s memory through dreams, and George Nelson notes that it could take more than four dreams for this to happen. Each spirit has its own song, which is communicated to an individual and then the particular power of that spirit is explained to the one dreaming. By singing this song in the future, the receiver of this *pawakan*, or “dreaming guardian spirit,” can conjure their lifelong spirit helper at any time.⁶³

To specify, *pawakan* is fundamental to the origins of songs and creation. Neal McLeod explains the way in which Plains Cree people dreamed the world. He writes,

A dream helper, *pawakanak*, links a person to the rest of creation. A *pawakan* could be any being, from a mosquito to a bear, and it imparts to its human counterpart various powers and abilities. In return for these gifts, the person treats the animal with respect and honors it. ... There are many songs that the person sings to his *pawakan* that honor this being.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Brightman, *Grateful Prey*, 106–107; McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 32–35.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Brown and Robert Brightman, “‘The Orders of the Dreamed’: George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823 (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 143.

⁶¹ Alex Wolfe, *Earth Elder Stories: The Pinayzitt Path* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishing, 1988), xiv.

⁶² Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Persistent Ceremonialism: The Plains Cree and Sauleaux* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1980), 23.

⁶³ Brown and Brightman, *The Orders of the Dreamed*, 51.

⁶⁴ McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 27.

To add, the *pawakan* is also a lifelong companion, which is not easily obtained. According to Brightman, men could obtain a *pawakan* through a vision fast, whereas women could obtain them through dreaming. Both obtained songs that were only sung by the individual who had acquired that *pawakan*.⁶⁵ So, to clarify McLeod's statement, the songs were given to the person by the spirit helper in order to both conjure and honor the helper. The dreamer did so to ask for guidance in all issues related to their well being, and also to acknowledge the *pawakan* for that help. They were necessary and highly respected.

From a geographical perspective, many argue that the Plains Cree people migrated from the regions of northern Manitoba or even further, from the James Bay areas in Ontario.⁶⁶ There is no mistaking the similarities in ceremonies; singing and drumming that exist between the two. In *Grateful Prey*, Brightman describes the way in which people meet spirits in their dreams. Cree people use "dream" in relation to communicating with the spirits. Dreaming is not only associated with sleeping; trance-like states reached through drumming and singing can also summon *pawakan*.⁶⁷ A trance is considered to be a very powerful and beneficial act as it helps with the success of the dreaming person to obtain *Miyo-Pimachesowin*. Northern Plains people have used these ceremonies for centuries as a way of balancing themselves within both the physical and spiritual worlds. Migration of Plains Cree people would explain the origins of the act of dreaming within territories stretching from Alberta to Ontario, Canada. These facts solidify resistance to Christian influence, as much of the knowledge of *pawakan* still exists despite migration and western influence.

⁶⁵ Brightman, *Acaohkiwina and Acimowina: Traditional Narratives of the Rock Cree Indians* (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1989), 90.

⁶⁶ Brightman, *Grateful Prey*, 56.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

Through ceremonies, people attempt to obtain spirit songs and spirit helpers, yet the influence of the modern society creates difficulties. In contemporary Northern Plains culture, many people do not consider these spirit helpers as anything more than fictitious and mythological. It is necessary to reflect on the reason for these helpers and why they are not as prevalent today. It is also imperative to question the loss of these songs and their meaning and purpose, as they are some of the fundamental links to the world of spirit helpers, and the language that they share with human beings. Through interviews with knowledge keepers, this research will consider this connection and assist in revealing the true importance of songs for Northern Plains people as a means of living and surviving in the natural world.

Immense changes to the Plains Cree way of knowledge have occurred throughout history along with Christian influence and the repression of belief in “pagan” spirits. Within the last two hundred years, a shift can be witnessed as to how ceremonies and songs are conducted. As John MacLean confirmed in 1896, “The native religious ideas and the mortuary customs have been changed through contact with the white man and the influence of Christian religion.”⁶⁸ The greatest concern is that through this influence, along with loss of language and teachings being passed down to the next generations, the songs and ceremonies will no longer exist. Therefore, in contemporary times, it becomes a responsibility of Indigenous people to seek these teachings by re-learning that the spirits exist and are meant to interconnect with the lives of humans. The Indigenous musicians discussed in this thesis protect this knowledge through practice and teachings. By revitalizing our ways of knowing, we can continue to move towards a decolonial existence.

⁶⁸ John MacLean, *Canadian Savage Folk* (William Briggs Wesley Buildings: Toronto, 1896), 83.

2.1.2. Colonial Perspectives and Influence in History

In the early 1900s, anthropologists such as Frances Densmore and Franz Boas paid special attention to Indian music. As with all aspects of Indigenous culture, there was a strong interest among anthropologists to collect as much information as possible before Indian cultures “vanished.” Using a significant number of Indigenous songs from numerous cultural groups, they recorded wax cylinders. This research became the focal point of academic discussion of Indigenous music throughout much of the twentieth century. Densmore’s method of collecting songs was through a description of the person singing along with the events and stories that went along with the songs. For example, she writes,

The Singer stated that this song was a memory of her earliest childhood when she heard her mother sing it. . . . Mrs. Benjamin Gauthier who sang this song, is known also by her Chippewa name Bi’tawagi’jigo’kwe (Double Sky Woman). She . . . was a progressive member of the Lac du Flambeau Village, but retains her interest in tribal customs and traditions.⁶⁹

Densmore’s description shows no analysis of meaning, purpose or intent of the songs and how the music fits within the ceremony of daily life. So while earlier and more recent anthropologists and ethnomusicologists attempt to define Indigenous music, what is always missing is the recognition of song as a part of the fabric of life, and its connection to the spirit world.

Regardless of these immense changes, there is still a need for recognition of Indigenous music as part of complex and interrelated relationships and connections to land, spirits and each other. For example, today’s social and ceremonial events like the round dances and the Sundances are still centered on the use of song and instrument as a means of

⁶⁹ Densmore, “Technique in the Music of the American Indian,” 222.

communication from the physical world to the spirit world. We will see that this is also prevalent within contemporary genres such as folk and hip hop.

2.2. INDIGENOUS MUSICIANS' PERSPECTIVES

The following section will engage the reader in the experience of each interviewee through a description of the interview processes and the main themes that arose. I will share an interwoven and overlapping description of what I have learned from each one of these artists regarding music and livelihood. It was not possible to depict a linear journey as so many connected themes and concepts evolved upon completion of the interview process. Instead, this section will be divided into an overview of Indigenous music as resistance through the drum, women, songs as prayers, and language.

In the summer of 2010, on the beautiful riverside ceremonial grounds of Muskoday First Nation, I completed a four-day fasting ceremony hosted by my father, Harvey Knight. I brought tobacco, coloured broadcloth and ribbons into the opening sweatlodge ceremony as an offering to the spirit world. In this ceremony, with these offerings, I asked for strength and guidance as I partook in this research journey. I asked for determination and the ability to maintain organization and motivation, ensuring that my intentions are always towards the benefit and betterment of Indigenous peoples. Although the experience was difficult and challenging, it equipped me with the endurance and patience needed to fulfill this commitment. Those four days allowed me to prepare my family for what lay ahead: an academic journey comparable to creating life. It was immensely challenging, rewarding and something that I will never regret.

Upon completion of my fasting ceremony, it became clear that the first interview that I do should be with Bill Ermine, a well-known Elder from Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan, Canada. Someone who is strongly immersed in ceremonial practices and has experienced the various changes throughout the last few decades would have much to share with regards to the foundational aspects of Cree music and its purpose, meaning and message. By following this process, the interview proved to set a basis of themes for analysis. I followed through conducting interviews with Marc Longjohn, Violet Naytowhow, Os12 and Albert Berland. Along with participant observation and journaling data, each interviewee and experience reflects the concepts of resistance and decolonization through action and practice of Indigenous ways and music. In adhering to my Cree/Saulteaux ceremonial upbringing, initiating this research journey with a fasting ceremony not only gave me the guidance that I needed, it also brought forth a spiritual presence throughout the highs and lows of researching and writing that I can only attribute to acknowledgement of the existence of the spirit world. The themes discussed by the interviewees and myself reflect this truth and I am so grateful for the way it all came together.

2.2.1. The Drum as Resistance

On the first warm day of spring, just when the snow began to melt, I drove out to visit Elder Bill Ermine of Sturgeon Lake First Nation, about forty kilometers northwest of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Bill is very well known in the Indigenous community. He is consistently asked to be a part of any gathering in “Indian Country,” not only because of his reputation as a renowned storyteller and his unlimited repertoire of Plains Cree knowledge, but also because of his humorous and good-natured way of communicating with everyone he meets. His memory of places and people is astounding: he will recall in detail the last time he

saw you, what you may have asked him, or the type of hat you were wearing that day. Regardless of his popularity, Bill is a man of words and a man of his word, very articulate and careful with his phrasing. In fact, in both Cree and English he shares his personal history through colorful tales and teachings, all of what he has come to know in his 83 years on earth.

Bill was born and raised in the Sturgeon Lake First Nation, steeped in Plains Cree traditional practices and livelihood, amidst the fast-changing and ever-challenging environment of what is now known as Saskatchewan. While he will not say that his life was hard, some of the stories he shared illustrate a shockingly difficult life compared to our comfortable contemporary existence. In the short hours that I spent with Bill, it became clear that much has changed within our Indigenous societies. I learned about Indigenous music from a perspective of a man who has witnessed both the growing oppression and emancipation of the drum and song, recalling his childhood experience to what he sees in today's ceremonies and gatherings.

Years ago, as a much younger person, I recall listening in on Bill and my dad having a conversation at our house. Bill explained that our ways of giving tobacco have changed and that he has always known it as offering just enough to fill a pipe.⁷⁰ With this in mind, I handed Bill a small tobacco tie, wrapped in yellow cloth, which is the color that was given to me in ceremony. In very clear and charming English, Bill responded with, "Thank you very much for this. Now what is it that you would like to ask of me today?" Of course I had a list of questions ready to go, although I did not get through more than a couple as his answers inadvertently covered much of what I had written down. He cracked the window open and as the first birds of spring chirped outside in the crisp open air of Sturgeon Lake, Bill began to

⁷⁰ Ermine interview, March 2012.

explain the drum, and I was taken into a world so different from my own, yet one I long to understand.

A teaching that is common amongst Indigenous people is that the drum is the heartbeat of Mother Earth. Bill described, “that is why we, as Indigenous people, when we hear that drum we come alive”.⁷¹ We know this from attending powwows and ceremonies, whether we are in Frog Lake, Alberta or Albuquerque, New Mexico. Bill further explained that this heartbeat embodies the drum as a living and breathing being and that it must be treated gently, as you would treat your mother.⁷² Other sources of literature indicate that this statement is common across North America. The beat of the drum resonates within both our world and the spirit world and it carries the songs and prayers forward. Other interviewees—Violet Naytowhow, Plains Cree singer/songwriter/ceremonialist; Marc Longjohn, a well-known young Plains Cree drummer; and Albert Berland, a sundance maker from Frog Lake, Alberta—also referred to this teaching. Most discussions of the drum offer continuous references to women and the sacred role they have within drum culture. By recognizing the old teachings and reflecting on contemporary times, we can decipher the environments in which the drum is still very much used as resistance and where it has become more of a piece of the colonial reality of Indigenous people.

The drum is considered an essential element of Northern Plains culture. As Berland states, “in the ceremonial world the drum was your connection to the animal world and the song was the connection to the spirit world.”⁷³ Because the drum is made of an animal hide, one must offer tobacco for the animal in exchange for its life. The tree that makes the frame is

⁷¹ Ermine interview, March 2012.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Albert Berland, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, August 20, 2012.

also respected in the same way. Once made, a drum is then recognized in the animal world. By using it for songs, it is then heard and acknowledged in the spiritual realm.⁷⁴ In *The Painted Drum*, Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich describes the drum as an embodiment of the history of families and of people.⁷⁵ As Erdrich describes it, a drum can heal or harm, depending on its care.⁷⁶ According to Bill Ermine, Indigenous people recognize a living spirit attached to such objects and thereby follow protocols necessary to maintain a balanced, respectful relationship with that spirit.⁷⁷ So, a drum keeper not only learns songs and a style of playing, their purpose is to protect the drum by treating it with the greatest respect as it is a living being.⁷⁸ For the vast amount of songs and styles of dance, there are different ways of acquiring the ability to sing and own a drum. Therefore, for Indigenous people attempting to articulate decolonial strategies, the re-introduction and then strict maintenance of protocols ensure success in a continued relationship with the drum.

To learn the protocols of the drum, one must first understand the reasons for its existence within Indigenous culture. The following descriptions are particular to the teachings for a hand drum. Erdrich describes a woman who finds a painted hand drum. She takes the drum and carefully brings it home to show to her Ojibwe mother, who explains:

The drum is the universe. The people who take their place at each side represent the spirits who sit at the four directions. A painted drum, especially, is considered a living thing and must be fed as the spirits are fed, with tobacco and a glass of water set nearby, sometimes a plate of food. A drum is never to be placed on the ground, or left alone, and it is always to be covered with a blanket or quilt. Drums are known to cure and known to kill. They become one with their keeper. They are made for serious

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Louise Erdrich, *The Painted Drum* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 43.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁷ Ermine interview, March 2012; Thomas Vennum, *The Ojibwa Dance Drum: Its History and Construction* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009), 44–45.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

reasons by people who dream the details of their construction. No two are alike, but every drum is related to every other drum. They speak to one another and they give their songs to humans.⁷⁹

This serves as a concise description of drum protocols in Ojibwe traditions, in which one treats the drum as one would a person. Vennum explains that the protocols were linked to Indigenous understanding of natural law, where both creative and destructive forces exist.⁸⁰ Also, the great respect and reverence for a drum emphasizes relationships that human beings have with other beings in the universe. It recognizes the existence of relationships within the spirit world as drums are “related” to and speak to each other.⁸¹ So, although protocols vary from tribe to tribe, understanding their value and purpose can secure the safety of that person and the knowledge itself.

