

**She's Ahead of the Times: A Study of How Buffy Sainte-Marie's Music Addresses
Indigenous Rights**

by

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She's Ahead of the Times: A Study of How Buffy Sainte-Marie's Music Addresses Indigenous Rights

submitted by Sofie Athanasia Tsatas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Most singer-songwriters in the 1960s and 1970s wrote protest music in opposition to the Vietnam War and in support of the Civil Rights Movement. Cree musician Buffy Sainte-Marie (b. 1941), however, was one of the few artists composing songs to call out the wrongs done to Indigenous peoples in North America, such as land dispossession, treaty violations, relocation, and Residential Schools. This study demonstrates how Sainte-Marie's music addresses Indigenous injustices within both Canada and the United States.

Discussions of Sainte-Marie's music have dealt mainly with her lyrics. This study, in contrast, examines both lyrics and music, including such elements as harmony, timbre, form, vocal delivery, and dynamics. Furthermore, her songs are placed within the history of the protest music genre, revealing how Sainte-Marie uses aspects of the genre to advocate for Indigenous rights. Each chapter presents an analysis of how Sainte-Marie's songs disrupt colonialism. Her music offers a history that challenges and exposes the blind spots in settler histories. Sainte-Marie also addresses the concerns of the American Indian Movement during the 1970s and the sexism that took place within the organization.

By placing Sainte-Marie's songs within the protest music genre, and through an analysis of both textual and musical elements, this study highlights the importance of her music in challenging the listener to really *listen* to what she has to say and the particular stories that she chooses to tell. The thesis reveals the significance of Sainte-Marie's music in efforts of decolonization and allows the listener to reflect on current Indigenous injustices still taking place in North America.

Lay Summary

In this thesis I demonstrate how Cree musician Buffy Sainte-Marie (b. 1941) advocates for Indigenous rights and addresses Indigenous injustices within her music. In particular, I analyze the lyrics and music of four of her songs (“Now that the Buffalo’s Gone,” “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying,” “Starwalker,” and “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee”) to reveal how they call out the wrongs done to Indigenous peoples by both the Canadian and American governments.

Most singer-songwriters in the 1960s and 1970s were writing protest music in opposition to the Vietnam War and in support of the Civil Rights Movement. Sainte-Marie, in contrast, drew attention to the issues facing Indigenous peoples. This thesis is significant because it reveals the important role played by Sainte-Marie in the fight for Indigenous rights. Additionally, it reveals how her activism then and now is important for current efforts at decolonization in North America.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Sofie Athanasia Tsatas.

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A special thank you to Dr. Dory Nason for her careful and meticulous reading of my research and all that I have learnt from her in her Indigenous Studies course. The knowledge that she has passed down will always be with me.

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Lastly, a big thank you to my family for all of their love. Mom, Dad, Terry, Michael, Maya, Noelle, and Sally, I would not have been able to do this without you. Thank you for supporting me throughout all of my endeavors.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and their families. We hear, love, support, and miss you.

<http://itstartswithus-mmiw.com/>

Chapter 1: Introduction

With the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008, efforts at decolonization have become an important topic in Canada. Many universities have begun incorporating land acknowledgements in order to provide recognition of the Indigenous land that they are situated on. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has collected eyewitness and survivor reports of the abuses that took place in the Residential School System, offering survivors and their families support and recognition of how their lives have been negatively impacted by Canada's colonial history. Current attempts at decolonization, though, have not taken away from the destructive effects of Canada's turbulent history of colonialism. Indigenous communities today suffer from a shortage of clean drinking water, lack of funds and basic resources, intergenerational trauma, and the claiming of their land by the federal government for valuable goods and resources.¹ Settler history in the United States is not any different. In fact, both Canada and the United States have engaged in the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples and communities through colonial efforts such as land dispossession and assimilation.

While attempts at acknowledging North America's settler history are increasing, many settlers in both the United States and Canada are still unaware of certain aspects of colonial history that have taken place. Literary scholar and writer Thomas King writes how first contact between settlers and Indigenous peoples resulted in colonists attempting to exterminate Indigenous communities and tribes.² Extermination later led way to assimilation and by the 19th-

¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2015, 1, accessed March 1, 2020, http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf

² Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, illustrated edition (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2017), 112.

century, “both came together in an amalgam of militarism and social theory that allowed North America to mount a series of benevolent assaults on Native people” through deception and coercion, “assaults that sought to dismantle Native culture with missionary zeal and humanitarian paternalism.”³ Both Canada and the United States launched such assimilative campaigns under the guise of “humanitarianism,” classifying their efforts as a means to help Indigenous peoples, and not to dismantle their culture.⁴

Cree musician Buffy Sainte-Marie (b. 1941), began singing of the colonial injustices taking place against Indigenous peoples in both Canada and the United States in the early 1960s, well before many other musicians took up that fight. Born in February 1941 on the Piapot Reserve in the Qu’Appelle Valley, Saskatchewan, Sainte-Marie was adopted by Albert and Winifred Sainte-Marie and grew up in both Sebago Lake in Maine and North Reading and Wakefield in Massachusetts.⁵ At three years old, Sainte-Marie discovered a love for the piano and composition and from there her passion grew. She mainly learned music by ear and would make up her own songs.⁶ While attending the University of Massachusetts, Sainte-Marie began to explore Indigeneity and learned of North America’s horrifying colonization efforts and its present day ramifications.⁷ Most of her peers were non-Indigenous and were unaware of colonialism.⁸ Her fellow students were “brimming with ideas around justice, civil rights, and the

³ King, *The Inconvenient Indian*, 112.

⁴ J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 64; Eric Taylor Woods, “A Cultural Approach to a Canadian Tragedy: The Indian Residential Schools as a Sacred Enterprise,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no. 2 (2013): 177-78.

⁵ Andrea Warner, *Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2018), 15-6.

⁶ Warner, *Buffy Sainte-Marie*, 16-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*

burgeoning protest movements.”⁹ No one though, was discussing Indigenous rights.¹⁰ In 1962, when she finished her University degree, Sainte-Marie moved to New York City and began performing music full-time.¹¹ To this day, Sainte-Marie has released twenty-one albums and has engaged in a range of different genres from folk to country, protest, rock, electronic music, and pop-rock. Her songs take on themes of protest, Indigenous rights, love, and anti-war sentiments. Current works still point out present-day Indigenous injustices.

In this thesis, I explore how Sainte-Marie’s music addresses Indigenous injustices within North America. Indigenous music is a relatively new topic of study in musicology, especially the music of Sainte-Marie, whose work has been neglected.¹² Beverley Diamond has written much on Indigenous contemporary music by Indigenous women. Her 2010 article “Native American Contemporary Music: The Women,” examines how Indigenous female artists conceptualize their roles as musicians in relation to the communities in which they grew up or now live.¹³ Other topics discussed in this article include choice of media, stage experience, artistic aims, recording experience, and the interplay of tradition and innovation in the compositional process.¹⁴ The specific Indigenous musicians that Diamond spoke to and wrote about in the article include: Sadie Buck, Alanis Obomsawin, Mary Youngblood, Joy Harjo, Pura Fe, Soni Moreno, Jennifer

⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 49, 52.

¹² For an analysis of text and metre in Sainte-Marie’s work, please see: Nancy Murphy, “‘The Times They Are A-Changin’’: Flexible Meter and Text Expression in 1960s and 70s Singer-Songwriter Music,” (Ph.D. diss., the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2015), 202-03.

¹³ Beverley Diamond, “Native American Contemporary Music: The Women,” *The World of Music* 52, no. 1/3 (2010): 389.

¹⁴ Diamond, “Native American Contemporary Music: The Women,” 389.

Kreisberg, Jani Lauzon, Mishi Donovan, Lucie Idlout, Joanne Shenandoah, and Buffy Sainte-Marie.¹⁵ In her conclusion, Diamond asserts that the music of these Indigenous women

Is often action-oriented, offering new possibilities for being a Native American woman, sometimes by finding contemporary means of reinforcing historically rooted traditions and values, sometimes by playing – tricksterlike – with various identities of modernity (be they diva, rock star, historian, activist or environmentalist), sometimes by insisting on the in-betweenness of living among different cultural worlds.¹⁶

Nancy Murphy has written on the expressive qualities of metre and tempo used in songs by singer-songwriters such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Cat Stevens, and Sainte-Marie.¹⁷ On Sainte-Marie’s music, Murphy asserts that she uses “expressive timing to highlight the meaning of her lyrics.”¹⁸ An example of such timing is the use of *ritardando* at lyrically specific moments.¹⁹ Furthermore, Murphy argues that Sainte-Marie’s music employs irregular metric structures to highlight personal and religious themes.²⁰ Murphy’s dissertation provides valuable musicological and theoretical research into Sainte-Marie’s music.

Both Kimberli Lee and Seonghoon Kim have written articles on Sainte-Marie’s music. Lee’s “Singing for the People: The Protest Music of Buffy Sainte-Marie and Floyd Westerman” examines how “Indigenous continuance, survival, and resistance are interwoven “ in the music of the two artists.²¹ She further discusses the blend between traditional Indigenous sounds and contemporary instrumentation in their music and what this means in regards to oral traditions.²²

¹⁵ Diamond, 389.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹⁷ Murphy, “‘The Times They Are A-Changin’,” ii.

¹⁸ Murphy, 94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

²¹ Kimberli Lee, “Singing for the People: The Protest Music of Buffy Sainte-Marie and Floyd Westerman,” in *Indigenous Pop: Native American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*, eds. Jeff Berglund, Jan Johnson, and Kimberli Lee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 62.

²² Lee, “Singing for the People,” 62-3.

In her article “‘Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee’: Oral Tradition, Native American Activism, and Buffy Sainte-Marie’s Folk Songs,” (2015), Seonghoon Kim discusses how Sainte-Marie’s music offered a critical voice to both the Civil Rights Movement and the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.²³ Kim looks at specific songs written during the Red Power Movement that address issues of colonization and assimilation.²⁴

My research at times overlaps with Kim’s. We both analyze the lyrical content of songs from the 1960s and 1970s and how they address Indigenous injustices that have been overlooked in settler historical accounts. In contrast to Kim’s article, I offer an analysis of the music in terms of harmony, timbre, dynamics, form, and vocal delivery. Furthermore, I situate each song within the history of the protest music genre, examining how Sainte-Marie uses direct approaches to advocate for Indigenous rights.

In my first chapter, I analyze Sainte-Marie’s “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone,” and “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying,” and examine how they deal with land dispossession and the Residential School system, among other issues. Both songs point out the gaps in settler histories in regards to assimilation and the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples and communities. I also draw upon Leanne Simpson’s idea of shared codes within the work of Indigenous artists and how Sainte-Marie’s music is coded to challenge settler historical accounts.²⁵

²³ Seonghoon Kim, “‘Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee’: Oral Tradition, Native American Activism, and Buffy Sainte-Marie’s Folk Songs,” *Journal of American Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 147, accessed March 16, 2020, <http://kiss.kstudy.com/thesis/thesis-view.asp?key=3355263>

²⁴ Kim, “‘Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee’,” 147.

