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**Identity Formation and Native Canadian Women's Literature:  
Radicalizing Resistance**

**Jessie Forsyth**

**A Thesis**

**In**

**The Department**

**of**

**English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Identity Formation and Native Canadian Women's Literature: Radicalizing Resistance**

**Jessie Forsyth, M.A.  
Concordia University, 2002**

Focusing on the literature of two writers, Lee Maracle and Jeannette Armstrong, this thesis explores processes of 'claiming voice' within a context of resistance. The central questions focus on challenges to, and methods of, re-writing affirming identities. Key theoretical concerns involve negotiating essentialist and constructivist discourses, and disrupting binary oppositions, in order to locate and legitimate claims of oppression without perpetuating the discursive structures supporting colonialist ideology. Using a wide range of texts, the thesis examines three aspects of identity formation as crucial to the project of radicalizing resistance: a dialogical interaction between personal and political identities; the need to re-write narratives of history; and the ways in which race- and gender-constructs intersect in naming 'Self.' Concepts of collaboration, continuity, and dialogue, expressed both thematically and structurally, play a key role throughout the thesis.

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*"The listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it...." (Maracle, Sojourner's Truth & Other Stories, "Preface: You Become the Trickster," 12)*

*"As listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose." ("Trickster," 13)*

*"She [Lee Maracle] does not close her eyes, her ears, but speaks no matter what the cost. She will ask that you participate, voice the many questions that will inevitably surface, and take part in the mystery of the answer..." (Joy Harjo, "Foreword" to Sojourners and Sundogs, 11)*

*"Realization of the power in speaking is in the realization that words can change the future and in the realization that we each have that power." (Armstrong, "Land Speaking" 183)*

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## ***IDENTITY FORMATION and NATIVE CANADIAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE: RADICALIZING RESISTANCE***

### ***Chapter One: Theoretical Framework Opening Thoughts and Sustained Questions***

The phrase 'Native Canadian Women's literature'<sup>1</sup> raises a complex nexus of questions that precede and exceed the texts themselves. Framed by particular but fluctuating socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts, a series of interrelated processes provide entry-points for discussion: reading 'difference'; negotiating definitions; translating and traversing notions and parameters of Subject-/Object-ification; and interrogating language use. This thesis works from the premise that identities, like definitions, are simultaneously useful in their capacity to demarcate one s/Subject from another and dangerous in their tendency to obscure their own fictiveness, demanding, as a result, perpetual (re)consideration. Exploring the work of Jeannette

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<sup>1</sup> Central to its focus, this thesis recognizes the insufficiency of definitions and the inexactness of terms, particularly in the case of this body of writing. Rather than propose one term (i.e. 'Native Canadian,' 'First Nations,' 'Indigenous') as the most appropriate and thus resolve the tension generated by naming, I either use whichever term is used in the text at hand, or I use each of the above interchangeably – not to imply that they have no specific meaning, but to avoid reducing the significance of diverse peoples to contested, and largely arbitrary definition (as in the case of the Canadian Government's terminology).

Armstrong and Lee Maracle specifically, the thesis investigates the role of identity formation within a context of resistance. Centrally, this exploration asks: what are the stakes involved in challenging the imposition of negative representation by claiming a self-scripted identity? How can a tool used for destructive ends be, through transformation, embraced as a cornerstone of empowerment? What are the key challenges in the process, and why does the process itself warrant extensive (though not exhaustive) consideration? In response, the thesis sets aspects of contemporary (Western) critical theory in dialogue with First Nations scholarship to examine, through a variety of texts, methods of ‘speaking as’ a self-identified individual/group – ‘seeking voice,’ in idiomatic, literary, and political terms – while challenging the very notion of a unified Subject. My project’s central problematic emerges from the tension between essentialist and constructivist discourses to investigate, significantly, the productive aspects of narrativizing that tension. As will be explored, Armstrong and Maracle underline the danger of stabilizing and resolving something as non-reductive as identity (that must braid shifting intersections of gendered/ racialized/ ‘classified’ narratives), but also of denying its significance in complex processes of resistance, empowerment, and decolonization. ‘Process’ and ‘negotiation’ are thus foregrounded as key concepts throughout this thesis, expressing numerous faces of binary subversion<sup>2</sup> and prioritizing journeys over substantive destinations.

The work of two writers provides generous material with which to analyze diverse methods, locations, and consequences for negotiating identity(-ies). Armstrong and

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<sup>2</sup> Binary oppositions can be considered “a way of bringing dynamics and process into theory. In a binary opposition the two poles must not only be opposed to each other but must also be in exclusive opposition to each other; in other words, they are bound in polar opposition” (Makaryk, 511). I use ‘binary subversion,’ by extension, to denote a process of disrupting the oppositional structure of a binary.

Maracle are of especial significance for their contributions to First Nations literature in Canada – which include developing means of accessing and producing that literature<sup>3</sup> – and are the writers whose thinking, expressed in fiction, poetry, and criticism, anchor this thesis. Working within a context marked by conspicuous inequality, Armstrong and Maracle face formidable challenges; yet their creative and critical texts, by radicalizing notions of collaboration, work to destabilize the bases on which inequities are premised. Their approaches and foci diverge, but their challenge to binary oppositions – rendering subjectivity at once visible and unstable, and meaning adaptive rather than fixed – is shared. Exploring the significance and suggestiveness of textual instability, my project here is similarly invested in destabilizing myths that homogenize First Nations communities and cultures (and, by extension, writers and literature); Armstrong's and Maracle's texts are approached, therefore, as neither analogous nor diametrically opposed. Rather than scrutinized for explicit comparison/contrast analysis, the primary texts are examined collectively, with an emphasis on inter- and intra-cultural dialogue, to better consider the terms by which both writers disrupt popular and official discourses about (First) Nation(s) in Canada and redress wounds exacted by social, cultural, and political narratives of exclusion.

The following chapters focus on three separate but interrelated aspects of (re)conceptualizing identity(-ies) in the service of resistance: negotiating personal and political identities; re-writing histories; and interrogating intersections between gender and race constructs. Chapter Two explores a dialogical exchange between

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<sup>3</sup> Jeannette Armstrong was instrumental in establishing the En'owkin International School of Writing in Penticton, British Columbia, "the first center in the world where Aboriginal people learn and teach how to write and publish their literatures" (Lutz: 1991, 13). Armstrong has acted as Director at the school since 1989; Lee Maracle has also worked there as a writing instructor (and is currently the Distinguished Visiting

personal/individual and political/collective identities by, first, outlining primary challenges to subject-formation. Chapter Three examines the texts' constructions of Self and history, focusing on the role (and use) of language as simultaneously insufficient and necessary for the project of historiographic revision. And Chapter Four – a culmination of prior analyses – examines processes of resistance as they address both colonialism and sexism, generating internal disruptions along multiple points of 'allegiance.' Rather than form an 'action plan' for empowerment, the discussions performed here are designed to engage a broad critical terrain with which to read Armstrong's and Maracle's methods of resisting enforced voiceless-ness. As such, the thesis raises (more than answers) a range of questions about subject-formation as operating within, and operative of, processes of transformation.

Each area of exploration – constructing Self in relation to Other, history, and gender – is informed by the theoretical and methodological issues mapped out in the remainder of this chapter. As central challenges to processes of claiming voice, the first issues given attention are appropriation of voice – which includes the twin infractions of being defined by others, and losing voice through others' use of it – and the discursive tension generated by essentialism/constructivism negotiations. In response, two significant 'counter-claims' will be outlined: Armstrong's and Maracle's pedagogical imperative, and calls to negotiate 'difference,' in conjunction with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of 'strategic essentialism.' To better understand the climate in which Armstrong and Maracle operate, the broader critical and socio-political context will then be interrogated alongside the position of the critic, drawing into question the limitations



as well as the usefulness of post-colonial approaches to Native Canadian literature. Finally, the last two sections of this chapter build upon prior discussion to illustrate, first, the shared challenges in processes of claiming voice – adopting and deploying an identity – and defining a body of literature; and, second, the ways in which Armstrong's and Maracle's literature functions thematically and structurally to create a content/form interface.

***1.1) Speaking for Self, Seeking Self Determination – Two Key Challenges and Modes of Response***

As implied in the quote from Armstrong (used as an epigraph), Native Canadians' processes of claiming voice have immediate political consequence in their direct association with self-determination, as speaking for one's Self dislocates the basis upon which paternalistic political policy functions. Paula Gunn Allen, emphasizing ideological factors, also offers a cogent and pertinent comment on the political import of writing:

*I write because I am aware that whoever controls the image controls the population; that those who define us determine not only our lives, but our concept of our very selves, and that colonization begins and ends with the definer, the contextualizer, and the propagandist. (Quoted in Harjo, 151)*

I will return to the relationship between literature and politics later in this chapter, but the focal importance of 'determining Self' anchors this exchange of challenges and responses that frame Armstrong's and Maracle's processes of speaking, being heard, and negotiating the constraints of identity categories. In introduction to this examination of identity claims and negotiations, 'self-determination' is an apt term to consider: as the ultimate goal about which these questions are asked, it is a political term that requires simplistic understanding (governing one's own community) yet denotes a process – of defining, and claiming Self – that is far more complex than its political use allows.

A particularly contentious issue surrounding Native Canadians' self-representation is the practice – both simplistic in appearance and complex in effect – of appropriating (others') voice(s), raising concomitant questions about truth claims, transparency, and access to/ means of representation. For the purposes of this thesis, voice appropriation is most troubling for its denial of self-determination through simultaneous elision and construction of difference-based identification. (The 'difference' is elided in the instance of claiming authority to 'speak for' another Subject; it is constructed in the instance of 'speaking as' an-Other (non-Self) Subject.) Armstrong confronts Eurocanadian artists and writers as complicitous in the colonial project of naming and rendering the Other 'knowable,' and demands that imagination not be premised on her own misrepresentation:

You writers from the dominating culture have the freedom of imagination. You keep reminding us of this. Is there anyone here who dares to imagine what those children suffered at the hands of their so-called 'guardians' in those schools? You are writers, imagine it on yourselves and your children. Imagine you and your children and imagine how they would be treated by those who abhorred and detested you, all, as savages without any rights. ("The Disempowerment." 240)

As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, claims to authenticity in speaking for the 'Other' carry various risks, including that of essentializing and homogenizing diverse and dynamic processes. This, in turn, leads to the recognition that simply inverting 'incorrect' images is a fallacy, and moving beyond binary oppositions in conceiving of identity is an imperative. Rey Chow, for example, condemns acts of appropriation and names violence as a by-product of representational claims, but also cautions against the ostensible 'solution' of seeking 'authenticity' in the 'native' (used synonymously, here,

with 'Other') (Chow, 14).<sup>4</sup> Linking particularism (self-identifying as a member of an identity- or location-specific group) with universalism (self-identifying as an individual in an undifferentiated world population), Chow argues that the two are opposite sides of the same coin, both seeking to reify experiential reality and assume epistemological command over T/truth (5):

Our fascination with the native, the oppressed, the savage, and all such figures is therefore a desire to hold on to an unchanging certainty somewhere outside our own 'fake' experience. It is a desire for being 'non-duped,' which is a not-too-innocent desire to seize control. (53)

In challenging the possibility of 'correcting' appropriation by turning to 'authorities,' Chow effectively echoes Daniel David Moses who maintains that danger resides in constructing a knowledgeable 'cultural insider': partially in collapsing (thus appropriating) all Native voices into one, and partially in perpetuating colonial stereotypes of Native-as-archive/archival, proffering quantifiable data for the external observer. "I know Native legends," Moses comments, "but I really have a feeling that it's not my right to go traipsing around, telling other people's stories. This image of traditional Native storytelling places Native people in the museum with all the other extinct species" (Moses and Goldie, xx). Mineke Schipper also speaks to the hazards of designating 'cultural insiders,' arguing that it preempts dialogue between different Subjects and cultures; corresponding to "the question of the difference between us and others" (Schipper, 4), identity, according to Schipper, is a relational, contingent, and

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this project, the capitalized 'Native' refers to a First Nations Subject, and a small-case 'native' denotes Chow's use of the term (as a generic title for someone indigenous to a specific place). Similarly, a capitalized 'Subject' is suggestive of a proper noun and is used to identify a person, whereas a small-case 'subject' carries a generic meaning, used to indicate a process (i.e. subject-formation).

shifting construct that requires engagement rather than definition.<sup>5</sup> As such, identities might theoretically be ‘protected’ from appropriation – an act, in part, of simplification – by the fact of their complexity, yet power differentials between appropriated and appropriating Subjects obscure both the complexity of identity and its leveling.

Cultural relativism, the flip side of voice appropriation, engenders similar problems in reifying an ‘un-deconstructable’ (i.e.) cultural Other and forfeiting voice in all matters extending beyond the Self. Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” for example, outlines the paradoxical position of contemporary critical theory – the space where absolute ‘Truths’ are most challenged – in relation to the subaltern voice. Resonating with Chow’s account of particularism, Spivak charges Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari with “fetishizing ‘concrete experience’ as something out there (in the factory, the school, the barracks, the prison or, we might add, the reserve)” (Spivak: 1988, 279). As such, Spivak argues, the intellectual effectively represents her/himself “as transparent, masking her or his role as an investigating subject, and denying complicity of the intellectual, as a fractured subject, in her or his own class interests.”<sup>6</sup> The result is similar to what Chow describes as “‘giving in’ to the strangeness of the other[,]...a philosophical and semiotic gesture that characterizes many European intellectuals” and presumes the existence of an impermeable epistemological barrier between cultures (Chow, 33). Although antithetical to the critical approaches employed, this gesture constructs its own “totalizing logic” (Emberley: 1993, 69) and enforces absolutist

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<sup>5</sup> Schipper focuses on various African literatures, but the critical questions she raises are applicable to First Nations literatures as well.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Julia Emberley: 1993, 69. Emberley reads Spivak’s response to Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari by elucidating Spivak’s distinction between “representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy” (Spivak, 275). Spivak argues that making this distinction is necessary “for displacing an ‘essentialist, utopian politics’ in intellectual production” (Emberley, 69). a politics which she attributes to the theorists mentioned.

assumptions about the ‘Other,’ both of which reinforce a dialogical impasse between inter-discursive voices.

To challenge the twin practices of being spoken for and/or constructed as ‘cultural insider,’ Armstrong and Maracle employ culture-specific pedagogy that points to a discrepancy – and a power structure – within prevailing notions of voice(lessness). As Emma LaRocque unequivocally argues, the “issue is not that Native peoples were ever wordless but that, in Canada, their words were literally and politically negated” (LaRocque: 1990, vx). Both Armstrong and Maracle, as a preliminary necessity, give expression to voices otherwise ignored or subsumed under a generic rubric termed ‘Native’; the introduction of such voices disrupts non-Native authority over Native cultural practices and undermines homogenizing, reductive images of Native peoples. Because challenging the power/voice configuration of appropriation, silence and homogenization advances the right of self-determination, claiming control over cultural production is crucially important for First Nations communities. As Helen Hoy notes, the growth in Native-run publishing presses (i.e. Theytus Books, Penticton, BC; Seventh Generation Books, Toronto), theatre companies (i.e. Centre for Indigenous Theatre, Toronto), journals and magazines (i.e. *Gatherings*, *Sweetgrass*), and the En’owkin International School of Writing (Penticton) “reflect[s] the desire of First Nations people in Canada to control the contexts in which they speak with others...[and their] insist[ence] on Native perspectives regarding their literature and representation” (Hoy: 2001, 13).

It is the “Native perspectives” (13) Armstrong and Maracle offer that are couched within a pedagogical imperative. Armstrong, for example, offers a literary mandate that frames her use and analysis of voice, and her approach to communication across cultures:

I suggest that in reading First Nations Literature the questioning must first be an acknowledgement and recognition that the *voices are culture-specific* voices and that there are *experts* within those cultures who are essential to be drawn from and drawn out in order to incorporate into the *reinterpretation through pedagogy*, the *context* of English Literature coming from Native Americans...

I suggest that the *pedagogical insistence of such practice is integral to the process*. In doing so I suggest that First Nations Literature, *as a facet of cultural practice*, contains symbolic significance and relevance that is an integral part of the deconstruction-construction of colonialism and the *reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practice*. (“The Disempowerment,” 7-8; emphasis added)<sup>7</sup>

Her interrelated foci destabilize hierarchical binaries to enable co-operative cross-cultural relationships that function “beyond colonial thought and practice.” Though her insistence on using “First Nations Writers, readers, academics and critics” may appear to privilege ‘authentic,’ ‘insider’ perspectives, her argument focuses instead on generating polyphonic interpretation made possible through multiple processes of listening to, and engaging with, historically *invalidated* voices. Emphasizing the dual need to educate a readership and identify the speaker, Armstrong states: “We writers have the responsibility to clarify for the world who we are, what we are, where we fit in, what our perspective is” (Williamson, 22). She argues that although this is a “developing pedagogy,” it demands a “process which would deconstruct the standard and assist in the collective articulation of some guiding principles” (Armstrong: 2000, 9, 10).

Addressing both non-Native and Native audiences, the pedagogical imperative in Armstrong’s and Maracle’s texts involves the “guiding principle” of self-analysis. For the non-Native reader, this reflexivity registers as (what Spivak terms) “unlearning privilege” (Spivak: 1990, 57); for the Native reader, it means unlearning internalized devaluation; and for both, the critical self-analysis involves a discursive modification of

Self versus Other. Although 'pedagogy' signifies instruction, its potential for reductive didacticism is disrupted in the call for reflexivity (and will be explored further in Chapter Two). For the non-Native reader and critic, this pedagogy endeavors to raise consciousness about First Nations peoples in Canada as a pre-requisite to informed cross-cultural, intra-/international dialogue; for the Native reader, it reinforces First Nations philosophies and cultural traditions as pre-requisites for (re)positioning oneself within particular power structures. As Marlene Nourbese Philip explains,

White writers...must understand how their privilege *as white people*, writing *about* another culture, rather than *out of* it virtually guarantees that their work will, in a racist society, be received more readily than the work of writers coming from that very culture. (Quoted in Hoy: 2001, 12)

Armstrong's concomitant call for Native writers to "examine the past and culturally affirm toward a new vision for all our people in the future" involves healing, for the Native reader, through "cultural affirmation," and recognition, by the non-Native reader, that "*numbers* are not the basis of democracy, *people* are, *each one* being important" ("The Disempowerment," 241). "To the Native writers here," Armstrong asserts, "my words are meant as empowerment to you" (241); "Lies need clarification..., and resistance to oppression needs to be stated, without furthering division and participation in the same racist measures" (241). Both Maracle and Armstrong, as a result, work to radicalize notions of inclusion, encouraging their Native readership to join in the struggle to 'decolonize the mind'<sup>8</sup> and their non-Native readership to understand the struggle.

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<sup>7</sup> "The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment Through Their Writing" was a paper delivered for the Saskatchewan Writers Guild 1990 Annual Conference.

<sup>8</sup> 'Decolonizing the Mind' is the title phrase from the book by Ngugi wa Thiong'o that analyzes the linguistic and cultural bases for colonization and the means necessary for 'decolonization.' Ngugi argues that the process of decolonization – freeing oneself and one's community/region/country from the subjugation of imperial controls – has a fundamentally psychological character in that it requires a belief in oneself as capable of self-determination and a definition of oneself not rooted in colonialist discourse. It is therefore imperative, Ngugi argues, to place one's culture at the conceptual center of one's worldview,

Maracle describes the process (for the Native Subject) of unlearning internalized devaluation and resisting unthinking racism as primary to processes of empowerment. Mirroring the “lateral violence” (*I Am Woman*, ix) of interpellated hatred (and central to discussion in Chapter Four), this process, in turn, relies upon the focal practice of subverting binaries. Advocating doubt as an expression that counters the certainty of binaries and encourages reflexivity capable of challenging assumptions and fostering change, Maracle states:

A lot of people say my book [*I Am Woman*] is very angry. But most of my folks say it's a very inspiring, empowering book because there's an energy there that never lets up. There's a thread that says to them every sentiment they've ever had about the world they live in is a good one. Every doubt they've ever had is a wonderful doubt. It makes us sharp. It makes us brilliant. It makes us very powerful just to see – just to see. (Maracle, “An Infinite...,” 171)

The importance of finding voice through engagement with, or in contrast to, other voices produces a key tension: having to separate Self from Other to name and examine distinctly un-equal contextual circumstances while, simultaneously, creating doubt and demanding thought by constructing the binary (Self/Other) in need of disruption. Helen Hoy employs as well as troubles binary oppositions by outlining intersections between Native and non-Native addressees (of First Nations literature), thus demonstrating a “slipperiness” in the address of projected and intended audiences (Hoy: 2001, 13).<sup>9</sup> Central to each chapter and respective foci, both Maracle and Armstrong emphasize complicity and interrelation in their critical pedagogy that works to deconstruct binary-

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thereby challenging both the supremacy of a colonial center/-ing and one's status as colonized, marginalized, and secondary. For Ngugi, the use of Indigenous languages is integral to mobilizing and rebuilding cultural integrity; although both Armstrong and Maracle write primarily in English, the issue of using and negotiating (power-inflected) languages and discourses remains key to the issues explored in their texts.

<sup>9</sup> As an example of ‘slipperiness’ Helen Hoy refers to Maracle's statement in the opening of *I Am Woman* – that she is writing for her own people and not for Europeans in Canada – which is followed by a direct address to European Canadians (“you just don't concern me now”) (Hoy: 2001, 13).



dependent stereotypes and re-construct positive understandings of First Nations peoples, histories, and cultures without simply reassigning values within a (highly problematic) binary structure that remains uncontested.

At the level of discourse, this negotiation between Self and Other becomes a negotiation between constructed and essential T/truth(s), and entails approaching meaning as always already deferred but also as experiential and attestable. (This tension will be examined further in Chapter Three, concentrating specifically on historical referentiality.) Having to assert an identity that is both empowering and capable of resisting oppressive ‘naming’ procedures in the face of systemic and institutionalized inequity requires concurrent exploitation of the two discourses (essentialism and constructivism). Yet each holds distinct and discontinuous political valence. Within a context inscribed by marginalization and disempowerment for the First Nations speaker, essentialism risks replicating, by inverting, the structures of colonialist discourse which align aboriginality with ‘primitiveness’ and produce the ‘Native Canadian’ as fundamentally ‘Other’ – either romanticized or vilified, but always categorical and inferior. Unquestioned constructivism, on the other hand, risks continually displacing the historical, linguistic, and Subject-ive referent(s) (that need recognition in order to address structures of power and oppression), thus becoming itself a totalizing discourse of uncertainty. As Kumkum Sangari observes about postmodernism (as a constructivist discourse), it “both privileges the present and valorizes indeterminacy as a cognitive mode,...preempt[ing] change by fragmenting the ground of praxis” (Quoted in O’Brien, 90). Hoy also warns against wholesale adoption of either post-structuralism (which tends to focus on the specificity of each voice/-production process) or realism (which tends to conflate specific perspectives with broad applicability). As she notes, both “respect for

specificity and challenges to ethnocentrism can produce, ironically, ‘a kind of difference that doesn’t make a difference.’<sup>10</sup> Or worse, they can introduce new forms of domination” (Hoy: 2001, 5).

Because the intersection between agency and subject-making is marked by ambivalence in contemporary critical discourse, this thesis considers discourse theory, alone, as insufficient for addressing the voice of the Subject who is ‘Other-ed’ (to be explored further in Chapter Two), and explores the texts’ construction of a ‘third option.’ Armstrong, for example, claims an identity category from which to speak but emphasizes the complexity of context and ‘difference,’ resisting the seduction of an uncritical humanism which defines diversity within hegemonic, and unilateral, discourses. She introduces *Looking at the Words of our People* with a disclaimer: “I am not an authority on First Nations Literature[;...] I depend upon native critical thought and draw on it in order to contribute in a valuable way to such dialogue” (Armstrong: 1993, 7).<sup>11</sup> As noted earlier, Armstrong suggests that “the questioning which forms the critical pedagogical voice” applied to Native North American (English) Literature requires an understanding of “the internal questioning” from within its specific community, and calls for engagement with community-specific perspectives and attention to cultural diversity (7).

