



The Resurgence of Indigenous Women's Knowledge and Resistance in Relation to Land and Territoriality: Transnational and Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Leanne Simpson

Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogaming

Wanda Nanibush

Curator in Residence, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto

Carol Williams

University of Lethbridge (Department of Women & Gender Studies)

“Expressing our sovereignties...”

[1] Indigenous women and Two-Spirit LGBTQI people have been involved in resistance, dissent, mobilization and resurgence since the very beginnings of colonial occupation. We have intervened on a host of issues – sovereignty, nationhood, self-determination, governance, politics, jurisdiction, citizenship, international diplomacy and the protection of Indigenous lands, to name just a few. The logics of colonialism, however, have consistently denied and obfuscated these interventions, attacking the power of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit LGBTQI people by framing these issues outside of the

political sphere and placing them firmly in the place of perpetual victimhood. Too often, the "activism" of Indigenous women has been reduced in the academic literature to issues regarding identity, violence, and discrimination – in a context that removes these issues from their colonial roots and that undermines and erases Indigenous nationhood. This does a tremendous disservice to our collective work.

[2] The essays in this volume aim to begin to unpack some of these issues and place the resurgence of Indigenous nations in a framework that interrogates the colonial logics of bio-power – race, gender and sexuality. This is just the very first and tiniest of steps towards a larger project of recognizing, supporting and generating the resistance and resurgence of Indigenous nations based on our own political traditions, not on entrenched heteropatriarchy. Indigenous women have always known that growing strong, resilient nations is based on diversity, generated consensus, authentic power rather than authoritarian power and the maintenance of good relationships rather over coercive ones. With this knowledge, our communities can remain firmly planted, taking our space in the world, actively expressing our sovereignties and living as *Indigenous Peoples* in our homelands.

Leanne Simpson, Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogaming

"A fight for life itself..."

[3] I come to the ideas of resistance and resurgence from the place where intellectual engagement is not severed from the bodies' memories or the heart's commitments or my culture's knowledges and practices. Resistance is a daily practice and a community process with an ever-changing meanings. In English usage, resistance has meant being against a government or an occupier. From the Latin *resistere* it means "to resist, to stand back, withstand," and further breaks down to the re- "against" and *sistere*- "take a stand, stand firm." These meanings can encapsulate the Indigenous resistance to over 500 years of colonialism and neo-colonialism. This captures the persistence in maintaining our philosophies, languages, political institutions, social practices and family lives despite policies meant to eradicate them. It really is incredible how firm we stand. Yet the meaning is not enough because it does not engage Indigenous actions that go well beyond resistance to something into the territory of resurgence or the active process of living culturally sovereign. Resistance while necessary does not always dislodge the primacy and ground of the values and systems against which it fights.

[4] The word *resistance* can take on new meanings as it crosses over into Anishnabeg territory. Translated into one Anishinabemowin dialect, *resistance* becomes a metaphor of planting or a being planted. A plant grows from and continues to grow solid roots into the ground while at the same time it expands above ground into a new being, bringing with it the necessities for life beyond itself. If we think of resistance in this vein it becomes many resistances, a multi-faceted fight to maintain the spaces/resources that facilitate imagining a new world as well as the active creation of new ways of being Indigenous. We come to the earth planted and yet continue to root. It is our ancestors (more than just human ones) that form our root systems, they feed us and store for the future. We need to be planted to absorb the nutrients of the earth. This is not a process of being against but of being with. Our stems process the past here and now. How we have absorbed the past will determine if our structure will rise or fall. Leaves, flowers, and fruit are the future products of this oscillation between ancestors knowledge and current understandings, and they all bear seeds for the future, giving back when the process is in harmony and circulating continuously. If the process goes wrong, there will be no future seeds or roots. There is no stasis and no linearity in plants. The fight for territory, for cultural differences and for sovereignty is a fight for life itself and for every living being in all its complexity, diversity and transformative power. Maybe that is why assimilation will never be a desirable option.

Wanda Nanibush, Curator in Residence, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto

“Develop an ethical consciousness...”

[5] The intellectual labour and knowledge production of Indigenous friends and colleagues, if heeded, leads to the development of an ethical consciousness. As one contributor Daphne Taylor Garcia aptly prompts, this type of criticality is enabled by a purposeful *capacity to listen*—yet, this perspective is uncommon in most academic disciplines many of which are dominated by non-Indigenous scholars. The ability to speak back to and refute, colonialism or, more significantly, for non-indigenous historians to *listen* beyond one's inherited and maintained empowerment and authority is crucial. Non-Indigenous scholars may struggle to navigate the massive entanglement of misrepresentation about Indigeneity, Indigenous knowledge and history. While all peoples may experience the *multigenerational* and *spatial* effect of colonialism (which grants the non-Indigenous individual permission to remain ignorant of the monumental impact of the Indian Act or to be racist), only some benefit from it. Canada's **Indian Act** exemplifies how a state apparatus is mobilized to collectively segregate peoples and within the Indigenous collective, as Bonita Lawrence and Joanne Barker have elaborated elsewhere, individually distinguish and thus divide while

ultimately dispossessing Indigenous Nations of the right to self-govern. Discriminatory practices between peoples of variously situated populations are enabled by colonialism's purposeful address while discrimination varies at the individual level. Is it possible to understand colonialism's effects without active participation in a *collective* experience or, conversely, may colonialism be resisted without a *community* of embodied analysis?

[6] Perhaps political force, and a critique of the "unrealities" of colonialism most effectively emerge from an *oppositional gaze*—and as the grassroots activism of Mary Two-Axe Early, Jeannette Corbière-Lavelle, Yvonne Bedard, and Sandra Lovelace among other women and organizations who fought to repeal discriminatory sections of Canada's federal Indian Act, has decisively shown—the actions of women and girls can strategically unravel even hegemonic consolidations of state or informal power.

[7] The intellectual and cultural resurgence or "hemispheric consciousness" of Indigenous thought and knowledge constitutes what Renya Ramirez identifies as a *Native hub*—a virtual, or actual convergence of cultural, political and social activities— the *hub*, moreover, is not static but mobile or portable (Ramirez 3). Writers, poets, artists, videographers, filmmakers, scholars, spiritual leaders, and policy changers craft hubs across disciplinary, tribal, and geographic boundaries to cross-pollinate the

languages and tools of change and transformation. The contributors in this issue of *InTensions* seed *transnationalisms* and anticipate the promise of *transformation*. *Transnationalism* does not imply the conventional politically-bounded nation states (as in those nations who have colonized other nations) but, as Ramirez describes, represents adaptive communicative *links* between urban peoples: those who remain connected, or reconnecting, to Indigenous nations (who are themselves already transnational), even while living away from ancestral homelands. *Transformation* is grounded in critical familiarity with historical acts, but is enhanced or compounded by contemporary public advocacy, protest, spoken word, and performance all made lush by a grasp of political possibilities. A ferment of thought and action will grow from rich furrows.

Carol Williams, University of Lethbridge

Works Cited

Ramirez, Ramirez. 2007. *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*. Durham: Duke UP.