²⁵ Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 200.

The second chapter explores how “Starwalker” and “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,” reinforce the goals of the American Indian Movement (AIM) during the 1970s while also calling out the rampant sexism within the organization. I analyze how “Starwalker” presents a call for unity among Indigenous activists, while also placing Indigenous peoples at the forefront of their history. Additionally, I look at how “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” directly responds to the federal government’s handling of the Wounded Knee Occupation in 1973 and the consequences thereof, especially for Annie Mae Pictou Aquash who was a close friend of Sainte-Marie and a leading member of AIM. Both songs highlight the importance of Indigenous resistance. In the conclusion I offer a summary of and reflection on my research and findings. I also briefly extend my research to Sainte-Marie’s songs today and consider how her current works are similar in content and approach to the earlier pieces.

This thesis expands the scope of the scholarship on Sainte-Marie’s music by placing her work in the context of the protest song during the 1960s and by examining how her songs lyrically and musically address specific Indigenous injustices. A discussion of the musical, political, and cultural dimensions of her songs reveals the significance of those works in the Indigenous rights campaigns of the 1960s-1980s. My work also demonstrates the importance of Sainte-Marie’s songs in the context of decolonization efforts and aims to encourage settler readers to reflect on their history and unknowing contributions to colonialism. I hope that my research will inspire further discussion of Sainte-Marie’s music in the field of musicology and among settler and Indigenous peoples engaged in decolonial efforts today in both Canada and the United States.

While completing this research, I realized that there was a lot that I initially did not know about the colonial endeavors of both the Canadian and American governments. It was shocking,

disheartening, depressing, but absolutely necessary to read about treaties, treaty violations, and Residential Schools. As a settler living in Canada, my responsibility is to educate myself about my role as a settler, recognize my actions, and do what I can to decolonize myself. This thesis allowed me to understand how I can decolonize my scholarship as well. While writing the thesis, I had the great pleasure of meeting music theorist Robin Attas, who specializes in issues of decolonization in higher education. From her, I learned the importance of giving voice to those who you are researching. As such, I decided to use many quotations from Buffy Sainte-Marie so as to allow her to tell her story. I also enrolled in an Indigenous Studies course taught by Professor Dory Nason in order to learn more about Indigenous literature and how I can decolonize my language. I hope to have shown not only how Sainte-Marie's music addresses Indigenous rights, but also how settler scholars can recognize their roles as settlers and do what they can to decolonize their work.

Chapter 2: Disrupting the History of Colonialism

In his book *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, Thomas King writes: “Most of us think that history is the past. It’s not. History is the stories we tell about the past.”²⁶ The stories that we choose to tell is how the past is defined. It is important, therefore, to consider which stories have been chosen and by whom. In her songs “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” (1964), and “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying” (1966), Buffy Sainte-Marie challenges the ways in which history has been taught.²⁷ Most histories have forgotten Indigenous peoples.²⁸ Missing or neglected are the stories of colonialism, genocide, and the injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples as a result of colonial endeavors.²⁹ Instead of discussing how settlers stole the land and how they continue to engage in land dispossession even today, and how both Canada and the United States are guilty of genocide, namely in the Residential School system, the history books have chosen to tell of the “greatness” that has been accomplished since “discovery.” But North American history is rife with suffering, death, and trauma to which Indigenous peoples have been subjected to since settlers first arrived on their land.

This chapter will explore how Sainte-Marie disrupts the history of colonialism by offering a history that challenges and exposes the blind spots in settler histories in “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” and “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying.” According to Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson, Indigenous artists can code their work to “disrupt the noise

²⁶ King, 4.

²⁷ Nancy Murphy, 94.

²⁸ King, 22.

²⁹ Kim, 148,

of colonialism.”³⁰ When Indigenous artists code their work, it becomes an act of resurgence that is collectivized when “Indigenous peoples recognize the shared code.”³¹ The code can apply to many things. For Leanne Simpson, her code is relying on Nishnaabeg aesthetic principles in her writings in order to “speak to multiple audiences.”³² For Sainte-Marie, her code consists of the stories that she chooses to tell in her songs, stories that Indigenous peoples will understand. The Indigenous injustices that she addresses are the dispossession of land, Residential Schools, genocide, and the writing of history.

2.1 Protest Music Scene

Buffy Sainte-Marie’s music emerged in the 1960s, with her first album *It’s My Way!* released in 1964. She had begun performing in the coffeehouses of Greenwich Village in New York City and Toronto, cities where the folk scene was unfolding.³³ According to Andrea Warner, Sainte-Marie “found herself sharing stages and spaces, exchanging ideas with, and observing established artists and future superstars,” within the folk scene.³⁴ It was at one specific coffee house, Gerde’s Folk City in Greenwich Village, where Sainte-Marie met Bob Dylan, one of her contemporaries. Dylan heard and enjoyed many of her songs and the two of them also performed at the Newport Folk Festival.³⁵ Upon hearing her music, Dylan suggested that she play at The Gaslight, a well-known venue in New York City at the time.³⁶ This is how she met

³⁰ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 200.

³¹ Simpson, 200.

³² Ibid.

³³ Warner, 51; David Dicaire, *The Folk Music Revival, 1958-1970: Biographies of Fifty Performers and Other Influential People* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 256.

³⁴ Warner, 52.

³⁵ Murphy, 92.

³⁶ Warner, 51-2.

record producers Maynard Solomon and Seymour Sullivan from Vanguard Records who she later signed with. She released her first twelve albums (out of twenty-one) with them.³⁷

The coffee houses in the 1960s folk music scene were places where artists were coming together to sing and/or recite poetry demanding civil rights and an end to the Vietnam War, among other causes.³⁸ The artists included Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, Peter, Paul and Mary, and Pete Seeger. Although Sainte-Marie wrote a song about the Vietnam War, her acclaimed “Universal Soldier,” she was mostly writing about the injustices that Indigenous peoples and communities were facing. As she recalls: “I was still a Native American person with identity questions, and I saw bellies full of nothing but poverty on a lot of reservations and urban Indian slums, and it was all being ignored, even snickered at, by showbiz folks who simply didn’t know or care enough to help.”³⁹ Sainte-Marie knew the importance of singing about Indigenous rights, and she felt that if she did not do it, then no one would.⁴⁰

There were, though, a handful of artists in the 1960s who were singing about Indigenous rights. One example would be Peter LaFarge, who was a prominent musician within the 1950s and early 1960s folk protest music scene. He and Sainte-Marie founded the Federation for American Indian Rights in the early 1960s, an organization dedicated to promoting social justice for Indigenous peoples.⁴¹ Like Sainte-Marie, LaFarge was also singing in coffeehouses in Greenwich Village and he knew and was friends with other contemporary and notable folk

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Warner, 76; Murphy, 76.

³⁹ Warner, 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 42, 44-5, 50.

⁴¹ Jan Johnson, “‘We Were All Wounded at Wounded Knee’: The Engaged Resistance of Folk and Rock in the Red Power Era,” in *Indigenous Pop: Native American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*, eds. Jeff Berglund, Jan Johnson, and Kimberli Lee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 94.

singers such as Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger.⁴² One of his most famous songs is “The Ballad of Ira Hayes,” released in 1962. The song tells the story of Ira Hayes, an Indigenous war hero who was ultimately subjected to racism, persecuted by all of those around him, and eventually dying alone from alcoholism.⁴³ The song also describes how the government stole most of the water supply from the Akimel O’odham Nation that Ira Hayes was from. LaFarge condemns the dispossession of Indigenous land for government use and exploitation,⁴⁴ an injustice addressed in both of Sainte-Marie’s songs discussed below.

Johnny Cash was another musician who addressed Indigenous issues, most notably with his 1964 album *Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indian*. Peter LaFarge is also credited as a writer on this album. Cash sings a cover of LaFarge’s “The Ballad of Ira Hayes,” part of a larger critique of Indigenous injustices, racism, and the dispossession of land made on the album. Both Cash and LaFarge claimed Indigenous ancestry, but it is not clear whether or not this was the case.

Lastly, Floyd Westerman, a Sioux musician, was also singing of Indigenous rights and activism in the 1960s. In total, Westerman has released six albums in his life, most of them devoted to Indigenous history and injustices. According to Kimberli Lee, his album *The Land is Your Mother*, released in the 1960s, “is one of the earliest instances of a powerful pairing of Native literature and contemporary [Indigenous] music meant to inspire, influence, and most of all change the status quo for [Indigenous peoples] in the late 1960s, [that] still resonates today.”⁴⁵

⁴² Johnson, “‘We Were All Wounded at Wounded Knee’,” 96.

⁴³ Johnson, 96-7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁵ Kimberli Lee, “Singing for the People: The Protest Music of Buffy Sainte-Marie and Floyd Westerman,” in *Indigenous Pop: Native American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*, eds. Jeff Berglund, Jan Johnson, and Kimberli Lee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 68.

In the folk protest music movement of the 1960s, there were two general ways in which artists chose to deal with social issues in their music: allegorical or direct approaches. The former consists of lyrics that can be applied to a range of social issues, as opposed to just one. Accordingly, the lyrics are often broad, conveying a sense of general discontent.⁴⁶ An example of such a song is Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" (1963), which many consider to be one of the most famous folk protest songs. Dylan accompanies himself with acoustic guitar and harmonica, consistent with the folk music ideal of intimacy and simplicity. Dylan asks the listener rhetorically direct questions to incite critical thinking. An example includes the line: "Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist/Before they're allowed to be free?" Though Dylan never states specifically what the song is about, it can refer to the discrimination and persecution experienced by Black Americans. These lyrics, however, have been applied to other social situations and injustices, such as the Vietnam War and the Cold War. Buffy Sainte-Marie's "Universal Soldier" is also an allegorical protest song as the lyrics can be applied to any war, not just one in particular.

Dylan's "The Death of Emmett Till" (1962) offers an example of the direct approach. Unlike the allegorical approach, the direct one addresses a particular injustice head on. For example, Dylan's "The Death of Emmett Till" is about the lynching and murder of Emmett Till, an African American teenager in 1955 and the injustice surrounding the trial where the murderers (two white men) were acquitted. The lyrics discuss the horrific details of how Till was murdered. For example, Dylan sings: "Some men they dragged him to a barn and there they beat

⁴⁶ Jerry Rodnitsky, "The Decline and Rebirth of Folk-Protest Music," in *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*, ed. Ian Peddie (London: Routledge, 2017), 19, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351218061>

him up,” and “then they rolled his body down a gulf amidst a blood red rain/And they threw him in the waters wide to cease his screaming pain.” Dylan sings how the crime was racially motivated with “He was born a black skinned boy, he was born to die.” He calls out the listener, stating that if they cannot speak out against racism, then they are just as culpable as the white men who killed Emmett Till. This song is direct in that it calls out the injustice of Emmett Till’s murder and the systemic racism that caused it.