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<sup>10</sup> Hoy is quoting Stuart Hall, from “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” *Black Popular Culture*. A Project by Michele Wallace. Ed. Gina Dent. Seattle: Bay, 1992. p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Looking at the Words of Our People*, collected and compiled by Jeannette Armstrong, is a collection of First Nations’ literary criticism by First Nations writers. When it was published (1993), it was one of the first collections of First Nations’ analysis of First Nations’ literature. In 2001, *(Ad)ressing Our Words: Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Literatures* was published, also by Theytus Books Ltd. This second critical collection was designed as a follow-up text to *Looking at the Words of our People*; in it, Janice Acoose pays special tribute to Jeannette Armstrong. She respectfully states: “As an Indigenous-Okanagan writer/critic and the editor of *Looking at the Words of our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature* (1993), Armstrong courageously pioneered the territory of literary criticism in Canada – a territory I might add that is inhabited by the most ferocious kinds of *Wiintigos*” (Acoose: 2001, 48). In this light, it is particularly significant that Armstrong would ensure she not be considered an authority on the literature.

Maracle sets out a similar problematic, arguing that attention to cultural specificity is mandatory, but that writers “do not represent anybody” (172):

What they represent is a personal direction, a new humanity and a new sense of the world. That’s something the world always is going to need...Every single Native person who writes is pointing to a road over there. I don’t necessarily agree with every writer who ever wrote something, but it needs to be said and thought about. It needs to be approached from every angle we can. (172)

Emphasizing diversity and interchange, Armstrong and Maracle both demonstrate that categories of difference (as deployed, for example, in culture-specific pedagogy) can be interrogated, respected, and sustained without causing irreconcilable division. Showing ‘difference’ to be neither essential nor inconsequential, however, their texts also illustrate that the effects of a ‘difference-hierarchy’ are as real as its legitimacy is constructed. As Maracle states, “for us, racism is not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives. The pain, the effect, the shame are tangible, measurable and murderous” (*IAW*, 4). Hoy also addresses the effects of difference-based discrimination and the usefulness of difference-based identification:

Race and gender (among other identity categories) may well be inventions, constructed categories that signal the deviation of marked races and gender(s) from the norm, but their effects are tangible, producing distinctive racialized and gendered subject positions. (Hoy: 2001, 7)

To address this profound imbalance – between a constructed but ‘normalized’ center of power from which images are produced, and a radically dis-empowered margin about which images are disseminated – both Armstrong and Maracle demand for First Nations-centric literary analysis as a measure of protection, an expression of self-determination, and a means of asserting difference under a rubric of cultural integrity that disrupts centers of [disem]power[ment].

Spivak offers a particularly useful approach to reading 'difference' within this constructivist/essentialist tension by employing 'strategic essentialism' and "mobilizing slogans" to simultaneously claim and question voice:

The strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized [people...T]he critique of the 'fetish-character' (so to speak) of the masterword has to be persistent all along the way, even when it seems that to remind oneself of it is counterproductive. Otherwise the strategy freezes into something like what you call an essentialist position, when the situation that calls forth the strategy is seemingly resolved. (Spivak: 1993, 3)

By way of explanation, Spivak maintains that "a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory," and that strategic essentialism is useful in acknowledging "the dangerousness of something one cannot not use" (4, 5). Essentialist discourse, as a frame for the "things without which we cannot live on...; like our running self-identikit" (4), is both dangerous and necessary. Spivak eliminates the possibility of merely 'uncovering truth' by arguing that a deconstructivist critique of essentialism is not an "exposure of error" (5); by extension, the significance of deconstruction is in its ability to "question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility" (Spivak: 1987, 201). Continual re-examination of positionality is therefore a necessary ingredient in struggling, as either speaker or listener, for or against identity categories:

If one is considering strategy, one has to look at where the group – the person, the persons, or the movement – is situated when one makes claims for or against essentialism. (Spivak: 1993, 3)

An associated requirement is remaining "vigilant" about the use of fluctuating tactics, rather than applied theory, in making the discourse of essentialism relevant to the specific task:

Since the moment of essentializing, universalizing, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question, is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment, let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it. (Spivak: 1990, 11)

### ***1.2) Critical Challenges: Canadian Context and Critical Positionality***

Studying Armstrong and Maracle from the perspective of, and within, a dominantly non-Native cultural, political, and academic environment – informed, in turn, by a critical climate characterized by Hoy as a “poor fit between prevailing paradigms of literary studies...and [Native peoples’] own ways of knowing” (Hoy; 2001, 15) – renders critical positionality especially relevant. In addition to the arguments of many Native Canadian writers, including Armstrong and Maracle, that non-Native scholarship of Native literature risks perpetuating its own forms of domination, Hoy provides an instructive overview of the challenges facing cross-cultural dialogue and literary criticism produced within markedly unequal multi-cultural environments. She argues that even well-intentioned studies of First Nations writing that seek to overcome the isolating effects of identity politics must be alert to the pervasive “means of domesticating difference, assimilating Native narratives into the mainstream...[and] neutralizing the oppositional potential of that difference” (Hoy: 2001, 9). Similarly, Margery Fee warns that “a writing process that may well be part of a liberatory struggle is read through the dominant culture’s scripts” (Fee: 2000, 6). Hoy describes common ‘occupational hazards’ (for a person of privilege studying culturally-different work) as employing “opportunities for romanticizing, cultural ignorance, colonization”; conducting “‘narratives of denial, accusation, and confession’”; performing “‘relational positionality’,” “the ‘retreat response’,” or the “‘embarrassed privilege’” stance. By way of prevention, she suggests that critics “keep to the forefront the assumptions, needs, and ignorance that [they] bring

to [their] readings, the culture-specific positioning from which [they] engage with the writing” (Hoy: 2001, 16, 17, 18).

The critic’s position in relation to the text informs, by extension, the questions s/he asks. As Carol Boyce Davies argues,

the application of specific juridical standards or aesthetics or generic categories to a text, with the demand that it fits into them, is a flawed cultural practice. Instead, newer approaches should encourage students to understand how meaning is constructed. (Davies: 1995, 6)

Because the act *of* acting – participating in the shaping and changing of contexts – is of primary concern for Armstrong and Maracle, the dangers of the non-Native critic determining the routes of Native literatures, sustaining hierarchies of ability, and prioritizing non-Native ‘expert’ opinion, are particularly acute. As LaRocque states,

It remains that as scholars we are all challenged to cross borders and to seek greater understanding. Western-based assumptions (including feminist, deconstructionist, and/or ‘post-colonial’ discourse) can no longer claim exclusive rights to the ways and means of academic methodology and insight. (LaRocque: 1996, 14)

Similarly, the editors of *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada* argue that “[c]onventional standards of literary excellence in no way prepare a reader for the complexity of responses the writing contained here will evoke” (Perreault, Vance, xi). Forwarding a deceptively simple prediction – that readers will “discover the limitations of their own reading practices as they encounter the emotional and intellectual demands of this collection” (xi) – Perrault and Vance call their audience to critically examine narrative and knowledge constructs as ‘in process,’ dynamic and moving.

Framed by a political context still largely defined by ‘settler nation’ characteristics,<sup>12</sup> writerly and scholarly voices crossing cultural boundaries in Canada are

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<sup>12</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define ‘settler colonies’ as nations where “the invading Europeans (or their descendents) annihilated, displaced and/or marginalized the indigenes to become a

informed by a national narrative claiming multicultural inclusion, but dependent upon Self/Other (citizen/non-citizen; non-Native/Native) binaries of *exclusion*. To further obstruct discursive exchange, in Canada “and North America more generally, the First Nations face a particular, historically grounded insistence by descendents of European settlers on obliterating difference and claiming connection” (Hoy: 2001, 9). Through the discursively violent process of defining nationhood, a crucial turn takes place: ‘Indigenous’ comes to function as a signifier upon which ‘Canada’ relies, but with which ‘Canada’ cannot be reconciled. Margery Fee offers one reading of this process by examining intersections between romanticism and nationalism. Outlining a “complicated process, simultaneously a confession and a denial of guilt – an identification and a usurpation – [that] ensues when white writers choose Native peoples as literary material” (Fee: 1987, 15),<sup>13</sup> Fee locates a romanticism/nationalism nexus that renders the Native Subject a literary trope, crucial (*as* a trope) to processes of European settlement. In Fee’s analysis, the settler “moves from observer to participant, outsider to insider, immigrant to ‘native’” (16) and, in the process, from colonizer to colonized, and must therefore acquire a “white literary land claim” (17) to justify the call for nationalism. Because an “autochthonous claim to the land” (18) is the coveted aspect of ‘Nativity’ and the basis upon which ‘homeland’ rests, nationalism, Fee argues, “is the major ideological drive

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majority non-indigenous population” (Ashcroft et. al.: 1998, 211). Though this differentiation (from ‘colonies of occupation,’ such as India or Kenya) appears simplistic, it is useful to this thesis in evoking key characteristics: settlers’ experience of displacement “from their own point of origin” and consequent construction of identity “within a discourse of difference and inferiority by the colonizing power” to simultaneously suffer and enact discrimination (211). An ambivalent settler identity that relies, in part, on both its “difference from the ‘native’ population” and its appropriation of aspects of ‘native’ cultures, and forges its own ‘indigeneity’ in the form of a “distinctive and unique culture that is neither that of the metropolitan culture from which they stem, nor that of the ‘native’ cultures they have displaced” (211-212), carries particular resonance for the de-/re-construction of empowering Native Canadian identities in appropriating, most importantly, the language of decolonization for discussing the relationship between settler societies and imperial centers (rather than between indigenous populations and settler societies).

behind the use of the Indian in contemporary English-Canadian literature” (17). Performing what Fee names “totem transfers” (21), (some) non-Native texts legitimate the conquest of land by emphasizing an exchange of “something symbolic of the land from Native to white” (21). The appropriation process is resolved, crucially, once Native Subjects “come to represent what is past, lost, almost forgotten” (25), nostalgic figures rather than colonized Subjects.

To avoid reinforcing a duality that overwrites diverse Native peoples as either singular, silent Other or a misappropriated component of Self – subsumed into a projected image of settler Canada<sup>14</sup> – First Nations writers must address the internal contradiction that supports nationalist discourse: the elision of difference and appropriation of ‘Indigeneity’ to justify a colonial project. Because the Native Subject has historically been represented (in non-Native cultural production) as *external* or marginal to the world of colonialism, and settler Canadians as colonized peoples, the use of post-colonial theories generates significant debate. Thomas King, for example, strongly objects to post-colonialism’s temporal trappings that order “literature progressively, suggesting there is both progress and improvement”; and rejects its implication that Native Canadian literature is a “construct of oppression,” non-existent without colonialism (King, “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial,” 11-12). King considers the term itself a “hostage to nationalism” (12). Alternately, the post-colonial critical lens

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<sup>13</sup>In this article, Fee refers to writers such as John Newlove, Marian Engel, Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe.

<sup>14</sup>Terry Goldie also writes about an apparent urgency, within settler societies like Canada, to appropriate characteristics of an ‘indigene’ to justify processes of ‘nation-making’ in a ‘new world.’ To rehearse Goldie’s argument, in such cases the “Indian is Other and Not-self but also must become self. The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?” (Goldie, 73). One of the ‘solutions’ Goldie cites as a method of Eurocanadian ‘settlement’ has been to “attempt to incorporate the Other, as in superficial examples such as beaded moccasins and names



may also offer potential for engagement with First Nations texts in light of Spivak's argument that "[p]ost-colonial theory – perhaps more properly termed 'decolonial theory' – has challenged the reduction of minoritized peoples to the function of 'self-consolidating Other' for the dominant culture" (Quoted in Hoy: 2001, 5). Also pertinent to my discussion here is the emphasis, in post-colonial approaches, on "the region of 'taboo' – the domain of overlap between these imperial binary oppositions, the area in which ambivalence, hybridity and complexity continually disrupt the certainties of imperial logic" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 25-26).

As explored throughout the thesis, however, First Nations writers – regardless of approach – are clearly compelled to "challenge ideas of a fixed, given content of Canadianness, of a Canadian character" (Hoy: 2001, 10) in order to author-ize 'radical' ideologies by creating new forms of dialogue. Destabilizing a monolithic national identity can be a precursor to re-writing individual and cultural identities within that nation, and Hoy, with this aim, suggests that "Canada be thought of as a conversation" (10). Even as she recognizes that the most privileged stakeholders are not participating ("I'm sorry, but thanks to my spot in the social hierarchies, I don't need to listen" (10)), Hoy proposes that, in discussions of the 'Other,' both "absolute, irreducible distance [*and*] presumptuous familiarity" – the "dangers of fixating on or ignoring difference" (11) – be avoided. Succinctly put, "[d]ifference from whose point of view is, of course, the question" (11). Conducting a conversation with the texts, her readers, and herself, Hoy models a fertile approach to cross-cultural engagement by invoking difference as a port of multiple-entries, knowable and re-knowable but never entirely known: "I am less

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like Mohawk Motors" (73), in the need to become 'not alien.' Goldie terms this process 'indigenization' to describe "the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous" (73).

interested in resolving the question of the title [“How Should I Read These?”] than in rehearsing some of its attendant challenges and discoveries” (11). Exposing the limitations as well as the uses of a conversation metaphor for Canadian identity, Hoy reveals the power dynamics that bound the image and urges the reader to ask whose conversation it is; whose language is spoken; and who are invited to speak. Perhaps the most important act in the project of decolonization is challenging binaries by making connections between and across differences; as Whitlock argues, because dualistic thinking marks colonialist discourse, ambivalence is required of decolonizing discourses:

If binaries, thinking in terms of origins and authenticity, centre and periphery, and the separation into consistent and homogenous identities are fundamental to colonizing discourses, then the work of decolonization is to return to ambivalence and duplicity, and to look to intersubjectivity in cultural formations and texts (Whitlock, 6).

Armstrong’s and Maracle’s texts “return to ambivalence” by setting into dialogue dissimilar understandings of n/Native, n/Nation, and Canada; urging a radical split from hegemonic practices, they perform a dialogical pedagogy that establishes a provisional but fertile base from which to converse.

### ***1.3) “An Aesthetics of Simply Who We Are”: Interface between Identity Formation and Literary Definition***

The challenges to identity formation outlined thus far merit further consideration as they intersect with processes of defining a body of literature. Most importantly (for this thesis), First Nations texts and concepts of identity therein are enlivened by various forms of heterogeneity that counter restrictive homogeneity. Just as ‘First Nations peoples’ acts as a descriptor for vast and diverse cultural, linguistic, and geographic communities, recurring signs – such as the trickster, the circle, or the Four Directions – emerge as partially characteristic of First Nations literature, yet find expression in a variety of

voices, encompass many genres, and encourage numerous methods of interpretation. The consequent “resistance to totalization that can be read in the discursive praxis of Native literatures” (Emberley: 1993, 19)<sup>15</sup> requires continued negotiation of essentialist and constructivist discourse. To further elucidate the interface of definition/voice, three primary issues will be explored: suggestions for and challenges to literary definitions; risks and benefits of oppositional discourse; and terms for First Nations’-centric analyses.

LaRocque states that there is “ample evidence in the study of justification literature for the argument that objectivity can be a self-serving tool of those accustomed to managing history” (LaRocque: 1990, xxi), a danger likened to balancing strategic and fixed t/Truths. Analogous to appropriation of voice, non-Native-authored scholarship that determines the ‘authenticity’ of First Nations texts enacts a parallel form of discursive violence in effectively controlling First Nations’ literary production, interpretation, and validation (Monture-Angus, 25). Demonstrating, by extension, the danger of reductive definitions devised by non-Native authorities and, in the inverse, the rich innovation of increasingly diverse Indigenous literatures, Rasunah Marsden uses images of colonialism to denote the associated compulsion to categorize and control:

It should be obvious that emergent creative non-fiction defies former methods and definitions of writing practice in that same field...*It reminds me of the phrase, ‘the 1001 Nights’ but let’s speak of the ‘veils of perception’ instead like this: ‘Can you be sure, Columbus, that what you saw was a novel, a bunch of short stories, a creative non-fiction collection, or what?’* (Marsden, 21)

Marilyn Dumont further elucidates common non-Native expectations of Native literature that limit the boundaries of ‘acceptable content’: these include legends (from older writers); “stories about foster homes, street life and loss of culture” (from younger

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<sup>15</sup> Here, Emberley is referring to Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity which, unfortunately, cannot be sufficiently engaged within the confines of this project, but which, in part, describes “the perplexity of the

writers); and “if you are in the middle,...[accounts of] alcoholism or residential school” (Quoted in Hoy: 2001, 6). In response, Patricia Monture-Angus urges her reader to demarcate ‘authenticity’ (a set of questions that are often external to a culture and linked with marketability) from ‘identity’ (constructed internally and linked with resistance as well as survival),<sup>16</sup> and demands (with Armstrong and Maracle) that First Nations voices be included at the negotiating tables around which approaches to, and readings of, First Nations literature are discussed.

Likened to Dumont’s comments, Thomas King speaks as both writer and literary scholar to remind us that, as a construct of definition, authenticity “can be a slippery and limiting term when applied to Native literature for it suggests cultural and political boundaries past which we should not let our writing wander” (“Introduction,” 1990, xv). Cautioning his reader that a literary corpus named ‘Native Canadian’ has yet to be determined, King argues that the literature should be approached as contributing to a changing/growing/indefinite body:

What we do have is a collection of literary works by individual authors who are Native by ancestry, and our hope, as writers and critics, is that if we wait long enough, the sheer bulk of this collection, when it reaches some sort of critical mass, will present us with a matrix within which a variety of patterns can be discerned. (King: 1987, xv)

Though without definite parameters, the literature can be usefully addressed with tentative identifying criteria. King suggests ethnicity (“literary works by...authors who are Native by ancestry”) be the focal point of cohesion; Kateri Damm and Janice Acoose/Misko-Kisikawihkwe each include Native peoples’ “connection to the land” (16)

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living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life” (Emberley: 1993, 19).

<sup>16</sup> Monture-Angus, 26-27. While it is necessary to propose one’s own identity, it is also necessary – as argued earlier – to avoid approaching others’ identities as essential and to avoid – as a cultural ‘outsider’ – constructing ‘cultural insiders’ as knowledgeable ‘bodies’ available for exhaustive study.

and “common ideology premised on autochthony” (Acoose: 1993, 32). Rather than focus on writers’ ancestry and risk essentializing provisional descriptions, this thesis recognizes the effectiveness of strategically employed definitions but locates the designation ‘First Nations’ within the heritage of shared socio-political histories: namely, subjection to officially denied self-determination, discursive erasure and romanticization within a national imaginary. As Kim Anderson argues, “[a]lthough our life situations may differ dramatically, the lives of all Native peoples intersect at the juncture of state-sanctioned assimilationist policies and genocidal attack” (Anderson, 31). By extension, Native peoples’ shared socio-political predicament intersects with literary concerns at the juncture of power (and its lack) over self-definitions.

The need to expose inaccuracies in existing ‘knowledges’ before constructing alternatives sees the return of Spivak’s strategic essentialism for claiming an identity out of a counter-stance. The resulting oppositional aesthetics, characterized by Barbara Harlow as “resistance literature” or by Margo V. Perkins, in a more limited generic context, as “political autobiography,” has often proven critically useful in challenging prevailing ideologies that perpetuate compound forms of inequality. Arun Mukherjee, like Armstrong and Maracle, emphasizes the necessity of studying texts in context; considering “the themes of history – conquest and subjugation, anticolonial struggles, racism, sexism, class conflict”; and deconstructing “the authority of the universal” as central to decolonizing literary scholarship (Mukherjee: 1994, 4, 6). Though respecting apparent differentials, oppositionality is most compelling (when most effective) in drawing attention to the broader economic, social, political, cultural, and discursive bases of those constructed differences. As such, oppositional stances are able to subvert the

authority(-ies) of singular, extant meanings or interpretive praxes that exclude/ occlude the same voices forced into opposition.<sup>17</sup>

However, although oppositionality performs the important task of exposing the constructedness (and the possibility for de/reconstruction) of identity, it requires contextualized understandings and risks both essentializing ‘corrected’ views and ghettoizing voices heard only in opposition. Though oppositionality acts “as a corrective to the distortive truth of the ‘West,’ in order to bring about the ‘truth’ of the West,” and open a discursive space (that reveals the gross discrepancies that compose a less-than-equal cultural playing field), it also embodies a concomitant gesture towards authentic “narrative[s] of truth...[,] unambiguously and reducibly transparent” (Emberley: 1993, 23). Further, hegemonic literary discourses use terms such as ‘oppositional,’ ‘resistance’ or ‘protest’ to codify particular bodies of writing as marginal and non-canonical; this charge is often aligned with texts’ pronounced (and considered, therefore, to be suspect) interests in socio-political commentary. To guard against both ghettoization and marginalization, LaRocque emphasizes First Nations literature’s cross-cultural significance and illustrates ways in which all literature, regardless of expressed intent, “is political in that its linguistic and ideological transmission is defined and determined by those in power” (LaRocque: 1990, xvi). Significantly, echoing Armstrong and Maracle,

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<sup>17</sup> One example of vibrant and significant critical analysis arising out of a counterstance is what has been called, most broadly, Black Criticism or African-American Criticism, involving Black Aesthetics and a Black Arts Movement (the latter of which intersected with the “Afro-centred ideology known as ‘Black Power’...a call for black people in [the United States] to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations” (Carmichael and Hamilton, Quoted in Makaryk, 6), based on the “assumption that ‘race’ is a fundamental category of literary and cultural analysis (just as the broad range of feminisms takes gender to be a fundamental category of analysis)” (5). This body of cultural and literary criticism (which flourished in the 1960s) involves such writers and scholars as Stephen Henderson, Larry Neal, and Amiri Baraka, all of whom contribute to ways in which notions of ‘Blackness’ have been, and continue to be, radicalized and theorized.

LaRocque argues that both “white and Native communities are implicated” in the production of Native Canadian literature; therefore “both are invited to hear” (xxix).

Exploring the impossibility of separating writing from politics, or ‘me’ from ‘you,’ Janice Acoose also illuminates the ideological aspect of literature by examining the effects of dominant literary texts on First Nations communities in Canada who struggle to assert (them)selves as Subjects rather than be presented as Objects. Coincident with the premise of this thesis, Acoose argues:

canadian literature is an ideological instrument...[which] promotes the cultures, philosophies, values, religion, politics, economics, and social organization of the white, european, christian, canadian patriarchy, while at the same time it fosters cultural attitudes about Indigenous people that are based on unrealistic, derogatory, and stereotypic images. (Acoose: 1995, 34)<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Acoose’s “approach to so-called *Native Literature*,...speak[s] from a politicized position influenced by sovereignty and self-determination” (Acoose: 2001, 46). Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiong’o provides careful analysis of ways in which literature and politics, voice and power, are inter-informed; within Ngugi’s critical framework, literature results directly from social and political interaction:

At the level of the individual artist, the very act of writing implies a social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody. At the collective level, literature, as a product of men’s [*sic*] intellectual and imaginative activity embodies, in words and images, the tensions, conflicts, contradictions at the heart of a community’s being and process of becoming. It is a reflection on the aesthetic and imaginative planes, of a community’s wrestling with its total environment to produce the basic means of life, food, clothing, shelter, and in the process creating and recreating itself in history. (Ngugi: 1981, 5-6)

Contextualizing the political import of (Armstrong’s and Maracle’s) textual production, these arguments also demonstrate modes of literary-political linkages that persist

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<sup>18</sup> Both Janice Acoose’s (Mikso-Kisikawikew’s) 1995 book *ISKWEWAK – Kah’ Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakank: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws* and Leslie Monkman’s 1989 book, *A Native History: Images*

regardless of levels of concealment. Principally, because a history of oppression underlines First Nations peoples' existence, the literature evokes a state of continual resistance against manifold forms of occupation (political, as well as psychological), to which Maracle speaks: "We want peace. Peace, freedom from warring conditions, freedom from conditions which annoy the mind" (*BL*, "Oka Peace Camp," 7).<sup>19</sup>

Rather than corroborate an oppositional divide between literature and politics, or between 'canonical' and 'Other' texts, LaRocque provides a useful interpretive model: "We have developed what we might call an aesthetics of opposition. But now we need to develop an aesthetics of simply who we are" (Quoted in Anderson, 152). Her statement implies that oppositional aesthetics are at once imperative and limiting. Necessarily evoking 'us'/'them' to name oppressive structures, oppositional aesthetics threaten (through simplistic application) to both overlook/annul complexities and perpetuate a normalized center that produces the First Nations speaker as Other. Though the concept of "an aesthetics of simply who we are" (152) asserts self-identity as relational and thereby provisionally exclusionary, it differs from "an aesthetics of opposition" by moving outward from a center defined as Self-as-Subject – complete with priorities set by that Self – rather than Self-as-not-you. As an example of strategic essentialism and a parallel to culture-specific pedagogy, an "aesthetics of...who we are" means de-authorizing hegemonic centers and shifting identity discourses from reactive to proactive. By manipulating positive identification processes, this approach draws upon First Nations'-centric analyses that incorporate and rework writers' own traditions in tandem

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*of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature* clearly document, with varying foci, the negative representations of Native Canadians in Eurocanadian literature.