Offering a Plains Cree perspective, Marc Longjohn describes the care of his hand drums in great detail. Quite similar to Ojibwe drum protocols, he always hangs them up, as they are never placed on the ground. According to his Elders, it is disrespectful to place any ceremonial objects on the ground as it interferes with their purpose. One can observe the older style of drum, also known as the “big drum” used in grass dances before powwow was widespread, which was suspended on four legs or saplings.⁸² I interpret this as the drum being Mother Earth’s heartbeat and the closeness to the earth could disrupt a balance in the drum’s power. I recall a woman’s teaching that encourages women not to sit directly on the ground, always on a blanket as they are too powerful to sit directly on the earth. Also, drums are always covered with a blanket or a cloth bag when not in use. Marc explains that they are not meant to be on display and they require privacy. He is also very strict about the places in

⁷⁹ Erdrich, *The Painted Drum*, 43.

⁸⁰ Vennum, *The Ojibwa Dance Drum*, 62.

⁸¹ Erdrich, *The Painted Drum*, 43–45; Ermine interview, March 2012.

⁸² Vennum, *The Ojibwa Dance Drum*, 62.

which he performs with his hand drums as the event must be particular to the drum's usage and also clean and free from drugs and alcohol.⁸³

According to Alex Wolfe, a Saulteaux Elder from Sakimay, Saskatchewan, a hand drum is always cared for tenderly, like a child. Even the conversations around a drum are gentle and kind. Offerings of food, water and tobacco sustain the drum, and the drum is always prayed for before use.⁸⁴ Lastly, one must also live a clean lifestyle, and if they should engage in the use of alcohol or drugs, they are to stay away from the drum and ceremony for four days until the spirits of the alcohol or drugs have left their bodies.⁸⁵ All of these teachings embody reverence for the immense power of the drum.

As a drumkeeper, one is expected to adhere to these protocols for various reasons. One that resonates throughout this research is protection of one's family. Bill Ermine explains,

It's all about sacredness, it's all about the human being, it's all about ceremony. We don't do nothing for ourselves, we do it for our children, for our community, for the elders that have passed on, we do that for them. All ceremony we do that.⁸⁶

He refers to the ability to keep a drum as something that has a great responsibility attached to it. Misusing the drum through beating it too hard, putting it on the ground, abusing alcohol and drugs before or during singing, not covering it up, not feeding it, using it in unclean settings or for purposes other than it was intended for can evoke *Pastahowin*, a Cree concept

⁸³ Longjohn interview, May 2012.

⁸⁴ Harvey Knight, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. July 8, 2012.

⁸⁵ Longjohn interview, May, 2012.

⁸⁶ Ermine interview, March 2012.

that is interpreted as what you do will come back to you or your family. It refers to actions that disobey sacred Creator's Laws.⁸⁷ Bill Ermine proclaimed in a concerned manner:

No one in my time nobody hit the drum hard. Nobody. Today I see them go like this and hit the drum as hard as they could. Long time ago it was forbidden because you are holding the heart of mother earth. You don't try to smash it. When they do that that's what they're doing and the judges (contest drumming), they do not know enough about the meaning and the preciousness of our instrument and our values and our beliefs.⁸⁸

What is significant is the lack of knowledge transfer from old to young, as we see this drumming style as commonplace and normal today. For many, the teaching of drum as the heartbeat has become an esoteric idea, one that resonates nicely, but is not taken literally. While middle-aged and younger drum keepers have good intentions, many do not have proper understanding of the power of the drum, and as a result, they may cause harm to their families.

Albert Berland, who was born into a Sundance family and has maintained Sundance teachings for generations, refers to the drum in a similar fashion. The Sundance ceremony is considered the greatest in a hierarchy of ceremonies in Plains Cree culture.⁸⁹ Considering levels of resistance within Indigenous music, the Sundance serves as juxtaposition of the extent of both maintenance of culture and loss of culture. The drums used for the ceremony are specific and treated with the utmost care. They are kept by men close to their bedside and played on a daily basis. Berland insists that they are to be used at all times because they "cry" when they are left unattended.⁹⁰ Berland's descriptions are so immersed in the Plains Cree

⁸⁷ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan*, 7–8; Ermine interview, March 2012; Longjohn interview, May 2012.

⁸⁸ Ermine interview, March 2012.

⁸⁹ Berland interview, August 2012.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

worldview that the drum as a living being is not mentioned throughout the interview. To Berland, it is as common a fact as a car being able to drive when filled with gas. Berland notes that Elders pass on without transmitting ceremonial knowledge, while younger generations are displaying less and less interest in learning the knowledge. He is aware of a growing disconnect, and he sees the decline of knowledge of the drum and songs. He therefore devotes his life to teaching his many kids the Sundance songs whether they adhere to the value of these teachings or not. He believes that without the Sundance ceremony, “we are no longer Plains Cree people.”⁹¹

Marc Longjohn, who was taught by Elder drum keepers Gordon McGillvery and Mervin Dreaver, adds to this knowledge by sharing examples of his experience as a drum keeper and relaying teachings to others to protect them. He says,

If you respect this way it will take you a long way in your life. It will help you clear your mind and have a stronger connection to the earth, like to ceremonies. That’s what I was told and that’s what I believe and ... I’m living proof ’cause I don’t drink, I don’t do drugs, I don’t smoke cigs or disrespect tobacco in any way. And I have a lot of really close friends that do and I don’t end my friendship with them but I try to help them and remind them. I try to say that if you encourage children to drum and sing in the long run it will help you. But on the same page if you disrespect it, if you go around the drum high and drunk, like, think for your kids, your grandparents and things that you really care about. ...They’re hurting their family.⁹²

Marc takes on the responsibility of sharing his knowledge and living a clean life in order to not only help his fellow young singers, but also his own family. His careful and conscientious attitude about being a drumkeeper ensures his own success as a grandson, son, parent, partner, friend, and community member. This is because he recognizes and believes the teachings. He goes on to say,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Longjohn interview, May 2012

Hopefully my kids will finish school and if I really try to help these kids on the street maybe someone will help my *kokum* at home, something like that, you know? ... The drum is powerful and you can pray for people. The drum is a living thing, it's alive, it's a spirit. I was told that when you hit a drum it calls spirits to wherever you're at. An old elder lead singer, Gordon McGilverly, said that the hand drum and the stick is no different than the pipe. It has that same power and that same capability and when you're given the right to hold the drum and sing, it's just like you're given a pipe cause you're sending prayers up to god and to people. I rarely take my drums out in public cause what I was told was some people don't understand what living a clean life is, and if my drums get bothered by someone who's not clean that's just like me saying I don't care for that drum. My drum can't speak up for itself so I speak up for it.⁹³

For Marc and many Elders such as Bill Ermine, this way of life is valued as a part of what makes Indigenous people distinctive.

To adhere to drum protocols is to follow a path of resistance. Continuance of protocols despite many other drummers' desires to use a drum without proper preparation is what separates Marc, Bill and Albert from those who have relaxed in their responsibilities. Detailed, lifelong care and commitment to a drum proves that these ways have survived and progressed through time. Through environmental changes, the protocols may have been altered throughout the continuum, yet original intentions based on Creator's Laws are what motivate the drumkeepers. By adhering to these teachings, they maintain Indigenous worldview.

Another aspect of the drum involves the protocols behind songs. Certain protocols have to be followed to ensure the proper use of songs. As previously mentioned in the definition of *pawakan*, either spirit or human beings gifted songs to singers through dreams and ceremonies.⁹⁴ While different nations' protocols vary, the underlying similarity is respect

⁹³ Longjohn interview, May 2012.

⁹⁴ Brightman, *Grateful Prey*, 104.

for proper transmission of the song. When passed down, they must be learned exactly as they were presented. According to Elder William Bineshi Baker,

Our original songs that was given to us, that's passed onto us, we always try to sing the way it was given to us... You can't change our religion, the beginning is still the same today, and the songs are the same today as far back as I can remember, and you can't change them.⁹⁵

In this way, the teachings stay attached to the song. Also, there is awareness of the story behind the song and the direct link to the nation in which it originated. Unfortunately, this too has changed with modernization, and many do not value songs in the same way.

Powwow is a cultural musical tradition that emerged in more recent time in response to the pressures and effects of colonization and as resistance music. Before European contact, powwows did not exist. Sioux people first introduced the ceremony and later powwow gatherings in the Plains cultures emerged as an act of resistance to the government's banning of ceremonial gatherings in the early 1900s. The dance was, on the surface, a way to appear as a harmless cultural display to the colonial rulers, but the underlying purpose was to share and learn ceremonial songs among different families and tribes, under the guise of entertainment and performance.⁹⁶ From then on, many variations and changes to these original songs and new ones have occurred within the context of powwow gatherings. Powwow culture represents a large section of resistance within the continuum of Indigenous music.

As the interviewees describe, song transmission through the powwow drum and protocols for drum and song have adapted and changed. Songs are to be obtained through dreaming and ceremony, or by offering tobacco to the owner. Certain songs are sung for

⁹⁵ Vennum, *The Ojibwe Dance Drum*, 95.

⁹⁶ Harvey Knight, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. September 22, 2012.

certain dances and events. Like the hand drum, the big drum (powwow drum) and singers must also be smudged before they begin.⁹⁷ As Marc explains, many singers make up songs without prior knowledge of the song protocol. Commonly, technology such as CD recordings and the internet has added to the abundance of and access to songs, and drum groups are not adhering to these protocols.⁹⁸ While recordings can be useful for retention of songs, permission must be granted to the singers and drummers before they record them in a studio. Also, many honour songs are not to be recorded, yet some singers are either unaware of the rules, or ignore them.⁹⁹ In many ways, protocols are not followed, so songs may or may not be authenticated by elders' voices and teachings [or do not adhere to the protocol of permission.

Within the last few decades, powwow culture has changed immensely, provoking complicated discussions about the authenticity of songs and culture. In the past, preparation and discipline were necessary to become a singer. Singers had to travel to ceremonies and dances, and, when gifted songs, they would learn them through memory. Now, because of technology, new songs become more popular than the older, sacred songs and the singer may not know the original language of the song, therefore re-creating it in English and further weakening the required protocols.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the loss of language contributes to the disconnect between the old and young, one that is experienced in all aspects of Indigenous life. Within the language lies the spirituality, so without understanding the language, it becomes difficult to teach the younger generations about the sacredness of the songs and the

⁹⁷ Vennum, *The Ojibwe Dance Drum*, 96.

⁹⁸ Longjohn interview, May 2012

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Scales and Gabriel Desrosiers, "Contemporary Northern Plains Powwow Music: The Twin Influences of Recording and Competition," in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges*, ed. Anna Hoefnagels and Beverley Diamond (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 91.

drum. In effect, powwows have begun to exclude many of the ceremonial aspects such as smoking the pipe and offering tobacco to the drum before performances.¹⁰¹ Longjohn adds that he has stopped going to powwows due to the loss of spirituality and respect for the songs and the drum. He concludes that until the old ways are reinforced, he will only drum at rounddances and ceremonies that adhere to his teachings in order to protect himself and his family. Berland also attests to this fact, stating that he was told not to attend powwows or rounddances as a means of protecting himself from harm.¹⁰²

Some drummers who consider themselves keepers of traditional songs explain that the songs are passed down through families and that protocols to obtain these songs include asking permission to use them with an offering of tobacco. Recordings of these songs are not acceptable, as they should be “left at the drum.”¹⁰³ Gabriel Desrosiers, a popular Ojibwe powwow singer from Ontario, describes his songs as an embodiment of the history of Indigenous people embedded with meaning and context. He describes them as a form of oral tradition. Desrosiers adds,

For myself, I believe that all the songs I make, I don't make them on my own. I have a gift but that's through the Creator...He gives me those songs. They come from somewhere. I absolutely believe that they did not pop out of the air like that for no reason. They come from the Creator. And so I always take time in my life, when I pray and give tobacco, I always take time to thank him for all the songs and the ability he gave me to share these songs with the people...my life is a song”¹⁰⁴

Desrosiers is an example of one of the older singers who currently practices powwow singing, yet observes the changes within the “traditional” and “contemporary” categories as diverse and divided. Like Longjohn, Berland and Ermine, Desrosiers sees the division grow with

¹⁰¹ Scales and Desrosiers, “Contemporary Northern Plains Powwow Music,” 92.

¹⁰² Berland interview, August 2012.

¹⁰³ Scales and Desrosiers, “Contemporary Northern Plains Powwow Music,” 104–105.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 105

access to technology, loss of language and fewer teachings being passed down from old to young. He makes it his life goal to share his knowledge of protocols for songs with younger singers and remind them of the importance of maintaining the true meaning and purpose behind the drum and the songs.¹⁰⁵ So while some are wary of powwow culture and poor song use, others maintain the proper protocols within powwow drumming and singing, resisting the complete loss of the spiritual aspects of the events.