2.2 Now that the Buffalo’s Gone

Sainte-Marie chose the direct approach for “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” and “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying.” Since many were not aware of Indigenous injustices in the 1960s, Sainte-Marie used the direct approach in order to clearly explain what particular wrongs she was singing about. “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” was released as part of Sainte-Marie’s first album *It’s My Way!*. According to her, the song condemns the breaking of treaties and the dispossession of land, specifically land belonging to the Seneca Nation in the state of New York, which was taken by the American government in order to build the Kinzua Dam, despite the fact that a treaty “protected” the land from colonial exploitation.⁴⁷ This was a dam that could have been built elsewhere, but the Seneca Nation was specifically targeted as part of ongoing systemic colonization, as has been the case with many Indigenous reservations where land is stolen for the extraction of exploitable goods.⁴⁸ According to Thomas King, settler societal attitudes regarding land view it as a commodity, “something that has value for what you can take from it or what you can get for it.”⁴⁹ As such, North American history is fraught with

⁴⁷ Warner, 57; Kim, 151.

⁴⁸ Warner, 57; King, 105.

⁴⁹ King, 229-30.

the taking of land and the breaking of treaties. In 1868, a peace treaty was signed between the Lakota and the U.S. government that stipulated that the Black Hills would remain as part of the Lakota Nation and that white settlement would be forbidden on their land.⁵⁰ In 1874, gold was discovered at French Creek in the Black Hills and the treaty of 1868 was effectively broken as white settlers poured in, destroyed the land, and created settlements.⁵¹ In the case of the Kinzua Dam, the U.S. government wanted control of the Allegheny River in order to extract hydroelectrical power.⁵²

“Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” responds to two main injustices perpetrated against Indigenous peoples and communities: the dispossession of Indigenous land and self-determination for Indigenous nations. In 1956, the American Government passed the Indian Relocation Act which sought to displace Indigenous peoples for the exploitation of natural resources by moving people off reservations and into urban areas. In addition, from 1953-1968 termination laws began to target certain tribes deemed “assimilated” to be no longer federally recognized.⁵³ “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” responds to the dispossession of Indigenous land by the government as well as the ways in which both Canada and the United States have engaged in cultural genocide with the attempted erasure of Indigenous culture, agency, and personhood.⁵⁴ Sainte-Marie directs her song at what she terms the “unknowledgeable colonials,” the ones who unwittingly support this system of colonialism.⁵⁵ In this instance, the unknowledgeable colonials

⁵⁰ Ibid., 231

⁵¹ Ibid., 233.

⁵² Ibid., 242.

⁵³ Warner, 32-3.

⁵⁴ Kim, 151, 154.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 91.

are those who claim to have Indigenous ancestry but mostly identify as non-Indigenous.⁵⁶ “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” condemns the dispossession of Indigenous land through the use of musical devices such as genre, form, harmony, voice, and lyrics. Sainte-Marie also employs rhetorical devices to disrupt the history of colonialism.

Sainte-Marie challenges history in “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” by directly referring to the dispossession of Indigenous land with lyrics such as: “Oh it’s written in books and in songs/That we’ve been mistreated and wronged,” “Has a change come about Uncle Sam/Or are you still taking our lands,” “A treaty forever George Washington signed,” “the treaties are broken by Kinzua Dam,” and “The government now wants the Iroquois land/That of the Seneca and the Cheyenne.” Many of the injustices mentioned in the song have been left out of the history books. As Thomas King writes: “The sad truth is that, within the public sphere, within the collective consciousness of the general populace, most of the history of Indians in North America has been forgotten.”⁵⁷ These lyrics are just one example of Sainte-Marie bringing the history and present moment of Indigenous injustices to the listener’s knowledge. The broken treaty with the Lakota in 1874 might seem like ancient history to settlers, but the dispossession of the Seneca Nation for the Kinzua Dam is proof that not much has changed. Sainte-Marie does more than just tell history for what it actually is: she implicates the listener, the unknowledgeable settlers, for profiting from and contributing to colonial efforts and cultural erasure, and challenges them to do something about it.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ King, 22.

⁵⁸ Kim, 151-54.

Throughout the song, Sainte-Marie refers to the listener as “you,” “lady” or “man,” sometimes calling them “proud,” “good,” and “dear.” Alternatively, she refers to herself and Indigenous peoples as “I,” “they,” “them,” and “we.” According to Elyse Carter Vosen, this “allows for an ironic commentary on the dehumanizing impulse inflicted through such language.”⁵⁹ If settlers view Indigenous peoples as Other (and lesser than) in relation to themselves, words such as “You,” or “Lady/Man” strip Indigenous peoples of their identity, implying that their names are not even worth mentioning. In the first stanza of “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone,” Sainte-Marie sings: “Can you remember the times/That you have held your head high/And told all your friends of your Indian claim/Proud good lady and proud good man/Your great great grandfather from Indian blood came/And you feel in your heart for these ones.” In the second stanza she sings: “Oh it’s written in books and in songs/That we’ve been mistreated and wronged/Well over and over I hear those same words/From you good lady and you good man.”

Sainte-Marie uses these particular adjectives to reaffirm that while the listener has good intentions and is possibly even proud of their Indigenous ancestry, they are still largely unaware of how their support for the government has contributed to this ongoing system of colonialism and how it has subsequently impacted Indigenous peoples and communities. In fact, the message of the song can be addressed towards settlers as well. Sainte-Marie is imploring the listener to be critical and to educate themselves on Indigenous history in North America.⁶⁰ Furthermore, she challenges the listener on what they are going to do about their unknowing support of

⁵⁹ Elyse Carter Vosen, “‘We Need More than Love’: Three Generations of North American Indigenous Protest Singers,” in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), 266.

⁶⁰ Kim, 152.

colonialism with the lyrics: “And what will you do for these ones,” and “It’s here and it’s now you can help us dear man/Now that the buffalo’s gone.”

Unlike other protest songs from the 1960s, Sainte-Marie’s songs have to explain the current situation: the specific injustices taking place against Indigenous peoples. And, unlike other political messages from protest songs of this time, Sainte-Marie’s message is much more challenging for the listener. Those who listened to protest music were very much aware of the Vietnam War and of the Civil Rights Movement. However, not many were aware of the discrimination taking place against Indigenous peoples and communities. Awareness does not necessarily mean change and it is important to consider how one can engage in decolonization. In the 1960s, decolonization for Indigenous peoples could have involved the return of their land. In most cases, this never happened; rather, throughout North American history, new treaties would be drawn up by governments in order to extract even more land.⁶¹ The majority of settlers were unaware of land dispossession and so the concept of returning territory would have been foreign to them as well. As Sainte-Marie sings in the song: “Has a change come about Uncle Sam/Or are you still taking our lands.” Listeners would have been confused and shocked by the story of land dispossession that Sainte-Marie tells in her song.

In addition to her direct lyrics, form contributes to Sainte-Marie’s disruption of colonial history and the challenges directed towards the listener. The song begins with an Introduction of eight measures in length, with the rest of the song divided into five stanzas consisting of six lines each and twelve measures for each stanza. The song is in the key of A-major and in a 6/8 compound time. Typical of folk protest songs from the 1960s, Sainte-Marie accompanies herself

⁶¹ King, 237.

on the guitar, creating a sparse texture. She uses the same chord progression throughout for each stanza: I-V- \flat VII-vi-IV-I-V-I-IV-I-V-[V]-V. The progression of \flat VII-vi adds weight to some of Sainte-Marie's lyrics. In each instance that it occurs, the lyrics expose the listener's hypocrisy in claiming Indigenous heritage while also engaging in colonialism. For example, the first time the \flat VII-vi occurs with text, the lyrics are: "and told all your friends of your Indian claim." In context, Sainte-Marie is reminding the listener of the times when they have proudly proclaimed their Indigenous ancestry. In the second stanza, the \flat VII-vi occurs with the line "well over and over I hear those same words." This is referring to the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples that is frequently acknowledged but never acted upon. The next line of text for this progression "but even when Germany fell to your hands," points out the irony of Germany being allowed to keep their land after losing the war. Similarly, Indigenous peoples have "lost" the war regarding settlements but have been stripped of their land. The last two lines of text with the \flat VII-vi progression are: "a treaty forever George Washington signed," and "the government now wants the Iroquois land." Both of these lines refer to the establishing of treaties that result in the taking of land and how the government will keep on dispossessing Indigenous territory until they have it all. The \flat VII-vi movement underscores the dichotomy between the ideal world that the listener has created regarding Indigenous ways of life (acknowledged in their pride for Indigenous ancestry), and the actual reality that Sainte-Marie is bringing to light: how the listener unwittingly contributes to colonialism and its destructive impact on Indigenous peoples and communities.

"Now that the Buffalo's Gone" also features a descending bass line throughout. The notes for the descending bass line in the introduction are: A4-E4-G4-F#4-D4-A4-E4-B4-E4.

Alternatively, the notes for the bass line in the verses are: A4-A4-E4-E4-G4-G4-F#4-F#4-D4-D4, which is repeated. The descending bass provides continuity for the song, which also builds throughout. Sainte-Marie's voice and her guitar accompaniment also begin to increase in dynamic range by the third stanza. Moreover, Sainte-Marie adds more vibrato, usually occurring on the last word of each line. In comparison with other female folk singers at the time, such as Joan Baez and Judy Collins, Sainte-Marie's voice is not smooth and clear;⁶² rather, she adds this vibrato, demonstrating her intensity, fueling her messages, and establishing a voice for herself and Indigenous peoples. The song continues to build in intensity, with the guitar accompaniment increasingly becoming louder and more dynamic. It is as if Sainte-Marie is leading up to a weighty conclusion which comes with the last line of the song "Now that the Buffalo's Gone." This is the only time that she states the title of the song. Sainte-Marie is reinforcing her main message: that history (and the present) is fraught with the breaking of treaties and land dispossession. Now that the buffalo are gone (in other words, no longer useful for colonial expansion), settlers want land in order to extract valuable resources from, and as King writes, settlers have never believed that Indigenous peoples could put their land to "good use."⁶³ This is how the song ends, with Sainte-Marie bravely affirming that cultural genocide is still ongoing.

As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Thomas King writes that "history is the stories we tell about the past."⁶⁴ King's comments resonate with Sainte-Marie's disrupting of colonial history within her songs. She provides an alternative perspective to the ways in which settlers

⁶² Jane A. Bernstein, "Thanks for My Weapons in Battle – My Voice and the Desire to Use It: Women and Protest Music in the Americas," in *Women's Voices Across Musical Worlds*, ed. Jane A. Bernstein (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 168.

⁶³ King, 237.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

have taught history and the “stories” that they have chosen to tell.⁶⁵ When history is taught through a Eurocentric world-view, it encourages the receiver “to remember the hindrances that Native people [have] posed to the forward momentum of European westward migration.”⁶⁶ The stories that Sainte-Marie has chosen to tell about the past, on the other hand, reveal the dispossession of land and the cultural erasure of Indigenous personhood that resulted from the taking of land.