<sup>19</sup> In a talk given at Concordia University on September 9, 2002. Maracle noted that she found this definition of peace in the Oxford English Dictionary.



with the constructs that inform and create post-contact contexts. Though neither Armstrong nor Maracle make authoritative claims to define literature or Self (as noted earlier), what both writers do insist upon is a sentiment that echoes a Douala proverb: “You have to understand your neighbour’s language before you judge him” (Quoted in Schipper, 1). The texts explored throughout this thesis enact viable means of empowerment alongside cross-cultural, cross-linguistic dialogue, acknowledging the strength of diversity within an equitable unity by first placing Self (literary or actual) at the conceptual center. As the protagonist of *Sundogs* relates, “[w]e are no longer victims, but people who have made a decision, established a direction for ourselves after what seemed like a century of floundering” (*SD*, 145). In both personal identity and literary definition, Armstrong and Maracle create sustainable means for empowerment by troubling the binaries that construct the margins and motioning towards alternates.

#### ***1.4) Interface between Literary Themes/Concerns and Form/Structure***

Associated with the interface joining identity formation and literary definition, this final introductory consideration outlines the dialogical relationship between *what* and *how* texts speak. Performing multiple negotiations, the texts dramatize difference-based mobilization tactics as potentially strategic but ultimately perfunctory and ideally temporary in favour of greater continuities among peoples. Various expressed and continually reshaped, dialogic elements structurally support the texts’ thematic desire for conversation between and among diverse Native and non-Native voices, showing culture-‘bound’ identities to be in constant flux – responding, adapting, creating – to allow for multiple points of inter-/intracultural dialogue. By outlining a series of binary subversions – between center and margin; body and mind; and orature and literature –

this section will help preview the ways in which radicalized notions of continuity, interrelation, and co-operation are reflected in both form and content.

The need, first, to revisit colonialist discourse manifests itself in Armstrong's and Maracle's texts as interrogating the terms of Subjects' in-/exclusion(s) in/from various political/cultural/historical narratives – thus rendering permeable the 'barriers' between opposite poles – and de-centering hegemonic narratives through the use of First Nations-centric discourses. Emberley underlines the "contradictions and antagonisms" that dislocate "a false sense of equality and unity within and among the correlative subjects such as Native, Métis, Inuit, lesbian, English Canadian, Woman, Man" in First Nations texts (Emberley: 1993, xiii). She argues that thematized Native political resistance joins with "narrative and thematic use of the oral Native tradition" to indicate that texts' "self-consciously explore[] what it means to be writing as a Native in Canada" (139). As such, the texts emphasize process rather than progress, and effectively disrupt dualistic binaries and under-theorized "pluralit[ies] of differences" (xiii); master narratives of linear development; and "Eurocentric definitions of what constitutes a Native literary tradition" (139). By attending to their own textuality and displaying ways in which a text is formally and thematically a "dynamic intertextual process" rather than a "discrete, bounded object" – analyzed for "discursive mobility" rather than "stable instances of meaning" (S. Mohanty, 28) – Armstrong's and Maracle's texts foreground circularity. By making incursions into a center/margin binary, they replace 'truth-telling' with storytelling as the pivotal axis for constructing identities.

Constructing and utilizing a conceptual unity also involves the significant disruption of epistemological body/mind oppositions. Duane Niatum, for example, argues that discontinuity between mind and body characterizes Euroamerica and

prioritizes cerebral activity over physical experience (Niatum, 67). Though neither Armstrong nor Maracle use the designation, Niatum's description of a "tribal poet" as "embrac[ing] the world beyond the self, the earth, sea, sky, bird, animal, fish and plant, stone and snowflake," and of disunity as the inevitable precursor to self-destruction, resonates with Armstrong's and Maracle's visions (67, 69). Re-phrased, LaRocque maintains that "[l]ong-standing [literary and philosophical] conventions hold that objectivity must necessarily entail the separation of the 'word' from the self" and emphasizes, in contradistinction, that her own "primary socialization is rooted in the oral literatures of the Plains Cree Métis, which does not separate the word from the self" (LaRocque: 1990, xxi).

Joined with body/mind distinctions and pertinent to each following chapter, the conversational and participatory element of orature provides an essential form of innovation in Armstrong's and Maracle's literature, and plays a leading role in their texts' representations of Self. Also subverting the structure of the binary, Daniel David Moses links literary form with content to enact continuity rather than division by unsettling distinctions between aesthetic and pedagogic concerns: "From my perspective, the Native tradition allows you the freedom to do things that people respond to. You are dealing with your own life, with your own stuff intimately, and looking to formal innovation not as an end in itself, but as part of the story" (Moses & Goldie, xxi). These concerns pivot, in part, on the use of orature, simultaneously confounding barriers between speaker and listener and challenging a constructed center (in literary as well as nationalist discourses) to broaden forms and means of fostering radical notions of unity while also "dealing...with your own stuff intimately." Though the intended referent of her collective pronoun is unclear, Maracle argues that "[w]e all strive to become orators,"

leaders/thinkers/interlocutors “coming from a place of prayer” (“Oratory,” 9, 7), for whom thinking is a “complete and total process” not sequestered within a disembodied mind (Lutz: 1991, 172). The orator is likewise contrasted with “European scholars” (7) and orature with the “objectification of thought” (Lutz: 1991, 172); as such, orature provides its literary adaptations a structural basis for participation with/-in a text. Portraying the orator as culturally and pedagogically crucial yet physical (rather than divine), and necessarily engaged (rather than isolated from the larger community), Maracle promotes a rich sense of inclusion. Her understated description, below, further indicates that orature is premised on circularity rather than linearity and denotes the importance of a particular vision more than specialized training:

An orator is simply someone who has come to grips with the human condition, humanity’s relationship to creation, and the need for a human direction that will guarantee the peaceful coexistence of human beings with all things under creation. (9)

The considerable importance of the orator rests with her/his ability to not only “come to grips” with a philosophy of creative harmony, but also to successfully overcome diverse binaries to “say what we think” (10) by way of “present[ing] through story, human beings doing something, real characters working out the process of thought and being” (10).

For both Armstrong and Maracle (as will be discussed further in Chapter Two), the participation of the reader and critic in processes of signification underlies the enactment of resistance, through revised/negotiated knowledge constructs, and re-imagination, through dialogue. Maracle, for example, combines notions of interrelatedness and continuity with those of participation by welcoming the reader into an engaged relationship with the text, disallowing the presumption of (the possibility for) passive consumption of explicit literary interpretations. Indeed, Maracle argues, as a reader,

“You Become a Trickster” (*STOS*, 11), and are responsible for “actively work[ing] [your]sel[f] out of [the dilemma]” (12); thus the text, and creation of its many meanings, appears as a co-operative location of dynamism rather than a static object of delineated signification. Interestingly, Maracle responds to critics’ readings of her ‘trickster’ (or Raven) figure by foregrounding its gendered, but also expansive, aspect:

In many of these stories [*Sojourner’s Truth and Other Stories*] and in parts of *Sundogs*, Raven calls you forth to jump into her jogging shoes, or put on an old slouch hat and try to see the world through some other angle. Being Raven can be a difficult task for Europeans, because being is not about definition or theory. Defining and naming things is an external world phenomenon. It takes place outside the self while being takes place inside the self. The journey from outside the self to inside is sometimes a long one.

All of my stories are ‘internal world’ stories. My Raven, my transformer, is the catalyst for internal transformation. (“Preface,” 13)<sup>20</sup>

To negotiate interpretations of “‘internal world’ stories” – that harbor processes of identification – without the ‘aid’ of authoritative interpretation, as “all conclusions are considered valid” (*STOS*, 12), the reader must make sense of meanings that are not hierarchically valued or absolutely determined. To do so the reader must negotiate, in conjunction with the text, various faces of context, culture and continuity that impact upon characters’, readers’ and writers’ means of transformation.

Maracle, finally, enjoins notions of orature, participation, and movement to describe the textual role of identity formation that creates, itself, a type of communicative medium: “[w]e conjure new words by understanding our different and common pasts. We cannot resolve this past unless we can come to this silver streak between the river bank and sand without quarrelling” (Maracle: 1992, 15). To create “new words” on

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<sup>20</sup>Maracle published a second edition of *Sojourner’s Truth and Other Stories* with *Sundogs* through Press Gang Publishers (Vancouver, 1999) in which she included an additional introduction entitled “Preface to the New Edition.”

which to base co-operative means of interaction, the participation of everyone (each with her/his own historiography) is required; to “make a little mark on the historical destination of Native people” (*IAW*, 102), Maracle encourages lateral social input. Citing herself as an example of the *inability* to provide uninflected ‘truths’ Maracle states, “I did not escape self-interested motivation any more than those I criticise. I want you, the reader, to adopt the slogan ‘one must doubt everything’ when you read this or any other book” (102). The ability to doubt everything yet continue to speak performs a version of ‘strategic essentialism’ that, Maracle and Armstrong suggest, requires interactive interpretation involving the consideration of oneself and one’s thoughts in relation to other Selves and ideas rather than in secluded contemplation.

The texts discussed throughout the thesis will variously demonstrate the significant intersection between pedagogy, intertextuality, the reader’s interpretive role, and the emergent forms of ‘conversation.’ The questions posed of the individual texts and within the individual chapters traverse – like the continuities they explore – methodological boundaries between chapters; these ‘subversions’ of the larger organizational structure are welcome, indicating as they do the fertile possibilities for further and/or extended investigations into a complex fabric of cultural production.

*"We know that the process of transformation in the external world begins with the transformation of the internal. We know that the process of transformation of the internal world requires a clear picture of the external conditions of that world and our relationship to it." (Maracle, "Preface," 14)*

*"The story was always to unearth the myth makers. The demons. To subdue them. To draw them. Towards nature's way. Now the story is about virtual life. Or non-life. Trickery. Sorcery." (Armstrong, WS, 192)*

*"Your grief is where the hope resides." (WS, 188)*

**Chapter Two: Empowerment – 'Mine' and 'Ours'  
The Relationship between Personal and Political Identity(-ies)**

'Speaking as' First Nations women writers in order to 'speak to' myriad forms of dis-empowerment, Armstrong and Maracle present identity as continually re-constructed within a dialectic joining personal expression with its political counterpart. In the quotation above, Maracle accentuates a form of reciprocity between personal experience and political imaginaries, sketching the interface between 'internal' (read, here, as personal or individual) and 'external' (collective or political) processes of subject-formation. Where transformation of the 'external' – expressed in part through political change – requires transformation of the 'internal,' or self-empowerment, the latter also depends upon a "clear picture" of both the "external conditions" and "our relationship to [them]" ("Preface," 14). Linking personal expression with political involvement at a most fundamental level, this interchange contributes to Chapter One's discussion of *self-determination* as a "mode of decolonization by which the indigenous population reclaims its *collective* right to the process of achieving autonomy" (Emberley: 1993, 7; emphasis added). This chapter examines these mutually framing modes of identification in three texts specifically: Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* and "Lee on Spiritual Experience," and Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows*. To do so, the writers' cultural traditions are

also accorded special attention as they provide both a backdrop for communal expression of identity, and an entry point for personal involvement in its formation. Because, as Maracle reminds us, First Nations peoples cannot afford to negate either personal specificity or one's position in a larger society, drawing upon a collective worldview is necessary for safeguarding diversity, 'difference,' and the literal survival of Native peoples: "[u]ntil our separate history is recognized and our need for self-determination satisfied, we are not equal" (*IAW*, 80).

Significantly, Maracle emphasizes the need for continual learning in a dialogical form that involves all people; she speaks of bridging cultural constructs in Canada by "build[ing] a new society based on the positive histories of both [Native and non-Native peoples]" (*IAW*, 92). This imperative to move towards a participatory inter-/intra-national community, dependent upon first locating oneself within a specific context, involves an associated dialectic between Self and Other. Maracle helps illustrate this exchange by differentiating passion from compassion, describing passion as feelings that pertain to the Self, compassion as feeling for others, and both as compulsory tools for constructing an equitable future. Positioned at the center of her worldview, continuity and interdependence between Self and others is expressed in Maracle's texts as the subversion of hierarchical and authoritative relationships. For example, Maracle speaks of both teaching to and learning from children; whereas her children demonstrate that "what is revival and renaissance for a Native is death for a colonizer...[and that] for both of us there is re-construction and a future full of passion and compassion" (*IAW*, 10), Maracle's own analysis indicates that challenge and resistance are also necessary:

Without colonization, neither I nor my children would have had to suffer through the coming into being of this knowledge. Without colonization, there would not



have been the need for ‘re-constructing’ the passion and compassion we should naturally feel. (10)

The empathetic wisdom Maracle sees enacted in her children is central to cross-cultural dialogue in climates of oppositionality, yet Maracle’s experiences of inequity also render resistance necessary, and both processes must operate in tandem. To facilitate the ensuing negotiation between rejection and conciliation – or, alternately, between passion and compassion – hierarchies that exclude voices need attention. Just as Armstrong speaks from “individual experience as an indigenous North American person in a society dominated by Euro-Western thought” (“Racism,” 75), Maracle emphasizes that “we did not create this history, we had no say in any of the conditions into which we were born...yet we are saddled with the responsibility for altering these conditions” (*IAW*, x), and both demand that colonizer as well as colonized struggle for dialogue in the process.

By extension, Maracle’s discerning reading of ‘revolution’ – “to turn around” (109) – follows from Chapter One’s discussion of re-positioning to signal the importance of self-reflexive critique in creating social change:

Revolution means to turn around. Square boxes do not turn around. Circles do. This society [Canada] is made up of a hierarchical system of classes: rectangles that pile up on one another, with the smallest rectangle and the fewest members at the top of the pyramid. The majority fit into the rectangle at the base. The thinking of the people in this country is married to that reality. It is stratified, linear and racist. (109)

In hierarchies, according to Maracle’s model, ‘revolution’ is counter-intuitive, threatening, painful; given a circular frame for human interaction, however, the same motion – destabilizing binaries and negating “stratified, linear and racist” (109) modes of thinking – is encouraged. Maracle’s call to “turn around” in order to assess and modify one’s implication in, and contribution to, hegemonic formations also makes interesting use of a term with explicitly political connotation (revolution) for a process that begins

with the individual. Rather than nullify the effects of colonialism by equalizing everyone's involvement in social constructions, however, Maracle consistently reminds Native and non-Native readers alike of "the oppressive dirt which colonialism has heaped upon us" (11), and the diversity of circumstances that variously aid or impair efforts at self-empowerment. Armstrong, likewise, insists upon co-operation – committed involvement of both Self and Other – in asking her reader to, first, "understand and accept that this country is multi-racial and multi-cultural now, and the meaning of that" ("The Disempowerment," 241). As explored below, Armstrong's articulation of First Nations' meanings draws upon essentialist discourse, and is premised on the belief that "principles of peace and co-operation, in practice, are natural and survival-driven mechanisms [for First Nations peoples] which transcend violence and aggression" (242). Yet this essentializing tendency is significantly coupled with a belief in change rather than reified preservation, and a conviction that "healing can take place through cultural affirmation" (241). Finally, Armstrong's call for self-critical dialogue resonates with Maracle's by demanding not only the participation of all Canadians, but also recognition of the models she offers:

We, as Native people, through continuously resisting cultural imperialism and seeking means toward teaching co-operative relationships, provide an integral mechanism for solutions currently needed in this country. (241)

Exploring the central challenges in processes of subject-formation – which are primary to "teaching co-operative relationships" through cross-cultural dialogue – this chapter considers, first, the authors' shared (though divergent) interests in context, community and continuity as reflected in their worldviews. Following, an extended theoretical discussion about subject-formation (building upon issues raised in Chapter One) will help contextualize the primary texts' suggestions for reading identities. The remainder of the

chapter will explore those suggestions, demonstrating that binary subversion – reflecting personal/political and Self/Other interdependence rather than mutual exclusion – is focussed on readerly-writerly participation in Maracle’s texts, and on the mixing of genres in Armstrong’s.

### ***2.1) Contextual Worldviews: Armstrong and Maracle***

Before using textual examples to examine Armstrong’s and Maracle’s respective approaches for “teaching co-operative relationships” (241) and exploring diverse forms of continuity, it will be helpful to consider some basic tenets informing each writer’s “aesthetics of...who we are” (Anderson, 152). Stating that “Literature reflects the deepest meanings of a community” (Allen, 565),<sup>21</sup> Paula Gunn Allen echoes Ngugi in linking the personal act of writing with the political interests of a community, and implying that literature’s “meanings” are drawn upon to establish a group (or political) identity (or aesthetics). Similarly, Armstrong’s desired pedagogy resonates with Maracle’s in foregrounding worldviews that are informed by particular traditions; these culture-specific perspectives serve to interrupt exclusionary narratives that are ignorant of heterogeneous “definitions of Native identity, [each with its own] political, geographic, social, emotional, and legal implications” (Damm, 12). Though their emphases differ, both Armstrong and Maracle express – through critical and literary work – philosophies based on cultural teachings/worldviews that uphold circular rather than linear modes of conceptualization.

“Oratory: Coming to Theory” elucidates the philosophy that appears to frame Maracle’s worldview. As demonstrated in her texts, social interaction provides the basis

of all meaning, and meaning – as expressed through words that “represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples” – is inextricably linked to language (“Oratory,” 7). Rejecting the Cartesian divide between body and mind, Maracle rejects also the notion that language and meaning could exist in isolation from physical experience; instead, Maracle argues, “[w]e humanize theory by fusing humanity’s need for common direction – theory – with story” (9). Thus theorizing, as a form of storytelling, does not require “a different set of words...to ‘prove’ an idea [from those required] to ‘show’ one” (7), and is neither alienated from social interaction nor confined to use by academics. Maracle’s conjoining of theory and story, coupled with her assertions that “[n]o thought is understood outside of humanity’s interaction” (10) and that “[t]heory is useless outside human application” (10), bring personal experience into contact with philosophy and insists that community, communication, and communal participation be the forming features of her own (voiced, here, as ‘Native’) context.

Armstrong also stresses the importance of context to communication and of ancestors’ teachings to culture-bound philosophies, but shifts her focus to the role of land in language production. For Armstrong, land and language hold vast significance but coincide in amorphous meaning; it is Armstrong’s “own experience of the land [that] sources and arises in [her] poetry and prose,” and it is the use of the exclusively oral N’silxchn – her “original language” – that inflects her written work (“Land Speaking,” 175). N’silxchn acts as a “constant voice” within Armstrong, one that “permeates [her] experience of the Okanagan land” and, as she describes, “yearns for human speech”

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<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that I use this quote to emphasize the relationship between human communities and cultural production, like literature; I am not suggesting, however, that literature is a privileged form of

(176). Rather than “awaken as words,” the senses she carries of her own existence “move within as the colors, patterns, and movements of a beautiful, kind Okanagan landscape,” as visual, sensual, and verbal articulations converge (176). Naming those senses “the Grandmother voices” and translating grandmother into “something like loving-ancestor-land-spirit,” Armstrong adapts synesthesia to accentuate an intangible solidarity between language, physical context, culture-based philosophies, and notions of ancestors (176).

Land, however, is not only a creative influence for Armstrong: it is her stated source of oral language. The binary Armstrong implicitly constructs between her own oral language and scripted European languages gains particular political purchase in her description of land: language, for Armstrong, is “given to us by the land we live within” (175); land is “constantly communicating” (176); and communication is derived from “listening intently to [the land’s] teachings...and then inventing human words to retell its stories” (176). By linking language (arguably the basis of culture) with land (arguably the basis of a distinction between ‘Canadian’ and ‘Native Canadian,’ from both colonizing and resistance points of view), Armstrong, in effect, employs Spivak’s notion of strategic essentialism to strengthen claims for self-determination. Having to use English, Armstrong argues that Native writers must incorporate unique knowledge of the land into their written expression in order to transform languages of oppression into languages of affirmation:

I will emphasize the significance that original Native languages and their connection to our lands have in compelling the reinvention of the enemy’s language for our perspectives as indigenous writers. (175)

Armstrong further reinforces the centrality of land to her work by attributing “all knowledge of life and death [to the land, which] is a constant teacher,” and premising communication itself on understanding “its stories,” retold in “human words” (176).

Divergent foci notwithstanding, Armstrong and Maracle are both centrally concerned with language use/ production, and both explicitly link communication with socio-political contexts. “To make words mean in isolation...is an impossible task” (Krupat, 124), and once meanings are made, their shapes change through dialogue. Mixing multiple expressive genres creates an additional form of conversation, of dynamic continuity and co-operation, that parallels the exchange of meaning across a personal/political divide. Armstrong’s emphasis on her relationship to land in conveying “our perspectives” (“Land Speaking,” 175) means, in part, combining oral with written forms to better tell ‘our stories.’ Both Armstrong and Maracle employ conventions of orality to merge traditional forms with their own written expression, and both perceive forms of enunciation in physicality that further erode an absolute division between mind and body. Maracle considers “[t]he silent language of physical metaphor...a story in itself” (*STOS*, 13), and focuses this crossing of boundaries on a demand for readerly, or audience, engagement with text. For Armstrong, crossings expand across mediums – music, visual art, and poetry/prose – and are performed in her literature, her work as a visual artist and sculptor; a storyteller in the Okanagan tradition; and a participant in collaborative projects such as *The Native Creative Process* and *Crisp Blue Edges*. Most importantly, both Armstrong and Maracle concur on the transformative power of language and its relationship to physical experience; the fertile potential of land (literal or metaphoric) as related to creativity; and the “cause and effect in human interaction”

enlivened by words “being spoken” (“Land Speaking,” 183). Sharing an emphasis on community, culture, and continuity, Armstrong and Maracle’s worldviews support

a dialogic model in which [people] learn from one another and from the narrative and their interactions with it...[re-learning, in the process] the disempowering effects of colonial constructs of alterity. (Home, 157)

## ***2.2) Subject-Making: Negotiating Discourses of Self***

To further interrogate this personal/political dialectic, a related intersection, introduced in Chapter One, between conceptions of identity and continuity (as described by Armstrong and Maracle) and theories about ‘subjectification’ requires consideration. This cross-cultural interchange helpfully frames the challenges, paradoxes, and negotiations involved in claiming ‘Subject-hood’; shifting from appropriation of voice to the role of critical discourse, the discussion places the terms themselves – personal and political; Self and Other – under scrutiny. As Rey Chow argues, “investigating the ‘subjectivity’ of the other-as-oppressed-victim” (Chow, 29) is integral to examining sites of possible change (in studies of (post/neo/colonialism) and locating potential routes for decolonization. If “[s]ubjectivity’ becomes a way to change the defiled image..., by showing the truth behind/beneath/around it” (Chow, 29), and if claiming subject-hood is continuous with claiming voice and changing one’s own images, then Armstrong and Maracle must address the truth of image/counter-image by acting (as a Subject) out of choice rather than submitting (as one subjected) out of coercion.

Both Chow and Spivak, however, demonstrate that claiming subjectivity is particularly fraught for the Native Subject who, like Armstrong and Maracle, must do so on her own terms yet whose subjectivity has been (discursively) denied in having been (discursively) Other-ed. Like Terry Goldie’s notion of ‘indigenization,’ Chow describes the concept of the ‘native’ as “the white man’s symptom” (31): the Other that effectively

constructs, is constructed by, and negatively defines, the Self. Further, Chow argues that Western discourses on the Other are characterized by theorizing subjectivity through an Oedipal frame, typified as “compensation for a presumed lack” (31). Drawing an analogy between Freud’s construction of the woman and Fanon’s construction of the native, Chow notes that both are Oedipal: while Freud represents woman as defined by ‘lack,’ Fanon describes the native as “someone from whom something has been stolen” (31). The challenge for the n/Native (Canadian), therefore, is not only to speak in the uneasy context of contested authenticity, but also to present ways in which s/he has been defined in the literal negative: by absence.