Bill Ermine acknowledges the modifications in drum songs and the ways in which the songs have changed at rounddances. Rounddances are originally a Plains Cree ceremony intended to offer food, song and dance to deceased relatives. Drums were prayed over with sweetgrass and placed on a center table. One singer is considered chief drum.¹⁰⁶ Singers approach the table throughout the night taking turns singing. People of all ages dance to a double beat style of drumming unlike the powwow single beat style and hold hands and dance in a clockwise circle around the singers. This dance has evolved and changed immensely in the past century, particularly through songs. Bill remembers old “lonesome” songs that some singers would either dream or piece together for their sweethearts. He says that these songs are now sung at rounddances and he considers this improper, as this was not their intended place.

At one time, rounddance songs were considered prayer songs, and to Bill, the recent changes speak to a major shift in the purpose and intent of the rounddance ceremony.¹⁰⁷ He worries that these events have lost their original intent. Every song has its place in the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Studies, 1979), 211–212.

¹⁰⁷ Ermine interview, March 2012.

Indigenous worldview, whether it is a lullaby, medicine, ceremonial, or a sweetheart song. Also, any song being sung with a drum opens the connection to the spirit world and therefore must be considered before being used inappropriately. There is a tone of sadness as Bill recounts his experience at rounddances and powwows today and he implies that these changes are not beneficial to Cree people. Despite this lament, he continues to attend the events and he says that he still has a good time when he is there.

In response to resulting data, as a part of this research I had the opportunity to attend a rounddance and a powwow. I wished to seek out the positive aspects of these events. Through my journal reflections, what I experienced during the breaks in singing and drumming were significant stories and teachings shared by Elders and guests. I felt a strong sense of community and belonging as family and friends laughed and danced together. I witnessed the transmission of teachings of pride and identity passed from old to young people as the little ones watched, listened and learned through story, dance and song. The songs, when sung outside on a calm sunny afternoon in a prairie field, sent ripples of delight through my body, and an ancient sense of resonance with each beat. Upon reflection, I have determined that, although much has changed and been lost, the original ancestors and spirits are still there within the ceremony, very vibrant and active within each song and dance. As Valaskakis explains,

For Native people, pow wows express certain cultural similarities and a deeply felt and shared sense of “being Indian” that threads through the dichotomies used to analyze power and identity-belonging and exclusion, knowledge and ignorance, control and resistance-all signified in the rhythm of the drum and the collective singing of seemingly wordless songs.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture*, Waterloo: (Wilfred Laurier University Press. 2005), 151.

So, the interviewees serve as knowledge keepers and sharers of the customary teachings of drum and song, and with them and others there is anticipation that we will come back to the recognition of the spiritual connection to the drum and song. These elements of powwow and rounddance are still very much a part of Indigenous spirituality and an ongoing act of resistance to complete adoption of a colonial mentality.

Through the concerns of the interviewees, we also see a dedication to resisting the loss of drum culture in all aspects of Plains Cree livelihood. These drumkeepers recognize colonial damage and mourn the loss of the Elders who have passed on without transmitting their knowledge to the younger generations. They experience the harmful effects of unschooled drummers disrespecting the drum and the songs. As a result, they use the teachings that they have embodied to re-awaken the purpose and desire within young people. So while they express their concerns with the changes, they also promote adaptation through continued resistance to complete destruction of their drum protocols, practices and ceremonies. They are proof that the drum teachings are a part of a decolonization process that can and will continue to be built upon throughout the coming years.

2.2.2. Women's Roles and Resistance

The relationship between women and the drum is often discussed, but is rarely detailed. Various teachings and considerations evolve within the discussion, so it is best to start with one example of a story relating to the beginnings of the drum. As a historical example, according to Elder William Bineshi Baker, Sr., the Ojibwe people share a legend of Tail Feather Woman, the Sioux founder of the ceremonial powwow or "big drum." It was said to be around the time of the 1870s when White soldiers massacred her people, including her

four sons. She hid for four days and during that time, the Great Spirit gave her a drum. She was taught how to make the drum and sing the songs. Through these songs and use of the sacred drum, her people would have power to resist the White soldiers' continuous onslaught. She gave the drum to the men to care for and use in this sacred way.¹⁰⁹ As one example, this story allots ownership of the powwow drum to a woman. Although there is much scholarly debate about the true origin of the big drum, this legend is recognized by many tribes. Along with various Indigenous teachings of these origins, early anthropologists such as Truman Michelson and Alanson Skinner spent years debating these origins based on their various research findings, without any conclusion.¹¹⁰ Oral history reflects a much older history of the drum as a part of creation, so it is difficult to pinpoint drum origins. Without a clear history, the issues of when and why the gendered ownership transpired and became the norm remain ambiguous.

As described throughout previous research, there are multiple uses for the drum today, including ceremonial and secular events, and most of these uses exclude women from participation beyond background singing and dancing. Most commonly, women are the back up singers standing behind the drummers and singing in a higher octave.¹¹¹ Today we experience powwows and rounddances and most other ceremonies with the men singing at the drum. The reasoning behind this phenomenon varies depending on the nation and/or region, although the premise is much the same. As with the story of Tail Feather Woman, women owned the drum first. Also, woman are considered the heartbeat because they give birth,

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 44–45.

¹¹⁰Vennum, *The Ojibwe Dance Drum*, 46.

¹¹¹Anna Hoefnagels, "Aboriginal Women and the Powwow Drum: Restrictions, Teachings, and Challenges," in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges*, ed. Anna Hoefnagels and Beverley Diamond (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 110.

similar to how the drum is considered the heartbeat of Mother Earth. Since men do not hold such power, they use the drum as a way to spiritually connect to Mother Earth. They also drum as a form of respect for women, some singing in a high-pitched tone as a means of acknowledging the power of women.¹¹² All of these teachings clearly define women as superior in sacredness. So, according to men, women do not touch the drum, as their spiritual power comes from different sources.

Marc Longjohn referred to women staying away from the drum during their moontime (menstruation) as they are very connected to the spirit world and powerful during this time. By participating in certain ceremonies and handling sacred objects at this time, women could evoke *pastahowin* and create imbalance within the universe.¹¹³ Older teachings conclude that men must practice ceremony more frequently in order to be spiritually balanced with women. Fortunately, Longjohn was instructed by those who, drawing on ancestral teachings, still value and regard women as an equal part of a universal balance. He says,

What I was told was the women were the first ones to hold the drum. I asked my adopted dad Mervin Dreaver ... a man of the hand drum. He said women held the drum a long time ago, women made songs and a lot of the old songs that I learned women made. I'm nobody to pass judgment. If you step back and look at it, like men, a woman is singing because she had a dream about it and she's doing it for her and her family.¹¹⁴

Young men who respect women's role in drum teachings, before extensive modernization and Western influence, promote the purpose of the drum and continue to keep Indigenous people grounded in original ideologies.

¹¹² Hoefnagels, "Aboriginal Women and the Powwow Drum," 114–115.

¹¹³ Longjohn interview, 2012

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

However, while some are aware of this knowledge, others who are not informed of drum teachings and Indigenous knowledge may use Western gender hierarchy, which holds that women are unequal to men and therefore not entitled to use the drum. As a result of colonization and an imposition of patriarchy, many Indigenous men believe that they are superior to women in all aspects of Indigenous life, including music. Due to extensive policies of extermination in the United States and civilization and assimilation in Canada, the gender biased ideologies of Western settlers have long since embedded themselves in most Indigenous people in some form. This reflects on our “traditional” teachings of the purpose and meaning of songs, singing and drumming. To understand Indigenous music, we must understand that the drum represents the origins and core of Indigenous music as a practice and as theory. Therefore, unpacking the reasoning for gender specific usage of the drum may speak to issues of colonization and ways to decolonize.

To further reinforce the role of women with the drum, Anna Hoefnagels compares the female drum with the male musicians as a representation of a heterosexual relationship.¹¹⁵ While this idea draws interest, it is a problematic heteronormative colonial hypothesis that excludes same-sex relationships. Before Christianization, two-spirited people were revered within the Plains Cree communities and other nations. They were a part of the circle, just as women and men were not entrenched in a hierarchical structure, but balanced in roles as equals. And while procreation requires male and female components, this kind of relationship cannot be extrapolated to the relationship between men and the drum and various other aspects of Plains ceremonial music, which have a different purpose than humans. There are

¹¹⁵ Hoefnagels, “Aboriginal Women and the Powwow Drum,” 116.

countless examples of teachings across Turtle Island that establish separate gender roles and confirm women's gendered place within the drum's circle.

The source of women and drum teachings needs to be examined further. As Hoefnagels considers, "It is time to scrutinize the origins of these so-called 'traditions.' They are rooted, not in our own traditional practices, but in the colonizer's patriarchal beliefs of women's inferior position in society."¹¹⁶ As a form of resistance to oppressive ideologies, reconsidering the origins of the current teachings by re-remembering previous livelihoods, before the colonial shift, can counter-oppress ideologies imposed on Indigenous peoples. And while one cannot go "back in time," Indigenous people can consider living within a value system that is rooted in a worldview based on balance and relationships with Mother Earth and the spirit world. The detriment brought on by colonial influence further draws Indigenous people away from the original teachings of the drum and its use and purpose amongst both genders.

Plains Cree singer/songwriter/drumkeeper Violet Naytowhow was gifted a hand drum through a women's ceremony, a rare practice in Plains Cree territory. She is constantly aware of the known teachings that women aren't to hold the drum, although she, along with other women in the area, had been given this gift.¹¹⁷ Violet questions the reasoning behind these limitations as she had been told that, originally, women owned the drum and if it is given in ceremony, it is a relationship between her and the spirit world, not with other people.¹¹⁸ The most obvious disconnect lies in a place in history that is not recorded by anthropologists, so we are left with oral history, which, many times can shift to reflect the colonial mentality of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁷ Violet Naytowhow, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, May 28, 2012.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

many Indigenous people. As past scholars of Northern Plains culture [?] detailed drum and song events through writing and recording, they did not focus on women's involvement to the extent that a firm description of their role was ever established. So because women like Violet are left with unanswered questions in their own communities, they seek answers through ceremonies, a direct and effective link to the spirit world. As Violet believes, when history is not written down, and when the oral teachings are laced with a colonial undertone, sometimes the best way to find an answer is to go to the source, the Creator.¹¹⁹

Some Indigenous men's critique of Violet's use of the drum does not prevent her from performing in ceremony and on stage. She finds the men and women within the Plains Cree community who are compassionate and considerate of women drumkeepers. In fact, her brother, Joseph Naytowhow, a popular drum and flute musician and renowned storyteller, promotes her gift on stage and in ceremony. Joseph has told her that if she chooses to drum on stage, she should use a store bought version of her hand drum, like he does in his own performances, so as to keep her ceremonial drum within the proper context.¹²⁰ Albert Berland concurs with this adaptation of women's use of the drum. He describes the "Remo" hand drums that can be bought in stores as being used by women around Plains Cree Territory in ceremonies and secular events such as hand games and stage performances.¹²¹ The songs that she chooses to sing must also be of a secular nature, as the environment of a performance can involve unclean circumstances.¹²² Many times, Violet has shared the stage with Joe, creating a positive and healing presentation of their cultural beliefs. They have received only positive

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Berland interview, August 2012.

¹²² Naytowhow interview, May 2012.

reviews and, as a drumkeeper, she will continue to conduct ceremony and perform on stage with Joe and other artists with open minds.

As a ceremonialist, Berland was taught that women do not hold the drum. However, his interpretation of the role of women in music is somewhat different than others. He articulates that,

Women were a part of all this, and if somebody tells you they weren't, they're lying. Half of my songs came from my kokum. And there was nothing wrong with that. She just couldn't pick up a drum. My grandmother, she got a lot of her songs from her grandfather cause for some reason back in her day when she was a young lady she always participates because we come from a Sundance family eh? She sat there and would listen. So when I was younger and I'd try to sing a little verse of it she'd go "no, no grandson this is how," and she'd pick up a little stick or whatever and she'll drum on the table and then when the time comes for her to really show me? Then she'll pick up a rattle. Then she'll go, "no grandson don't try to sound like me cause I'm a woman. Use your man voice, use your distinction, use your identity in yourself," she said.¹²³

This passage verifies the differences in gender roles without the subjective notion of Indigenous women as passive participants in ceremonial songs and drumming. While Berland did not have a memory of the reasoning for women's distance from the drum, he continued to discuss the necessity of women's involvement in the Sundance:

I don't object to my nieces singing, like I say, 'go ahead, you're not violating anything you know,' continuity is continuity and gender cannot inhibit culture. If it did, if gender was approached in that manner, then it would certainly inhibit the acquisition of songs. For example, my grandmother explained to me that there is nothing wrong from learning from a man or a woman. The only thing that she had said is that she didn't want to teach her teenage granddaughters at that time because they were menstruating and it was quite powerful. She started teaching me after menopause, she never taught me when she was in her 30s. It's quite amazing to keep those things after many years. And she said she never rendered them cause that menstrual cycle served a purpose and she didn't want to violate any acquisition or transference or continuity of songs.

¹²³ Berland interview, August 2012.