2.3 My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying

In 1966, Sainte-Marie released her third album *Little Wheel Spin and Spin*. One of the most striking songs on this album is “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying.” The title comes from the American patriotic song “My Country ‘Tis of Thee.”⁶⁷ Sainte-Marie’s version targets the way in which North American history has been taught.⁶⁸ Seven minutes in length, with just verses and no chorus, the song is “a devastating account of Indigenous reality in America that took down stereotypes and clichés perpetrated by Hollywood, the government and racketeers, and the media.”⁶⁹ It calls out the Residential Boarding School system that took place in both Canada and the United States, corruption, greed, and the way in which Indigenous peoples have been vilified in the media.⁷⁰ Sainte-Marie addresses these injustices through form, harmony, voice, and lyrics. She also uses rhetorical devices to disrupt the history of colonialism.

The song as a whole tells the story of Indigenous genocide, divided into an Introduction and five verses, each of which is separated by the line “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re

⁶⁵ Kim, 149-152.

⁶⁶ King, 22.

⁶⁷ Murphy, 94.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Warner, 92.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 92-8.

Dying,” followed by a guitar riff. The Introduction is both speech-like and freer than the rest of the song. There is no clear beat in the introduction, adding to the impression of someone beginning to tell us a story. This changes in the first stanza, where her account of American history begins. Adding to her narrative in the Introduction, Sainte-Marie makes use rhetorically of the words “now,” and “you” when referring to the listener, and of the words “them,” “they” and “ones” when referring to herself and Indigenous peoples. Just as in “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone,” Sainte-Marie is taking the language frequently used against Indigenous peoples by settlers (such as “You”) and by redirecting it, she reclaims that oppressive language for her and Indigenous peoples, which also serves to reclaim identity as well. The song begins with “Now that your big eyes have finally opened/Now that you’re wondering how must they feel.” Now that she has the listener’s full attention, she is going to tell the story of the history of Indigenous genocide.

After the Introduction, the song establishes a beat in triple metre as Sainte-Marie engages in her telling of history. One of the first references that she makes is of Christopher Columbus. Known largely for “discovering” America, he has been seen as the instigator of a long history of genocide for Indigenous peoples. However, as Sainte-Marie points out in her lyrics, many believe that American history “really began/When Columbus set sail out of Europe.” She further sings: “Then stress that the nation of leeches that conquered this land/Are the biggest and bravest and boldest and best/And yet where in your history books is the tale/Of genocide basic to this country’s birth.” American and Canadian history *is* the history of Indigenous genocide, and as Sainte-Marie points out, this fact has been forgotten, erased, and overlooked.⁷¹

⁷¹ Kim, 154-55.

Moreover, Sainte-Marie refers to the Residential School system that took place in both Canada and the United States. Here, she connects past with present, singing: “You force us to send our toddlers away/To your schools where they’re taught/To despise their traditions/You forbid them their languages.” Sainte-Marie gets right to the point, directly implicating the listener for their involvement in colonialism,⁷² specifically the Residential School system, once again calling out the unwitting and unknowing settlers.

Following a similar practice in the United States, Canada established a system of Residential Schools beginning in the late 19th-century, with the pretense to the non-Indigenous public that the schools were a “benevolent” form of humanitarianism to protect and civilize Indigenous peoples.⁷³ Prior to the set-up of these schools, the Canadian government relied on Indigenous populations for transportation, warfare, hunting, and diplomacy.⁷⁴ At this time, Indigenous peoples were considered by Canadian settlers to be valuable to the expansion of European settler colonialism.⁷⁵ However, as the fur trade diminished and warfare ceased, settlers saw Indigenous peoples as expendable.⁷⁶ If Indigenous peoples were no longer useful to extending Euro-Canadian values, then they would be forced to integrate into Canadian society.

⁷² Ibid., 152.

⁷³ Eric Woods, “A Cultural Approach to a Canadian Tragedy: The Indian Residential Schools as a Sacred Enterprise,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no. 2 (2013): 173; Brieg Capitaine and Karine Vanthuyne, “Introduction,” in *Power Through Testimony: Reframing Residential Schools in the Age of Reconciliation*, eds. Brieg Capitaine and Karine Vanthuyne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 4; Eric Woods, “On the Making of a National Tragedy: The Transformation of the Meaning of the Indian Residential Schools,” in *Power Through Testimony: Reframing Residential Schools in the Age of Reconciliation*, eds. Brieg Capitaine and Karine Vanthuyne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 29.

⁷⁴ Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*, 61-2.

⁷⁵ Miller, 62.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Approximately 150 000 Indigenous children were taken from their homes and placed within these schools, which were operated by Christian churches.⁷⁷ According to Stephanie Anderson, many survivors of Residential Schools “recall being beaten, strapped, and shackled to their beds; some had needles put in their tongues for speaking their traditional languages.”⁷⁸ The schools were fraught with physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse, much of which still has an impact on Indigenous communities today from the effects of trauma.⁷⁹ In addition to the many abuses that took place, the majority of the schools were overcrowded, had insufficient food supplies and healthcare, and lacked proper sanitation.⁸⁰ The death toll from Residential Schools is estimated at 6000 children, a disturbing figure.⁸¹

Residential schools were a death trap for many, but for those who survived, they endured years of abuse, sickness, malnutrition, punishment, and loneliness. Many never saw their families again, some tried to run away but died from the cold Canadian climate. In fact, Canadian musician Gord Downie has a whole album, called *Secret Path* (2016), dedicated to Chanie Wenjack, an Anishinaabe boy who ran away from the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Ontario but who died of exposure trying to find his way back home. In total, there were about 130 operating Residential Schools in Canada, with the last one closing in 1996.⁸² In 2010, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology to Indigenous

⁷⁷ Woods, “A Cultural Approach to a Canadian Tragedy,” 173-4.

⁷⁸ Stephanie Blair Anderson, “The Stories Nations Tell: Historical Consciousness and the Construction of National Identity at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights” (Ph.D. diss., the University of British Columbia, 2017), 174.

⁷⁹ Tanya Talaga, *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2018), 34-6; The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, v.

⁸⁰ Anderson, “‘The Stories Nations Tell’,” 174.

⁸¹ Anderson, 174.

⁸² “A History of Residential Schools in Canada,” *CBC News*, March 21, 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280>; Woods, “A Cultural Approach to a Canadian Tragedy,” 174.

communities across the country and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established which set out to collect witness reports from survivors. The mandate for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba states: “A shared vision held by those affected by Indian residential schools was to create a place of learning and dialogue where truths of their experiences were honored and kept safe for future generations.”⁸³ As Sainte-Marie sings in her song, history, and therefore Indigenous genocide, really began with Columbus. Residential Schools are an example of the most recent history of persecution, and her songs remind us that cultural genocide, such as what happened with Residential Schools, stretches back hundreds of years, its origins with Columbus and “discovery.”

In the third stanza Sainte-Marie refers to the use of blankets contaminated with smallpox that settlers gave to Indigenous nations for trade in order to take land. This “trade” resulted in the loss of entire tribes. Sainte-Marie sings: “Oh well, blankets for land is a bargain indeed/And the blankets were those Uncle Sam had collected/From smallpox-diseased dying soldiers that day/And the tribes were wiped out and the history books censored.” The history that Sainte-Marie is singing about is the use of smallpox contaminated blankets as a form of germ warfare. It has been reported that in 1763, the British used smallpox contaminated blankets in order to kill Indigenous tribes that were considered a threat to colonizing efforts.⁸⁴ However, this has not been verified and remains a source of contention among historians.⁸⁵ In 1851, historian Francis Parkman was the first to claim that the English purposefully gave Indigenous Tribes smallpox

⁸³ “About the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation,” National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: The University of Manitoba, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://nctr.ca/about-new.php>

⁸⁴ William B. Spaulding, “Smallpox,” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, June 22, 2015, accessed February 2, 2020 <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/smallpox>

⁸⁵ Adrienne Mayor, “The Nessus Shirt in the New World: Smallpox Blankets in History and Legend,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 427 (1995): 57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/541734>

infused blankets as a type of germ warfare.⁸⁶ In particular, Parkman presented evidence of handwritten letters from Lord Jeffrey Amherst to Colonel Henry Bouquet that detailed his plan to exterminate Indigenous peoples with smallpox-infected blankets from the corpses of British soldiers.⁸⁷ According to Adrienne Mayor, many scholars “dispute the handwriting, signatures, chronology, authenticity, responsibility, and outcome” of the letters.⁸⁸ She points out though that germ-warfare “had already been imagined” long before Jeffrey Amherst, and that most historians can agree that smallpox, brought to Indigenous land by colonists, did wreak havoc for many Indigenous Tribes.⁸⁹

In the fourth stanza, Sainte-Marie sings of how Indigenous peoples and communities have lacked self-determination throughout history and in the present moment. She sings: “The past it just crumbled, the future just threatens/Our life blood shut up in your chemical tanks/And now here you come, bill of sale in your hands/And surprise in your eyes that we’re lacking in thanks/For the blessings of civilization you’ve brought us/The lessons you’ve taught us, the ruin you’ve wrought us/Oh see what our trust in America’s bought us.” If the history of colonialism continues as it has been then the future is bleak indeed for Indigenous peoples. The line “our life blood shut up in your chemical tanks” represents how settler society has tried to strip Indigenous peoples and communities of their self-determination. Settler society attempts to control the lives and land of Indigenous peoples. When Sainte-Marie sings the line: “and now here you come, bill of sale in your hands/And surprise in your eyes that we’re lacking in thanks,” she is referring to how Indigenous peoples are beginning to fight back against colonialism and against their land

⁸⁶ Mayor, “The Nessus Shirt in the New World,” 57.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 57-58.

being taken. This is pivotal because it represents a turning point in the history of colonialism: Indigenous resurgence.

The fifth verse of the song returns with Sainte-Marie's rhetorical use of the words "now," and "you." She sings: "Now that the pride of the sires receives charity/Now that we're harmless and safe behind laws/Now that my life's to be known as your 'Heritage'/Now that our own chosen way is a novelty/Hands on our hearts we salute you your victory/Choke on your blue white and scarlet hypocrisy." Repetitive use of the word "now" reaffirms the ongoing effects of cultural genocide for the present day. Reference to blue, white, and scarlet refers to the American colours on the national flag. In the last few lines, Sainte-Marie sings: "'Ah, what can I do?', say a powerless few/With a lump in your throat and a tear in your eye/Can't you see that their poverty's profiting you?/My country 'tis of thy people you're dying." She ironically uses the word "powerless" to signify that the listener does have the power to do something. She reminds the listener that they are unknowingly profiting from colonialism.

What is especially significant about "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying" is that Sainte-Marie calls out the assimilative processes of Residential Schools at a time when most settler Canadians saw the schools as part of a humanitarian enterprise to civilize Indigenous peoples for their own protection.⁹⁰ With her direct reference to Columbus after she mentions the Residential Schools, Sainte-Marie is affirming to the listener that the reason most were unaware of the assimilative and genocidal processes of these schools was in large part due to settlers choosing not to include this history in their history books.⁹¹ Essentially, by disrupting the history

⁹⁰ Woods, "On the Making of a National Tragedy," 29.