Spivak challenges the dominant concept of the ‘Other-ed’ Subject by contesting the thinking that supports the analysis; she critiques “current Western efforts to problematize the subject” and examines ‘first world’ representation of the ‘third-world’ Subject in order to address the critical problems encountered in recognizing and deconstructing “Subject as Europe” (Spivak: 1988, 271). This prototypical Subject, according to Spivak, is constituted discursively through its own critique, giving rise to a dialectical interdependence between naming and being, between critique and its object, that engenders “epistemic violence...[in the] heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (280). The “colonial subject” must, then, contest her own absence and the normalization of a European ‘presence,’ while addressing those critics of colonialism who attempt to “wrest them away from their status as symptom or object” but fail to deconstruct the model of objectification (Chow, 31). Further, the ‘subaltern’ (so-named in relation to “Subject as Europe,” in Spivak’s terms – not to denote geo-political locations, except as they align with discursive distinctions) must constitute subjectivity through the problematic compromises Armstrong describes: negotiating European



languages and discourses with non-European and culture-specific epistemologies, and remembering Spivak's caution that "a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism" (Spivak: 1988, 291).

In response to her question "where have all the 'natives' gone?" – that is, how can critics re-present the 'native' and how can the n/Native re-present her/himself as "not the defiled image and not not the defiled image" (Chow, 54) – Chow suggests that we seek the 'native' "between the defiled image and the indifferent gaze" (54). Like Maracle, who calls for self-reflexive critique without collapsing the political and material differentiation between 'oppressor' and 'oppressed,' Chow argues that approaching the 'native' as neither authentic nor inauthentic "is not to neutralize the massive destructions committed under such orders as imperialism and capitalism" (53). Rather than use the "same symbolic order" to which both "[d]efilement and sanctification" belong (53), Chow conceptualizes an 'extra-binarized' alternative based on avoiding inversions. Both Spivak and Chow thus challenge the discourse within which power is determined by gesturing towards potentially non-oppressive routes for subject-making. By extension, Spivak's and Chow's critiques also create discursive space for the processes of subject-formation and negotiation of essentialist/ constructivism and European/ non-European discourses in Armstrong's and Maracle's texts to better understand the project of claiming voice without theorizing voice into silence.

Judith Butler's subject theory also contributes to this discussion in usefully emphasizing a tension between extremes for all Subjects. Resonating with Maracle's description of the personal/political dialectic that deems internal and external change mutually dependent, Butler argues, further, that acting and being acted upon are part of a(n unequally) shared gesture. To speak means, in a primary instance, to come into being

as a Subject; yet as “a form of power,” Butler argues, “subjection is paradoxical” (Butler: 1997, 1). Drawing attention to a double expression of power and ‘subject,’ Butler points to a simultaneous subjugation and empowerment in the process of subjectification:

If, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, [*sic*] as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. (2)

Here, Butler’s description of paradox in subject-formation appears comparable to Spivak’s description of essentialism: both subjectification and essentialist discourse involve “the dangerousness of something one cannot not use” (Spivak: 1993, 5). Foreclosing the possibility for eliminating destructive processes (subjugation), Butler’s argument suggests a difficult instance of ‘inter-dependence’ that replaces models of opposition with models of transgression. Rather than forfeit the possibility for agency, Butler’s argument that “[s]ubjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency,” redefines the terms and parameters of agential power (Butler: 1997, 2). By distinguishing between two types of power – one that is the Subject’s condition and the other that is the Subject’s enactment – Butler offers an alternative much like Chow’s and Spivak’s that locates agency within ambivalence; unlike either Chow or Spivak, however, Butler’s focus on the Subject’s ‘coming into being’ (simultaneously violent and liberating), as neither “(a) a resistance that is *really* a recuperation of power nor (b) a recuperation that is *really* a resistance” (13), challenges the notion of the unified Subject even before it constructs an Other. As a result, the instability of subjectification processes that employ and deploy hybrid forms of power, and occupy neither side of a (disem-)/power binary, engenders multiple processes of potentially productive negotiation. In the work of

Armstrong and Maracle, these include negotiations between the personal versus the political; Self versus Other; and power that informs the Subject (constructs 'Native') versus power that the Subject exercises (as 'Native').

**2.3) Bobbi Lee: *Indian Rebel*, “Lee on Spiritual Experience” and *Whispering in Shadows: Border Crossings***

Negotiating the ambivalence of subject-formation in a personal/political matrix is particularly difficult when claims to (personal) voice require the same language used to subjugate, and claims to (political) 'rights' employ the same discourse used to silence.<sup>22</sup> The two writers' shared but distinct approaches to personal/political negotiations expand to involve various blends: a fusion of speech with writing, orature with literature, theory with story; an understanding of language production as participatory, necessarily interdependent, conjoined with physical experience; and an exploration of agency through narrative which maintains the possibility for epistemological flux and discursive de-/reconstruction. Negotiation is perhaps the signature characteristic of both Armstrong's and Maracle's work on identity, intersecting critical discourse on subject-making and gaining illustration through diverse forms of border-crossings. Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* and “Lee on Spiritual Experience” and Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* each attest to the heterogeneity of approaches used in identity (or subject) formation and illustrate disparate conceptions co-operation and continuity. The texts also, to varying degrees, share an allegiance with autobiography, self-creation through script, about which Maracle offers the following observation:

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<sup>22</sup> Regarding language, First Nations peoples are faced with having to communicate the terms and experiences of their oppression in European languages, the forced use of which (i.e. in residential schools) was instrumental to their colonization. Regarding a discourse of rights, First Nations peoples seek political power by exercising the right to self-determination yet are simultaneously denied the right to protect cultural practices when 'appropriation of voice' is considered an exercise of 'freedom of expression.'

Usually when one writes of oneself it is called nonfiction. I disbelieve that. Hindsight is always slightly fictitious. The events that shaped my life are written down here. They happened. They taught me the great lessons that altered the course of my life. They moved me to see that through all the hurt and the anger written into the lives of Native people, great love has survived. (IAW, 5)

Rendering ambiguous the line between fiction and non-fiction, Maracle underlines the constructedness of “great lessons” and their connection with the words of her grandmothers, her ancestral teachers and arbiters of culture. By observing imperative lessons in events that “happened” but are, through the inevitable lens of retrospection, “always slightly fictitious,” Maracle demonstrates an ability to value something that cannot be guaranteed. A ‘translated’ illustration sees the blending of discourses or genres without relying on definitive outcomes. As Susie O’Brien maintains, Maracle’s “integration of the principles of European literature and native orature” allows her to “enact her own liberation from rigid discursive categories” (O’Brien, 91). Maracle’s and Armstrong’s facility with border-crossings, and literary use of “the principles of oratory” (STOS, 11), work towards multiple ends: constructing identities through the use of historical and traditional narratives; confounding a ‘colonizer’/‘oppressed’ binary; and enriching “an aesthetics of...who we are” (Anderson, 152).

Each text will be considered in light of two shared areas of interest: the ways in which binaries are challenged and disempowered, and the ways in which continuity, co-operation and interdependence are narrativized, both through a personal/political dialectic. To help illustrate the convergence and divergence of Maracle’s and Armstrong’s thinking, questions specific to individual texts will also be posed: *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* will be examined for its overt concern with personal/political negotiations within the ambivalence of subjective agency; “Lee on Spiritual Experience” will be discussed in terms orality/writing interplay, the constructedness of political/

community identities, and representations of spirituality; and *Whispering Shadows* will provide a contrast to Maracle's work by exploring the negotiation of mediums as well as identities, and the role of continuity in generating health.

#### 2.4) ***Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel: Movement(s)***

*Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, Lee Maracle's (auto)biography, was first recorded in 1972 onto audio tape, by Maracle, and transcribed by then-colleagues Don Barnett and Rick Sterling (of the Liberation Support Movement Group). The text provides particularly interesting material for an exploration of voice and subject-formation (that, unfortunately, cannot be given comprehensive analysis here); of particular importance to this discussion is Maracle's assertion that "Don never intended [*Bobbi Lee*] to be a disaster for me...What began as a class to learn how to do other people's life history, turned into a project to do on my own" (*BL*, 19). The 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee* includes an additional preface ("Oka Peace Camp – September 9, 1990") and epilogue, written by Maracle, that both frame and contextualize the earlier version, foregrounding Bobbi Lee's construction and mediation and the paradoxical position of her subjectivity. Together, the two texts offer orality and voice as complex constructs that inform, rather than define, Bobbi Lee/Lee Maracle, naming instead the desired destination for narrative participants: "[We want] Peace: freedom from conditions which annoy the mind" (9).

As an autobiography, *Bobbi Lee* follows, in the first person, chronologically-structured sections that relate Maracle's young life. Maracle is a (mediated) speaker who re-presents her experiences according to their personal relevance, beginning with her first memory (of getting caught in mudflats while catching crabs, and being pulled out by her soon-to-be absent father who "was so strong it seemed he was spanking [her] and [she] wondered why" (21)), and closing with her burgeoning interest in reading (particularly

Franz Fanon, Malcolm X, and Mao Tse-tung) and politics (particularly in relation to First Nations peoples in Canada). Through the transcription of spoken word to scripted text, *Bobbi Lee* has been subject to substantive revision and editing – of content as well as style, structure as well as emphasis. Maracle feels that (in addition to the obvious changes and losses in a 180-page transcription of 80 hours of taped material) the spoken version expressed poetry that remains absent from the published text, overwritten in the editors' concern for even English and an even chronology (Lutz: 1991, 170). In reference to the original telling, Maracle describes the sequence as circular: "The chronology is there, but sometimes it's doing what I'm doing, and I'm doing what it's doing" (170). The published narrative, however, is shaped by the priorities of its transcribers who produce (paradoxically) a 'life-writing' focused on Maracle's experiences with "racism and sexism and how they eventually led her to become involved in political groups such as the Native Alliance for Red Power (NARP) and the Liberation Support Group (LSM)" (Warley, 67), sketching a linear movement from personal identity to community and political identifications/affiliations.

When read within the frame of her preface and epilogue, the substance of Maracle's 1990 text broadens in implication and problematizes linearity, urging the audience to "read[] for complexity rather than closure, for the making of truth rather than its revelation" (Whitlock, 204). Gillian Whitlock, interested in the relationship between women's autobiography and discourses/experiences of (post)colonialism, works from the premise that no single "transhistorical female experience" (3) exists. Instead, multiple subject positions emerge from the experience of imperialism/colonialism/empire, for which no homogeneous approach to women's autobiography will suffice. In the absence of an authoritative interpretive model, Whitlock underscores the reader's role in

examining “exactly how the subject negotiates a space to speak, and how she manoeuvres in place and time” (2), to draw linkages across autobiographical texts:

Rather than constructing an identity and history of women, I am interested in difference and intimacy, in the relations between very different female subjects, and the leakage between what might seem to be secure gendered, national and racial identities...Although autobiography seems to stabilize truth and the subject who utters it, this is an illusion. (3, 4)

Whitlock’s emphasis – on identities as acts of invention implicating Self and Other, and on strategies of “connected reading” (7) granting agency and responsibility to both reader and writer – resonates with Armstrong’s and Maracle’s ideas of a dialogic co-relation between ostensible binaries.

The Self Maracle invents and re-invents throughout the two volumes of her autobiography is marked by complexity, and offers multiple entry-points for disrupting a self-contained, linear, individual-focused narrative. Movement between the two volumes’ end-points is striking: whereas the final section in the 1975 version, entitled “Confronting White Chauvinism,” sees Maracle actively questioning and struggling with racism, emblematic of a developing, oppositional-based political consciousness, the final pages of her 1990 epilogue express a commitment to creating alternatives: “a country free of racism” (*BL*, 240). Maracle’s initial editors ‘conclude’ her life story with a suggestion that personal growth be measured in progressive (i.e. linear) terms ultimately expressed in the ‘self-actualized’ form of political commitment. Near the end, for example, Maracle is represented as “realiz[ing] how dehumanizing and alienating...nightclub work really was,” leaving her job, and “getting involved again with NARP” on the condition that it operated as an all-Native organization (192). This form of “learn[ing] to do things on our own” (193) is consistent, in the 1975 narrative, with moving towards empowerment and more serious thinking about “Native/settler relations and the

connections between colonialism and neo-colonialism" (194). Here, Maracle professes to be at once "not at all sure [she] wanted to become a political person" (194), and impressed by people whose views on Native Canadians could be both challenged and challenging: "I realized that in order to achieve that level I'd have to drop my negative feelings about learning" (195). By the end of the 1990 epilogue, Maracle's expressed understandings of herself, her politics, and her political environment are not discontinuous from those expressed earlier, but are more comprehensive and broad-based: her analysis of "the robbery of our lives...a complex thing this colonization" (238) is cogently linked to notions of work, self-respect, self-reliance,<sup>23</sup> and the additional but integral recognition of everyone's complicity. The discerning title of this last section – "Divorce–Remarriage" – captions Maracle's discussion of personal changes in relation to political visions: the need for Canada to reassess its 'status' and reconvene on the basis of equality among all 'partners':

We need a country free of racism, but we do not need to struggle with white people on our backs to eradicate it. White people have this need as well. They need to stop our continued robbery, to rectify colonialism in order to de-colonize their lives and feel at home in this land. Racism has de-humanized us all. It once filled me with shame and nearly drove me to death...It keeps white people separated from each other...We, I, we, will take on the struggle for self-determination and in so doing, will lay the foundation, the brick that you can build on in undoing the mess we are all in...Don't wait for me to jump up, put my back to the plough, whenever racism shows itself. You need to get out there and object, all by yourself. (240-241)

Significantly, even in its declarative moments ("We need a country free of racism"), *Bobbi Lee's* self-analytical destination is neither pre-determined nor predicated

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<sup>23</sup> "...I watch what financial dependence has done to our families on welfare and the dependence of Native politics on government goodwill and know self-reliance must guide our emancipation. Not the sort of self-reliance I thought we needed yesterday...that drove young mothers...to sacrifice their children's well-being...We need to be economically, politically and socially self-reliant so that we can re-affirm who we are and come to Canadian people whole, but this process should not require we starve the young" (*BL* 239-240).



on linear routes from ignorance to awareness. An early example of the self-questioning that is evident throughout the text(s) is set in California's Mexican communities where Maracle first struggles with varied and blatant expressions of racism – "a multiplicity of racisms" (Warley, 69) – and, rather than be subjected to the signifier 'Indian,' enacts Butler's paradox of subjectivity by claiming the identity herself. Prior to Mexico, Maracle relates:

Three months after I entered school I became aware that I was an Indian and that white people didn't like me because of the colour of my skin...Of course, my situation wasn't simple because my old man was white. But when he got drunk and angry with mom he called her a 'dirty old squaw.' (33-34)

Intersections between organized education, traditional learning, and identity are introduced here, where home and cultural tradition are not synonymous (though "[m]ost of the people we knew lived on the Indian Reserve" (26), Maracle lived in Vancouver), and clear demarcations between Native and non-Native are not available. This is emphasized when Maracle is expected, but unable, to prove her status as either a Registered or non-Registered Indian (93), illustrating both the insufficiency of identity categories and the extent to which government control over Native communities – beginning at the level of identification – grossly circumscribes the ability to claim Subject-hood. O'Brien views *Bobbi Lee* as a thematic representation of liminality through which Maracle "expose[s] the arbitrariness of official discourses of race and...stage[s] the performance of an identity that refuses to be contained by them" (O'Brien, 91). It is interesting, therefore, that in an/Other Mexican community, where Maracle is objectified as a thing of curiosity, a "curio," her self-identity is created less through counter-stance ('I am not white') than through affirmation ('I am Indian') (*BL*, 57):

It would have been worse if they'd known I was Indian. The local Indian population lived in really squalid conditions – except for a small elite on the Reserve who lived high on the hog – and were treated worse than Mexicans. In fact, even the Mexicans felt superior to Indians. I thought this was pretty funny, since all Mexicans were of Indian descent. (54)

In this example of limited and ambivalent self-affirmation, Maracle gains perspective on her own subjectivity and notes discrepancies between ranges and forms of communities while braiding together her personal and political Selves. One distinction critics make between the texts involves individual- versus community-oriented concern, attributing the former to the 1975 volume and the latter to its 1990 counterpart; however, the performance of self-questioning in both undermines the assumption of mutual exclusivity. Though “in the second text Maracle inscribes herself as part of a ‘people’” (Warley, 71), and though Armstrong notes a “clear path toward transformation through personal resolve, resistance, and clear thinking” as one “Bobbi sharpens into focus” (“Foreword,” 15), that path – joining personal experience with political imaginaries – is shown to be more than uni-directional. *Bobbi Lee* is indeed both a ‘testimonio,’ to use Caren Kaplan’s term, a challenge to “the implicit patterns in western subjective narratives that present individual, singular accounts of experience,” and what Kenneth Harrow calls ‘temoignage’: “literature that bears witness to social, cultural and historical realities” (Quoted in Androne, 323-324). As such, the texts exemplify “‘outlaw genres’ or ‘literature of revolt’” (323) but also challenge the terms on which discussions of (post)colonialism in Canada take place. As Warley argues, *Bobbi Lee* does overcome “a discourse of individualism, which is fundamentally Western and patriarchal and a powerful legacy of European colonialism” (Warley, 70); yet *Bobbi Lee* also appears to be more concerned with comprehending both a sense of Self and “the matrices of various

constituencies and communities” (71) of which Maracle is a part. The terms of ‘individualism’ Maracle evokes are important to consider, particularly the sense of self-reliance that cannot be entirely subsumed under Eurocentric discourses. The early narrative emphasizes her family’s anti-welfare position; her mother’s insistence on working hard to protect fishing and trapping rights and resist increased Government control firmly situates Maracle’s understanding of ‘self-reliance’ within the oppressive context of colonialism where it is informed by, but oppositional to, Eurocentric discourses of power (*BL*, 31-32). Incorporating her mother’s teachings and negotiating various faces of dependency and reliance, Maracle’s individualism associates self-reliance with self-determination:

I always thought I had to solve something in my own mind before I could do anything about it...and this made it difficult for me to accept anything Doug or some of the other people I knew said. My whole family was like that...So instead of asking people a lot of questions accepting what I heard, I kept trying to figure things out for myself. (*BL*, 107)

In this way, thinking and speaking for oneself is firmly located within a larger community context, and discourses of individualism are not so easily attributed to non-Native traditions (as will be discussed further in Chapter Three with regards to *Slash*).

Maracle’s struggle to think for herself and act in her own defense is consistent with her need to assert her self-respect, particularly within a domain where overt racism becomes internalized: “Our dilemma was that we still needed some European author to validate our thoughts...Thoughts, when they are crimped in a vice of foreign validation, can never really take root and blossom” (210). The systemic racism that Maracle struggles to resist manifests itself in institutionalized state structures – school, police forces, hospitals – as well as in the people around her. In the introduction to her short stories Maracle states: “All of my characters live within both a condition and

themselves...What you see is the journey from the outside to the internal world. You see impact on being and then you see being's response" ("Preface," 14). Her own character experiences the same multiple contexts, negotiating internal and external influences to construct an empowering identity. In contrast to her sister Joyce, whom she describes as a "'yes girl'...always walking like she was ashamed, around white guys" (*BL*, 49), Maracle "fought all the time to maintain some dignity, refusing to accept any racist crap...[and] figured [her]self to be a fairly intelligent person" (50). Her understanding of racism characterizes her sense of Self from an early age, and becomes implicated in her need to continually re-learn self-control; when "something snapped in [her] head" and she "flipped out" (46) in school, Maracle is given tranquilizers and eventually taken to the hospital for "three weeks of forced rest" (47) where she endures the indignity of being considered "crazy" without consideration of her socio-political environment. To subvert this externally-imposed form of control – replicating the larger control of First Nations peoples through colonization – Maracle resists the prescription of psychiatric drugs and eventually returns to school, discovering that she enjoys drama. Tellingly, the act of assuming different characters and imagining alternate scenarios "help[s her] overcome [her] shyness and get outside [her]self" (48); sublimating her lack of control over external circumstances, Maracle finds alternate avenues for agency.

Just as drama is, in part, a personal expression made public – an individual exploration of ideas and emotions related to, but demarcated from, the Self – writing provides a means of "unraveling what it would take to get back to the little girl and the woman that lived inside" (199) and making the findings public, an offering to "really talk – from a position of wholeness, completeness" (11). The dialectic between the personal and the political that emerges in *Bobbi Lee* sees Maracle living the consequences of

Butler's idea that "[p]ower not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being" (Butler, 13). "Oka Peace Camp – September 9, 1990" illustrates the same through the opposite expressive move – from political to personal – in foregrounding the criminalization of peaceful resistance and consequent circumscription of agency by state power. The descriptions of people at Oka – behind "razor wire" facing "growing numbers of Sureté du Québec" (5) – and of Maracle herself, "preparing for death...because it feels like maybe bloodletting is what this country needs" (6), illustrates the impossibility of peaceful protest against a militarized state. When a state will not, and cannot (by virtue of its unacknowledged militarization, its discourses of 'defense') recognize protest as peaceful, or struggles for peace as legitimate, the political ability and right to 'self-actualize' is obliterated. In literal (and, effectively, literary) terms, political expression is thereby forced into personal forms – like autobiography – where political dissent can be studied through personal experience and against a backdrop of repression. *Bobbi Lee's* call for dialogue illustrates – through different speakers, different 'I's, different modes of identification and different inflections in those processes – that the "object of life is solidarity [and] that there are consequences for every action" (Lutz: 1991, 172). Creating dialectical interchange, the text suggests that "the autobiographical process is an ongoing one. So is the process of decolonization" (Warley, 70).

**2.5) "*Lee on Spiritual Experience*":  
*Reading Sojourner's Truth... through I Am Woman***

As this thesis will continue to emphasize, the initial process of self-identification and subject-constitution must be addressed before empowerment, predicated on cross-cultural dialogue, can emerge. A concurrent exploration of Self and Other involves a contractual relationship joining reader with writer, in which Maracle takes particular

interest. When “the reader is as much a part of the story as the teller” and the stories themselves “merely pose the dilemma,” the onus for creating meaning rests largely on the reader who is “trust[ed to] draw useful lessons” from stories devoid of “orthodox ‘conclusions’” (*STOS*, 11, 12). Described as a trickster, a figure of central but ambivalent importance in Native Canadian traditions, the reader occupies an integral though uncertain position that requires an active ‘working out’ of textuality. Liminal, elusive, “creator [as well as] destroyer” (Vizenor, Quoted in O’Brien, 85), the trickster evades definitives; full of promise, s/he is potentially “the architect of great social transformation” (*STOS*, 13) but risks “fall[ing] victim to his[/her] own folly” (Keeship-Tobias, 175). Directly associated with the role of the reader, conventions and expectations of/for orality used in “Lee on Spiritual Experience” also raise questions about notions of engagement, interaction and identity with suggested, but no determined, responses. “Lee on Spiritual Experience” enacts as well as disrupts its own version of orature while challenging normative representations of spirituality as strictly transcendent, and of Native Canadians as “a spiritual people, as though others were not” (*IAW*, 114). Framed within the context of orality and “present[ing] thought through story” (Maracle, “Oratory,” 10), “Lee on Spiritual Experience” functions as an exposition on, as well as an exploration of, spirituality and its role in a political identity. The story disempowers binaries by narrativizing reader/ writer, orature/ literature relations; revising stereotypical images; and inviting the ‘audience’ to make sense of spirituality as it informs both a collective ‘Native’ identity and the speaker’s own.