Women play a strong role in maintenance and rendering of Sundance songs, yet, as mentioned by other interviewees and within the literature, a women's moontime is a powerful ceremony. In Berland's teachings, this is probable reasoning behind the denied use of the drum.

Today, Violet Naytowhow is not the only woman on this journey, as there is a growing trend amongst women who are beginning to drum and becoming drumkeepers. Many women's drum groups are forming in North America, both as stage and ceremonial performers. Some examples are Asani, based in Edmonton, Alberta, and Women of Wabano, based in Ottawa, Ontario.¹²⁴ The formation of these groups is mostly reactionary and reflective of their environments, with urban centres being the most common places in which they form. Women struggling to survive in circumstances such as poverty, single-parent households, systemic racism, violence and residential school generational trauma are beginning to pick up hand drums as a way of healing and refocusing their ancestral knowledge and awareness.

The women's drum group phenomenon further promotes the idea that, when used properly, the power of the drum provides protection and healing for those who have been abandoned by their families and partners. Serene Spence, an Ojibwe drummer actively involved in a drum group, describes the importance of the protocols and ceremonial aspects of the drum groups.¹²⁵ Inner city women who have not experienced much of their cultural history seek a form of connection and find it through the drumming ceremony. Protocols are strictly adhered to [how so, given the previous discussion] and based on Elders' teachings of the

¹²⁴ Ghislaine Goudreau, Cora Weber-Pillax, Sheila Cote-Meek, Helen Madill and Stan Wilson, "Hand Drumming: Health-Promoting Experiences of Aboriginal Women from a Northern Ontario Urban Community," *Journal of Aboriginal Health* 4 (2008), 72–78.

¹²⁵ Serene Spence, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, April 12, 2012.

drum. They begin each ceremony with a sage smudging ceremony and a prayer, followed by the blessing of each of the drums, which are wrapped in soft blankets stored in cloth bags. As previously mentioned, women on their moontime do not participate as they are too powerful and can offset the balance of the ceremony. In a circle, they take turns leading songs either taught and given to them by Elders in other ceremonies, or given to them in a dream.¹²⁶ With technology, some well-known resistance songs, such as the Women's Warrior Song or the American Indian Movement Song, can be found on the popular internet site YouTube, as the scarcity of the women's drum groups and geographical limitations make it difficult to learn songs in person. In addition to this, as a striking example of the adaptations that emerge as a means of maintaining Indigenous music, permission is sometimes asked by email or Facebook message. Lastly, they close the ceremony with water and berries, which they provide as an offering to the spirits, and then pass around to each member. Similar to Ojibwe women's berry fasting ceremonies, this action is meant to acknowledge women's rite of passage, their ability to nurture children, whether biological or adopted children.¹²⁷

So while concessions are made, the intention of the women is to re-discover their drum history and teachings. The results of the growing popularity of these drum groups are decolonial in nature as women draw identity and strength through the ceremonies. They resist not only the colonial structure surrounding them but also their own Indigenous people, both male and female who do not approve of women playing the drum.¹²⁸ As the drum groups

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Kim Anderson, "Honouring the Blood of the People: Berry Fasting in the 21st Century," in *Expression in Canadian Native Studies*, ed. Rob Innes, Ron Laliberte, Priscilla Settee, and James Waldram (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Extension Division, 2000), 374–394.

¹²⁸ Goudreau et al., "Hand Drumming," 62.

evolve, more research in the area will provide a scale of success as this form of resistance continues to flourish.

For Indigenous women, this growing act of resistance has been destined to develop. The men's protector roles have become diluted or have disappeared: men have become increasingly violent towards women, negligent towards their families, addicted and disconnected from the spiritual aspects of Indigenous culture. So if history tells of men gaining strength and power from the drum, without the proper knowledge or care, many have begun to abuse it just as they exploit women. It is no surprise that women are beginning to take the drum back. As original owners of the drum and songs, women are protecting themselves and the drum from the harm that it experiences when men disrespect it. Both Ermine and Longjohn describe drummers arriving to powwows intoxicated, or beginning their performance without praying with tobacco, and/or leaving the drum in unclean places. So, as an act of survival, women will increasingly take on the role of the drummer until men begin their own healing journey and re-assume their roles in Indigenous society. Women are beginning to touch the drum as resistance not only to the oppressor, but also against Indigenous men.

Resistance through the drum comes with maintenance of protocols and knowledge of the old teachings, but also through adaptation, change and innovation. Indigenous ceremonialist and scholar Tamara Starblanket once said that to be an Indian is to be spiritual and that is what separates us from the rest of the world, our own spirituality.¹²⁹ Without that we are walking shells of who we once were. To retain a strong identity despite colonial suppression, the spiritual must be present. To re-remember and utilize this older knowledge of

¹²⁹ Tamara Starblanket, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, July 2, 2012.

the drum and song, women can continue to resist colonial encroachment and also build decolonization strategies for our future generations.

2.2.3. Songs as Prayers

In different contexts, all of the interviewees referred to songs as prayers. From the Elder to the young rapper, each regards songs as sacred in nature, gifts from the spirit world that, if properly performed, are designed to heal. In many ways, these songs are the primary connection to the physical and spiritual worlds as obvious aspects of ceremonial protocols and also in more subliminal approaches. To understand songs as prayers, the interviewees share details of their upbringing in relation to music, through life on the trapline, in the city, and within the Sundance ceremony.

Violet Naytowhow discussed her childhood experience living on the trap line with her auntie and uncle, completely removed from technology and any access to music other than gospel, which she heard at church each Sunday. She recalled,

When you're in the bush there's an orchestra of sound, okay? I always listen to that 'cause different environments have different orchestras so I go out into the bush and there'll be the birds, the creaking of the trees, they have those different screeches, and then there's the chickens, they hit their chest...we didn't like going to church, nobody did, but we looked forward to the music and singing.¹³⁰

Her natural radio was within the forest as she listened and learned birds' song, familiarizing herself with their sound, tenor and tone. Her Auntie and *Kokum* (Grandmother, in Cree) would make reference to each bird's song and, in Cree, what each bird was saying about itself. Many messages were humorous, all with purpose and meaning, morals and lessons. Even with Violet's family's devotion to Christian beliefs, each animal's songs were

¹³⁰ Naytowhow interview, May 2012.

considered spirit songs and it is these same bird and animal sounds that are immersed in hunting songs, which are always prayers for success in the hunt and a thank you to the animal for giving its life.¹³¹ Even though she refers to attending church, the notion of spirituality is not attached to her experience in church; rather, the songs and music entertained her. Unintentionally, by living on the trapline, Violet learned songs as prayer in the natural environment.

Although Violet was not connected to the Plains Cree ceremonial teachings that are more common in southern Saskatchewan, she held the innate ability to experience spirituality on the trapline through a strong connection to the natural world. The land in itself holds countless sacred songs, all performed with or without human involvement. Like the birds and the trees, the water, wind and fire create songs of their own that are mimicked in different ceremonial events. These sounds are always attached to honour and prayer songs, where Indigenous singers give thanks for the existence of these elements and animals. As an Indigenous person, Violet's memory of ancestral knowledge encourages her to acknowledge these natural elements regardless of childhood experience. While Violet was raised in a Christian belief system, her understanding of the natural world transmits her ancestral Indigenous identity throughout her life.

It was not until young adulthood that Violet had the opportunity to be a part of a ceremony in Poundmaker. There, she experienced ceremonial prayer songs and was moved by both their beauty and familiarity.¹³² At that time, with her Christian upbringing, she felt frightened as she was told that the heathen way of praying was taboo. Yet, intrigue overcame

¹³¹ Whidden, *Essential Song*, 24–25.

¹³² Naytowhow interview, 2012.

fear and she continued to learn the old ways of Plains Cree Territory. She remembers her first experience:

I was fascinated because the men sang and the women came after them and there was young kids in the middle in the center. I can learn a song almost immediately. In a sweat it's almost like a stream that pulls you in. I didn't know it then but I was so pulled in. That kind of singing is only for in there, not anywhere else. They can't be recorded. I'd never heard of song as a prayer until then. I know I heard birds and wolves howling out there, I knew there was talking going on but I didn't make the bigger connection until then. I started learning about ceremonies and songs.¹³³

From this experience, Violet spent the rest of her life devoted to Plains Cree spirituality. Her connection to songs and music stems from this sacred understanding. As a contemporary folk artist, her practice of songs remains concurrent with her ceremonial songs in that she always smudges before a performance, and always creates songs that are healing in some way. From her first encounter with ceremony to this day, she considers all of the songs that she sings as a form of prayer.

Marc Longjohn also refers to songs as a way of praying for Indigenous people, family in both the natural and spirit world. He claims,

Music, it's also a way to communicate with god and that's the unique way of singing with a hand drum is that I can smile laugh and sing but I can also make somebody in a wheelchair smile and pray for that person. Not saying that my songs are powerful enough to pray but in general when people get together and sing from their heart that's a strong, strong prayer.¹³⁴

In his humble way, Marc believes that the songs he is given through ceremony and dreams are intended to be prayers. He speaks to the power of a song performed by a collective as a powerful means of prayer. This holds true in many of the Plains Cree ceremonies such as Sundances, Chicken Dances, Tea Dances, Tobacco Dances and sweatlodges, where a group of

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Longjohn interview, 2012.

men sing in unison, drawing in the spirits with their united song. Bill Ermine also agrees with the notion of songs as a form of prayer as they connect us to the natural world and “bring things to life.”¹³⁵ Prayer songs acknowledge these worlds in all ceremonies. At all Indigenous gatherings there are songs, and they are in conjunction with prayer and respectful recognition of the universal balance.

From a Sto:lo perspective, popular rapper Os 12 shares the opinion of an artist who practices a newer form of music, hip hop. Although he does not practice songs within a ceremonial context, his musical intentions are based on spiritual connections. He believes that many of his songs come from another place and he reflects that

Anyone who’s doing blues, cowboy music, songs about love that’s where it all is that as Indian people we all found our spirit song and visionary quests and what came to being after our appreciation for life after fasting and appreciation for creator was a song that came from your inner core of your being, right? And sometimes when I’m writing songs and I get that feeling that’s where the best songs for me come from.¹³⁶

Although many may not consider hip hop or country music ballads as prayer songs, in many ways aspects of songwriting and presentation of the songs are ceremonial. If the message, meaning and purpose stem from a spiritual place, and the intention is to resist colonization, then the music becomes a conduit from the spiritual to physical world.

I have always written lyrics from a perspective of a Plains Cree woman. I observe what I experience in my homeland, both dreaming and awake, and interpret it into words. The underlying, undeniable part of the process is that the foundation of everything I write and then say comes from the place of resistance, always conscious of our unique past, present and future. I view song as anything that flows; words, music, paint, beadwork, a river, the wind, there is

¹³⁵ Ermine interview, 2012.

¹³⁶ Ron Dean Harris, aka Os12, in discussion with Lindsay Knight, June 20, 2012.

poetry in it all. And like a ceremony, music is mostly beyond my level of awareness, yet I do it devotedly. As a performer, I also succumb to the ways in which the energy within each word or phrase embodies my actions and movements. It comes to me in dreams, without thinking, without warning. It thumps out of my heart in drumbeat precision and I write what I capture, hoping to respectfully relay the meaning in the rhythm. I feel humbled, honored and burdened all at once because some of the stories are so tragic, so painfully sad that I am sometimes left sobbing uncontrollably, begging for strength by putting down the pen and picking up a braid of sweetgrass.¹³⁷ And while not all the lyrics come from that place, they all have purpose. I use them to speak for those who cannot. I use them as prayers for an answer to struggle, both of others and my own.

The obvious example of Indigenous songs as prayers is within knowledge of the Sundance ceremony. Albert Berland details, the Sundance ceremony as being the most important aspect of Plains Cree culture. Each step of the ceremony demands meticulous and rigorous training, down to the obscure details. He explains that the prayer songs involved are so sacred in nature that it takes years before a young person is able to sing them within the Sundance ceremony itself. In fact, from a toddler age, both boys and girls are taught the songs, yet they are only given sticks to learn the drum beats and patterns, as ownership of an actual drum only comes with proof of coordination, dedication and skill in singing.¹³⁸ Berland himself learned many songs from his grandmother and grandfathers and could not sing them until he was twelve or thirteen years old. Since the Sundance was only held in the summer, the children learned the songs throughout the winter. He says,

¹³⁷ Cleansing, also known as “smudging,” is a ceremony where one prays to the ancestors by lighting a braid of sweetgrass or a bundle sage. The smoke takes their message to the spirit world.

¹³⁸ Berland interview, August 2012.

There is one ceremony that is used as a school and that's the most bottom ceremony in Cree country and that's the sweat. The sweat was the classroom for young people. That's where you'd go into ceremony through that doorway okay, so you'd have all these ceremonies hey you'd have the sweat down here and the Sundance and you have to work your way up and that's what I did. That was the place where your *mushum* [grandfather] would show you a few songs, spending all winter showing you these songs [for the] ghost dance, chicken dance all sorts of things in there to show. So it was a place for that and at the same time it's not like showing somebody in a living room. You're in a ceremony and in this particular ceremony you'd be quiet and more attentive and you wouldn't be distracted by the TV or the radio or something so you were in there with a clean mind in the sweat so I was taught those songs since a very young age in there.¹³⁹

The sweatlodge, referred to as a school, encourages a non-Western concept of education. As a member of a ceremonial family, and a keeper of the Sundance, Berland finds it an important way to teach children. He gives credit to the Elder Pete Waskewhayat for drawing the comparison to Western education. Along with the teachings in the sweatlodge, students were expected to retain and practice the songs until the Sundance season began in early summer.