⁹¹ Kim, 154-55.

of colonialism, Sainte-Marie reveals the truth that many listeners feel uncomfortable to face. This is her challenge to the listener. She is pointing out how the listener has indirectly and perhaps unknowingly contributed to the erasure of Indigenous cultures and peoples.

“My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying” is divided into an Introduction and five verses, each one separated with statements of the title line. The title is a play on the American patriotic song “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” which uses the melody from “God Save the Queen.” Nancy Murphy argues that by borrowing text and melody from the American patriotic song, Sainte-Marie is “specifically targeting the teaching that U.S. history began with the arrival of European colonists.”⁹² Rather, U.S. history really began with genocide of Indigenous peoples. Sainte-Marie adds “thy people you’re dying” to signify that Indigenous people have been dying and suffering while settlers extract value from their land. Of the “God Save the Queen” melody, Sainte-Marie mainly uses it whenever she sings “my country ‘tis of thy people you’re dying.” This is significant because it adds weight to European westward expansion and the consequences of such migration for Indigenous peoples in North America.

In the song, Sainte-Marie accompanies herself with guitar only, leaving for a sparse melody. The song is in the key of B-major and Sainte-Marie alternates between the same six chords, presenting them in similar progressions, but sometimes with minor alterations in each section. The general progression is as follows: I-VI-V-I-ii- \flat VII-ii- \flat VII-I. Similar to “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone,” Sainte-Marie uses a \flat VII, particularly to emphasize certain words that hold weight to her narrative. For example, when Sainte-Marie sings: “Then stress that the nation of leeches that conquered this land/Are the biggest and bravest and boldest and best,” she uses

⁹² Murphy, 94.

♭VII-ii for the words “biggest” (ii), “bravest” (♭VII), “boldest” (ii), and “best” (♭VII). Sainte-Marie calls the settlers who “conquered” Indigenous land “leeches,” a term that represents her perspective of history.⁹³ She presents her own term in contrast with the words that settlers might use to define their “discoverers”; big, brave, bold, and the best. The ♭VII-ii adds weight to her narrative in that it challenges the listener to evaluate the perspective of history that they were taught. Additionally, Sainte-Marie uses instrumentation and voice to emphasize certain words that she wants the listener to contemplate. She adds vibrato to her voice and slaps the guitar more forcefully at these places. The words include: “tricked and evicted,” “leeches,” “biggest, bravest, boldest, and best,” “genocide basic,” and “rang with a thud o’er Kinzua mud.” The commonality between these words is that they contribute to Sainte-Marie’s disruption of colonial history. Most of these words would have shocked a settler listener in the late 1960s.

Both “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone” and “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying” address Indigenous injustices, such as the dispossession of land, the trauma that has stemmed from the Residential School system, and the biases and erasures in colonial historical accounts. They do so musically through form, harmony, voice, and lyrics whereby Sainte-Marie disrupts the history of colonialism in North America. Drawing back upon Simpson’s idea of Indigenous artists using shared codes to disrupt colonialism, Sainte-Marie’s music is coded to challenge settler historical accounts by presenting a history through Indigenous perspectives. Indigenous peoples will know and understand what she is singing about, but for settler listeners, the truth is unsettling.

⁹³ Kim, 156.

Chapter 3: The American Indian Movement

The 1960s was a decade clamoring with social protest, particularly the Civil Rights Movement and anti-war movements. Not as well-known was the Red Power Movement which was led by Indigenous peoples in both the United States and Canada. Similar to other social movements at the time, Red Power wanted self-determination for Indigenous Nations and Tribes in North America. Two main organizations were associated with Red Power: the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). One particularly important member of AIM was Annie Mae Pictou Aquash, who was a close friend of Buffy Sainte-Marie. They met in the late 1960s and became involved together in various social protest movements, including AIM. Aquash left behind many important contributions to AIM; however, she was found murdered in 1976. Her death highlights sexist attitudes within AIM's leadership and the complexities of the organization and the American government's response to AIM's aggressive activism. Aquash's legacy represents the efforts and contributions of Indigenous women in advocating for both Indigenous rights and women's rights. This chapter will explore how Sainte-Marie reinforces the goals of AIM while also calling out the rampant sexism within both the group and settler society in her songs "Starwalker" (1976) and "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" (1992).

3.1 The History of AIM

AIM was founded in 1968 in Minneapolis by members Dennis H. Banks (1937-2017) from the Leech Lake Reservation (Anishinaabe), and Clyde Bellecourt (b. 1936), from the White Earth Reservation (Anishinaabe), as a response to the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples by the

American government.⁹⁴ In particular, the Termination Era (1953-68) and the Relocation Act (1956) were the main concerns of the organization. According to Indigenous lawyer Robert Odawi Porter, American policy for “dealing with American Indians tends to run in cycles.”⁹⁵ In particular, the federal government will, for a few decades, implement policies meant to recognize Indigenous sovereignty, followed by another few decades of policies meant for assimilation of Indigenous tribes and peoples.⁹⁶ The Termination Era is an example of the latter. It was a policy meant to abolish services to Indigenous communities as well as to terminate recognition of Indigenous tribes.⁹⁷ Consequently, Indigenous communities under the act would be disbanded. The Relocation Act of 1956 was implemented to remove Indigenous peoples from their communities in order to use their lands for the exploitation of extractable resources.⁹⁸ It was an assimilation program that promised a better life for enlisted families and individual members.⁹⁹ In other words, the Termination Era ended the rights of Indigenous peoples to govern themselves, while the Relocation Act removed Indigenous peoples from their communities and displaced them into settler society in the hopes of assimilation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Alvin M. Josephy Jr., “Introduction,” in *Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account by David Stanley Lyman*, eds., Floyd A. O’Neil, June K. Lyman, and Susan McKay (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), xv; Donald L. Fixico, *Indian Resilience and Rebuilding: Indigenous Nations in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 126.

⁹⁵ Robert Odawi Porter, “American Indians and the New Termination Era,” *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 16, no. 3 (2007): 473, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?lname=&handle=hein.journals/cjlp16&collection=&page=473&collection=journals>

⁹⁶ Porter, “American Indians and the New Termination Era,” 473.

⁹⁷ Theodore Catton and Joel D. Holtrop, *American Indians and National Forests* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 89.

⁹⁸ Warner, 32-3.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

In addition to the protection of tribal rights (directly related to the Termination Era and Relocation Act), further efforts of AIM included the protection of Indigenous peoples from police brutality and rights of self-determination. The organization called for the dissolution of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) which was responsible for the administration and management of Indigenous reservations in the United States.¹⁰¹ AIM's overall mission then and now was for Indigenous Nations to be able to govern themselves, as opposed to the American government. Their profile on their website states that "AIM shall be there to help Native People regain human rights and achieve restitutions and restorations."¹⁰²

By 1969, AIM had coalesced into a greater political movement fighting for the rights of Indigenous peoples throughout North America.¹⁰³ Russell Means, an Oglala Lakota activist, was appointed chairman of AIM in 1970.¹⁰⁴ Initial AIM activism consisted of meetings and the establishment of patrols to protect Indigenous peoples from police brutality.¹⁰⁵ However, the organization quickly became more direct with protests, demonstrations, and occupations. In 1969, AIM occupied Alcatraz Island, protesting for the right to govern the land via the 1868 treaty between the U.S. and the Sioux, which allowed Indigenous peoples to claim any unoccupied land by the government.¹⁰⁶ Two years later, in 1972 AIM occupied the headquarters of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and in 1973 they occupied Wounded Knee, located on the Pine

¹⁰¹ Fixico, *Indian Resilience and Rebuilding*, 128; Warner, 146.

¹⁰² American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council AIM, "AIM-GGC Profile," accessed March 13, 2020, <https://www.aimovement.org/ggc/>.

¹⁰³ Kim, 147.

¹⁰⁴ Fixico, 140.

¹⁰⁵ Warner, 146.

¹⁰⁶ Bryan Rindfleisch, "'Slaying the Sun Woman': The Legacy of Annie Mae Aquash," *The Graduate History Review* 3, no. 1 (2011): 91, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ghr/article/view/5995>; Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "American Indian Movement," accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian-Movement>

Ridge Reservation. By the time of the Wounded Knee Occupation, AIM had their own radio program to voice Indigenous concerns and approximately 300 000 members and seventy-nine chapters across North America, eight of which were located in Canada.¹⁰⁷

Though Sainte-Marie was associated with AIM during their initial years, she did not align herself too closely with the movement. She kept a distance largely because of the rampant sexism within the organization.¹⁰⁸ Before AIM, Sainte-Marie was involved in other activist endeavors. In 1969, she started the Nihewan Foundation for American Indian Education which provided scholarships for Indigenous youth.¹⁰⁹ Sainte-Marie was also involved with the Alcatraz Occupation of 1969 with a group called Indians of All Tribes. The group and occupation were led by her friend John Trudell (1946-2015), an Indigenous political activist. In 1963 the prison that had been located on Alcatraz Island was closed down and so the federal government no longer had use for the land.¹¹⁰ Because the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie stipulated that all unused land would go back to Indigenous peoples, the Indians of All Tribes decided to fight for the land back after the American government had refused to do so.¹¹¹ Sainte-Marie donated three-hundred dollars a month to have clean water brought to those occupying Alcatraz but it was not always enough.¹¹²

In the late 1960s, Sainte-Marie met Annie Mae Pictou Aquash. Both came to be involved with AIM and knew the leadership quite well. Born on March 27th, 1945, Aquash was a Mi'kmaq Indigenous woman from the Indian Brook Reservation in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia.

¹⁰⁷ Josephy Jr., "Introduction," xv; Fixico, 140.

¹⁰⁸ Warner, 149-51.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 146-47.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Warner, 147-48; Kim, 149.

In 1962, she moved to Boston and helped to establish the Boston Indian Council that would draw attention to the rights of Indigenous peoples in that area and ultimately create a support system for them.¹¹³ When Sainte-Marie met Aquash she was quite impressed and humbled by her activism. She writes: “Twenty years before, most people in Boston didn’t know that there were Indians. They just plain had never come across it; it never crossed their screen. But Annie Mae knew, and she was involved with some other ‘invisible Indians’ in Canada and Boston.”¹¹⁴ Initially, Aquash saw AIM as a movement “that promised to inform the public opinion about the challenges that Native people faced and, more important, promised to solve those problems.”¹¹⁵ Soon though, she began to disagree with some of AIM’s methods and believed that radical violence and aggression did not actively help Indigenous peoples.¹¹⁶ Aquash instead argued that poverty, lack of access to clean water and food, drug and alcohol abuse, and poor health conditions deserved more recognition than the immediate need for self-determination.¹¹⁷ The men who were at the forefront of AIM, though, were not “experienced enough to listen to [the] women [in the group].”¹¹⁸ The women were not taken seriously and their concerns dismissed. Sainte-Marie was tired of it and so she distanced herself.¹¹⁹ While Sainte-Marie continued touring and writing music, Aquash quickly became a prominent member of AIM, hoping to address her concerns.¹²⁰

¹¹³ Warner, 144; Simone Poliandri, “Annie Mae Aquash: A Renewed Source of Mi’kmaw Identity and Pride,” in *First Nations, Identity, and Reserve Life* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 241-42, eBook, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/14443/>

¹¹⁴ Warner, 143.