Doubling as a personal essay, the story draws upon the conventions of orature most explicitly in its setting: a poetry reading. As one of the readers/performers, Maracle herself is characterized as a type of orator who “present[s] thought through story, human

beings doing something” (10). “No brilliance exists outside of the ability of human beings to grasp the brilliance and move with it,” Maracle argues; thoughts about spirituality and identity, presented “through story,” lend access to a “brilliance” available for learning (9-10). Translating idea into action, Lee’s fictional reading begins with a humorous anecdote about children, parenting, and the perils of adolescence:

Teenagehood is a crippling disease. I can tell because none of my children can walk anymore...I raised every one of my children to be long distance runners, but as each reached teenagehood they ceased to be able to walk to the corner store. (STOS, 110)

To describe the “mind-crippling” (110) effects also apparent in her teenage children, Maracle shares a story about her fifteen-year-old’s “mini-eruption” (111) in height that increases household accidents through decreased dexterity and loss of comprehension; when he spills a glass of milk and watches the liquid fall, he also fails to respond. “I ask the thirteen-year-old to get a dishrag; I already know the older one doesn’t speak this kind of English anymore...” (111). Her wry sense of disparagement at the state of her not-yet-adult children creates a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere for her audience (fictional and actual), involving the listener/reader in her story-telling and minimizing the divide between ‘provider’ and ‘receiver.’ Lowered barriers are not replaced by transparency, however, and the listener/reader remains responsible for “draw[ing] useful lessons” from Maracle’s words (11). Just as Maracle finds “the word storyteller...appropriate here: *to tell, to explain*,” her character presents “the poetic terseness of the dilemma” and allows the reader/listener to choose her/his own interpretive guidelines (11).

While Maracle’s family anecdote helps illustrate a theory about children – as “new, full of life and unable to be cynical” (IAW, 12) – and their contracted intuition,

intelligence, and self-motivation during years marked by increased awareness of Self vis-à-vis Other(s), it also parallels *I Am Woman* in exploring theory as not only “useless outside human application” but as actually “tested in the crucible of human social practice” (“Oratory”, 10). ‘Theory’ and ‘orature’ are closely aligned for Maracle who argues that “the orator...attempts to be persuasive,” that “proof of a thing or idea is in the doing,” and that “[d]oing requires some form of social interaction” (7). An orator, then, narrativizes what might be called theory – “humanity’s need for a common direction” (9) – through interactive or participatory story-telling. “Lee on Spiritual Experience,” furthermore, plays with Maracle’s own parameters of orature: a narrating Maracle assumes the position of orator but engages her actual reader and implied listener in different capacities, thereby disrupting the central assumption that something will, in fact, be heard. “The silent language of physical metaphor is a story in itself,” yet that story remains forever silent to the reader through both medium and content constraints (*STOS*, 13). Whereas the actual reader ‘hears’ Maracle’s introductory anecdote and internalized thinking, the fictionalized listener ‘hears’ the love poem her character performs. By withholding from the reader the focus of her spoken word (“my bent box poem about this lust/love” (109)), Maracle renders separate her aural and scripted narratives and enacts an exploration of spirituality – the title of her story, but not the explicit focus of her reading – along a path of interruptions.

As her fictionalized audience hears stories about parenting and poems about love, Maracle’s reading audience participates in a challenge to ‘new age’ appropriation of (what is mistakenly considered to be) ‘Native spirituality.’ The story opens sardonically:

California must be a magic place. Not only will it be the first state in the U. S. of A. in which the minorities combine to outnumber the white folks, but her colours dot our northern landscapes. Pinks, pastel blues and rose-hued beiges colour new



homes and apartments, diluting the powerful deep green of our mountains almost as though we needed some of the soft colours of California's desert to tone down the depth of our green. (108)

Representing, through colour, a northward-moving influence typifying U.S.-Canada relations, Maracle associates notions of depth with the latter but attributes an "apathetic social conscience" to a pre-1960s Canada, and a "deep need for spiritual enlightenment" to the 1980s version (108). Though Maracle questions Euro-American ideology on both sides of the border, she constructs a binary between authenticity and superficiality that parallels spiritual beliefs and new age ideology, and depth and its dilution. In this instance of narrativized oppositionality, Maracle co-relates soft colours and shallowness to the empty, "tone[d] down" adaptation of spirituality packaged in "the new wave movement for spiritual renaissance" (108) that contrasts the multivalent depth found in California's northern counterpart. In *I Am Woman*, Maracle urges her reader to "strip spirit of its mystical cloak and look at it in the cold light of reality" (*IAW*, 113). Her proposal involves understanding one's own spirituality without fetishizing and commodifying the perceived beliefs of 'Others,' rendering ridiculous the new wave search for "real spirituality, the kind that motivates humans to behave more humanly" (*STOS*, 108). Maracle is careful to challenge the colonialist depiction of Natives as spiritual *rather than* political, particularly as that stereotype "arose from a debate between European intellectuals [and proponents of natural law versus civil law] over how to interpret our society as opposed to their society" (*IAW*, 39). The sarcastic observation that Native North Americans are "very spiritual – everyone knows that" (108) undermines the assumption that spirituality is the sole domain of Native peoples, and the antonym for politics; instead the spirit, for Maracle, is "the phenomenon that defines all things" (*IAW*, 113). If its "mystical cloak" is removed and the spirit is examined in "the

cold light of reality” (113), its significance, for Maracle, will prove earthly rather than transcendent, and ‘old age’ rather than ‘new.’

Though the title suggests an expository treatise or authoritative tract, “Lee on Spiritual Experience” watches Maracle struggle with her own positioning within a collective identity by examining personal ideas “on Spiritual Experience.” Clearly opposed to uninformed assumptions about Native spirituality and resistant to the appropriation of her conceptions of spirit, Maracle recalls cultural teachings while asserting herself: “I don’t remember my grandmother ever telling me that there was any virtue in surrendering my spirit, so I don’t” (*IAW*, 116). But her alternative is marked by ambivalence. Maracle questions the terms of interest that “bring[ her] folks back to the front of the bus” and compel David Suzuki to “popularize[e First Nations peoples] again”; yet Maracle confides in her reader: “As he speaks, I wonder about myself” (*STOS*, 108). Although she holds reservations with Suzuki’s account of spirituality, Maracle’s argument that meaning is determined by context, and that context entails interconnectedness, does not contradict Suzuki’s description of Native people as “underst[anding] the need to live in harmony with nature” (108). At the level of language, Maracle argues that words and meanings signify through context: “For us ‘syntax’ is even bigger than a sentence...it’s in our life, in our conduct of being” (Lutz: 1991, 171). Her premise that “thinking is a complete and total process” (172) – moving towards eradicating a divide between mind and body – resonates with a belief in continuity (or, in Suzuki’s words, ‘harmony’) underlying all things. Yet Maracle is careful not to essentialize any definitive reading of spirituality. She describes spirituality as a “reconnecting with the self and our ancestry” (*IAW*, 134) and suggests that the

process of “reconnecting” is both available to all people and devoid of a procedural framework for easy consumption.

Noting the centrality of spirituality to a collective Native identity, Maracle expresses concern that “[a]lmost every important Native person [she] know[s] has had some sort of powerful spiritual experience, except [her]” (*STOS*, 108-109); Maracle also, however, deconstructs ‘the myth of the spiritual Native’ to enact her own “ceremony”: “Anything that brings people closer to themselves is a ceremony. The search for the truth of one’s spirit is a private one, rich in ceremony” (*IAW*, 111). Embodiment is paradoxically joined, in this process, with “a deep sense of unreality, a feeling of unphysicality” (*STOS*, 109). While Maracle experiences an “absence of bodily consciousness” (109) before she delivers her reading (in the whale room, at Stanley Park in Vancouver), she wonders about the whales’ association(s) with her own people:

The whales are swimming about somewhat neurotically, as all people do when caged on a reservation too small for them to enjoy living. They are swimming in circles with Hyak, the man, on top and two women underneath, in stairwell formation. Beautiful people of the sea. Poetry in motion, and I am lost in the sleekness of their skin, the elegance of their motion, and saddened by their imprisonment. (109-110)

Foregrounding circular movement, Maracle’s description goes on to posit physical, familial, and compassionate love alongside spirituality. The text’s narrative movement sees Maracle identify with the whales, communicate with Hyak, and recognize a parallel between her interest in Hyak’s physical presence and the audience’s interest in Maracle-as-reader. When Maracle introduces herself to her audience, “Hyak stands up in all his tumescent glory and chatters at [her], seductively” (110), effectively involving himself in Maracle’s performance. That Maracle understands his salutation to be “seductive” becomes important when she notices him again during her reading:

Hyak is still jabbering at me, standing perfectly vertical, his huge manhood waving at me. *Hyak likes my poetry* I say innocently to myself and wonder what that thing waving at me is. *I must ask Dennis*, I note mentally. I read my love poem and Hyak looks as though the poem was written specifically for him. (111)

Her recognition of the whale's physicality precedes the recognition of her own in relation to her audience: "[I]t dawns on me that these people are as captivated by my physical presence as they are by my words and voice. I feel, for the first time, absolutely lovely" (111). Realizing, after, the sexual quality of Hyak's attentiveness, in conjunction with her own thinking about "spiritual experience, California colours, new wave and Native people," Maracle leaves her reader in the same sardonic tone with which she begins: "*And doesn't that all say something about your character, old girl?*" (112). Though the 'true' outcome of Maracle's feeling of communion – of harmony – with nature utterly de-romanticizes 'Natives and spirituality,' it also indicates that even notions of something as important as spirituality are under revision, and that her allegiance to a political identity is not predicated on narrow understandings of that group. Instead, a ceremony that brings Maracle closer to herself deflates the requisite seriousness of community identification and shows its potential to surprise.

Interrogating the terms by which a group is defined and irrevocably inserting the physical within the realm of the spiritual, while simultaneously traversing boundaries between oral and written, "Lee on Spiritual Experience" illustrates Maracle's diverse conceptions of co-operation. In contrast to *I Am Woman*, a text Maracle considers to be "an emotional one, free of the humour and joy that punctuated the struggle for being which this book represents" (*IAW*, viii), "Lee on Spiritual Experience" offers an antidote to the presumed austerity surrounding spirituality. Both texts, in addition to *Bobbi Lee*, attend to and move beyond the individual, teaching their readers that the "value of

resistance is in the reclaiming of the sacred and significant self” (“Oratory”, 11). As Warley states: “The challenge of the text, then, is to act. But action cannot precede self-awareness” (Warley, 73). As Maracle reminds us, the process(es) of ‘attaining’ “self-awareness” are difficult and always incomplete, necessary, unreliable, and continuous.

## **2.6) *Whispering in Shadows* and Creative Dialogues**

Like *Bobbi Lee*, *Whispering in Shadows* is overtly concerned with the dialogue between personal and political identification; like “Lee on Spiritual Experience,” *Whispering in Shadows* draws upon diverse expressive mediums and “forges itself into a document of understanding” (Hartwig Iserhagen, book cover) by negotiating multiple thematic and structural binaries. The protagonist, Penny, is a visual artist who becomes involved with political activism and struggles to make both ventures meaningful to herself and to her larger community; the text, likewise, mixes poetry, prose and journal entries with an evocation of artistic processes, effectively nullifying generic categories and creating an expressive means of non-duality. Armstrong describes her own experiences working with different mediums as all sharing the same challenge: “finding ways to deliver [her] information...or to give a point of view which requires an emotional response and an intellectual response” (Beeler, 144). Seeking visceral as well as rational artistic appreciation serves to emphasize Armstrong’s commitment to generating diverse means of co-operation – like that between personal and political, Self and Other, orature and literature – and parallels her protagonist’s desire to overcome dualism in her work and in her struggle to envision a more equitable world. Maracle’s description of the book focuses on synasthasia and border-crossings as organizing principles, and foregrounds the communal, or political, voice portrayed:

*Whispering in Shadows* tracks our deepest murmured pride, our deepest whispered shame. Our deepest desires and thoughts hum through the pages of this book. From shadowland to clear light, we travel across the pages of our murmurings about life, about being. Delicately, Jeannette paints this journey in colours and moments we understand. This book is a painting. This book is a song. Poetry, colour and art are its governors and we its beneficiaries. (book cover)

Maracle's repeated use of plural pronouns underscores the collective experience to which Armstrong's text gives voice; the resulting binary between 'us' and 'them' – based on contextual, rather than inherent, differences – provides space from which to speak affirmatively of First Nations' peoples and contribute, through cultural production, to understandings of socio-political relationships within Canada. The binary is thereby strategic, a temporary demarcation rather than definitive division, and employed with an aim to forge a future of collectivity. The text's performance of song, to which Maracle refers, is particularly significant in this respect; for Armstrong, "song has all of the ingredients and qualities that we [Okanagan people] require to rebalance our emotion and intellect and even our bodies" (Beeler, 147). The final 'we' in Maracle's passage encourages Native and non-Native readers alike to benefit from the text and begin processes of recovery from the destruction of colonialism; harmony through health, engendered by song (for Armstrong) becomes the text's focal point around which co-operation/continuity is possible.

Armstrong's efforts to confound and reform extant binaries – in ways of thinking about people and the world; in ways of producing and analyzing creative expression – do not contradict Maracle's. Yet the two writers diverge in style and tone, and in the extent to which particular conceptions of continuity are emphasized. Like Maracle's "Lee on Spiritual Experience," the generic parameters of *Whispering in Shadows* are unclear; Rasunah Marsden analyses the text while speaking about and questioning the terms of

discussion for Indigenous creative non-fiction, and for constructing generic categories generally. Using *Whispering in Shadows* as an example, Marsden argues that First Nations creative non-fiction is expanding in volume and scope, and is

much richer in overlap of stylistic concerns and devices...for all of the heavy borrowing done and treaties made with poetry, poetic prose, fiction, and not least of all, drama, for singularly innovative and creative purposes. (Marsden, 21)

Determining genres is less important as an end in itself than in reflecting an underlying indeterminacy of categorization, evident in both writers' work. Yet Armstrong goes further than Marsden in exploring generic overlaps by challenging more formal constraints than those separating fiction/non-fiction and orature/literature, incorporating various artistic forms into her writing, and raising related questions within the narrative itself. Penny self-identifies as someone working to cross a boundary between visual art and written expression, and to relate the 'findings' of that crossing politically. Questions about form, intersecting with content and enacted by the text, are thereby also raised by the protagonist herself:

IS THIS PART OF THE POEM  
OR IS IT NON-FICTION?

Globalization and supremacy deceit and grudging paternalism systematized racism colonial practice and government structured racialization power enforcement might makes right the colour of oppression and racism is money and blood

I THINK IT'S PART OF THE STORY  
OR THE PLOT

A piece here and a piece there (WS, 185)

Playing with the distinction between poem (her own) and non-fiction (the world's), and the terms 'story' and 'plot,' carries multiple implications: Penny's (and Armstrong's) personal expression cannot be separated by political experience, but the extent to which

the story can be plotted – either fictionalized, or consciously controlled – is ambiguous. In an earlier poem, ‘plot’ is re-formulated and re-iterated in a list of “choices” that irrevocably link artistic/ creative expression (the plot of a story) with politics/ economics, and with people (grave plots):

the question of globe plotting  
plot-izing the globe  
marking into plots  
person by person  
as in story plots  
as in house plots  
as in evil plots  
as in grave plots (152)

Yet Penny demonstrates throughout the text that challenging the “plot” of colonialism is necessary even as the object of challenge changes shape, requiring both internal and external exploration.

By involving the protagonist in her own challenge to formal and thematic binaries, and articulating, through that protagonist, thoughts about oppression, empowerment, and desired forms of interdependence, Armstrong creates a narrative in which the “storyteller becomes a character” (Beeler, 145). Thus generic questions return: is this an autobiography, wherein Armstrong-the-storyteller becomes Penny-the-character?; how indebted is the novel to orature and the tradition of having a storyteller?; as a storyteller, is Penny responsible for “com[ing] to grips with the human condition, humanity’s relationship to creation, and the need for a human direction that will guarantee the peaceful coexistence of human beings with all things under creation” (“Oratory,” 9)? Most important to this inquiry, the crossover between Armstrong and storytelling gives rise to a character who espouses Armstrong’s own ideas about needing to challenge existing systems and move towards socio-political systems that are universally enabling.



Armstrong cautions against “the commonly made error that it is a people we abhor”; instead, she urges her reader to “be clear that it is systems and processes which we must attack” (“The Disempowerment,” 241). Similarly, in her friendship with Julie (a fellow university student who is not Native) and in her university-based interactions (contrasting those at the Native Friendship Centre), Penny practices focusing the anger and frustration of oppression on structures rather than people. In an informal, largely conservative conversation with a political economics professor and various students, Julie calls upon Penny to define herself – racially and politically – to which Penny responds with justified, but also well-directed, anger. About and to Penny, Julie states: “she’s absolutely irreverent to the status-quo...Are you an anarchist?” (WS, 67). Penny responds:

‘None of it makes a damn bit of difference anyway. The whole system is set up to suck everything from the powerless to serve the rich...no matter which courses you take. Nobody even stops to think that those resources out there weren’t made by the government. Why should only those who already have money profit from them? Maybe there’s something wrong with the whole bloody system which drives it all...And by the way, I don’t have a damn thing to be revenant [*sic*] about. And that goes a long way back to every extinct tribe and every missing buffalo. An anarchist? I don’t have a clue. An Indian? You got that one right. And don’t ever forget it. I’m gonna call it a night, too, before I say things none of you deserve.’ (67-68)

Penny’s indictment of colonialism gains both complexity and exemplification throughout the narrative, but the premise stated above, in conjunction with her self-identification as “Indian” and her focus on structures rather individuals, remains the same.

Penny also, like Armstrong, promotes the understanding that “*numbers* are not the basis of democracy, *people* are, *each one* being important” (“The Disempowerment,” 241), and that learning methods of co-operation and sharing must take the place of

domination. Penny's need for community, and intent to help individuals act within a community, imaginatively resonates with the points of a circle:

Penny is sitting forward again but now she is looking at the candle flickering in its glass at the centre...[T]he candle has now burned down below the rim of the beveled glass and there is a perfect circle of flickering shadows on the floor pointing outward, dancing. (WS, 34)

At this point in the narrative, Penny has just heard Manuel speak of Indigenous peoples' circumstances and struggles in Bolivia and of the need to "heal *Pache Mama*" (33), to "achieve courage to become serene and calm within and so to make good decisions" (34), and to "seek to bind ourselves in solidarity and spiritually as brothers and sisters" (34). Her own difficult negotiation between art and politics, and between isolation and activity, is centrally linked to *making* links which Armstrong relates, in turn, to healing itself. The views Penny expresses in her painting – which the curator criticizes, significantly, for depicting "so much violence and blood" (202), decreasing their market potential in a business where "social consciousness is secondary" (203) – reflect the anger, violence, suffering of an abused world, and her own experience of that world, particularly as gained through a political trip to Chiapas. The personal struggle to express suffering through art, then, becomes central to a politics of 'revolution' (in Maracle's sense of the term) wherein an aesthetics of mixings, crossings, and mergings corresponds with a radical re-envisioning of Self-in-politics.

To create harmony in the service of health – personal and political, physical and emotional – Penny seeks, most importantly, a sense of herself in connection with her physical environment, thereby enacting Armstrong's ideas in "Land Speaking." Plagued by both psychological and physical suffering, Penny's attempts to "restore balance" (248), encompass her own, and others', personal well-being, in alliance with the political

well-being of a larger collective. The rage that compels Penny to destroy her paintings is followed by a narrative reflection on her own experience of disconnection:

They were points of madness – pointed – or pointing, she never could differentiate. Not like the petals of the wild sunflower pointed outward in every direction surrounding the brown centre with bright yellow. But the same green bough being turned to point toward her again and again. (207)

These moments of incapacity to look outward – to turn the “bough” beyond herself – are also periods of painful confusion manifest, the text suggests, from an internal/external imbalance. A concurrent, though different, imbalance becomes known to Penny during her physical struggle with cancer, a struggle she understands as largely caused by myriad forms of environmental destruction: when her daughter Shanna visits, Penny finds that they no longer understand one another, and that her commitment to teaching about the role of the environment in individuals’ personal and collective lives has failed to extend to her own family (257-261). This discourse-based impasse between mother and daughter also resonates with Armstrong’s conception of land’s relationship to language (Shanna, lacking the “teachings” from the land, also misunderstands Penny’s use of words), and an earlier remembrance of Penny’s grandmother:

Tupa’s voice, talking in the language, sounded somehow like the ducks, the water, the bees buzzing and the song, all at the same time... ‘Paen-aye!... You and the colours can talk, I see. They tell you things. Listen to them. They never lie.’ (45-46)

Although Penny does not understand the language of her grandmother, she envisions the physical environment in Tupa’s words and those words sooth, console, and ground her. Likewise, Tupa perceives and encourages Penny’s own perception of the land’s importance and her (Penny’s) ability to communicate through sound and colour, and anticipates Penny’s eventual reliance on Tupa’s teachings for final peace as “the wind t[akes] her voice away” (295).

Because *Whispering in Shadows* focuses so intently on the role of the environment within First Nations' worldviews and identities, on environmental activism, on harmony and community and wholeness, and on health as inspired by a version of each, it risks reinscribing stereotypes about First Nations peoples. Yet both formal and thematic developments challenge reductive images. Formally, Armstrong's mixing of genres undermines any attempt at prescriptive analyses of 'the' First Nations' writer's task and, by extension, image. Though Armstrong's desire to evoke "the universal kind of connectedness that exists between [her]self and this plant or this land form" (Kennedy, 11) may correspond with preconceived assumptions, her narrative practice provides an important and unique point of departure for studying First Nations' writing. Thematically, the focus on environmentalism creates, most importantly and most emphatically, a sense of harmony that is not a static endpoint but a dynamic process, requiring constant vigilance and evading prescriptive definitions. Finally, Penny presents a Native woman as an agent rather than a vessel, a maker of meaning rather than a repository of others' conceptions, and a deft negotiator of art and politics in a contemporary activist setting, all of which defy stereotypes of passivity, archaism, and absence. An examination of First Nations' community-based identification dialoging with personal expressions of Self in *Whispering in Shadows*, *Bobbi Lee* and "Lee on Spiritual Experience" indeed demonstrates Helen Hoy's argument that "[a]cknowledging a location, a community....opens up rather than foreclose[es] the question of what that positioning or that membership might mean" (Hoy: 2001, 189).

*Speaking to newcomers in their language is dangerous  
for when I speak  
history is a dreamer  
empowering thought  
from which I awaken the imaginings of the past  
bringing the sweep and surge of meaning  
coming from a place  
rooted in the memory of loss (from "Threads of Old Memory," BT, 58)*

*I no longer weep for myself or for the lost Europeans, but rather insist on writing myself  
into a new book that counts all of humanity on its tender, warm, and colourful pages.  
(IAW, 68)*

*Civilization has reached  
the promised land (from "History Lesson," BT, 28)*

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### **Chapter Three: Re-Writing History(-ies), Re-Envisioning Futures**

The second major facet of identity formation and decolonization explored in this project involves the role of historical narrative(s) in constructions of Self and/in History. Extending from previous discussion, this chapter focuses the question of binary disruption on 'colonizer'/'colonized' distinctions. locating negotiations between Self and Politics within historical moments demanding new scripts. *Breath Tracks* (Armstrong), *Slash* (Armstrong), and *Sundogs* (Maracle) each enact revisionist historiography that challenges colonial historical narratives – the "distortion of history in classrooms" (*IAW*, 76) – and expands beyond oppressor/oppressed polemics to radicalize the very terms of resistance. In this aim, Armstrong emphasizes the centrality, in traditional world views, of extra-dichotomous collaboration to:

Our task as Native writers is twofold. To examine the past and culturally affirm toward a new vision for all our people in the future, arising out of the powerful and positive support structures that are inherent in the principles of co-operation. ("The Disempowerment," 241)

These primary texts illustrate that 'cultural affirmation' includes understanding and reconstructing a past in order to re-imagine a future devoid of replicated binaries and

replete with diverse forms of circularity. A pivotal challenge in this process, however, involves the necessary use of deficient languages, conflicting discourses, imperfect terms of reference. Re-invoking the thesis' central concern with negotiating essentialist and constructivist discourses, this chapter foregrounds an approach to language that looks at historical and linguistic referents as both indispensable and unreliable. Once the key discursive challenges are outlined, discussion will turn to the primary texts and their means of negotiating realist (or monologic and linear) and constructivist (or dialogic and circular, in the ways this thesis demonstrates) literary elements. The texts discussed here collaboratively negotiate the dangers of both objective fact and subjective narrative by constructing history as referential without re-inscribing an-Other totalizing logic, thus broadening structural and thematic conceptions of resistance and tradition via chronicled history.

The primary obstacles in concurrently re-writing history and negotiating language(s) pose a succession of inter-related questions that both circle back to previous issues and map onto historiography-related concerns. These encompass three broad areas: key goals for re-writing history(-ies); the instability of language in its contradictory capacities; and discursive violence, ideological control, and modes of resistance. Through brief expansion of each, this prefatory discussion will help situate the analyses of *Breath Tracks*, *Slash*, and *Sundogs* within a context of marked discursive tension, against which history is re-imagined through a fabric of heterogeneity.