He goes on to detail,

And it's not only songs, it's those principles behind those songs eh? It's the protocols the processes, the physical, ... they can even instruct you of the process of building a lodge for example, you know, how many rails, how many, you know that kind of stuff, that was a time for that. And that was a time for you to ask questions. So when you were taught formally in a sweat that was a time for you where it was kind of officiated in front of the spirit world.¹⁴⁰

In the sweatlodge, they are taught the purpose and meaning behind each of the songs. By example, the instruction in the sweatlodge prepared Berland and other children for their part in the ceremonies. Through these teachings, they embodied the worldview of the Plains Cree people as the lessons were taught within the realm of both spirit and physical world. With that in mind, students were intent on proper behavior and mistakes were rare.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Much of Albert Berland's discussion of the learning of songs included a strong reinforcement of proper recitation and structure. As mentioned in the historical background, many academics have compared Indigenous music to western music, with the former being seen as simplistic in nature. Yet, as Berland surmises, depending on the ceremony, the drum patterns and accompanying vocables were so intricate and complex that years of practice were necessary to remember each song properly and in the proper order.¹⁴² In fact, very few singers were gifted enough to learn them all. As I had the opportunity to participate in two Sundance ceremonies, I can attest to the multifaceted octaves in each song, all sung completely in the Cree language. I was more familiar with Powwow and rounddance singing and was astounded to hear the difference in song structure. The detailed orchestration of each song and the proper sequence that they follow can only be achieved through years of disciplined instruction and practice. And the reasoning for this strict regimen is the importance of retaining each song just as it has been since the beginning of time as they are the most sacred prayer songs and direct links of communication to the spirit world.¹⁴³ In the Sundance culture, most families have been involved for generations. They spend their summers travelling to different communities to share their songs, teach and learn from others. Song protocols are strict and unwavering.

The Sundance ceremony is the ultimate act of resistance in many Indigenous cultures. That it has survived through cultural genocide in both Canada and the United States of America speaks to the resilience of our people and the deep-set desire to maintain ties to the spirit world in this manner. In Canada, many ceremonies were outlawed by the Canadian government with the establishment of the *Indian Act*. Regardless of authoritative Indian

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Agents and threats of punishment, Plains Cree people continued to hold the ceremony. They also used other non-ceremonial events such as the powwow, which was introduced as recently as the early 1900s, to entertain the new settlers while secretly teaching each other the Sundance ceremonial songs as a part of the performance.¹⁴⁴ Little did the settlers know that Indigenous people were resisting the insistent doctrine of missionaries and settlers. To this day, the songs have survived and continue to be taught and shared amongst the Plains Cree people.

The Sundance songs are used from the moment the ceremony is dreamt right until the last feast and give-away. Four feasts are held throughout the year prior to the actual three or four day ceremony, where songs are sung to prepare both the dancers and the spirit world for the ceremony. Berland explains,

So you have to know songs such as how to take down the tree, raise the tree, and you have to know songs for when you stake out the Sundance. There's songs throughout right from that first morning when the sun comes up. There's songs to travel with the center pole, songs to dig and then the really ritual songs where you make the square pit and then you sing those songs to the sun, the thunderbird, wind, buffalo and the moon, right? Then those songs and then the tobacco songs, tying, untying...the go home songs, the cannibal songs, the giveaway songs. So the song sets are only used for the actual dancing and that where most of the songs are. It's only a few people who are actually been given the right to keep those ritual songs. So I have that right I have all those and it came from a set of numerous Elders.¹⁴⁵

Songs are the essential spiritual tie that bind the whole ceremony together. Without the maintenance of the songs, the ceremony itself will cease to exist. Berland recognizes the need for the Sundance to continue and for the songs to be taught as prayers. The sacredness of what he refers to as ritual songs keeps Plains Cree culture worldview existent and alive.

¹⁴⁴ Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties That Bind* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 172–173.

¹⁴⁵ Berland interview, August 2012.

2.2.4. Language as Resistance

As each interviewee mentioned, the Cree language embodies the worldview of Plains Cree people. Bill stated that it is impossible to translate some of the concepts he describes, as there are no equivalent English words or philosophies.¹⁴⁶ He claims,

I cannot interpret English into Cree, neither can I interpret Cree into English because our language comes from the universe, it comes from the heavens, it comes from below into the atmosphere, it comes from the water, it comes from the sea, it's the swimmers, the flyers and the crawlers and the four legged. That is where our language comes from and it's identified in everything.¹⁴⁷

As Randy Morin, an active language keeper in Treaty Six Territory, explains that in his *Kokum* Flora Weenonis's teachings, there are two types of Cree: old Cree and modern Cree. In music, the old Cree is what has always been used in prayer and ceremonial songs. The modern Cree is what people now sing at powwows and rounddances.¹⁴⁸ Many Cree language speakers lament their lack of understanding of old Cree as they attempt to translate their Elders' songs, stories, philosophies and overall knowledge. As they struggle, the youngest generation loses the majority of the connection between the old and new, only grasping strands of their Indigenous worldview.

The gradual erosion of Indigenous languages exposes the effects of colonization. Over time, Indigenous languages continue to erode. According to Teresa McCarty, scholars and language keepers are making attempts to preserve and revitalize the languages, understanding

¹⁴⁶ Ermine interview, 2012.

¹⁴⁷ Ermine interview, 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Morin interview, July 2012.

the importance of language revitalization as an integral aspect of a decolonization strategy.¹⁴⁹

They recognize that, by losing the language, Indigenous people also lose many of the concepts embedded within worldview. Many Indigenous musicians are of a generation of people who do not speak their Indigenous language. This affects the ways in which they interpret identity and ceremony through music. While the loss of language creates a great divide between the old and modern, many are using this awareness to learn their language and then are sharing what they have acquired through song. Language revitalization in song further promotes decolonial thought and action.

Younger drumkeepers such as Marc Longjohn are examples of this generation. He has taught himself Cree and continues to learn from Elders in his family and within the drum community. Although most of his songs are sung in English, he continues to create music from a Cree perspective. He states that he has so much respect for the language that he is afraid to say something out of context with the possibility of it being misinterpreted.¹⁵⁰ In time, Longjohn hopes to sing all songs in Cree, and shares this fact with as many young people as possible. Longjohn also works with youth in Saskatoon and is frequently asked to attend events as a speaker and role model. He is humbled by these opportunities and uses them as an outlet to express his gratitude for his Plains Cree culture and language. In this way Longjohn, along with other young musicians, is resisting language loss and transforming the language into something that is not the same, yet still localized and Indigenous in context.

¹⁴⁹ T. L. McCarty et al., “Reclaiming the Gift: Indigenous Youth Counter-Narratives on Native Language Loss and Revitalization,” *The American Indian Quarterly*, 30 (Winter/Spring 2006): 28–48.

¹⁵⁰ Longjohn interview, 2012.

Berland also perpetuates the strict adherence to Cree language in ceremonies, yet recognizes the disconnect in the younger generation. He maintains his ability to teach his children the Sundance songs in Cree, yet admits that there are difficulties:

So, for example what's happening now is that I know some of the songs are still being sung. Not to the extent that were before because now the renderers are rendering song without knowing what they're singing for or about, ok? And then what I find myself doing is that I don't sing the words because they don't understand anyways, so and I do tell them the actual words and say this is the word for that. Some words it's kind of difficult to understand. Some songs are really, fast you can't get the words, so I have to explain it to them, ok? They'll sit down and drum with me and the second batch of kids, they're not as fluent as the first batch of kids are. Because that's what's happening in the Sundance world now. Still I'm hoping my kids take over the singing part. I'm hoping that I can be having tea in the tent and all my kids are singing. I want to be able to drive into the Sundance grounds and hear my kids singing and think well you know I've done something in this world.¹⁵¹

Berland recognizes this threatening divide and he strives to follow the teachings of his Elders, yet the loss of language limits the full transmission of the songs and their meaning.

Fortunately, many of the younger ones are dedicated to the Sundance and learn the language to pass on the teachings to the children, just as Berland has been taught.

Lastly, contemporary musicians are beginning to use their ancestral language within their works. Os12 shares examples of some west coast hip hop artists such as Rapture Rizin' and Manik Onederful, who, like himself, incorporate Indigenous language phrases and sounds in their lyrics. He also commented on my attempts to do so within my music.¹⁵² I began learning and incorporating Plains Cree language into my lyrics as I had always heard that our language encapsulates our worldview. I strongly believe that in order to really capture the attention of the younger generations you have to have the ability to "cool it out," which means that by

¹⁵¹ Berland interview, 2012.

¹⁵² Os12 interview, 2012.

respectfully fitting our traditional knowledge and language into examples of pop culture, we create a marketable tool that engages and teaches identity and values. While this is a rudimentary stage in approaching the vastly complex cosmologies embedded in the language, it is necessary to draw interest in the language within the younger generations. As Indigenous musicians, having a voice can mean having a responsibility to acknowledge Indigenous languages within our music.

To summarize, all of the interviewees shared their gifts of music knowledge in multiple ways. Through teachings, song and humorous banter, I had the opportunity to connect with Indigenous minds that serve to better Indigenous communities through their respectful adherence to protocols in both old and new ways of musical practice. Where possible, before each interview, we engaged in a cleansing with sweetgrass or sage. In Plains Cree culture, lighting up a braid of sweetgrass cleans the atmosphere and invites the spirits into the conversation. The participants willingly accepted this as a good way to begin discussions. Elder Bill Ermine carries with him knowledge that is derived from his Plains Cree ancestors and hopes that some of it will remain within his family and community. As we ended our conversation that day, he said,

That smoke that come from here a little while ago [sweetgrass ceremony], we don't know where it went. But my belief [is that] in order to give me strength and be careful I believe that the smoke is up there already where the grandmothers sit and where the grandfathers sit. They speak for us, talk to the Creator for us.¹⁵³

According to Ermine, the grandmothers and grandfathers are still listening and will help to revitalize and protect our ways of knowing. This also confirms that knowledge of Indigenous music remains as powerful as it was previous to colonial influence. Through continued

¹⁵³ Ermine interview, March 2012.

awareness of song and music as part of both the physical and spiritual worlds, the interviewees resist loss of teachings and contribute to the continuum of Indigenous music. Their intellectual and spiritual insights about the diversities within both customary and modern forms of music encouraged me to present this research as a fluid continuum of sound that stems from their desire to maintain and resist. They embody this truth.

CHAPTER THREE

RESISTANCE THROUGH INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATIONS OF INDIGENOUS MUSIC

Deepening the understanding of Indigenous music as a continuum grounded in resistance, this chapter draws on the present forms or genres of borrowed sound that encapsulate Indigenous worldview. An important theme that emerged from the interviews is one that is ever growing in popularity amongst scholars: intercultural adaptation.¹⁵⁴ In contemporary Indigenous music, “intercultural” can be defined as borrowed genres such as country, rock, blues and hip-hop along with borrowed languages such as English, French and Spanish.¹⁵⁵ The immensely popular genre of hip-hop is particularly limited in academic research and is therefore a main focus in this section. Young Indigenous people across North America share a common interest in hip hop music and culture. As examples of artists who display resistance in hip hop music, I will spotlight interviewee Os 12 and his work, Ottawa based DJ collective A Tribe Called Red, and myself, as I have been involved in the Indigenous hip hop community for fifteen years under the hip hop name of “Eekwol.” As Indigenous activists and voices of their people, each of these artists represents a current space in the continuum of sound.

Newer, popular genres of music attract Indigenous musicians because these artists exist in a space, place and time that balances within many worlds. Today’s generation of self-identified Indigenous people is a complicated mixture of multiracial, urban, rural, Western-

¹⁵⁴ Hoefnagels and Diamond, eds., *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges*; Bryan Burton, *Moving Within the Circle: Contemporary Native American Music and Dance* (Danbury: World Music Press, 1993); Dunbar-Hall and Gibson, *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places*.

¹⁵⁵ Beverly Diamond, *Aboriginal Music in Canada*, 215.

educated, ceremonial, Christian, non-Indigenous language speakers, Indigenous language speakers, and so on. Indigenous music of borrowed genres is still completely driven by innate cognizance of worldview, yet intercultural adaptations change the ways in which music is communicated or presented. And while the sounds do not have as long of a history as those discussed in Chapter Two, acts of resistance to total immersion into Western culture are what keep the music uniquely “Indigenous” and connected to the spirit world.

3.1 Indigenous Resistance through Hip Hop

Hip hop music in particular has begun to transform the ways in which young Indigenous people perceive their environments and assert their identities. Examples of resistance in Indigenous music can be easily discovered through hip hop. Without easy access to land and rural communities, urban Indigenous people have limited exposure to ceremonial ways of experiencing music. Many grow up without an awareness of the existence of Indigenous forms of song and dance beyond the limited versions taught in school. In effect, many latch onto non-Indigenous forms of music and reformat the songs by incorporating Indigenous style and sound into the music. By focusing on positive and conscious artists who are situated in this growing movement, this study describes how hip hop appropriately fills a cultural void within urban people’s identities.