¹¹⁵ Poliandri, “Annie Mae Aquash,” 242.

¹¹⁶ Bryan Rindfleisch, “‘Slaying the Sun Woman’,” 92.

¹¹⁷ Rindfleisch, 92.

¹¹⁸ Warner, 150.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150-52.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

3.2 Starwalker

Sainte-Marie's song "Starwalker," released in 1976 on her *Sweet America* album, addresses the female activist involvement within AIM and how women greatly contributed to the movement. Sainte-Marie began working on the song in 1975 and she wrote it to highlight and acknowledge Indigenous leadership, both male and female.¹²¹ As she put it: "I was thinking of all the people in the movement [(AIM)] that I really admired and I wrote a song for them, not for any one person."¹²² Sainte-Marie further states how the character of Starwalker is her own personal hero or heroine.¹²³ The song celebrates the efforts of Indigenous activists. "Starwalker" is strophic and in 2/4 time. In the key of A-minor, the general harmonic progression of the song is: i-VI-III-v-i-VI-III-v. "Starwalker" is one of the first songs to use samples of Indigenous traditional singing.¹²⁴ Such samples were extremely hard to locate, especially in the 1970s.¹²⁵ Sainte-Marie writes that it was very "hard to find Indigenous music" unless "you were home on the rez."¹²⁶ It is not clear where the samples in "Starwalker" come from. Sainte-Marie notes that "Indigenous music was not being heard at all. You could go to the Smithsonian and borrow a 78 or listen to Indigenous music on Ampex tape," and "I used a little bit of sampling, but I also used some live singers when I recorded 'Starwalker' for the first time."¹²⁷ Therefore, the particular samples used in "Starwalker" could be a mix of samples from the Smithsonian, and Indigenous

¹²¹ Ibid., 153.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 154.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

music from perhaps Sainte-Marie’s nation, the Cree. There are five stanzas consisting of sung lyrics and four verses of traditional singing. The structure of the song is as follows:

Traditional Singing Stanza 1	Sainte-Marie Stanza 1	Sainte-Marie Stanza 2	Sainte-Marie Stanza 3	Sainte-Marie Stanza 4	Traditional Singing Stanza 2	Sainte-Marie Stanza 5	Traditional Singing Stanza 3	Traditional Singing Stanza 4
Eight measures	Eight measures	Eight measures	Eight measures	Eight measures	Eight measures	Eight measures	Eight measures	Twelve measures

Table 2.1: Song Structure of “Starwalker”

Each stanza (including the traditional singing ones) are eight measures in length, with the final traditional singing verse consisting of twelve measures instead of eight before the song fades out.

The song speaks to Sainte-Marie’s personal experiences and her vision of female empowerment. In the first stanza, she sings: “Starwalker he’s a friend of mine/You’ve seen him looking fine/He’s a straight talker, he’s a Starwalker/Don’t drink no wine.” Sainte-Marie saw the devastating effects of alcohol on her friends and so she wrote the heroine/hero (Wolf Rider/Starwalker) as someone who is sober.¹²⁸ She writes: “That’s a very deliberate line, and I think it’s one of the reasons why the song continues to be a favorite of mine because I have always feared the destructive part of alcohol.”¹²⁹ Additionally, the character of Wolf Rider, which is first mentioned in the second lyrical stanza, is meant to represent the women of various Indigenous movements, including AIM.¹³⁰ For Sainte-Marie, the character is very specific: “female, strong, someone who creates connections and opens doors,” someone like Annie Mae

¹²⁸ Ibid., 153.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 154.

Pictou Aquash, Sainte-Marie herself, Indigenous scholar Winona LaDuke, or the four women (Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Sheelah McLean, and Nina Wilson) who founded the Idle No More Movement that began in 2012 as a response to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Bill C-45 that would diminish the rights and authority of Indigenous communities.¹³¹ As Sainte-Marie puts it in the song: "Wolf Rider she's a friend of yours/You've seen her opening doors/She's a history tuner, she's a sweet grass burner/And a dog soldier." The line "you've seen her opening doors" refers to the women of Indigenous movements who have provided opportunities for Indigenous peoples through their activism and leadership.¹³² The lyrics "she's a history tuner, she's a sweet grass burner" tells how female Indigenous activists are also writing history with their accomplishments for Indigenous rights.¹³³ Additionally, "she's a dog soldier" is meant to assert female agency in Indigenous movements, and more specifically, to refer to the women of AIM as being part of the guerilla warfare that took place at the movement's various occupations.¹³⁴

The third and fourth stanzas of the song are significant for various reasons. The lyrics of the third stanza are: "Holy light guard the night/Pray up your medicine song oh/Straight dealer you're a spirit healer/Keep going on/Ay hey way hey way heya." For the fourth stanza, Sainte-Marie sings: "Lightning woman, thunder child/Star soldiers one and all oh/Sisters, brothers all together/Aim straight/Stand tall." The third stanza represents Indigenous activism as distinct from settler protests, namely with references to particular Indigenous roles and songs: spirit

¹³¹ Warner, 154; Tabitha Marshall, "Idle No More," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, article published on April 12, 2013, last edited April 4, 2019, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/idle-no-more>

¹³² Warner, 154; Kim, 165.

¹³³ Kim, 164-65.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

healer, and medicine song.¹³⁵ The line: “keep going” exhorts Indigenous activists to not give up. Additionally, “sisters, brothers all together” represents a call for unity among the men and women activists within AIM and further challenges the misogyny and sexism inherent within the movement.¹³⁶ Lastly, the lines “aim straight/stand tall” is a direct reference to AIM itself.¹³⁷ In fact, the last two lines of this verse serve as a warning to Indigenous activists and resisters from Sainte-Marie.¹³⁸ She writes:

When it says, “Sisters, Brothers all together aim straight/stand tall,” I’m not talking about pick up a gun and aim it at the camera to get your picture in the paper. “Aim straight” really means, “American Indian Movement, stay clean, don’t get caught up in the rackets or any of the pitfalls that are out there when you’re attracting attention.” It’s so easy to go right when you should go left.¹³⁹

Sainte-Marie reminds her fellow resisters to remember the larger cause of Indigenous rights and to avoid getting caught up in negative media attention.

“Starwalker” ends with two traditional singing stanzas, the first one eight measures in length, and the second/last one twelve measures. The conclusion with traditional singing serves to reinforce Sainte-Marie’s call for unity and solidarity among Indigenous activists. It is a call for solidarity that transcends the sexism and misogyny that plagued certain segments of AIM. The singing is all done by female vocalists and though it is unclear who they are, where they are from, or what their singing means, the togetherness of the parts serves to reinforce the importance of Indigenous women activists.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 165.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹³⁷ Warner, 154.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 154-55.

In her authorized biography, Sainte-Marie describes how the sexism within AIM was especially disheartening because of how much the women contributed:

At the time, [the AIM leadership] were not smart or experienced enough to listen to women, including me. And they were surrounded by wonderful women. The women who were supporting them – their mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters, and aunties – they were just wonderful. But you didn't hear about them...Nobody ever gave us the microphone.¹⁴⁰

Just as Sainte-Marie's song ends with a call for solidarity, she further states in her biography:

"Later, grassroots women finally – without hurting any of the men – just stepped forward and blew through the rudeness and the misogyny that we had all experienced, and did whatever we could."¹⁴¹ For Sainte-Marie, the men and women of AIM are fighting for the same thing:

Indigenous rights and self-determination and so respect and unity is a must. "Starwalker" addresses Indigenous female involvement within AIM and how women's efforts and contributions greatly impacted the movement's call for self-determination and Indigenous rights.

3.3 The Wounded Knee Occupation of 1973

On February 27th, 1973, AIM occupied Wounded Knee in South Dakota, located on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The occupation was a response to the failed impeachment of Tribal President Richard "Dick" Wilson of the Oglala Lakota Sioux at Pine Ridge, who was accused of corruption by members of the organization.¹⁴² AIM was ultimately worried about corruption within and how that corruption was causing a mis-governing of those who lived on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Additionally, the occupation was a protest against the United States

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 150.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Josephy Jr., xxiv; Warner, 151; B. D'Arcus, "Contested Boundaries: Native Sovereignty and State Power at Wounded Knee, 1973," *Political Geography* 22 (2003): 416, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0962629802001075>

government for the breaking of treaties and a call for the right to govern themselves and the dissolution of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The BIA was responsible for the administration and management of reservations in the U.S.¹⁴³ AIM accused the program of corruption and neglect and of influencing Richard Wilson's governing of Pine Ridge.¹⁴⁴ In essence, AIM was fighting a two-front battle. According to Andrea Warner,

[AIM was] resisting racist U.S. government policies and policing, protesting broken treaties, and advocating for Indigenous sovereignty as well as land claims and resource rights. Both strip mining and uranium extraction were behind treaty violations and had severe consequences – pollution, exploitation, displacement, environmental and financial ruin, cancer, and even death – for Indigenous people.¹⁴⁵

The occupation, consisting of about 250 protestors and led by AIM leaders Russell Means and Dennis Banks, called for “self-government under local or district traditional chiefs, headmen and respected spiritual leaders.”¹⁴⁶ The site of Wounded Knee was of particular importance both geographically and historically. In 1890, 300 Indigenous men, women and children were massacred at Wounded Knee by federal forces.¹⁴⁷ In the decades following the massacre, Wounded Knee served as a “geographic symbol of colonial violence perpetrated by American westward expansion.”¹⁴⁸ As soon as the occupation began, U.S. federal marshals and the FBI set up roadblocks and began restricting movement in and out of Wounded Knee.¹⁴⁹ They also brought with them fifteen armoured cars, submachine guns, gas masks, 10 000 rounds of M-

¹⁴³ Fixico, 122; Josephy Jr., xvii; Warner, 151.

¹⁴⁴ Josephy Jr., xix.

¹⁴⁵ Warner, 144.

¹⁴⁶ Josephy Jr., Alvin M. “Foreword,” in *Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account by Stanley David Lyman*, eds. Floyd A. O’Neil, June K. Lyman, and Susan McKay (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), xi; Josephy J., “Introduction,” xvi.

¹⁴⁷ D’Arcus, “Contested Boundaries,” 416.

¹⁴⁸ D’Arcus, 416.

¹⁴⁹ D’Arcus, 416; Warner, 151.