The reasons Native Canadian writers re-visit Canadian history appear clear, but should be articulated. As Barbara Harlow argues, resistance narratives must address the "connection between knowledge and power, the awareness of the exploitation of knowledge by the interests of power to create a distorted historical record" (Harlow,

116). Writing in opposition to and re-creation of power/knowledge paradigms in Canada, Armstrong and Maracle ensure, fundamentally, that Canada's "distorted historical record" not continue uncontested. In the same vein, Kateri Damm offers instructive comment on the multi-dimensional role of historical narrative in processes of subject-(re)formation:

Part of what ['Native-ness'] means is that we remember the past and carry it with us...What it means is that the reality is that we have not faded into the earth like snow before the summer sun of 'progress' nor have we stagnated in some sort of retrograde time capsule. (Damm, 15, 16)

Damm suggests that empowered subjects must first understand and situate themselves within a context of both positive and negative historical legacies. From that position, individuals and characters can disempower stereotypes and re-historicize First Nations subjects, thereby significantly battling ideological erasure-through-mythologization (discussed in Chapter One). As has already been demonstrated, many and diverse Native subjects of course speak, think, write and act in Armstrong's and Maracle's work; this chapter examines, by extension, the positions and processes of historically-situated characters as they actively shape the stories that emerge.

Placing oneself at the center of a revised historical narrative does not supersede the theoretical and material challenges posed by discursive processes – at once volatile and creative – necessary for interrogating history(-ies) of subjugation and re-imagining future(s) of liberation. As Susan Rudy Dorscht argues, "if literary texts both challenge and participate in a society's construction of itself, then language has an important and contested role in this construction" (Dorscht, 140). But if, as Foucault argues, "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (Foucault: 1978, 100), then truth is always and only a product of language, its capitalized form only and always a

construct of “polyvalen[t...] discourses” (100). Clearly, an unproblematized embrace of realism undermines the oppositional writer’s need to deconstruct falsely naturalized truth claims in colonialist discourse; also clear, however, is the necessity of challenging oppressive claims with counter-claims, encoded in a shared but interested language. Sylvia Söderlind’s observation contextualizes the stakes of the argument and usefully recalls the theoretical debate this thesis addresses:

Postmodern criticism prefers to locate marginality in texts, while postcolonial criticism prefers to see it as evidence of an extratextual situation that involves the author’s subject position. This difference explains the *postmodern critics’ disdain of realism and the postcolonial critics’ necessary reliance on it*. (Söderlind, 104; emphasis added)

Linda Hutcheon contributes to the referentiality debate by suggesting that history be considered a form of intertextuality itself: “History becomes a text, a discursive construct upon which literature draws as easily as it does upon other artistic contexts” (Hutcheon: 1987, 170). From a political perspective, approaching history as intertext allows for critical examination of exclusionary and hierarchical truth claims by contesting and decentering linear, monologic, and monophonic accounts of experiential reality. Yet a concurrent consequence is the risk of perpetually displacing the historical referent, forever confounding the attempt to address both perceived and experienced oppression. The same historical referent that Hutcheon argues is approximate and mediated, Armstrong and Maracle must re-claim in the face of disabling silence. Reservations, residential schools, Indian Acts, Oka – the long and destructive history(-ies) of oppression alluded to in these signifiers risk extinction by either totalizing mythologies of “a settler culture struggling for national identity” (Lutz: 1999, 94), or unequivocal denial of referential reliability. Hutcheon offers, perhaps, a useful entry point for negotiation in reminding us that “[neither] Derrida’s contention that there is nothing preceding, nothing



outside the text, [nor] Foucault's unwillingness to accept language as referring to any first-order reference...*is a denial of the real world, past or present*" (Hutcheon: 1987, 175; emphasis added). But the question remains: how should one decide upon the cross-cultural terms of historical representation?

Armstrong's discussion of "The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment Through Their Writing" focuses this concern on the need to decrease the divide between history-as-referent and history-as-text. "In order to address the specifics of Native people's writing and empowerment," she begins,

I must first present my view on the disempowerment of first North American Nations. Without recounting various historical versions of *how* it happened, I would like to refer only to *what* happened here. ("The Disempowerment," 239)<sup>24</sup>

Distinguishing between historiography (versions of "*how* it happened") and historical referent ("*what* happened here"), Armstrong prioritizes naming the effects of colonialism – as those which cannot be (poststructurally) postponed nor (colonially) subsumed under the rubric of 'official' Canadian history – before, and in order to, interpret the process. Armstrong's work, consequently, echoes Maracle's in historicizing and subverting the falsely normalized referents of colonialist discourse with a *strategically* authoritative and hitherto ignored version of "*what* happened here." The two writers must re-tell history(-ies) that both demand legitimization and require discursive contingency, employing tools that produce "the history of [Indigenous peoples'] betrayal" (95) as well as "the history of [Indigenous peoples'] resistance" (95). If decolonization is to be considered "a truly

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<sup>24</sup>Armstrong delivered this paper at the Saskatchewan Writers Guild Annual Conference (1990) on a panel entitled "Empowering Aboriginal Writers." It is significant to note that her paper addresses both Native and non-Native writers and, though the focus is on the role of the Native writer, the concurrent addressee (the non-Native writer) is explicitly a part of the larger context and is considered to have a role in the process of Native peoples' empowerment (see discussion of pedagogy in Chapter One).

radical unhiding of the hidden” (Dorscht, 124)<sup>25</sup> – a radical movement away from oppressor/oppressed dialectics, incongruous with simple exposure of the overlooked – then language must be employed to destroy its own “shelter for the deformed morality of power” (Harris, 16).

### ***3.1) Discursive Violence, Ideological Control, and Modes of Resistance***

Before considering the primary texts’ reclamation and articulation of Native-centric historiographies, a related challenge requires comment: the pre-emption of cross-cultural dialogue by discrediting non-European modes of ‘knowing.’ As discussed in Chapter One, the practice of imagining another’s experience or reducing that experience to a ‘totem’ of one’s own perpetuates “a kind of ‘subjugated knowledge’ that runs throughout [Canadian] literary history” (Brydon, 7). This colonial practice of demoting the ‘Other’s’ knowledge of her/himself is what promotes, in Armstrong’s view, the “cultural blindness [that] might be perceived from inside only as a necessity to bring to knowledge those who are perceived to have no knowledge of their own” (“Racism,” 79). In this reading, the subjugation of knowledge is a misguided act of ‘benevolence,’ delivering discursive violence of the highest order. Residential schools, the “indoctrination camps [wherein] our language, our religion, our customs, our values and our social structures almost disappeared,” (“The Disempowerment,” 239), are what Armstrong identifies as the most pervasive and sustained form of discursive violence enacted against Native Canadians; the consequent “almost total disorientation and loss of identity” (239-240) is integral, in both writers’ analyses, to the ‘success’ of colonization. Significantly, the denigration of Native cultures and perpetuation of Native peoples’ socio-economic and political disempowerment began not with the fact of dispossession, Armstrong argues, but with

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<sup>25</sup> Dorscht borrows this term from Robert Kroetsch., by whom it was coined.

the achievement of “total subjective control...and the direct removal of political, social, and religious freedoms” (239). Ideological domination has therefore been requisite in sustaining socio-economic containment by alienating the colonized subject/community from her/his/its cultural understandings.

In response, both Armstrong and Maracle emphatically denounce the “totalitarianism which adequately describes the methods used to achieve the condition of [Indigenous] people today” (239) and employ, through revisionist historiography, three significant methods of resistance: respecting non-European modes of thought and means of knowing; embracing difference; and resisting assimilation. Maracle uses speech and silence as tropes for the discursive impasse between cultures that results when codes of communication are not mutually respected, and one asserts supremacy at the others’ expense. The speaker in “Black Robes,”<sup>26</sup> for example, recounts the encounter between a priest – on a mission for students – and her great-grandfather who assuredly explains that their people are, in fact, educated. Significantly, the priest (referred to as Black Robe) operates on the assumption that the intervening interpreter is sufficient for understanding, and being understood by, his Native interlocutor, deeming direct translation both possible and restricted to word use alone. But the respect from Native- to European Subject is conspicuously unreciprocated, evidenced in the priest’s dismissal of his discussant’s cultural codes. Though Black Robe “never repeated his listeners’ words as we do (very rude)” (*IAW*, 62), the speaker’s ancestor was

careful to repeat Black Robe’s words verbatim, to show respect for the speaker’s vision of truth and to ensure that no misunderstanding or distortion of his words occurred. (62)

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<sup>26</sup> “Black Robes” is the title of one of the sections in Maracle’s *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*.

Exacerbating his dual ignorance (rudeness and incomprehension), Black Robe's silence in this instance is coupled with his concomitant lack of respect for (and cultural understanding of) the silence of others. Here, Black Robe is opposed by the speaker herself; whereas "Black Robe did not stop talking" (64), the speaker had "learned not to query uselessly before [she] learned to speak" (64). Learning to think by listening – considering others' words, weighing the importance of each before choosing which to use – constitutes a central aspect of the girl's education and cultural conduct, an approach alien to the priest, who "seemed agitated," "spoke fast," and failed to seek communicative clarity. This lack of regard for others' beliefs and practices is emphasized by the story's opening statement which celebrates the attainment of ubiquitous knowledge: "The children of our people must seek knowledge wherever life presents itself" (62). Upon Black Robe's arrival, the girl thinks: "Here, indeed, was something different. Wordlessly, she absorbed its newness" (62). Her silence, significantly, denotes an approach to learning rather than incomprehension, a learning paradigm not comprehended by the priest who seeks to impart knowledge assuming its absence in his Native interlocutors. To this, the Native elder responds:

There is only learning and knowledge, Black Robe. We do not deny our children knowledge. You say that you have teachers who will show my children how to live. Can you not see? Beside me sits my daughter, who is neither blind nor deaf nor imprisoned. She is free to seek knowledge among whomever she chooses to learn from. Her presence among adults indicates her desire to know. Hence, are we not obliged to give her our knowledge whenever she walks among us? You see her. She will have no need of interpreters if we continue to counsel, you and I. What need, then, has she of this place called 'school'? (62-63)

Maracle's derisive commentary on the failure of cross-cultural communication and the defeat of this elder's hopes for co-operative 'counseling' – ensured by 'Black Robes' schools in which Native languages were prohibited and the English language was not

adequately taught – is not lost on her reader.<sup>27</sup> As she states elsewhere in *I Am Woman*, “[y]ou have always been seen as people in our eyes, but we are still cannibals in yours” (80). This fundamentally racist premise, equating ‘human’ with ‘European’ and “sameness” with “everyone’s obliteration but [the European’s] own” (81), makes an equal joining of cultures impossible. Rather than assimilate, therefore, and perpetuate the ideological control of her people by valuing ‘Black Robes’ truth claims at the expense of her grandmothers’, Maracle embraces difference. As discussed in Chapter One, speaking about and from positions of difference requires consideration of positionality: in this case, due to the subjugation of Native knowledge structures, the non-Native is deemed ‘knowing’ and the Native only ‘knowable’. The resulting epistemic violence anchors Maracle’s argument against assimilation, which she considers a violent forgetting of history, severance from identity narratives, and denial of the ability to survive outside dominant culture. Rather than question the endurance and value of difference, therefore, Maracle contests the structures of hierarchy and privilege that can deny difference:

Locked in your white-skinned privilege and blinded by your arrogance, you call on me to forget the past and be like you. You know not what you ask. If I forget my past, ignore our ancient ways, only violence will quiet the scream inside. (85)

Though she identifies political resistance and cultural engagement as two principal ingredients for “great social transformation” (*STOS*, 13), Maracle’s own method – like Armstrong’s – deconstructs a hierarchization of resistance(s) by both spearheading and exceeding organized political activity, and recuperating and challenging cultural traditions. Their methods of resistance involve deconstructing the ideology that endorses assimilative policies; remembering and contextualizing the past as it informs the present;

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<sup>27</sup> Maracle comments on Native peoples’ relationship to the English language, via residential schools, in her panel discussion – “Just Get in Front of a Typewriter and Bleed” from the 1988 conference (and ensuing

and celebrating an “aesthetics of simply who we are” (Anderson, 152) in ever-shifting convergences and divergences.

### **3.2) Textual Response: *Embracing Heterogeneity* *Breath Tracks, Slash, Sundogs***

Rejecting the polarization of people, Armstrong and Maracle produce revisionist historiographies that deconstruct the central – and centrally troubling – ‘us’/‘them’ dichotomy, embracing heterogeneity in its place. Their texts both pose and interrupt fixed referents – required, as discussed in previous chapters, for strategic political expression of identity – through narrative complication and textual instability. Because the “deconstruction-construction of colonialism and the reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practice” (Armstrong: 1993, 8) must employ the same “words [that] have been used to destroy, to cause pain, to cause the kinds of things we see happening all over the world between people” (“Words,” 28-29), Armstrong and Maracle enter precarious territory. Rather than “challenge normative history...[by] correcti[ng] oversights resulting from inaccurate or incomplete vision” (Scott, 776), Armstrong and Maracle dis-empower the authority of a singular, centered history by “speaking marginality and speaking against it” (Godard: 1990, 193), exploring “resistance [as] itself a process” (Emberley: 1996, 102). In Maracle’s words, “Liberation is not simple” (*IAW*, xi), and the metaphorical – and lived – margin that requires re-imagining is not easily removed.

Yet Armstrong and Maracle successfully expose discursive violence (beginning with the celebrated marriage of “civilization” with the “promised land” (*BT*, 28)), substantiate claims of material and ideological oppression, and challenge totalizing

narratives that overwrite First Nations peoples as passive/ silent/ romantic ‘Other’ by emphasizing a woven quality within narrative. Maracle, for example, makes an intervention into a potential essentialism/constructivism stalemate by describing memory as “taking an act which has already been committed” (the referent as undisputed) and “reconstructing it” (while its expression is always at a remove) (Maracle: 2000, 68). The employment and adaptation of both sides of a binary – or in Barbara Godard’s terms, “strategies of hybridization” (Godard, 193) – is demonstrated through a diversity of tactics in *Breath Tracks*, *Slash* and *Sundogs*. Building upon Chapter Two’s outline of Armstrong’s and Maracle’s culture-specific world views – what Armstrong calls the “shaper[s] of cultural process” (“Racism,” 78) – the remainder of this chapter considers the evocation of heterogeneity in Armstrong’s texts by focusing on land in relationship to language production and, ultimately, health; and in Maracle’s, on the terms of co-operative social interaction and community participation in meaning-making. The examination of actual strategies for writing non-monolithic histories will focus on formal elements corresponding with the writer’s world view: in *Breath Tracks*, synesthesia; in *Slash*, encounters between discourses, and between linear and circular narrative techniques; and in *Sundogs*, the role of interruption as a narrative device. By representing Indigenous-centric counter-histories “within an active struggle of decolonization” (Godard, 203), these texts combat what Maracle calls the “internaliz[ed], and paralyz[ing]...need to remain invisible” (*IAW*, 8) and explore the challenges of acting.

### **3.3) *Breath Tracks***

Armstrong describes her role in “undermin[ing] the dominant discourse[’s] monolithic position of power” (Godard: 1990, 193) and preserving “principles of co-

operation” (Armstrong, “The Disempowerment,” 241) as one characterized by writing and healing:

My responsibility is to approach....all of this colossal misuse of words from my purpose as part of a healing process for my children and my people who have been so damaged, so brutalized that their language, their tongues, have been wrenched from their mouths. (“Words,” 29)

Like *Whispering in Shadows*, Armstrong’s collection of poetry – *Breath Tracks* – models potential routes towards health by mixing senses and performing synesthesia in resistance to binary-based erasure of histories and stereotypes of peoples. Of particular significance to this chapter, the binary disruption in *Breath Tracks* also challenges the foundation of the objective historical referent and shows key discontinuities between ‘colonized’ and ‘colonizer’ terms of reference. By merging physical and emotional sense with meaning – linked, in turn, to land – Armstrong makes powerful political comment on her concept of ownership and subjectivity. Armstrong does not say “this land is *mine*”: she says, in effect, “this land is *me*.” To construct that ‘me’ historically, Armstrong – wary of the mutability of words and skillful in utilizing linguistic slippage – motions towards a recognizable referent encoded by language. Because she believes that words transmit culture and express identity (“Words,” 25), Armstrong focuses on finding ways to share meanings that are difficult to impart and require context to understand. When people are speaking to one another, Armstrong describes, they are “attempting to take something that’s not physical and turn it into a physical experience for another person...We find ways to couch our transmission of information to other people in metaphor” (26). Armstrong’s poetic expression thus foregrounds heterogeneity, encouraging historicized communication through the construction of multi-discursive and multi-sensory imagery.



The poem entitled “History Lesson” exemplifies Armstrong’s negotiation, first, of discourses. De-mythologizing the mystique of exploration and exposing the hypocrisy of ‘New World’ freedom, this counter-hegemonic lesson subverts the stereotypes of ‘benevolent’ colonization and enriches the historiographical fabric with its own voice. By drawing upon but confounding tropes of Christianity and teleological progress, the poem uses colonial imagery – combined with Native-centric interjection – to re-document the “long journey” (*BT*, 29)<sup>28</sup> of crossing and colonizing. The poem speaks directly to the “systematic[] enforce[ment of] manifest destiny or the so-called ‘White Man’s burden’ to civilize” (“The Disempowerment,” 239), showing the mission to be far more desecrated than holy, marked by destruction rather than rejuvenation, impossibly seeking an Edenic garden in a peopled land. Shifting in perspective from nineteenth-century settler disembarkment, to nineteenth-century ‘Indians’ bearing witness, the narrative’s emphasis replaces the ‘discovery’ of sublime wilderness with the arrival of inchoate chaos.

Out of the belly of Christopher’s ship  
 a mob bursts  
 Running in all directions  
 Pulling furs off animals (*BT*, “History Lesson,” 28)

Settlers are depicted as impatient hordes rather than visions of civility, “Shooting buffalo/ Shooting each other/ left and right” (28), intent on finding “their men/...to build a new world” (28). Colonial stereotypes of “saucer-eyed Indians” (28) in need of civilization are rendered absurd by a succession of counter-images: well-meaning Fathers bringing imported Christianity to bestow philanthropic, but unsolicited, forgiveness with “makeshift wand[s]” (28); traders bearing weighty gifts of “Smallpox, Seagrams/ and rice

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<sup>28</sup> Because the individual poems in *Breath Tracks* do not use line numbers, all references to the poems will

crispies” (28); farmers using agricultural expertise to sow “skulls and bones” (28); and miners “pulling from gaping holes/ green paper faces/ of a smiling English lady” (28). The stereotype of barbarity is not only displaced from the Native on-looker to the European gentlemen but is expressed as exacerbated by the exploitative approach to land, suggestive of untold destruction. Disjunctures, in this poem, between colonialist and Native discourses converge on the issue of land; though both claim its vital significance, that significance, for Armstrong, is enshrined in its preservation, while for an imperialist settler, in its exploitation. “[B]reathing forests and fields” (29) and “whole civilizations ten generations at a blow” (29) are sacrificed for “[t]he colossi/ in which they trust” (29): power, money, and land in its capacity to generate both. In the closing lines, Armstrong underscores the distance between stated colonial intentions and the results experienced by Native peoples, living a history that did not conform to the expectations of myth:

Somewhere among the remains  
 of skinless animals  
 the termination  
 to a long journey  
 and unholy search  
 for the power  
 glimpsed in a garden  
 forever closed  
 forever lost. (29)

Where “History Lesson” destabilizes the Catholic version of good and evil, subverting the trope of the binary structure by exploiting and merging multiple discourses, “Words” and “Threads of Old Memory”<sup>29</sup> illustrate the double-edged potency of language by asserting cultural premises through multi-sensory description. Armstrong’s use of synesthesia, discussed in Chapter Two, helps explicate the tenets of

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include title and page number only.

<sup>29</sup> Both of these poems are also from *Breath Tracks*.

her cultural perspective by miming, and invoking, her grandmothers' careful use of words. She describes speaking as a process, suggestive of physical experience, of "tak[ing] language and put[ting] it out for someone to come up against"; as a speaker, you must "assume responsibility for speaking those words," for the effect "of those words on the person you are addressing," and for the "thousands of years of tribal memory packed into your understanding of those words" (*Telling It*, "Words," 27).<sup>30</sup> Framing this reading of *Breath Tracks*, Armstrong's philosophy of language – as integral to constructions and expressions of identity, culture, and society, but infinitely misinterpretable and untrustworthy "because of the obvious: words can be misconstrued" (28) – gains emphasis in reference to historical narration:

Words are memory  
a window in the present  
a coming to terms with meaning  
history made into now  
a surge of reclaiming  
the enormity of the past (*BT*, "Words," 17)

Approaching language as politically significant (in transmitting culture and supporting identity) as well as vastly unreliable, Armstrong composes a word-ed "window in the present" through which to view narratives of the past without equating words (imagined as "memory" and "glass") with transparency (which also "has its secrets" (Hoy: 1994, 165)). Because Armstrong is most concerned with the speaker's *use* of words, the writer's handling of language, the act of "coming to terms with meaning" (*BT*, "Words," 17) is paramount to "reclaiming/.../ a piece of the collective experience of time" (17). The "fertile ground" (17) of metaphor in Armstrong's poetry emerges from imagistic overlap between physicality and "meaning wished onto tongues" (17), ideas articulated

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<sup>30</sup> This paper entitled "Words" – from *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures* – is not to be

with care and bound by a responsibility to others. Words are “a sleep in which I try to awaken/ the whispered echo of voices” (17); they “push[] forward,” “transform[],” and “bump wetly/ against countless tiny drums/ to become sound” (17), “always linking to others” (18).

This merging of sensory and bodily knowledge presents the boundaries within a binary structure as fluid and mutually contributory, denoting the potential for a broader co-existence of languages and meanings, cultures and peoples. Though words alone are indefinite, they “reach[] ever forward into distances unknown” (18), spanning generations to supplant pain, grief, isolation; as “voices of continuance,” traveling “over millions of tongues,” remaining “alive with meaning” (17), words become a testament to survival. “Threads of Old Memory” continues the exploration of the capacity of words to exploit, in the service of colonialism, but also to create in the process of healing, and opens with a warning: “Speaking to newcomers in their language is dangerous” (*BT*, 58). The poem contrasts the language(s) of the colonized – which “spoke only harmony” (58) – with that of the colonizer – which “meant to overpower” (58) – to reflect Armstrong’s own discursive positioning:

I do at all times speak to my people when I’m writing. Whenever I waver from that I get lost; I can’t speak to the newcomers and when I do it becomes dangerous because I don’t know your metaphors. I don’t know what your thinking is, what your perceptions are, and I don’t know how to approach that. (*Telling It*, “Words,” 27)

Her demarcation between Native and European languages and between positive and negative potentiality in language production emphasizes the difficulty of accessing “threads of old memory” – located in “imaginings of the past” (58), now “rooted in the memory of loss” (58) – necessary for deconstructing colonialism and re-constructing a

new social imaginary. Because the enormity of colonization is facilitated by “skillfully crafted words” (58) that ensure cultures are “wrenched from the minds of a people” (58), Armstrong’s “word speaker” (59) – most powerful as “the dreamer/ the choice maker” (59) – must negotiate treacherous ground. To impel a liberating collision of languages “when past and present explode in chaos/ and the imaginings of the past/ rip into the dreams of the future” (60), the speaker must construct a cultural premise – “words that become the sharing/ the collective knowing/.../the dreaming that becomes a history” (59) – allowing her to “mov[e] to a place/ where a new song begins” (61). The desired result – a world “that cannot be stolen or lost/ only shared” (61) – demonstrates a crucial version of binary disruption, replacing an ‘either/or’ paradigm (ever within the confines of ‘only’) with one of sharing (productive of endless variation).

The crucial and arduous intermediary process, however, relies upon the elusive breath tracks, the “sacred words/ spoken serenely in the gaps between memory” (60). The title’s paradoxical image of inscribed, ‘tracked,’ mist suggests a co-mingling of realism and constructed mediation, of images of presence and gestures of deferral, wherein words are “spasms,” turning “grey silence/ into explosions of colour” (*BT*, “Words,” 17).