The history of hip hop culture stems from a place of struggle and poverty in inner-city Bronx, New York, in the late 1970s. African American, Latino and Native American youth combined creative forces to develop what they titled “hip hop,” which includes but is not limited to rapping, breakdancing, graffiti, and DJing.¹⁵⁶ As a form of resistance to the ongoing

¹⁵⁶ Jeff Chang and DJ Kool Herc, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: MacMillan, 2005), xi–xii.

effects of colonization, hip hop culture did not involve material wealth, and anyone who participated in one of the elements was accepted and welcomed into the positive environment that it created. It was the feeling of being a part of a family that many did not experience in their own home lives.¹⁵⁷ Although most of these young people had little knowledge of their pre-colonial history, they were strongly affected by addictions, violence, abuse, neglect and an overall feeling of hopelessness. Wanting change, they began to energize their identities through hip hop, which continues to evolve and change today.

In Canada, hip hop culture resonates in the urban centres and, more recently, in northern and remote regions. It draws in people who are struggling with identity and seeking knowledge of history beyond what is offered in the current mainstream. Hip hop culture expert and University of Toronto academic Maki Motapanyane states,

Hip hop in Canada is an artistic body of work, an ever shifting and dynamic urban culture that rhymes, narrates, paints, documents, dances and in so many other ways, expresses, critiques and theorizes the social realities of our time. It is important to emphasize that hip hop theorizes, that hip hop has the capacity to philosophize, that hip hop and its artists are legitimate intellectuals of our time and furthermore, that there is no intellectual space where hip hop, its artists and learners do not belong or in which their experiences are not intellectually appropriate for discussion.¹⁵⁸

By connecting with fellow hip hoppers across Turtle Island (Canada and the Americas), young Indigenous people find a deeper understanding of self through artistic expression and by addressing the immensity of the social issues that affect them and their communities. Many are drawn to the intellectual aspects of the culture as it questions the current societal regime.

¹⁵⁷ Chang and DJ Kool Herc, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, xii–xiii.

¹⁵⁸ J. Maki Motapanyane, "The Black Female Body and Artist in Canadian Hip Hop: The Question of Femini(st)ne Space," *New Dawn: The Journal of Black Canadian Studies* 1 (2006):

Interviewee Os12 speaks to this when he describes his affiliation with hip hop and his own history:

It's who I've always been. I think people growing up in the cities and stuff know resistance through rallies and through people sharing these ideas through the movements, but I lived resistance [be]cause my grandparents taught me resistance. These ideologies were taught to me as a young person and my first songs were resistance songs when I was like twelve years old. When I was about 13 to 18 I was learning the artistry of hip hop...I don't wanna wave a flag saying you believe in this, boo, when I could be spending time studying my own spirituality. To me spirituality and spiritual sovereignty and political freedom and self determination and identity is the core structure of what I do.¹⁵⁹

For Os12, hip hop is a conduit to express all that he has learned and continues to learn about his Indigenous selfhood. It is his form of adaptation to the intercultural environment in which he exists. He seeks truth in hip hop, which is a growing movement in young Indigenous musicians in both rural and urban areas.

As a young, well-known rapper, activist and budding comedian, Os12, whose real name is Ron Harris, was an ideal candidate for this research. For over fifteen years, Os12 has been expressing his heritage and identity through rapping. His devotion to hip hop and his Coast Salish/Sto:lo culture create a unique and powerful form of musical expression.¹⁶⁰ He is among the many modern musicians who use globally recognized forms of music and adapt them with an Indigenous emphasis on sound, style and lyrical content. While his productions may be strongly influenced by Western sound and technology, the intent of the music remains completely hip hop and yet entirely Indigenous.

Os12 was raised by his grandparents and grew up in Vancouver, BC, where he attended a private school. He was surrounded by the typically urban music that represents pop

¹⁵⁹ Os12 interview, 2012.

¹⁶⁰ Os12, "Biography," *MySpace*, accessed August 10, 2012, <http://www.reverbnation.com/ostwelve>.

culture, such as hip hop, RnB, rock and punk rock. Os12 recounts being drawn to hip hop “from the start” as he related to the artists and their stories and issues.¹⁶¹ His grandparents educated him on the prevailing social issues of Indigenous people in Canada, and through activism, they implanted awareness in his mind that eventually flowed through his music. Today, Os12 has years of experience in the music industry, while staying grounded in Sto:lo Territory. His upbringing encouraged him to develop a distinctive formula of style and sound, and he is one of a few hip hop artists who have successfully adapted their cultural history into an urban, technologically driven society.

Os 12 draws inspiration from knowledge of his peoples’ oppression and a desire to promote resistance. His actions are a way of “talking back,” which scholar/activist bell hooks explains:

It is necessary to remember, as we think critically about domination, that we all have the capacity to act in ways that oppress, dominate, wound (whether or not that power is institutionalized). It is necessary to remember that it is first the potential oppressor within that we must resist—the potential victim within that we must rescue—otherwise we cannot hope for an end to domination, for liberation.¹⁶²

hooks’ language can provide insight into Os12’s struggle to access his Indigenous identity in relation to a history of oppression and life in an urban environment. Os12 uses his ability to write and rap lyrics that builds awareness of this history of inequalities to resist colonial influence. By doing so, he addresses his internal oppressor—he “talks back”—and encourages others to do the same.

For example, in the song “The Awakening,” Os12 reflects on his knowledge of Indigenous rights and the need for stronger action towards asserting sovereignty within

¹⁶¹ Os12 interview, 2012.

¹⁶² bell hooks, *Talking Back, Thinking Black*, 62.

Indigenous territories. Through his anthem-like hook (chorus) he attempts to recruit others to rethink history and move towards revolution:

No, I don't need you to think for me
We already can think for free
The awakening
Ancestors dance to the drum and away we sing¹⁶³

Os12 also draws attention to the idea that through the use of drum our ancestors approve by dancing in the spirit world. This line exemplifies his attempts to acknowledge continued connections to the spirit world through modern music. In the first and second verse he “talks back” by letting the oppressor know that he is aware of the ways in which the oppressor asserts power over him. He raps,

No I don't need you to think for me
Yo when I'm thirsty can you go and take a drink for me?
Take it to the limit that'll be the brink for me
Be on the couch tellin stories to the shrinks for me?
See in the same way, you can't go and eat for me
Because the way that you've intruded is deceitfully
You better be savin yourself a damn receipt to see
The awakening's beginning we got heat for thee
Eagles and condors are thirsty thousand feet from us
Fishers and hunters in the spirit world with meat for us
I got the angels and the demons in a sweet chorus
Letting you think for me's like trading magic beans for dust

Got me bangin on the walls to the doors of the system
Stand and speak the truth of the peoples that resist em
Tired of false histories with all the facts they twist em
Memories of my culture but a generation missed em
So, your lies don't mean a damn thing
Ain't worth a damn cent with the poison you bring
Each time you speak an evil bell rings
In a tower filled with screams and scorpion stings
The center of all sins in a world filled with babies
A monster in a dark robe with frothy mouth and rabies

¹⁶³ Os12, “The Awakening,” *CBC Music*, accessed August 20, 2012, <http://music.cbc.ca/#/artists/Ostwelve>.

Sleepin in the gutter with the maggots and the scabies
Got the world filled with terror with you later ons and maybes¹⁶⁴

In a dark description he paints a picture of negativity, yet ironically claims that he will not succumb to this reality. Os12 is known for the positive, optimistic messages in his music, yet he chooses to put a darker spin on his presentation. This by no means makes his message destructive; rather, it is a tongue and cheek approach to music, poking fun at the pop culture's idea of dark being evil. He also uses terminology relating to Christianity, such as sin, evil, angels and demons, as a way of speaking the language of the oppressor.¹⁶⁵ Overall, Os12 manages to assert the need for emancipation by creatively attacking the oppressor and rallying Indigenous people to consider revolution. Although some of the phrasing and instrumentation in his music sounds thematically gloomy, Os12's intention is always to uplift Indigenous people through awareness of colonization.

It is important to note that not all hip hop is positive and emancipatory. Similar to interest in Native American art and culture, the imagery and unique styles that hip hop delivered created outside interest. It was not long before corporate industry exploitation developed a warped image of hip hop, which evolved into a negative and destructive form of music related to gangs, money, drugs and misogyny.¹⁶⁶ Today, this type of hip hop is still dominant within the music industry. Mainstream music is most accessible, so it filters down to young Indigenous people and their families. Unfortunately, as a theme for the oppressed,¹⁶⁷ this form of hip hop encourages self-destructive patterns and actions that dominate Indigenous communities. Artists like Os 12 promote a revitalization of the original, positive, conscious

¹⁶⁴ Os12, "The Awakening," *CBC Music*.

¹⁶⁵ Os12 Interview, 2012.

¹⁶⁶ Chang and DJ Kool Herc, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, 132.

¹⁶⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 34.

form of hip hop culture.¹⁶⁸ This research relates to those who practice hip hop from the grassroots as a form of resistance through Indigenous awareness of culture and identity, colonization and revolution, as a focus on the destructive aspects of hip hop culture is counterproductive.

Activist artists like Os12 embed Indigeneity within lyrics and beats, creating a type of music that speaks from an old, ancestral place within the artist's being. He explains,

As Indian people we all found our spirit song in visionary quests. What came to being after our appreciation for life after fasting and appreciation for Creator was a song that came from your inner core of your being, right? And sometimes when I'm writing songs and I get that feeling that's where the best songs for me come from. These are the ones that actually affect me. I have songs that I've worked on for two or three years that are spiritual songs because [they are] the core entity of my being and spirit. There's lots of people who are still doing that and it's kind of weird now that people think that to have pop music or fun music that it can't come from the core of your being? I have dance songs that are awesome... It doesn't wanna make you cry but it affects you spiritually where the person was actually writing from the heart especially in the hip hop sense.¹⁶⁹

Os12 describes some of his songs as ceremonial songs that connect to the spirit world. He can differentiate between the construction of songs from the mind and songs from the heart. He speaks to the constant evolution of Indigenous music in that it can be completely Indigenous without being categorized in a "traditional" form. As an urban Indigenous person, he has managed to incorporate his ancestral "blood memory"¹⁷⁰ within his hip hop music, which is truly an intercultural adaptation and act of resistance. He firmly believes that anyone who is Indigenous and making music from the heart, whatever type of music it may be, is creating

¹⁶⁸ Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 13.

¹⁶⁹ Os12 interview, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Leilani Holmes, "Heart Knowledge, Blood Memory and the Voices of the Land: Implications of Research Among Hawaiian Elders," in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, ed. Budd L. Hall et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 46.

Indigenous music that is acknowledged in the spirit world.¹⁷¹ Os12 effectively uses hip hop as a means to connect himself to his history and identity.

Furthermore, Os12 acknowledges popular contemporary artists who use older, ceremonial Indigenous songs, incorporating them into their own form of music. Particularly, he refers to one of the newest groups receiving mass recognition in the Indigenous music industry, A Tribe Called Red (ATCR). A three-man collective from Anishnaabe/Six Nations communities in Ontario, Canada, ATCR has been garnering impressive attention for its electronic/hip hop style of music that incorporates powwow and rounddance musical influences into hip hop songs. Like Os12 and other musicians practicing newer forms of music, they respectfully incorporate historical styles of Indigenous music within their contemporary sound, thereby contributing to the continuum of Indigenous music.

Since 2008, ATCR's style has been dubbed "powwow-step".¹⁷² Although they are the first to blaze this trail, their influences include musicians who have successfully approached intercultural adaptations in the past: Keith Secola, Buffy St. Marie, and others have paved the way for ATCR's appreciation for the older forms of Indigenous music mixed in with the newer. They represent and reflect the adaptations in today's urban Indigenous people.

According to a *National Post* article,

The whole effect is an urban aboriginal experience that is not only building buzz on blogs and MTV, but is also focusing attention on a traditional form of music that doesn't exactly get mainstream radio airplay. In doing so, though, the group had to be

¹⁷¹ Os12 interview, 2012.

¹⁷² Jesse Kinos-Goodin, "A Tribe Called Red's Urban Powwow," *National Post*, August 23, 2011.

careful of what music they could sample without upsetting older aboriginal generations.¹⁷³

In keeping with song protocols taught to the men at a young age, they do not use any songs without first asking permission. ATCR member Ian Campeau, who was previously a powwow singer, also states,

We want people to dance, so we use songs that are meant for people to dance to. We won't use sacred songs, such as "honour" or "grand entry" songs, which aren't even allowed to be recorded. We have way too much respect for the tradition to do that.¹⁷⁴

ATCR represents a new wave of Indigenous musicians who have managed to respectfully incorporate Indigenous elements of sound within their music and garner attention in the mainstream music industry.

ATCR also address stereotypical ideas and imagery of Indigenous people through a multimedia performance. They collect Hollywood depictions of Indigenous peoples to play on a projector in tandem with their songs. In interviews, they speak about cultural appropriation and debunking myths about Indigenous people. By resisting stereotypes and maintaining an appreciation and respect for Indigenous protocols and history of songs and music, ATCR are a bold example of musicians who resist colonial constructs not only within music but in all aspects of society.