16 ammunition, bulletproof vests and sniper rifles.¹⁵⁰ In contrast, AIM had around 30-40 weapons.¹⁵¹

The media soon arrived at the site to capture footage of the occupation. According to D’Arcus,

As media coverage and public attention raised the profile of the occupation, senior Washington officials insisted on a policy of restraint. In spatial terms, this policy was manifested in a strategy of containment. Rather than forcibly remove the occupiers, federal forces worked to limit the movement of people, things, and images back and forth across the boundary that defined the occupation site.¹⁵²

AIM wanted as much public visibility as possible and so the federal government worked to contain this visibility.¹⁵³ They barred the media from access to the occupation site after 4:30pm every day.¹⁵⁴ As a result, the public was not aware of the nightly meetings and firefights.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the federal government limited the flow of people in and out of Wounded Knee as well as the occupiers’ access to food and water supplies.¹⁵⁶ Ultimately, the occupation of Wounded Knee was a challenge to federal authority and so the government worked to contain the site as much as possible.¹⁵⁷ On March 10th, 1973, the occupiers of Wounded Knee declared the site a new state: the Independent Oglala Nation (ION) as a way to reinforce their demands for self-determination.¹⁵⁸ The standoff at Wounded Knee lasted a total of seventy-one days, ending on May 8th, 1973, with AIM reaching a half-hearted settlement with the U.S. government.¹⁵⁹ In

¹⁵⁰ King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, illustrated edition (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2017), 164.

¹⁵¹ King, *The Inconvenient Indian*, 164.

¹⁵² D’Arcus, 417.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 421.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 426.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 423.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 421.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 416.

¹⁵⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “American Indian Movement.”

total, Frank Clearwater and Lawrence Lamont, two Indigenous activists, died, U.S. Marshal Lloyd Grimm was paralyzed from the waist down, and there were several exchanges of gunfire throughout the occupation itself.¹⁶⁰ The occupation served to draw public attention to the federal government's mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in America.¹⁶¹

3.4 Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

Sainte-Marie's "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" addresses both the concerns of AIM and the occupation at Wounded Knee, while also calling out the sexism pervading the movement. She began writing the song after the Occupation and it serves as an immediate response to the aftermath and consequences of Wounded Knee. In 1975, AIM was involved in a shootout at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.¹⁶² Two Special Agents of the FBI were investigating a "burglary" of a pair of boots at Pine Ridge when they were suddenly opened fire on.¹⁶³ The two agents were killed in the shootout. A BIA agent later shot and killed Joseph Stuntz, a Coeur d'Alene Indigenous man from the Lapwai Reservation in Idaho and a member of AIM, who was suspected of being involved in the shootout.¹⁶⁴ Leonard Peltier, a Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indigenous man who was also a member of AIM and an additional suspect of the shootout, fled Pine Ridge after the incident.¹⁶⁵ He was found and arrested in Hinton, Alberta and then extradited to the United States for trial.¹⁶⁶ In 1977, he was tried and convicted of the deaths of the two federal agents and "remains in prison to this day."¹⁶⁷ The trial and

¹⁶⁰ King, 166.

¹⁶¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "American Indian Movement."

¹⁶² Warner, 155.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

conviction of Leonard Peltier remains a source of controversy. This is because the bullets used to kill the two agents did not match Peltier's gun.¹⁶⁸ Although the evidence should have been cause for reasonable doubt, Peltier was convicted nonetheless.

A year later in 1976, Annie Mae Pictou Aquash's body was found on the Pine Ridge Reservation.¹⁶⁹ While Sainte-Marie had begun to distance herself from AIM, Aquash had become even more involved. Sainte-Marie writes: "[Aquash] became quite crucial to the American Indian Movement. She was part of the inner circle who were doing things that I would hear about only after they were either set up or had happened."¹⁷⁰ Ultimately she was the highest ranking female member of AIM.¹⁷¹ When her body was found, initial autopsy reports by the FBI determined that the cause of death was exposure. A second autopsy requested by her family, however, revealed a bullet wound at the back of her head.¹⁷² She was only thirty years old and left behind two daughters, Deborah and Denise.

The FBI was quick to suspect AIM as being responsible for her death.¹⁷³ Alternatively, AIM believed that the FBI was involved.¹⁷⁴ Evidence today indicates that potentially both AIM and the FBI are responsible for her murder. During the initial years of AIM, the FBI, in an effort to eradicate the organization from within, planted false rumours of potential FBI informants within the movement under their Counterintelligence Program.¹⁷⁵ Annie Mae Pictou Aquash was one victim of the FBI Program. Because Aquash was a prominent member of AIM, she was

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷¹ Rindfleisch, 89.

¹⁷² Poliandri, 244; Warner, 156.

¹⁷³ Rindfleisch, 89.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 95.

privity to information that could potentially implicate the organization, including information she might have known regarding Leonard Peltier's involvement in the shootout, should she be an informant.¹⁷⁶ Historian Bryan Rindfleisch writes that "Aquash encountered internal jealousies, leadership divisions, and pervasive rumours that denigrated her as an FBI 'informant'."¹⁷⁷ He further states that,

While these same investigative journalists and law enforcement officers believe the FBI still bears some responsibility for Aquash's death (the FBI, they say, created the 'atmosphere of paranoia' that pervaded AIM and allegedly spooked the leadership into acting irrationally against one of its own), they insist that, ultimately, responsibility for Aquash's assassination must be attributed to AIM.¹⁷⁸

In 2004, Arlo Looking Cloud, a member of AIM, was arrested and convicted of Aquash's murder.¹⁷⁹ Then, in 2009, AIM members John Graham and Thelma-Conroy-Rios were also charged for the murder of Aquash.¹⁸⁰ Andrea Warner writes that "all three were held accountable for Aquash's murder, and speculation remains that Peltier was involved too. Aquash's daughters, Debbie and Denise, believe that high-ranking AIM members ordered her execution due to fears that she was an informant."¹⁸¹

Indigenous writer Lee Maracle argues that the attitude of misogyny that permeated the leadership of AIM was a settler influenced one.¹⁸² In particular, she states how AIM's initial efforts to restore Indigenous rights had been subverted by colonial thinking and actions.¹⁸³ Some of AIM's members found that settler society was causing corruption within the movement and

¹⁷⁶ Rindfleisch, 97; Warner, 156.

¹⁷⁷ Rindfleisch, 92.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 94.

¹⁷⁹ Warner, 157.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Lee Maracle, "The Rebel," in *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1996), 99.

¹⁸³ Maracle, "The Rebel," 99.

that this is what led to the murder of Aquash. According to Rindfleisch, Aquash leaves behind a legacy of “grassroots advocacy aimed at revitalizing and self-empowering Indigenous communities struggling against a colonial hegemonic system that imposed, and continues to impose, political and social constraints on [Indigenous] peoples.”¹⁸⁴ According to such views, Aquash was a victim of colonialism.

Sainte-Marie’s “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” is rooted in this context: the injustice of Leonard Peltier’s conviction and the unsolved murder of Annie Mae Pictou Aquash.¹⁸⁵ According to Warner, the song is like a time capsule “filled with the information Sainte-Marie had at the time.”¹⁸⁶ Sainte-Marie began writing the song in 1976, and it took her fourteen years to complete it.¹⁸⁷ Sainte-Marie states: “Obviously, I was trying to quell some kind of emotional turmoil in myself to come to grips with what happened, to resolve it in a way that I could share with other people and have it all hang on irrefutable facts.”¹⁸⁸ “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” was released in 1992 on her *Coincidence and Likely Stories* album. It takes its name from the book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown. Published in 1970, the book details settler history through the perspective of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, the title of the book comes from the last line of the poem “American Names” (1927) by American poet Stephen Vincent Benet (1898-1943). Brown quotes the last few lines of the poem at the beginning of his book: “I shall not be there. I shall rise and pass. Bury my heart at wounded knee.”¹⁸⁹ In the key

¹⁸⁴ Rindfleisch, 90.

¹⁸⁵ Warner, 156-57.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁸⁹ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Rinehart & Winston, 1970).

of E-flat major, the song has the following structure: Introduction-Verse 1-Chorus-Verse 2-Chorus-Verse 3-Chorus-Verse 4-Chorus-Verse 5-Chorus. It is in 4/4 time. Each section is eight measures in length, except the second-to-last chorus which is sixteen measures long and the last chorus which is thirty-five measures long before the fade out.

Sainte-Marie's "Now that the Buffalo's Gone" and "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying" are direct in drawing attention to injustices against Indigenous peoples, but "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" is much more specific in its lyrical content. She refers to particular institutions, people, controversies, and incidents. For instance, the Introduction refers to the BIA and their mismanagement of Indigenous Reservations, one of AIM's main concerns. Sainte-Marie sings: "Indian legislation on the desk of a do-right congressman/Now, he don't know much about the issue/So he picks up the phone and he asks advice from/The senator out in Indian country/A darling of the energy companies who are/Ripping off what's left of the reservation/Huh." The do-right congressman represents an agent of the BIA. Sainte-Marie also points to the corruption within the BIA by singing about how the agent asks advice from senators who only care about the extraction of exploitable resources on the reservation lands and not the people themselves. It is a never ending cycle that benefits the federal government but not Indigenous peoples.

The first verse is a direct reference to the Wounded Knee occupation of 1973. Sainte-Marie sings: "I learned a safety rule/I don't know who to thank/Don't stand between the reservation/And the corporate banks/They send in federal tanks/It isn't nice but it's reality." This verse comments on how the federal government responds to Indigenous resistance. When AIM fought back against the government at Wounded Knee, the "federal tanks" were sent in. Of course, there are many more instances of the government (in both Canada and the United States)

responding to Indigenous resistance with firearms and ammunition. An example in Canada would be the Oka Crisis of 1990.

In 1989, the mayor of Oka, a small town northwest of Montréal, announced that the old golf course would be expanding to an eighteen-hole course.¹⁹⁰ Additionally, sixty new condominiums would be built.¹⁹¹ To complete this project, the Quebec government planned to expand the golf course and build the luxury condominiums on top of a Mohawk band cemetery.¹⁹² On March 10th, 1990, the Mohawk began occupying the Pines forest (where the cemetery was located) in order to protect their land. In July 1990, “the confrontation became a shooting war.”¹⁹³ According to Thomas King,

Neither the provincial government nor the federal government wanted to deal with the situation. [The mayor of Oka], Jean Ouellette, had no intention of talking with the Mohawk and said so on television. He instead insisted that the province send in the Sûreté du Québec (Quebec police), and in they came, storming the barricades that the Mohawk had erected with tear gas and flash-bang grenades. Shots were fired.¹⁹⁴

Corporal Marcel Lemay was fatally shot and Mohawk elder Joe Armstrong died of a heart attack attempting to escape.¹⁹⁵ At this point the federal government stepped in and reinforced the Sûreté du Québec with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and 2500 members of the Canadian military.¹⁹⁶ King writes: “Jets arrived, along with tanks and armoured personnel carriers.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁰ King, 245.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., 245-46.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 246.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Most recently and still concurrent are the protests by the Wet'suwet'en First Nation against the proposed pipeline project on their territory in Northern British Columbia. On December 31st, 2019, the B.C. Supreme Court granted an injunction calling for the removal of any blockade on Wet'suwet'en territory that the pipeline company has been authorized to use by the government.¹⁹⁸ The Wet'suwet'en First Nation responded on January 1st, 2020 with an eviction notice to the company workers to leave their land.¹⁹⁹ On February 6th, 2020, the RCMP trespassed onto Wet'suwet'en territory and carried out arrests in order to enforce the court's injunction.²⁰⁰ Just like the Wounded Knee occupation, the federal government responded to the Oka Crisis with violence and ammunition, what Sainte-Marie refers to as the "federal tanks," and responded to the current protests on Wet'suwet'en territory with the RCMP, another form of violence.