When I speak  
 I attempt to bring together  
 with my hands  
 gossamer thin threads of old memory  
 thoughts from the underpinnings of understanding  
 words steeped in age  
 slim  
 barely visible strands of harmony  
 stretching across the chaos brought into this world (*BT*, “Threads of Old Memory,” 59)

“Slim” and “barely visible,” the “strands of harmony” must be carefully extracted from this world’s “chaos,” not as disparate fractions but as parts of a collective, elements of an amorphous whole, delicately drawn by hand. Discursively constructed as mutually informing rather than hierarchically valued, the nexus of language and body and spirit is illustrated throughout *Breath Tracks* as a dynamic component of a continually re-shaped cultural tradition. To view and articulate that tradition, Armstrong’s blending of senses and discourses conjoins backward- and forward-looking referents, forcing uncomfortable recognition of cultural subjugation:

disfigured babies injured battered defenseless/  
 . . . bellies spilling guts gouges/ left for eyes . . . /  
 the terrible the hidden the unbearable (*BT*, “Grief Is Not the Activity that Heals.” 56)

Finally, however, a “truly radical unhiding of the hidden” (Dorchst, 134) sees “threads of truth” (*BT*, 61) gain visibility in their articulation, ushering knowledge of grandmothers and forefathers and offering interpretive promise in refusing a return to silence:

dispelling lies in the retelling  
 I choose threads of truth  
 that in its telling cannot be hidden  
 and brings forward  
 old words that heal (“Threads of Old Memory,” 60-61)

### ***3.4) Slash and Sundogs: A Shared Comment on Common Ground***

The two novels examined in this context offer similar challenges to binaries but also provide an opportunity to trace the two writers’ distinct movement through more comprehensive historical reconstructions than those available in *Breath Tracks*. Each text

posits the *word as a process of knowing*, provisional and partial, rather than as revealed knowledge itself, and aims to produce texts in performance that would

create *truth as interpretation* rather than those in the Western mimetic tradition that reveal truth as pre-established knowledge. (Godard: 1990, 184; emphasis added)<sup>31</sup>

Through the protagonists' own readings of history, language and truth are constructed as "provisional" rather than "mimetic," interpretive rather "pre-established," imperfectly translating cultural beliefs into [hi]stories that are continually re-located and re-told. As what Godard calls "text in performance," each novel emphasizes the dynamic aspect of its own textuality, the interpretive flux that frustrates attempts at easy, direct signification. Each makes an

epistemic break...both with respect to the semiotic field engendering the 'imaginary Indian' in white writing on the Native – s/he is historicized not mythologized – nor is it history as timeless myth as in traditional Native 'historical' narratives of mystical orality which reify an 'original source.' Rather it is a new history and historiography different from both, the history of struggle in the 1960s and 1970s in a hybrid narrative. This is *history as narrating, as telling*, in traditional native fashion, but within recognizable dates and events and the conventions of 'colonial' history...Nonetheless, these historical narratives make great demands on the reader for different historical knowledge...In this, they *foreground their partial – fragmented and interested – knowledges*. (203; emphasis added)<sup>32</sup>

The resulting construction of a 'third space' – or "place/ where a new song begins" (*BT*, 61) – makes historical and cultural 'truths' available for the reader's provisional translation more than passive consumption; even as their crucial focus remains singular – Native peoples' empowerment – the works in their entirety foreground formal and thematic heterogeneity, conjoined in active movement, constitutive of change.

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara Godard is describing the challenges she sees Indigenous literature posing to the Canadian literary tradition; she is referring specifically to the proceedings of a 1989 workshop, organized by the Committee to Re-establish the Trickster and directed by poet Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, entitled "Re-establishing the Voice: Oral and Written Literature into Performance."

<sup>32</sup> Godard is referring specifically to *Slash* (Armstrong, 1985) and *I Am Woman* (Maracle, 1996), but I feel her analysis also applies to *Sundogs* (Maracle, 1992).

For the characters' themselves, the process of expressing Self and/in History might usefully be described as gaining familiarity with the 'biography' of each. In Spivak's estimation,

[t]o an extent, the way in which one conceives of oneself as representative or as an example of something is this awareness that what is one's own, one's identity, what is proper to one, is also a biography, and has a history. That history is unmotivated but not capricious and is larger in outline than we are. (Spivak: 1993, 6)

Understanding history and identity as "larger in outline than we are," framed by fluctuating, "unmotivated but not capricious" lines, is central to both Armstrong's and Maracle's evocation of time and place. Where Spivak constructs a 'third space' – between "either objective, disinterested positioning or the attitude of there being no author" (6) – by approaching the subject as an "instantiation of historical and psychosexual narratives that one can piece together, however fragmentarily, in order to do deontological work in the humanities" (6), Armstrong and Maracle also claim an "identity from a text that comes from somewhere else" (6) by emphasizing their wider cultural communities (of grandmothers and lineage), and temporal 'communities' (of past/ present/ future overlays). As the characters interrogate their own use of mobilizing slogans, masterwords, strategies of essentialism (discussed in Chapter One), they also challenge the figure of 'Native' – as backdrop to, and reference for, settler experience – and "provide an integral mechanism for solutions currently needed in this country" ("The Disempowerment," 241) by focusing on history and identity as interrelated processes of reflection; negotiation; and non-teleological movement.



### 3.5) *Slash*

*Slash*, originally written as a high school history text,<sup>33</sup> lends itself to consideration of a number of issues: historical referentiality and dialogical storytelling; the multiplicity and non-linearity of ‘activism’; and intersections between voice, community, and health. Its purpose was to teach Native students the history of Native peoples in the Okanagan region within the context of the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) during the 1960s and 1970s. Carefully reconstructing the movement’s effects ‘north of the border’ – precipitating (temporally), informing, and framing First Nations’ responses to Canada’s Constitutional debates in the 1980s – *Slash* at once requires an approximation of historical specificity and enacts a reading of “history as narrating” (Godard, 203). As an educational tool, the text must deconstruct stereotypes of peoples and of histories – irreparably destroying the romance of the ‘Native’ by “address[ing] the contradictions of Native political practice within the structure of internal colonialism” (Emberley: 1993, 131) – and re-construct empowering versions within recognizable discursive parameters. In preparation for the novel, Armstrong herself completed extensive research: first archival – examining the period “in terms of what influenced the thinking of the people and how it affected Indian lifestyles, communities, and individuals” (Williamson, 18) – and then by interview. Armstrong states:

I did massive interviews with people at all levels of the community, not with the intention of using their words but of finding out myself what their thinking and feelings were, and where the people were in terms of their hopes, their dreams, their hearts, their rage. (18)

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<sup>33</sup> The text was written for the Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project, a project which began in 1979. The novel, Armstrong’s first, was designed for grade 11-level courses on Contemporary History (Williamson, 18).

The text itself, therefore, began through negotiation – between ‘objective fact’ and subjective remembrance, between writing and speech – in order to draw upon diverse forms of knowing that incorporate linear chronologies in conjunction with circular narratives.

*Slash* follows Tommy Kelasket, the title character, through his fluctuating experiences and roles wherein he remains “an unflinching observer of political realities, even when such observations are painful” (*Slash*, 11).<sup>34</sup> The protagonist presents his story as a means of accessing that of A.I.M., situating his own pedagogy within the context of ‘extra-oppositional’ resistance and survival dependent upon discursive negotiation and contextual understanding. In preface to his first-person narrative, *Slash* asks his reader to share in his exploration of how “he changed and what caused the changes” (13), rendering knowledge of past events and their impact upon present conditions necessary for future imaginaries. Tommy’s process of “think[ing] back” (13) re-introduces the importance of reflection in determining one’s place in a nexus of contending, but interdependent, narratives, and aligns elements of linear narrative progression (the novel is structured chronologically, in reference to *Slash*) with circular movement. The emergent “alternative conceptions of progress and identity” (Green, 66) sees both text and protagonist negotiate storytelling and ‘fact-telling’ to “cultivat[e] a world in which pride is left” (Williamson, 10). “For Tony,” *Slash*’s prefatory poem, partially typifies the novel by summoning cultural as well as historical context to create, simultaneously, (circular) story and (linear) documentation that together form internal

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<sup>34</sup> This quote – from George Ryga’s “Foreword” to *Slash* – is part of a cogent description of Armstrong. Yet *Slash*, as a character who “experiences some of these feelings [surrounding A.I.M.] first-hand and shows the effects on his family or friends or his people” (Williamson, 18), arguably voices the spectrum of Armstrong’s observations.

cohesion at the level of community. The poem illustrates the value of mobilizing and executing powerful words, stating: “All the stories you used to make laughter/ will be told around the tables of your people/ And we will be rich with weapons.” Documenting a life plagued by “that cold and lonely place/ where the only sounds/ were those of an always new beast,” the poem attests to an individual’s fight – extraordinary only in its frequency – and his impact on a larger community which provides a point of mutual identification. The memorialized Tony inspires both humour and strength with the same words that become the content of Armstrong’s poem, demonstrating the power and versatility of language used as a tool for remembering the past and a weapon for the changing the future: “You played with them/ in long chains/ or little piles/ People laughed at your stories and were happy/ for a few moments you would be too.”

Situated within a composite of discursive negotiations (that act as a narrative sub-text), the novel’s terms for action/ activism/ act-ing further destabilize the viability of binary frameworks. Manina Jones argues that “either/or choices are continually complicated both within the novel’s narrative and by its activist aesthetic practice” (Jones, 52), resulting in a “reciprocal translation between spoken and written discourse, English and Okanagan” (56).<sup>35</sup> Spivak helps collapse the distinction between speech and writing generally by contesting the apparent immediacy or transparency of the former. She argues that even “speaking ‘off the cuff’ is conditioned by a whole variety of psycho-social, ethno-economic, historical and ideological strands” and that, as with the written tracts of colonialist history, each of those inflections are “more or less violent in their necessary constitutive exclusions” (Spivak: 1990, 36). Within the structure of the novel,

Tommy's movement through a series of contending political positions reflects the interchange of contending discourses, indicating interstitial spaces between ostensible oppositions and the complexity of activism itself. Strategies and tactics generate debate even in Tommy's closest romantic and intellectual relationship, that with Maeg. As another example of complex political division and the difficulty of creating and sustaining dialogue, Government bureaucracies for Indian Affairs are most often supported, in the novel, by members of Tribal Councils and rejected by elders, traditional peoples, and activists seeking sovereignty. As Slash notes, in reference to the 1973 occupation of B.I.A (Bureau for Indian Affairs) buildings at Wounded Knee,

I understood it is easier fighting foreigners because racial prejudice is almost always an easy conscience soother, but protecting your people against your own is very difficult. Mostly, it's easier to just keep quiet and endure, and there had already been enough of that. (*Slash*, 114)

The concurrent news blackout about the activities at Wounded Knee underscores the difficulty of negotiating discourses and the explicit power of speech – within the unequal Native/non-Native exchange – able to simultaneously suppress and create information (“The reports were supposed to be one-sided” (114)). It is through the experience of Wounded Knee, also, that Slash becomes increasingly convinced of “how cheap the life of an Indian is to a white man who's [*sic*] status quo is threatened” (115). Yet the novel's distinctions between Native and non-Native reflect, and are used strategically to address, socio-economic and political hierarchies rather than inherent differences. Attending to the complexities of in-/exclusion shows the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ to be untenable in a

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<sup>35</sup> The binary Manina Jones focuses on, and responds to, involves the “relation between literary criticism, activism, and fiction” and the corresponding tendency to either assimilate the novel “to literary canonical norms” or relegate it to “the political or journalistic sphere” (52).

novel where ‘choosing sides,’ actively employing ‘the Indian’ versus ‘the white’ way, involves more than simple allegiance.

Deciding how best to act and speak, therefore, remains a focal question for Slash throughout his journeys. The internal conflict generated by this unanswered question gains clarity midway through the novel, when Slash’s active involvement with A.I.M. vacillates with periods of paralyzed *inaction* born of unspeakable frustration. Tommy’s movement between extreme poles – of strength, expressed through political activism; and disillusionment, expressed through helplessness and substance abuse – coincides with three notable factors: the absence of Mardi, a key organizer and leader and Slash’s first political mentor as well as serious lover (who in fact names him as Slash); his increased anger and desire for confrontation; and his decision to help in A.I.M.’s actions as much as possible:

Every time a meeting would come up, though, I would go straight and anger would build. By the time everyone got to have their say. I would be ready. It would just come spewing out. I knew I was good with words. I knew how to say things to get everybody feeling what I was feeling. At them times, I felt like if I had a machine gun, I would have run out and started shooting at any white man passing. (122)

As in “For Tony,” the correlation between language and power is articulated, here, in terms of aggression and action, without deeming words alone sufficient protection against a demoralizing world: “Afterwards, I would huddle somewhere and shake and be so tired I couldn’t do more than get up to pee” (122). Being “good with words” (122), in this case, creates a sense of oppositional empowerment and an important increase in confidence, and the battle imagery in these instances appropriately underscore the context of the struggle as well as the stakes involved. Slash’s aggravated frustration, however, finds voice in a series of expressions of political consciousness, all of which share the need to resist and assert strength but beg an additional, decisive ingredient for revolution

– for “turn[ing] around” (*IAW*, 109) – not possible when “all [Slash] cared about was to keep moving, to keep doing things so [he] wouldn’t have to stop and think” (123).

As the text moves into its fourth and final section and the need to circle back (advanced in the prologue) is repeated (in the frame of the text, though preceded in the chronology of its telling), Slash emphasizes the dangers of oppositional disempowerment – implicated in teleological notions of movement – and works towards decolonization that “rests upon refusing the co-optation of Native political action into a cycle of antagonism and aggression” (Emberley: 1993, 149). Suspending his own ‘bi-polar’ shifts, Slash examines varying forms political activism – happening around him, and which he has been involved in – and forwards tentative recommendations for the movement’s own ‘revolution,’ hoping to increase “the practice of the old ways of the tribe, and the way it made people feel” (182):

What I saw were many young people, much like myself a few years ago down at D.C., all gung-ho to act. An Indian power through confrontation kind of attitude. I knew it was necessary for them, in the same way it had been necessary for me, to develop a certain kind of awareness and self-confidence. I was past that. I knew I had to develop further, towards something that would carry me beyond the point of sheer anger and frustration..... I sat there one night and listened to the talk. I thought of how all of it seemed to be without any kind of realness attached to it, like a dream that we were all living at once. (182-183)

I had lived that dream [of action] with my people. I had wanted to stand and be proud to be Indian, and have everybody else know that being Indian was special, not something to be forever ashamed of for some unknown reason. I had wanted that more than anything. The success of the movement depended on that, but something had been missing. I had known I had to somehow find what it was that was missing. (184-185)

Though his comments are partially indicative of a required linearity (“..it had been necessary for me...I was past that”) and objective realism (the discussion lacked “realness”; “something had been missing”) for political progress, they also suggest that the missing piece is less puzzle-like – clearly formed and tangible – than amorphous. As

it interlocks with co-pieces in active processes of negotiation, Slash's missing piece helps render progress "a process which works across generations and [identity]...a question of interconnectedness rather than of independence and opposition" (Green, 66), as the elements of resistance are themselves seen as interactive. Traditional learning and the words of Pra-cwa; consciousness raising and the meetings at Pandora's; mobilized action and the support at Wounded Knee: each is both necessary *and* inadequate as singular foundational schemas for change, helping decrease the gap between dis-/empowerment without but sufficiently detailing a route to liberation. In this capacity especially, Slash becomes aligned with Armstrong herself who, in George Ryga's words,

recognizes the pitfalls of faulty revolutionary theory, of leadership tempered by opportunism, of one sided accommodation born of exhaustion, of scars too deep to heal easily. (*Slash*, 11)

Slash's overlapping processes of "Awakening," "Trying it on," and "Mixing it up"<sup>36</sup> involve recognizing injustices; negotiating assimilationist and militant tactics; and pausing at understandings of power only to move on to others. Propelled, finally, by the act of reflection, of self-critique, Slash becomes able to move beyond the parameters of dichotomous resistance.

The interactive character of resistance tactics comes to parallel a similar imperative for human interaction as Slash locates "what it was that was missing" (185) within Indigenous-centric understandings of community and tradition – dynamic and interconnected terms associated with strength and wisdom, respect and responsibility, and implications in larger communal structures: "I was part of all the rest of the people. I was responsible to that" (203). *Slash* focuses on community through the lens of the traditional home, resonating with Armstrong's own family and education in traditional

cultural practices. As a boy, Tommy learns from his Uncle Joe the ways of the hills and from his father that “it’s what in your head that’s the real law” (21), but it is only through hermeneutic exploration (involving government education, political activism, spiritual renewal) that the lessons of his youth resonate with the needs of his adulthood. By the end of his narrative, *Slash* names his “son and others like him” (253) his interlocutors and emphasizes the integral pedagogical importance of community, tradition, and interconnections that expand beyond and encompass both:

Under the cruel blows of the harsh one some call destiny, many of our people have shuddered and fallen. Few have accepted this teacher and taken her gifts. To those that do, defeat is a stranger and pain an everyday reality. Some shall call them leaders. (*Slash*, “Epilogue”)

Significantly, Thomas King points out that this “idea of community and family is not an idea that is often pursued by non-Native writers who prefer to imagine their Indians as solitary figures poised on the brink of extinction” (“Introduction”: 1990, xiv). The novel’s correlations between solitude/lack of health and community/health both sustain and defy the ‘dying Indian’ trope as Tommy comes to occupy both sides. In defiance of the stereotype, Tommy states:

What I was affected everyone around me, both then and far into the future, through me and my descendants. They would carry whatever I left them. I was important as one person but more important as a part of everything else. That being so, I realized, I carried the weight of all my people as we each did. (*Slash*, 203)

But in its ‘adaptive sustenance’ the novel does not so much perpetuate the stereotype as make its interpretation integral to empowering philosophies. Tommy’s experiences of alienation see him verge on death. *Slash* suggests that the strongest solitary resistance cannot supersede the need for community-based identification – integrated “with a real heavy emphasis on Indian values” (*Slash*, 139) – and the placement of these two

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<sup>36</sup> These are the titles for the novel’s first three chapters.



instances on the continuum of Tommy's political disillusionment is of particular importance. Previous to his revised self-perceptions stated above, Slash describes 'the city' (Vancouver) as effecting him "just like a slow rot inside [his] brain" (196). "The end of the road stands out clear" (197), Slash remembers, feeling "close to total defeat, almost suicidal" (196), and "like a stranger whenever [he] th[inks] of Mom and Pops and [his] people" (196). At this time Slash fails to recognize his own reflection, indicating his sense of distance from community and from an interrelated affirmation of Self that is emphasized by use of the third person: "The eyes were hard, bitter and alien, but deep behind them was a pain and a question that asked, 'Why?'" (196). Appropriately employing the novel's "coded idiom...[of] dominant Euro-Canadian culture" – that privileges commodity over ritual, capitalism over gift-giving, and individualist- over communal activity (Emberley: 1993, 133) – Tommy's expression of self-alienation also coincides with descriptions of nature as alienating and menacing rather than nurturing. He experiences, for example, a graphic hallucination on Vancouver's wharf that involves conversing with "driftwood piles and big boulders...all dripp[ing with] slime, oozing and grey" (197) and the sensation of the same slime eating "into [his] skin right down into [his] bones" (198). Before an isolated and despairing Slash is convinced by Joe – described as "an Ojibway from Ontario" (*Slash*, 198) and medicine man – that "there is another way" (198), that "we don't have to cop out and be drunks and losers[;] we don't have to join the rats either" (198), he only sinks "further and further into that shadow world of drink and drugs; a world where things can be made to vanish like magic; a world where there is little feeling and less caring" (196).

Significantly, Slash's re-entry into family and community, his re-education to "be like Joe...to feel again, to care, to love" (199), is precipitated by an angry and desperate

rejection of the “city and what it stood for” (196): the stereotype of the drunken Indian “poised on the brink of extinction” (King, “Introduction”: 1990, xiv). To an unseen listener, Slash proclaims:

‘Screw you, you can’t suck me in. I’m free. I always will be. I’m like the buffalo, man. You’ll never own me because I resist. I won’t join the stink that you are. I’m a dirty, drunken Indian, probably full of lice and that’s how I resist. That’s the only thing that makes you look at it and see that I will not be what you are. I refuse. I’ll die a dirty, drunken Indian before I become a stinking, fat hog.’ (196)

Feeling buried under the structural forms of oppression that continue to discourage his combat against colonialism, Slash claims the stereotypes that malign him only to reject the co-option that would erase him. In Homi Bhabha’s terms, Slash’s coincident rejection/embrace of oppressive images could be described as act of mimicry, of colonialist expectation more than of colonialist behaviour, significant for highlighting ambivalence. Slash’s enactment of mimicry attests, most visibly, to identity- and discourse-related negotiations taking place at multiple levels and to the complexity of finding and projecting voice both within and about historical moments. It attests – as a synecdoche for this discussion – to the complexity of resistance itself, both couched in strategically simplified discursive tactics and occupying interstitial spaces of perpetual, and shifting, transformative potential.

### 3.6) Sundogs

*“I am desperate for an interruption. Any interruption will do” (SD, 99).*

Maracle’s first novel, *Sundogs*, also performs incursions into the binary structure – disrupting and employing both sides – in a content/form interface. As with *Slash*, *Sundogs* constructs a particular historical moment through an exploration of personal and historical ‘biography’; but in contrast to Tommy, Marianne is urban, academic, contemporary and female. The span of First Nations history presented in *Sundogs* is also

temporally more concentrated than in *Slash*, focusing on the summer of 1990 and the events surrounding Elijah Harper and the Meech Lake Accord; Oka and the standoff between Aboriginal peoples and government security forces; and the support of Aboriginal peoples in western Canada for the people of Kanesatake, Kahnawake and Akwesasne in Quebec. Yet the significance of the historical scope is not diminished by its limited focus and the overarching concern remains Indigenous peoples' complex processes and definitions of empowerment. Mike Meyers, of the Wolf Clan of Seneca Nation, writes in the preface to Maracle's novel that the period "stands out as a turning point in the evolution of the Aboriginal rights struggle in Canada" and that, as a dramatization of that summer, "*Sundogs* presents us the opportunity to see how major events touch the lives of everyday people." In both *Slash* and *Sundogs*, "the lives of everyday people" gain focus against the backdrop of pivotal events in Aboriginal sovereignty movements. Continuing my exploration (begun with *Slash*) of lives coming into focus, this analysis of the novel's historical re-telling will concentrate on discursive negotiation effected by structural and thematic interruptions: between center and margin: the personal and the political (voices and events); and 'traditional' (Native) and 'academic' (European) forms of knowledge and articulation.

As Maracle states: "Once we understand what kind of world they have created then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create" (*IAW*, 90). Marianne's process of understanding a world both 'theirs' and 'ours' offers, like *Slash*, a fertile example of center(s) interrupted; by conflating periphery and center, thereby increasing the 'sphere of influence' of key historical events, both novels articulate "re-visionary historiography" (Godard: 1990, 203) from a position of liminality. Unlike Tommy, however, Marianne's expression of voice-from-the-margins involves a sense of cultural alienation within, as

well as outside, the home. Her struggle with hybrid self-understandings (which reflect Louis Althusser's assertion that "merely knowing" an ideology "does not dissipate its effect" (Quoted in Spivak: 1993, 5)) sees her as 'Other' in a predominantly non-Native academic environment, and as (a) "Baby" (*SD*, 38) – at once protected and mystified (by languages and traditions untaught) – in the fold of family. As a sociology student working at a Native rights' center, Marianne is well-informed about the position of Native peoples in Canada, but remains culturally excluded from a family who has not taken her "indigenous education too seriously" (143), and from a society operating on the racist assumption that colonized peoples lack both their own languages/ discourses/ practices and sufficient sophistication for use of the colonizers'. Resonating in terms of the earlier discussion of subjugated knowledge, Marianne maintains:

it was never so simple as cultural genocide. You see, they not only invalidated all of our thoughts and our thought processes, but they also cancelled out our ability to get a handle on theirs. (*SD*, 76)

She remembers, for example, her university professor's skepticism about her ability to engage western philosophical thought: "'This paper you wish to write requires an acute understanding of [John Stuart] Mill's concept of utilitarianism – are you sure you are up to that?'" (76). Sadly, such instances merely confirm for Marianne that, regardless of personality, aptitude or accomplishment, she has been perceived by European Canadians as "a Native, generic and sexless, for twenty years" (76). As will be explored further in Chapter Four, Marianne must struggle within the confines of the "masterword" (Spivak: 1993, 3) – without which the claim of oppression is diluted, easily dismissed, impossible to locate – in the knowledge that "mobilizing slogan[s]" (Spivak: 1993, 3) are made particularly insufficient by her ambivalent relationship to cultural specificity.