In addition to their music industry popularity, ATCR have also gathered appreciation in academic circles. As mentioned in the literature review, wax cylinder recordings were common practices amongst earlier anthropologists and were used to capture the sounds of Indigenous music. As a collaborative effort, ethnomusicologist Nolan Warden contacted one of the ATCR members, DJ Shub or Dan General, as he had access to a wax cylinder recording

¹⁷³ Kinos-Goodin, "A Tribe Called Red's Urban Powwow," 2.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 3.

of Dan's ancestor, Cayugan Chief Alexander J. General.¹⁷⁵ The resulting collaboration is a mixture of the old song and ATCR's electronic adaptation, titled "General Generations," which captures the essence of the continuum of Indigenous music. The collaboration and the song further demonstrate the importance of connecting old and new forms of Indigenous music as a way of understanding its place, purpose and identity within Indigenous nations and also within academic research.

3.1.1. Honouring Hip Hop in Academia

From an academic perspective, there is very little research about hip hop as a form of Indigenous resistance music. Some scholars such as Karyn Recollet, Beverley Diamond, Charity Marsh and Brett Lashua have begun to assess the "spaces and places and faces"¹⁷⁶ of Indigenous hip hop; however, they themselves indicate a strong need for more explorations focused on this emergent phenomenon.¹⁷⁷ Young people develop a strong connection to the oral storytelling and drumbeat aspects of hip hop, as it is relatable to their Indigenous backgrounds and histories; still, research is always more focused on "traditional" forms of Indigenous music, and newer intercultural adaptations are not examined in the same context. Research lacks a philosophical approach to adaptability in musical forms that are presented

¹⁷⁵ Nolan Warden. "General Generations": An Archival Collaboration with A Tribe Called Red," *Ethnomusicology Review* 16 (2011): 1-2.

¹⁷⁶ Charity Marsh. "Bits and Pieces of Truth: Storytelling, Identity and Hip Hop in Saskatchewan," in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and Exchanges*, ed. Anna Hoefnagels and Beverley Diamond (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 348.

¹⁷⁷ Recollet, "Aural Traditions,"; Diamond, *Native American Music In Eastern North America*; Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth,"; Lashua, "The Art of the Remix," 1-10.

and practiced by contemporary Indigenous people. In hip hop, re-examining the purpose, intent and meaning behind the presentation of music is how one will effectively ascertain Indigenous worldview within the rhythm and lyrics. By moving away from narrow categories of music styles and rigid timelines, researchers can consider Indigenous music within a continuum and explore beyond these boundaries to capture the essence of the music itself.

As a hip hop artist, I have also been involved within the Indigenous hip hop community for many years under the moniker of “Eekwol.” My decision to bridge my creative and academic work is based on a need to understand the motivation behind the growing hip hop phenomenon within Indigenous communities, and to further investigate links to activism and decolonization. Marsh challenges the idea of hip hop representing globalization and says that, in many cases, it is localized to suit cultural, social, economic, and political diversity¹⁷⁸: an excellent tool for decolonization. Marsh describes my thoughts on hip hop and decolonization,:

Hip hop is the genre that enables Eekwol to convey the contradictions and burdens of the current colonial situation in Saskatchewan. From within the hip hop culture she has also begun to think about decolonization and the possibilities of what this might look like: “I can only speak for myself, but I do try to use music as a tool to try to comprehend exactly what needs to happen to decolonize, to decolonize myself and try to talk about it ... music itself is a good tool, but it is not enough. We still need the action because we speak it. I can speak it to death, and I will, but the action has to be there. We have to live it too.”¹⁷⁹

Historically, music has always been interrelated with all aspects of Indigenous society. As an Indigenous musician, I have experienced changes throughout my career that have reminded me of the importance of including music in the act(s) of decolonization and as a part of the grander scheme of preparing and taking action towards an inclusive approach to rebalancing

¹⁷⁸ Marsh, “Bits and Pieces of Truth,” 355.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

our societies. This does not mean a few people dominating or dictating what Indigenous music sounds like or is meant to represent, but rather, all parts of the communal whole contributing to music in different aspects. Thereby, we create a new way of perceiving all types of Indigenous music that represents resistance and benefits a recovery of Indigenous worldview.

As a key component and element of resistance in Indigenous music, many hip hop artists refer to the rhythm of the drum beat as comparable to the historical version of the drum in the way that it is respected and used. In her PhD dissertation, Karyn Recollet describes hip hop artists referring to the drum as symbol of resistance and resilience and very much a foundational aspect of the music.¹⁸⁰ In many ways, one can scan through history and locate the drum as the heart of the nation in both Indigenous cultures and hip hop culture. In addition, hip hop is derived from African American roots where the drum is also a powerful element. This explains why young Indigenous people are attracted to hip hop; the roots are similar. The drum beat that resonates within hip hop beats is not always the same pattern as older Indigenous music; however, like ATCR, many Indigenous beat makers will incorporate these older drum patterns into their production. The difference between the historical versions of Indigenous music and song and hip hop is the use of the drumbeat to recite rapping words in timed precision with the beat and rhythm instead of singing. However, in both, the words and the beat collectively identify a complex message of resistance. The drum is an integral aspect of hip hop music and acknowledgement of this connection can further research into harmonic similarities within older and newer forms of Indigenous music.

¹⁸⁰ Recollet, “Aural Traditions,” 110.

Hip hop lyrics can also be compared to historical versions of songs. Prior to colonial interference, Indigenous tribes had efficient means of communication. Among Plains Cree, oral tradition is the foremost means of sharing knowledge and teachings. The role of the crier in particular was essential to each community; the crier, with or without a drum, would spread news and keep record of the happenings in the community and beyond.¹⁸¹ His way of delivering the words was in a song-like fashion, to attract an audience. Late Elder Simon Kytwayhat recounted,

I remember a story from my grandparents and how it use to be a long time ago. It was in the day of the horses and tipis, before there were buildings or electricity. Out on the Great Plains, early in the morning there would be this man who was known as the Camp Crier. As daybreak showed itself and the sun began to light up the earth, with his drum he would sing for all the people to hear, “Awake up, daylight is coming the birds are already singing our country looks so beautiful.”¹⁸²

The crier played many roles, all of which entailed relaying messages through the use of the word and a drumbeat. In Africa, the Griot would have a similar role of sharing community news through song. This man would travel to different tribes to share and gather information in a performance-like presentation.¹⁸³ For many hip hop emcees, this is a role that they have acquired, relaying thoughts, ideas and information to Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. Many Indigenous hip hoppers have taken on the position of a modern day Crier, one who is more centered on resistance and awareness of culture and history. By comparing these historical roles, we observe a continued practice embedded in current Indigenous hip hop

¹⁸¹ Mandlebaum, *The Plains Cree*, 109.

¹⁸² Linda Young, *First Nations Education* (Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2003), 7.

¹⁸³ Geneva Smitherman. “‘The Chain Remain the Same’: Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation,” *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (September 1997), 4.

music. The use of song and language for the purpose and intent of resistance helps to further revitalize Indigenous worldview through newer forms of music.

In addition to this, some rappers have begun to take their lyrics further by using their original language as a way of acknowledging their own history and culture. By incorporating Indigenous language, they resist the colonial tongue and strive to relearn and revitalize the concepts that exist within the Indigenous words. Once again, language becomes a recognizable instrument in resistance music and hip hop. We can surmise that the original drum traditions and oral traditions are what attract people to the culture of hip hop as it has roots that reflect our own ways of knowing and communicating.

Elements of hip hop—the drum, the lyrics and the language—promote dialogue about and explanation of the growing phenomenon of hip hop within Indigenous communities. From an artist’s perspective, one can mobilize and motivate others through knowledge of history and identity, and a desire to decolonize within. Academically, there is a great need for understanding the way Indigenous hip hop relates to worldview, resistance and decolonization. Recognition of intercultural adaptations of Indigenous music may be valued as integral to understanding Indigenous worldview rather than the limited focus on “traditional” Indigenous music. Also, expanding knowledge and examples of hip hop within an Indigenous context confirms the ways in which this new form of music continues to connect to the spirit world.

CHAPTER 4

RECOVERING INDIGENOUS MUSIC

This chapter summarizes the research findings through a theoretical and philosophical review of the evolution of Indigenous music. Liberating Indigenous music from the rigid dichotomy of “traditional” vs. contemporary is a deliberate act of resistance and a vital aspect of decolonization. This is a difficult task as many Indigenous people are bound to a colonial mentality, set in belief systems that prevent emancipatory actions. Here I move towards current reflections on the historical aspects of music, locating them within these contemporary examples and further releasing song and music from strict definitions and categories. The phenomenon of Indigenous music as a continuum beyond a “traditional” construct reflects worldview in a modern context. From the Indigenous perspective of the research participants, contemplating Indigenous music as a continuum recovers the knowledge, purpose, intention and meaning of music according to Indigenous worldview.

4.1 OVERCOMING OPPRESSION WITH INDIGENOUS MUSIC

In both ceremonial and secular Indigenous music, one can determine deep meanings and teachings within songs, whether they are historical or contemporary versions of Indigenous creative thought. Songs are derived from Indigenous cosmology and they reflect how people connect and relate to the physical world to the spirit world. In order to capture these concepts, decolonial processes must effectively eradicate all preconceived doubt about the power of Indigenous spirituality. By addressing difficulties that evolve with colonization and contemplating the meanings and teachings within the songs from an Indigenous

perspective, we begin to unravel oppressed mentalities and re-remember the music as a connector to the spirit world.

Paulo Freire's theory of oppression is relevant in a broader context, and is useful for this study of Indigenous music as a way of creating a critical consciousness by recognizing the "fear" of change that exists within oppressed people.¹⁸⁴ Most of the interviewees noted that it would be much easier to be accepted within the community than to brave the difficulties associated with resistance. Violet Naytowhow described the shock her family displayed at her interest in ceremony and sweat songs, as many devout Christian families considered Indian spirituality taboo.¹⁸⁵ Os12 explained the "crabs in the bucket" phenomenon, where any crab that tries to climb out is quickly dragged back into the bucket before long.¹⁸⁶ In other words, a person's success can cause jealousy and envy, so attempts are made to keep them from continuing their positive lifestyle. When the oppressed nature of a community and/or people is questioned or excused, the community or the people are either silenced or shunned depending on the community's state of oppression or the person's desire to maintain their resistant behavior.

As a starting point, Freire encourages dialogue as a way of reviewing a peoples' current state of oppression.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the goal of freedom becomes whatever the community views as their process of decolonization. Indigenous music and the musicians themselves prove to be excellent conduits for this process as music brings people together. The messages, intent and purpose of songs garner respect from the community, and musicians

¹⁸⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 84.

¹⁸⁵ Naytowhow interview, 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Os12 interview, 2012.

¹⁸⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 133.

have a greater platform to begin dialogue on oppression. Freire's theory of oppression speaks to those who have the means, knowledge and desire to address oppression; many Indigenous musicians, both ceremonial and secular, are already within that role. Therefore, as ceremonialists struggle to maintain ceremonies, and Indigenous musicians attempt to adhere to Indigenous worldview, a slow and steady awakening ensues within Indigenous thought.

As a means of capturing and addressing systemic inequality, once again, the solutions are embedded in the languages within our Indigenous communities. In a Northern Plains context, all encompassing Cree terms such as *Wahkotowin* and *Miyo Pimachesowin* are present in Indigenous music. As a Plains Cree person who does not speak my language, these concepts present limitations in my comprehension. Cardinal and Hildebrandt state,

The Cree, Dene, Assiniboine and Saulteaux share spiritual philosophies, teachings, laws, and traditions that are remarkably similar to one another. There is an interconnectedness, or *e-miciminitomakahki* among the sacred ceremonies and beliefs of First Nations. ... Elders are able to identify a unique First Nations worldview and philosophy.¹⁸⁸

This assertion benefits those of us who do not speak an Indigenous language, yet theoretical constructs and philosophies within the language are foundational to Indigeneity. This belief is problematic, as Indigenous music, both ceremonial and secular, includes the use of language to explain concepts and/or pay respect to the spiritual elements of the universe. According to Bill Ermine, it is the language of the spirit world and what the spirits respond to.¹⁸⁹ This is why younger generations, including ceremonialists and musicians, are encouraged to learn their languages. As researchers, we do our best to accommodate the conceptualizations

¹⁸⁸ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan*, 9.

¹⁸⁹ Ermine interview, 2012.

immersed in the words, while recognizing that the results will not be as rich as the results of those who speak and understand the language.

By engaging in *Miyo-Pimachesowin* in musical practice, a person is acting towards living in a good way and maintaining Indigenous songs and music. For many ceremonialists and contemporary musicians, the desire for *Miyo-Pimachesowin* is what drives the continuum of sound. In addition, the concept of *Wahkotowin* can further complete the act of learning, practicing, presenting, and performing songs and music by acknowledging that the intention is to maintain relationships with family, the land and universe. Brenda MacDougall defines this:

In the Cree language, *wahkootowin* was the term used to express the sense that family was the foundational relationship for pursuing any economic, political, social, or cultural activities and alliances. Strictly translated, *wahkootowin* can be defined as “relationship” or “relative,” but this belies much of the meaning and sentiment that the term and its derivatives actually express.¹⁹⁰

From this concept, we can derive that the essential balance in community is based on family; the intricacy and importance of these relationships supports Northern Plains peoples’ life. Songs are based on all of these relationships and assist in achieving balance. The importance of placing value and recognition on Indigenous conceptualizations in the language only helps to develop stronger attachments to the goal of Indigenous critical consciousness and anti-oppressive behavior and thought.