The chorus of "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee," conveys Sainte-Marie's grief and sorrow over the murder of Aquash. She laments: "Bury my heart at wounded knee/Deep in the earth/Cover me with pretty lies/Bury my heart at wounded knee." Wounded Knee represents a site of historical mourning with both the past and the present. Each statement of the chorus begins and ends with the title of the song suggesting that Wounded Knee will always be a place of sorrow for Sainte-Marie because of the death of her friend Aquash and Peltier's conviction. Her grief extends to the massacre that occurred at Wounded Knee in 1890 and the violence of the occupation for Indigenous peoples in 1973. According to Kim, the line "pretty lies" refers to the

¹⁹⁸ The Canadian Press, "Timeline of Wet'suwet'en Solidarity Protests and the Dispute that Sparked them," updated February 24, 2020, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6560125/timeline-wetsuweten-pipeline-protests/>

¹⁹⁹ The Canadian Press, "Timeline of Wet'suwet'en Solidarity Protests and the Dispute that Sparked them."

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

silencing of Indigenous voices such as Leonard Peltier's during his trial and Annie Mae Pictou Aquash's.²⁰¹

The harmonic progression of the chorus is as follows: I-bVII-IV. It is repeated for each line of text. In "Now that the Buffalo's Gone" and "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying," Sainte-Marie uses bVII to emphasize certain words. However, in "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee," she uses the bVII chord sound when there are no words occurring. For example, the I chord occurs on the last word of each line: "knee," "earth," "lies," and "knee" again. The subsequent bVII-IV occurs right after. While the bVII is not used in this instance to emphasize specific words, it does add weight to the vocal silences in those moments, further highlighting the silencing of Indigenous voices with Peltier's conviction and Aquash's murder.

The first verse (and each subsequent verse) has the following progression: V-vi-V-[V]-vi-V-[V]-vi. Similar to "Now that the Buffalo's Gone" and "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying," the second verse of "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" addresses land dispossession and Residential Schools. For example, Sainte-Marie sings: "They got the energy companies who want the land/And they've got the churches by the dozen who want to/Guide our hand/And sign our Mother Earth over to pollution, war and greed/Get rich/Get rich quick." The reference to energy companies signals land dispossession as most treaties with Indigenous reservations and territory have always been for the extraction of resources. According to Thomas King, "a treaty would be negotiated in which Native people, if they were fortunate, were forced to give up a portion of their land but allowed to keep the remainder and stay where they were."²⁰² In most

²⁰¹ Kim, 166.

²⁰² King, 91-2.

cases, however, treaties were either broken by the federal government or a new treaty would be reinforced to take even more land thereafter.²⁰³ Treaties have never been about protecting Indigenous land; rather, they have always been used as a tool by settlers to take land.²⁰⁴ The mention of churches guiding hands is about the Residential School system in Canada and how the churches that ran it attempted to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canadian society.

The third verse takes up the unjust trial and conviction of Leonard Peltier: “We get the federal marshals/We get the covert spies/We get the liars by the fire/We get the FBI’s/They lie in court and get nailed/And still Peltier goes off to jail/The bullet’s don’t match the gun.” The verse as a whole demonstrates how Indigenous peoples are treated when they assert their rights. When AIM occupied Wounded Knee to protest corruption, the federal government sent in the U.S. marshals. “Covert spies” refers to the FBI’s counterintelligence program which planted false rumours of spies within AIM. Sainte-Marie explicitly states how the FBI lied in court during Peltier’s trial and still Peltier was convicted. At first, it appears as if the line “and still Peltier goes off to jail” is the last one of the verse. However, right before the chorus, Sainte-Marie quickly calls out “the bullets don’t match the gun.” This is a specific reference to the evidence that was presented in court that should have been cause for reasonable doubt but was not. Sainte-Marie’s quick call-out of this line surprises listeners.

The fourth verse turns to Aquash. Sainte-Marie sings: “My girlfriend Annie Mae talked about uranium/Her head was filled with bullets and her body dumped/The FBI cut off her hands/And told us she’d died of exposure.” In this case Sainte-Marie is placing blame on the FBI

²⁰³ Ibid., 92.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

for the death of her friend Aquash.²⁰⁵ The verse is also the only one to end with a sample of powwow singing.²⁰⁶ The intensity of the powwow sample at the end of the verse adds weight to the emotionality of the song and also serves as a tribute to Aquash's legacy of activism that she left behind by evoking Indigenous resistance and solidarity. The powwow samples continue in the following choruses. The increase in texture created by the samples reinforces Indigenous female solidarity. It is Sainte-Marie's way of supporting her friend and continuing her fight for Indigenous rights.

The last verse brings up history writing, specifically addressing how Indigenous history is most often written from the perspective of settlers for the benefit of settlers. Sainte-Marie sings: "We had the Gold Rush wars/Aw, didn't we learn to crawl and still our history gets/Written in a liar's scrawl/They tell ya, 'Hey honey, you can still be an Indian down at the Y on Saturday nights'." She refers to settler perspective of history as being written in a "liar's scrawl." This is because Indigenous perspectives have not been taken into account within settler society and most often much of their history is left out.

"Starwalker" and "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" both address the concerns of AIM while also drawing attention to the misogyny that took place within the movement. "Starwalker" calls for unity among AIM members (of all genders) in fighting for Indigenous rights. To this day, "Starwalker" is one of Sainte-Marie's favorite songs, mainly because of its acknowledgement of Indigenous resistance and leadership. The song places Indigenous peoples at the forefront of their history, telling their story from their own perspective. In 1992, Sainte-

²⁰⁵ Kim, 166.

²⁰⁶ Kim, 150.

Marie re-recorded “Starwalker” for *Coincidence and Likely Stories* and amped up its production with electric guitar.²⁰⁷ Warner writes that Sainte-Marie’s “digitized powwow and powwow inspired songs and chants effectively smashed boundaries between traditional Indigenous music and pop and rock.”²⁰⁸ “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” is a direct response to the government’s handling of the Wounded Knee occupation of 1973 and the consequences thereafter, specifically for Leonard Peltier and Sainte-Marie’s friend Annie Mae Pictou Aquash. She directly refers to both figures and calls out the injustices behind Peltier’s conviction and Aquash’s murder. As for AIM, by 1990 most of its leadership were either in prison or “had had their lives destroyed by government sanctions, legal and illegal.”²⁰⁹ Still active today, the organization no longer engages in an aggressive stance but rather actively works on creating policies to better the lives of Indigenous peoples in North America. Nevertheless, “Starwalker” and “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” reveal the importance of Indigenous resistance and encourages listeners to consider Indigenous protest and how it relates directly to settler society.

²⁰⁷ Warner, 201.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ King, 170.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown how Buffy Sainte-Marie's music addresses Indigenous injustices within both Canada and the United States. An analysis of both music and lyrics reveals how her songs respond to colonial issues such as land dispossession and Residential Schools. They also addressed the concerns of the American Indian Movement during the 1970s and the sexism that took place in the organization. By situating Sainte-Marie's songs within the protest music genre, I was also able to highlight their importance in challenging the listener to really *listen* to what she has to say and the particular stories that she chooses to tell. Much of settler history has silenced Indigenous voices.²¹⁰ Sainte-Marie's songs, however, give power to those voices.

The main approach of this thesis was to analyze a particular set of Sainte-Marie's songs lyrically and musically. Songs from her early career (1960s and the 1970s) were chosen in order to demonstrate how ahead of the times Sainte-Marie was in her musical output. She was singing about Indigenous injustices related to colonial endeavors in both Canada and the United States when many settlers were unaware that such discrimination was taking place. She was telling history through the perspective of Indigenous peoples, a history that is often overlooked and forgotten. Because both scholars and critics have emphasized Sainte-Marie's lyrics I decided to highlight how particular musical elements support the issues that she raises in her songs.

Over the course of the five decades of Sainte-Marie's career, there have been several artists who have covered her songs. However, as Andrea Warner points out, many listeners are not aware that those songs were written and originally performed by Sainte-Marie. In 1965,

²¹⁰ Kim, 154-55.

British musician Donovan covered Sainte-Marie's "Universal Soldier," and it became a hit, charting at number five in the U.K., and at number fifty-three on the Billboard charts.²¹¹ He also covered Sainte-Marie's song "Co'dine." Warner writes: "Suddenly, everyone was talking about 'Universal Soldier' as if Donovan had written it. When he covered 'Co'dine' shortly thereafter, Sainte-Marie's authorship was erased yet again. To this day, there are numerous websites that credit him as the songwriter and it's blatant sexism that, fifty years later, this is still a common misconception."²¹² Her most covered song, "Until It's Time for You to Go," was also recorded by Elvis Presley.²¹³ Presley's managers wanted to buy the rights of the song from Sainte-Marie but she refused.²¹⁴ As Sainte-Marie notes: "He hadn't written it, period, and I felt that it was [an] unfair [demand]."²¹⁵

In addition to her music not being recognized as her own, Sainte-Marie's songs were also blacklisted by the American government in the 1960s and 1970s. Because of her involvement in AIM and other social activist campaigns, the FBI and the CIA monitored Sainte-Marie during this time.²¹⁶ This surveillance led to her music not being played on the radio.²¹⁷ The blacklisting, though, did not deter Sainte-Marie from continuing to pursue her career in music.²¹⁸ According to Warner, "being silenced by the government was just further proof of the real power of protest music," including that of Sainte-Marie's.²¹⁹

²¹¹ Warner, 68.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 121.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 125-26.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 125.

²¹⁶ Warner, 195.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 195-96.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 196.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

To this day, Sainte-Marie is still writing music and performing. Her songs continue to address Indigenous injustices taking place in North America. In 2015, she released her album *Power in the Blood*. Most of the songs on this album relate to the Idle No More Movement. According to Warner, “In 2012, Indigenous grassroots activists made headlines with Idle No More, a protest against the Canadian government’s ongoing abuse of Indigenous people, their land rights, and wide-scale exploitations of the environment for profit.”²²⁰ Of her album, Sainte-Marie notes: “Musically it takes huge risks, and thematically it’s a cohesive blast of Indigenous identity and authority, autonomy, and power. Galvanized by Idle No More and other grassroots activism, *Power in the Blood* signaled a bold era in protest music and resistance.”²²¹ Not much has been written about her current work and I hope that further discussion of Sainte-Marie might focus on how her most recent songs address ongoing issues of colonialism. I also believe that further research of Sainte-Marie and her music can allow for more recognition of who she is and all that she has accomplished.

²²⁰ Ibid., 243.

²²¹ Ibid., 244.

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