My research findings outlined relevant existing theories that merely touched upon the needs within Indigenous society. Although Cree terms such as *Wahkotowin* and *Miyo-Pimachesowin* begin to allow a space for this dialogue, converting these into academic context dilutes some of the meaning within the terms. Indigenous researchers know that

¹⁹⁰ MacDougall, *Wahkootowin*, 433.

phenomena exist all around us and that we must establish theory based on language, survival, identity, and adaptation. When we critically analyze our Indigenous history and current colonial state, we also develop a new fear of wanting to be a catalyst for change for our people; however, language limitations prevent us from fully understanding the solution from within our Indigenous worldview. A theoretical framework for a study of Indigenous music that captures the needs of the Indigenous community is based on themes of resistance and oppression, and concepts within the languages. The immediate solution to overcoming oppression is to relearn our languages, as each individual that has intentions to maintain Indigenous culture responsibly and respectfully (re-) constructs the languages. In this way, we define theory within our terms.

Indigenous musicians prove that musical culture is based on a fluid, ongoing continuation of sound that evolved for the purpose of maintaining a connection to the spirit world, so language within their songs and music (re-) builds philosophical foundations within Indigenous thought. The diversity of Indigenous music and musicians allows space for different dimensions of thought and intention. This research is meant to capture the voices of those who strongly advocate for anti-colonial awareness and maintenance of Indigenous worldview through music. So, many of those who are fully engaged in ceremonial practice and those who exercise social forms of music are of the same thought. They are firmly rooted in a spiritual and political commitment that allows adaptations, yet perpetuates ancestral preservation of sound.

4.2 THE CONTINUUM OF INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE MUSIC

Indigenous resistance music has always resonated in the sound of the drum, in the voice of a bird and in the song of a spirit. Now, we hear the same echo of resistance in newer genres and styles of music, adding to the future of Indigenous cultural revitalization through preservation of protocols. But, where does the artist's desire to protect these beliefs develop? Amidst temptation to "sell out" by denying cultural protocols, many choose to maintain their identity and teachings, sacrificing industry success for spiritual success. To frame this discussion, the concepts of creativity and connections of ancestral teachings within modern Indigenous music are both key factors in locating a continuum within Indigenous resistance music. There are no "traditional" divides between a spirit song and a rap song, when the intent of the artist exists in the same place.

At the close of our interview session, Os12 shared a lasting thought with me. He revealed a key component in his value system: creativity. He described that creating art is not an excessive or frivolous act; rather, it is an essential need for human beings to achieve contentment and happiness, or *Miyo Pimachesowin*. According to Os12, we have always been creative people, and our music exposes this truth regardless of its content.¹⁹¹ From a non-Indigenous perspective, Dr. Gabor Mate echoes that, without our creative expression, all other parts of our selves suffer, as there is no balance.¹⁹² The popularity of holistic practice within the modern world demonstrates the realization that creativity is essential to all aspects of life. According to Indigenous history, we see that music within all realms of thought has always

¹⁹¹ Os12 interview, 2012.

¹⁹² Dr. Gabor Mate, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* (Mississauga: Knopf, 2008), 213.

been present, not extricated as separate from the interconnected elements of the spiritual, physical, mental and emotional.

For the purpose of this research, I conclude that creativity is necessary in acknowledging changes and adaptations throughout history, thereby developing decolonization strategies. Creative invention is what makes cultures to dynamic and, therefore, what helps them survive. Music, while sometimes strictly set in patterns and style, always adapts to the environment. Based on circumstance and need, songs reflect current times, disproving “traditional” limitations and proving successful results within a modern context. Referring to Albert Berland’s comments, within the ceremonial context we comprehend a vivid display of creativity as Indigenous spirituality and survival prevail in adjusted realities.¹⁹³ Also within examples of modern genres of music, Indigenous people creatively manifest their worldview within music and performance as a means of (re-) discovering their identity and attempting to decolonize themselves and their people.

Some scholars have incorporated music into their projects as a way of establishing creativity as a foundation for education and identity building, yet ongoing analysis remains limited to temporary projects due to time and funding, facilities and volunteers. There are excellent examples of hip hop projects in inner city areas that involve young people as a part of the decision making and creation process, thereby maintaining their sense of identity and

¹⁹³ Berland interview, 2012.

ownership of the music.¹⁹⁴ Charity Marsh conducts these projects with a strong belief that creativity engenders decolonization action. She claims:

It is significant that through the Hip Hop Project, the participants are engaging in a dialogue about the world around them, and where they see themselves fitting in or not fitting in. Through their raps, beats, graffiti, and dance, the students are telling stories—to each other, to their peers, to their families, and to their communities—about how they understand their own politics, acts of resistance and compliance, fears, anxieties, dreams, celebrations, identity, and culture. In doing so they are investing in a global hip hop dialogue that encourages youth expression and activism in spite of media representations of capitalist narratives of excess, hyper-masculinity, and hegemonic norms.¹⁹⁵

Through creativity in the hip hop medium, Indigenous young people draw awareness to themselves while building skills as musicians, dancers and entrepreneurs. While resources limit the ability to follow up with the project participants, word of mouth and greater interest in the annual project speak to the results. Once their creativity is nurtured, the young people carry it through their lifestyle, promoting a sense of identity and belonging through something that they feel good at—involvement in Indigenous music. Therefore, creativity should be considered as essential in the development of decolonization strategies from both an academic and a musician's perspective.

In addition to creativity, new artists share ancestral stories within modern forms of music. Os12, Violet Naylor, Buffy St. Marie, Digging Roots, Derek Miller, Kinnie Starr, Tanya Tagaq, Samian, Wab Kinew and other Indigenous artists are part of the most recent stage of the continuum of Indigenous music. Beyond the actual sound and style of their music, in many ways they embody the history of their respective ancestry through song and instrument. Each practices their Indigeneity with their music and lifestyle. These are the

¹⁹⁴ Charity Marsh, "Research Overview: Hip Hop as Methodology: Ways of Knowing," *Canadian Journal of Communications* 37 (2012): 193–203; Lashua, "Just Another Native?" **PAGE?;** Lashua, "The Art of the Remix," 2.

¹⁹⁵ Marsh, "Research Overview," 201.

artists who represent the continuum of sound by resisting an exchange of their own values and beliefs for mass industry success.

As both Os12 and Violet Naytowhow described in their interviews, some of their songs come from a spiritual place. Os12's reference to writing music as a form of "vision quest"¹⁹⁶ and Violet's recollection of bird songs¹⁹⁷ and dreamed lyrics all relate to the concept of *pawakan*; an offering of song to the artists. In an interview, Indigenous blues guitarist, Derek Miller from Six Nations in Ontario, Canada describes his connection to music as metaphysical and a direct link to the Creator. He explores that reality and tries to become as much of a "musical shaman" as he can for his people.¹⁹⁸ Derek sees his purpose in life as contributing to the evolution of music by "going fishing or hunting for melodic hooks or lyrics that resonate with me and my audience."¹⁹⁹ Derek's approach to music is comparable to that of a ceremonialist seeking guidance from the spirit world. The artists attribute their musical creations to a spiritual connection.

Not only do the artists draw spiritual connection through songwriting experience, many practice ceremonies as a way of maintaining their musical careers. Violet Naytowhow attributes her success to ceremonial commitment and continues to give thanks to the spiritual realm.²⁰⁰ She does this by cleansing with sweetgrass or sage before each performance, leading a healthy and clean lifestyle, being humble and treating other human and animal beings with respect. In interviews and within their lyrics, other Indigenous musicians share similar approaches. For many, leading a clean lifestyle may not be a priority, yet their music still

¹⁹⁶ Os12 interview, 2012.

¹⁹⁷ Naytowhow interview, 2012.

¹⁹⁸ Derek Miller, interview by Ryan MacMahon, *Red Man Laughing*, June 28, 2012.

¹⁹⁹ Miller interview, 2012.

²⁰⁰ Naytowhow Interview, 2012.

resonates from a spiritual place regardless of the genre or style. If we set parameters as to who is more spiritual, we perpetuate the “traditional” vs. “non-traditional” dichotomy. As human beings, spirituality is an individual act for a collective purpose.

When used in a respectful way, instruments such as the drum, rattle, flute and whistle add to modern musicians’ compositions. Used since the beginning of time, these ancestral sounds accommodate maintenance of culture and identity. However, the use of these instruments can be problematic if protocols are not followed. Also, the voice as an instrument must be considered, as certain sacred sounds and words are not to be sung outside of a ceremonial setting.²⁰¹ As Violet Naytowhow, Marc Longjohn, Albert Berland and Bill Ermine confirmed, drums and rattles should be used properly; otherwise, they can become detrimental to the music. Mindfulness and carefulness when performing or recording with these instruments directly promote Indigenous worldview and ancestral knowledge in Indigenous music.

Once again, storytelling is a prominent feature in modern song and music. Indigenous resistance musicians share a decolonization perspective that opposes a mainstream colonial understanding of history. Through colorful lyrics and melodies, concepts, teachings, beliefs, knowledge and history are presented as a way of upholding culture and rediscovering truth. As a musician, I believe that we are engaging in a ceremony when performing powerful pieces that tell spiritual truths through body, instrument and voice. We characterize ourselves as conduits and these acts are our ancestors communicating through us. This is similar to ceremonial accounts described by Albert Berland and Bill Ermine where the spirits join in and

²⁰¹ Berland interview, 2012.

speak through the person conducting the ceremony.²⁰² These accounts speak to a continuation of the involvement of the spiritual beings within modern forms of Indigenous music.

Lastly, language has been an important theme throughout this thesis. The use of Indigenous languages within a ceremonial context is essential to the survival of the ceremonies themselves. However, in a secular context, many of the songs are sung in English, further dividing them from the spirit world. This is why some artists, like Tanya Tagaq, Samian and I have begun to study and relearn our ancestral language(s) in an attempt to revitalize these connections. As a goal, incorporating the language begins the process of decolonization for many, allowing people to gain understanding of and a sense of pride in their culture and history. This is a beginning stage that will continue to grow in the next while, ensuring that the continuum is based on resistance to loss of language.

Overall, much of modern Indigenous music is similar to its historical practice in many ways. The intention, purpose, message and meaning remains the same, and therefore the results are similar. By suggesting theory based on anti-oppression and Indigenous concepts we begin to examine the absolute necessity for Indigenous music within all aspects of today's environment as a means of resisting ongoing colonization and maintaining relationships with both the physical and spiritual world. The research participants and other Indigenous musicians share a sense of *Wahkotowin* and a desire to resist oppression, by sustaining their creativity based on ancestories, the stories of our ancestors, within a modern context.

²⁰² Berland interview, 2012; Ermine interview, 2012.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous music that is created, practiced and performed today is part of a continuum of sound that starts from the beginning of time and extends right into the present. It is created and fostered by worldviews, ideologies and actions that are based on historical and modern times. Indigenous music is related to all facets of Indigenous life in the physical, political and spiritual worlds. Through a trans-disciplinary approach, this thesis allows reconsideration of the place and space in which Indigenous music dwells within our current culture. By lifting the limited definitions of traditional, this thesis shows that the idea of Indigenous music becomes an emancipatory, evolving and constant stream of consciousness embedded in the adaptations of our people.

Thanks to the interviewees, I have constructed a unique understanding of Indigenous music, how it adapts with modernization, yet maintains an original intention, purpose, meaning and message. Indigenous worldview, consisting of ceremonies, protocols, teachings and knowledge of history, ensures continued existence through song and music. As we begin to consider decolonization strategies within Indigenous communities, musicians and ceremonialists serve an essential role in this process. They have described the ways in which resistance serves to both maintain worldview through continued practice of ceremony, and also to decolonize through activism. To explore this truth, I focused on the drum, women's roles, prayers, language and hip hop as examples of resistance within Indigenous nations. Each interviewee provided important insights into these facets within modern environments and how they continue to change, yet sustain their original intent.

While each section shares knowledge of Indigenous music, this thesis would benefit from further exploration and consideration, as my results were limited by time and thesis length. For example, the Northern Plains people retain intricate drum teachings that follow generations of families. As Albert and Bill lament, many Elders pass on, and knowledge and teachings go along with them.²⁰³ Also, the current roles of Indigenous women are in flux and there is an urgent need for further research into the history of women and men within decolonization contexts. Lastly, the ever-growing popularity of Indigenous hip hop as a form of resistance builds awareness of newer forms of sound that embody ancestral knowledge. Further academic study of these phenomena would greatly benefit Indigenous communities.

Overall, this journey has taught me that Indigenous music is alive and strong within Indigenous communities. By eradicating the concept of “traditional,” music becomes a part of a fluid continuum that captures worldview through voice and instrument without constricting purpose and intention. While Indigenous music cannot be defined, it can be nurtured, acknowledged and respected as an integral part of our past, present and future. Perhaps one day we will no longer conceive resistance integrated in the songs and music as they will be immersed within an enlightened, decolonized society where music, once again, sits comfortably within all aspects of Indigenous life.

²⁰³ Berland Interview, 2012; Ermine Interview, 2012.

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GLOSSARY OF CREE TERMS

Kookum - Grandmother

Miyo-Pimachesowin - Making one's own living based on a strong value system and particular ways of maintaining self-sufficiency.

Mushoom - Grandfather

Nehiyaw – A Cree person

Pawakan - dreaming guardian spirit, a lifelong companion not easily obtained.

Pastahowin – whatever you do in life, positive or negative, will come back to you and/or your family

Wahkotowin - Relationships between Indigenous people and environment, including kinship and connection and commitment to the land.