Marianne's cultural liminality is further complicated by, and intersects with, her participation in the Okanagan Peace Run: a supporting action and expression of solidarity for the peoples of Oka. As in *Slash*, this parallel interruption of center by margin documents repercussions of historical moments from a remove, but from an 'insider's' perspective and with narrative authority. (Marianne holds a speaking 'center' in the text regardless of multiple exclusions). The symbolic significance of the Peace Run, for Marianne, also creates a convergence between personal and political 'movement': as a rupture in her familiar contexts (home, work, university) that poses personal challenges; as a political action that informs, in the process, her understanding of family; and as disruption into her inadequate terms of identity through its appeal for cross-cultural identification (spanning diverse First Nations cultures as well as Native/non-Native divides). During the run itself, an alternately optimistic and desolate Marianne becomes determined to feel the same affection for her family as she feels for the Kanesatake warriors:

In the alienated distance between myself and my family wanders this great need to reconnect with my origins. The run for peace holds promise...It promises to give me the courage to take up the broken thread of my aborted past and march forward into life from a place where I am both familiar and accepted. (164)

The self-understanding that meaningfully includes family and Marianne's "aborted past" follows a path determined by interruptions reflected, first, in the novel's structure. Narrative attention throughout alternates between family and the broader world of politics, punctuated by Marianne's observations about her role and place in the multiple spaces which inform and are informed by her. The following is one of many sequences exemplifying the text's progression-by-interruption structure: Elijah Harper's filibuster and associated appearances on television (to be discussed further) are interrupted by

Marianne's developing interest in, but problems with, Mark, her boss and eventual boyfriend; further interrupted by the beginning of the Oka standoff, its intensification, and the fax Marianne receives at work about the Okanagan Peace Run – of especial interest as a “reprieve from [her] war raging inside” (138), and the immediately following call, also at work, notifying Marianne of her niece's fatal accident. Similar in effect to the text's structural and episodic interruptions, the scene of Marianne's first lunch with Mark, her co-workers, and Saul (the Head of the Union of B.C. Chiefs) on the day “Elijah” becomes a catchphrase is related through convergences and divergences between Marianne's personal internal monologue and the political conversation at the table. Mark's response, for instance, to Marianne's skepticism about Elijah's repertoire of stories, elicits two narratives:

‘But he lived for twenty years before he partied, heard endless trapper's tales and went to residential school – that must be worth a story or two. He must have had a dream on one or two occasions.’ Do you dream, Marianne? and he is at it again. What are your dreams Marianne? [...] “Besides, he could keep on repeating the same story over and over, if he knows only one.” Just one, Marianne, just tell me one dream [...] I am shaken. (66-67)

Thematically, these interruptions are narrativized as a conflict of discourses between Marianne's university learning and Momma's continuous political commentary for which ‘sociology’ and ‘riddle,’ respectively, become tropes. Even as *Sundogs* foregrounds the complexity of cultural signifiers, it constructs a strategic binary associating the learning privileged in Marianne's home with metaphor, community, and conviction; and university education with objectivity, individualism, and mimetics. The opening clearly positions Marianne in contradistinction from her mother and sketches the tension underlying Marianne's belief that “humanity is more apt to be bizarre than consistent” (45). Introduced by way of interruption, Momma's voice immediately

functions as a 'thought scrambler' (97) with both literal and metaphoric implications for Marianne who must abandon her sociology paper on "Marriage and Divorce in Khatsalano's community" (1) to consider the contexts in which 'home' is grounded. Complicating Marianne's essay "wrap up stage" (1) with contrary exhortations on the state of the world, Momma's voice compels movement away from solitary contemplation and towards the tenor of home: "My mind kicks into gear; the first line rolls out and is stopped dead by a familiar sound that scatters my thoughts. For Pete's sake, who is she talking to?" (2). Though preoccupied with community-as-concept in studying family, demographics, and First Nations' structures, Marianne appears physically and emotionally isolated, lacking adequate tools for negotiating impersonal academia with amorphous understandings of – and within – family and (dis)comfort with both solitude and community. Surveying the world beyond her window, for example, Marianne remarks that all the houses are "side by side with skinny walkways between them" (1) and wonders "if anyone has bothered to survey the social implications of growing up in the East End" (1) but decides, paradoxically: "I shouldn't be thinking about the crowding here...I have a sociology paper to do" (1). Turning her attention indoors, Marianne also describes her niece's painting, depicting contact between Native and non-Native Canadian cultures, as what Dorrie "imagines Khatsalano's village to look like, and layered over top is a bunch of apartment buildings" (2). But she remains convinced that her surroundings are unrelated to "Relocation and its effect on Marriage and Divorce among Khatsalano's villagers" (2), aligning the normative naming and classification processes of academic social sciences with 'non-personal,' 'extra-subjective' learning obtained outside of, and unrelated to, the home. Nevertheless, Marianne's sense of family continually encroaches, figuring as an anchoring force capable of drawing people

back (like the cars that “drone lazily in the direction of their homes” (1)). Feeling that “about the only thing these guys [her professors] guess right is the problem” (27) – socio-economic inequity – Marianne considers theory, alone, inadequate for comprehending people and movements, but cannot yet reconcile her thinking to the “literary confusion” (13) she feels characterizes her mother’s.

The construction of meaning through negotiation of statistical analysis and stories requires, in its simplest form, reconsideration of ‘learning’. Though she initially responds to her mother’s puzzling narratives with disdain, Marianne soon reflects that they offer more in return than her ease with school, where she “swallowed everything [she] read, secretly disagreed with most of it, but gave it back in neat little packages for fourteen years” (32). In contrast to Marianne’s academic instructors, whose lessons could be reiterated, unquestioned, Marianne’s Aunt Mary joins Momma as a bastion of (what Marianne deems) ‘difficult thought,’ delineating for Marianne her foundational paradox: “I whizzed through school...and the only people to stump me were my own. Something is going on here, Marianne” (32-33). The fallacy of Marianne’s academic disinterest is exposed early in the narrative; having to abandon her discussion of the (capitalized, categorized) institutions Marriage and Divorce. Marianne travels to the hospital to witness her sister give birth and leave her husband, disbanding Marianne’s carefully encapsulated and documented (but ineffective and irrelevant) sociological argumentation. Recognizing her consequent mistreatment of Rita<sup>37</sup> as premised on unchallenged idealism, formed and fostered apart from material or familial obligations,

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<sup>37</sup> In the narrative, Marianne is angered by her sister’s – Rita’s – decision to leave her husband. She feels sympathy for her brother-in-law and deems Rita’s actions selfish and unnecessary, but fails to consider the reasons for Rita’s decision.



Marianne asks: “How did I get to be so creepy?” (32); the answer appears to lie in her deployment of pre-conceived theories and unfamiliarity with the use of metaphor, notably prompting her sense of not being “much of a thinker” (32). In conjunction, a particularly suggestive passage locating qualitative discrepancies between Marianne’s perception of knowledge and Aunt Mary’s challenge to prescriptive ‘knowing’ centers on the latter’s definition of study: “‘Research. Look again. Look again and again, before you draw any conclusions or make any judgments’” (30). Aunt Mary’s injunction to be sensitive to detail and heteroglossia, consistencies and conflicts, forces a re-reading of the single-termed semiotic description of academic inquiry; her false naïveté (“‘What the hell do you think they are trying to teach you up on that hill?’...‘What does that mean...research?’”) (30) underscores the vulnerability of Marianne’s position as adept at western education but unfamiliar with the terms of discussion. Mary and Momma locate the value of riddles and re-search in the call to look not merely ‘into’ but ‘again,’ re-considering familiar knowledge en route to seeing – differently – the ramifications and connections informing words and voices.

Increasingly throughout the text, Momma’s interruptions inform Marianne’s politics and operate as a barometer of acceptable ideas. Just as Marianne’s work is interrupted (in the opening pages) by Momma’s proclamations at the news anchor, her sleep is interrupted and political consciousness roused by Momma’s emphatic discussion with the radio announcer about the 1990 Meech Lake Accord. Momma’s nightly exchanges with news broadcasters have become central to Marianne’s burgeoning world view, making Momma’s unusual absence from the shared experience of watching the news the night before disappointing rather than upsetting: “I don’t think much about it except that Meech Lake fills up her threats at the telee and I have come to rely on her

weird sense of logic to shape my own perceptions” (46). Seeing, at this point, only arbitrary and artificial linkages between her family and the Meech Lake Accord, Marianne also considers her mother’s refrain – genocidal plots targeting her people – to be exaggerated. But the same radio program that forces her out of bed also helps clarify linkages:

Johnny and Momma are huddled next to the radio...Why, I can’t figure out. It was playing loud enough to wake me up. Are they both going deaf? ‘It’s Meech Lake.’ The journalist hammers out reasonably ignorant questions, but fairly justifiable given Canada’s general attitude toward Natives and Canada’s vague perception of our connection to Meech. Despite a number of attempts by a dozen Native political organizations to be included in the constitutional talks over the last ten years, so far we are not considered a part of this momentous attempt to carve out a constitution uniquely Canadian. No one has been concerned until now. Me, I can’t help wondering what magic has occurred to bring about an entire program devoted to Native leaders and how they ‘felt’ about Meech, including a woman’s sultry poem, sandwiched between the discourse of the two men. (48)

Marianne’s observations attest to her critically wry interpretation of Native Canadians’ relationship to the state, finding the journalist’s questions “reasonably ignorant” but not surprising in a context of studied historical ignorance and unprecedented inclusion of Native leaders in Constitutional talks. Yet Marianne feels marginal to the pivotal political scene for her people, describing herself not as knowledgeable but as “large, awkward. I intrude on a private ceremony between our elders and the world” (49). Association with distance from ancestry, her minimal expertise contrasts Momma’s ability to anticipate the journalist’s questions. Though not fully understanding its importance, Marianne does notice a change in tone: “What affects me is the combination of sounds. I feel, sensed by...the whole impact of the scene in the kitchen, that something new is afoot” (49). About Momma, Marianne remarks, “I take her more

seriously” (48), considering her less a lone radical than an individual with insight into a larger community.

Though Marianne’s first reactions to Elijah Harper’s triumphs in Parliament are marked more by the gaps she applies to Native politics than the astuteness she brings to academic work, she soon reflects: “I am not much wiser about the raw facts of Elijah’s actions but I understand his significance” (69). Interrupting and converging on one another, Elijah Harper’s continuous flow of words – that create a filibuster and force national recognition of intra-national acts of genocide – becomes a catalyst for deciphering Momma’s, and the “total racial invalidation” (69) against which both speak. Notably it is the riddle – offering interpretation only to active seekers and obstructing passive consumption of transparent evidence – that typifies both Momma’s and Elijah’s presentations of the world. Describing Elijah Harper’s voice as “so soft you have to feel around for the words” (67) and underlining the poignancy of his expression of “the murder of our whole people” (68) in powerful and poetic terms, Maracle also emphasizes her own sense of body/mind interconnection. By contrasting Momma’s robust articulations with Elijah’s physical frailness and “even steady sounds...[spoken] so slowly that any Métis from Momma’s village could crowd a jig between his words” (67-68), Maracle also interrupts misassumptions about homogeneity among First Nations communities.

These instances preface the series of work/family/school/personal/political convergences, part way through the novel, at a seminal scene of interruption: the evening of “Elijah’s triumph” (94) on T.V. At this juncture, Mark arrives, for the first time, to watch the report with an apprehensive Marianne predicting household chaos: “Momma will not watch the showdown; she’ll orchestrate it from the living room” (91).

Simultaneously, James, a student at the university “drops by,” also to watch Elijah Harper with Marianne; he quickly departs, but not without arousing “passionate doubt” (96) Marianne herself has difficulty decoding. During the broadcast, Momma interrupts her own patterns with unexpected silence: “Momma doesn’t argue with the journalist, the Prime Minister, or anyone else. She doesn’t bother to answer a single question for Elijah or Phil Fontayne” (96). Marianne’s oldest brother Rudy is excluded from the scene, and from the house; Marianne’s mind is a “storm of confusion” and she is feeling more “upset” than “inspired” by the “Elijah business” (99); in the midst of Mark’s jealous interrogation “Lacey invades with her gang of merry men and women” (99); when Marianne pleads silently for “any interruption” (99) Rudy arrives, intoxicated, and sobbing “huge wracking sobs that jerk [Marianne’s] emotions around” (100). After all, “It is not the sort of madness [Marianne] expected would occur,” (100). She prolongs the commotion by upsetting her sister-in-law which prompts thoughts about lineage and Momma’s choice to become a “citizen of this country” before she and Mark finally leave, missing Elijah’s speech – the ostensible focus of the evening – entirely.

This final remark on *Sundogs* and interruptions involves Marianne’s increased riddle- *and* sociology-based clarity through the events at Oka. As “the crisis [at Oka] escalates” (126) and the Canadian army is called to replace Quebec security forces, “Momma cries in front of the television each night, powerless to express the horror and deep sadness she feels” (126). Marianne herself states: “I experience love for ourselves and sorrow I never felt before. I think of the hoop that is thrown out and how it always comes back pointing a dirty finger at us” (126). Though she still does not “buy the plot part of Momma’s formulation” (126), her doubt about genocide has dissipated as “Oka changes the nature of [their] work” (127) and sociology “comes alive” (127), and is

deemed useful: “Sociology becomes a joggling table that structures the helter skelter information that pours in every minute on fax machines” (127). The work of Elijah Harper has increased people’s faith in themselves, and solidarity pervades: “No one considers asking the Mohawks to lay down their weapons and dismantle the barricade in this office....Sovereignty association as a possibility, as a solution, now looks sensible, possible” (127). Showing ‘sociology’ to be, in fact, interconnected with ‘riddle,’ Marianne’s experience with the political events of summer 1990 – narratively focalized by Oka – lead her back to, and forward with, an empowering sense of community:

The fabric of resistance and repression woven around Elijah and Oka has altered the texture of me. My mother has become a living breathing person full of good sense and I am sorry I have lowered the guillotine on cultural unity in my family...I no longer want to be apart from my family...I am no longer on the periphery of their [European Canadian] world and cut off from mine; they are on the periphery of mine. (137)

Much movement remains after this point in the narrative as repercussions of interruptions continue to resound and empowering histories and biographies form. Pertinent to a text that underlines collaboration and inclusion rather than inverted power structures, Barbara Harlow argues that resistance narratives move thematically from being group-centered, outward, to encompass increasing numbers of people:

Resistance narratives, at the same time that they, each in its own way, propose historically specific analyses of the ideological and material conditions out of which they are generated,...contribute to a larger narrative, that of the passage from genealogical or hereditary ties of filiation to the collection bonds on affiliation. (Harlow, 116)

Most simplistically, perhaps, *Sundogs* bears witness to Marianne’s difficult process of constructing affiliations and re-searching Self and History, exploring a slowly increasing appreciation for a blend of heritages wherein her mother’s chaos “over cultural integrity” (39) becomes wonderful:

I come to grips with me, really, with my life, the sum of it. The essence of me hovers around the libraries of sociology. I resisted thinking until now. I look upon Elijah's bestirring of my thoughts as a royal pain in the butt pain but I re-dream and re-think the business of sociology and me anyway. (*SD*, 153)

*"We find our strength and our power in our ability to be what our grandmothers were to us: keepers of the next generation in every sense of that word - physically, intellectually, and spiritually...It is a matter of survival where genocide is an everyday reality." (Armstrong, "Invocation...", xi)*

*"I sometimes feel like a foolish young grandmother armed with a teaspoon, determined to remove three mountains from the path to liberation: the mountain of racism, the mountain of sexism and the mountain of nationalist oppression." (Maracle, IAW, x)*

*"Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization." (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 306)*

*"It is personally dangerous for me to live among disempowered, oppressed individuals." (Maracle, "Oratory," 11)*

#### **Chapter Four: Negotiating Race and Gender**

##### **Asserting Gendered Identities – Central Concerns & Necessary Steps**

Deconstructing the effects of racism and sexism requires a concomitant deconstruction of the ways each informs, complicates, and speaks to the other. This final area of exploration focuses extant questions about racialized and, literally, 'class-ified' subjectivities on the issue of gender, underlining the necessity of multi-level negotiations in exercising personal, political, and historical voice(s). Although it might appear counter-intuitive to end, rather than begin, a study of Native Canadian Women's Literature with a discussion of gender, this chapter's placement benefits from the groundwork previously established. Just as identity construction is examined throughout this project as a composite of 'starting points' – a descriptive tool more than a facet of being – 'Native womanhood' is expressed in both Armstrong's and Maracle's work as a nexus of heterogeneous experiences, negotiating positive as well as negative potentiality, within and between 'traditional' and 'modern' (or pre-contact and post-contact) concepts

of 'woman.' In *Sundogs*, for example, Marianne describes the tensions in her relationship as multi-contextual, informed by constructions of both gender and race:

Fatigue is an emotional thing. It inspires the spirit under siege. Unfortunately when the weight of emotional fatigue is brought on by our own besiegement of one another we despair. I add the weight of besiegement by [Mark's] heart's desire to the weight of his besiegement by the colonial colossus he carries on his back. I wonder if our men ask themselves 'how can she do this to me? Doesn't she know I carry the world, a world whose nightmare it is to vanquish me?'...I want to answer, 'You can't relieve this burden by climbing on my back.' (SD, 164)

As readers, we witness the young protagonist puzzle over a dilemma of having to simultaneously integrate diversity, trouble politics of power, and voice multiply-inflected identities. In conjunction with the other texts in this chapter – “Eunice,” “Who’s Political Here?,” “Bertha” (Maracle), *Slash*, and *Whispering in Shadows* (Armstrong) – *Sundogs* offers a useful framework with which to negotiate gender and race in conceptualizing identity, performing resistance, and interrogating multiple group-based affiliations. To examine the process more closely, this chapter identifies and explores two crucial stages of gender/race negotiations: the first – expressions of critique – focuses on constructions of gender within the framework of colonialism, and on gender relations within First Nations communities; the second – reclaiming ‘Native womanhood’ – examines the adaptation of ‘traditional’ gender identifications in reconstructing empowering images. Consistent with the analytical foci throughout this thesis, the texts, here, express race- and gender-based identification as joined in constant dialogue; rather than scrutinize the literature for seamless resolution, this chapter continues the work of the previous chapters in examining different textual manifestations of the dialogue in process.

The idea that oppression operates across many levels, generating numerous subject-positions out of multiple contextual restraints, re-invokes a critique of identity-based authenticity and suggests that First Nations women’s identities be considered as



numerous, simultaneous, and often contradictory negotiations between diverse gender-based expectations. Both Armstrong and Maracle challenge the use of biology to demarcate, value, and gender socio-political roles, exploring meanings of 'womanhood' without subscribing to essentialized notions of gender. Yet both also express a need to identify as women – as a specific 'body' within the larger bodies of First Nations peoples – and thereby exploit the political purchase of identifiable, shared characteristics among vast diversities of experience.<sup>38</sup> Placed in a position of negotiation, Armstrong and Maracle invoke distinctions among experiences of oppression as dynamic, and foreground gender as significant enough to the process of identity formation to risk fracturing a 'nation-based' decolonization movement.

Within this process, the role of cultural traditions demands particular attention. As Emma LaRocque states, Native Canadian women must carefully and critically utilize the diversity of First Nations' traditions to negotiate the "burdens and contradictions of colonial history" (LaRocque: 1996, 14). In conjunction, Maracle reminds us that "[l]iberation is not simple" (*IAW*, xi), and "empower[ing] Native women to take to heart their own personal struggle for Native feminist being" (vii) requires vigilant negotiation and analysis:

Re-feminizing our original being is not a matter of gaining equality with Native men, sharing the work of providing for family, obtaining decent jobs and education,

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<sup>38</sup> The relationship between essentialism and deconstruction (to which Spivak responds with 'strategic essentialism') parallels debates in feminist theory about the usefulness of cultural feminism, or identity politics, in comparison to post-structuralism, or identity construction; where the former "has promoted community and self-affirmation" (Alcoff, 421) but relies upon "a claim of essentialism that we [do not have] the evidence to justify" (421), the latter "has provided suggestive insight on the construction of male and female subjectivity" (421) but, arguably, "limits feminism to the negative tactics of reaction and deconstruction" (421). The act of demarcating a recognizable group and evoking a non-constructed, but knowingly artificial, subjectivity – naming oneself 'woman' or 'Native Canadian' – is complicated by its reliance upon the terms that are "crowded with the overdeterminations of male supremacy, invoking in every formulation the limit, contrasting Other, or mediated self-reflection of a culture built on the control of females" (Alcoff, 405), and assuming that one can and does know what 'woman' (or 'Native Canadian') fully denotes.

moving out into the world and struggling to make the law work fairly for us. First, we must understand the conditions under which we currently live. (xi)

Because they lend themselves to this distinction, Maracle's texts will be examined for their critique of the contexts that engender inequities, and Armstrong's for envisioning – through cultural reclamation – a desired endpoint. Maracle's texts will also provide the bulk of the analysis, but it is important to note that both writers show concern with both praxes as primary to Native women exercising their “sacred right of choice” (27). Maracle and Armstrong assert their right and ability to gain power, as Native women and as people of the world, but also (dispelling a ‘silent victim’ trope) to honour the existing strength of Native women. The discussions of “Bertha” and *Sundogs* will help elucidate those locations of strength, as well as the context for their denial, by critiquing restrictive stereotypes that correspond to notions of ‘productivity’ and ‘work.’ *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadow*, in contrast, are considered for processes of reclaiming ‘traditional’ notions of ‘Native womanhood’ with a focus on Armstrong's conception of power, healing, balance and harmony. Prefacing both parts of the analysis, “Who's Political Here?” and “Eunice” will be read for ways in which gendered identities are reconstructed within explicitly political contexts, demonstrating the tensions that result.

#### **4.1) “Answering Back”: Challenges, Methods & Differences**

For Native Canadian women, combinations of sexism and racism augment colonialism's economic and ideological oppression, and creates a ‘double bind’ of expected productivity – reproductive and material – that supports colonizing stereotypes and requires decolonizing resistance. These ‘productivity-based’ expectations of First Nations women reflect and are informed by a conceptual divide separating personal or private (colonially marked as ‘female’) from political or public (colonially marked as

'male') notions of work and ownership. Disrupting these expectations, Armstrong's and Maracle's texts expose ways in which a compound of biological and material productivity is paralyzing for women subject to both racism and sexism, and address a vital contradiction in the assumption that wage labour is necessarily liberating for women or that differences among feminists are inconsequential. As Julia Emberley argues, "feminist analysis that limits its discussion...to the issue of gender risks displacing racism and assimilation as major determinations in the specific configurations of sexism" (Emberley: 1993, 149). Both Armstrong and Maracle negotiate gendered identities and 'traditional' and 'modern' practices to engage the issues cogently raised by LaRocque:

The challenge is, finally, to ourselves as Native women caught within the burdens and contradictions of colonial history. We are being asked to confront some of our own traditions at a time when there seems to be a great need for a recall of traditions to help us retain our identities as Aboriginal people. But there is no choice – as women we must be circumspect in our recall of tradition. We must ask ourselves whether and to what extent tradition is liberating to us as women...We must ask ourselves wherein lie our sources of empowerment. We know enough about human history that we cannot assume that all Aboriginal traditions universally respected and honoured women. (And is 'respect' and 'honour' all that we can ask for?)...But, at the same time, culture is not immutable, and tradition cannot be expected to be always of value or relevant even in our times. As Native women, we are faced with very difficult and painful choices, but, nonetheless, we are challenged to change, create, and embrace 'traditions' consistent with contemporary and international human rights standards. (LaRocque: 1996, 14)

To reconstruct 'selfhood' with one's own strategies and tools in ways that conform to human rights standards, Armstrong and Maracle exploit manifold discourses for useful ways of thinking about gender. They approach texts armed with a belief in creativity and a conviction that "culture is not immutable" (14), that culture, in fact, "constantly changes...grow[ing] and stagnat[ing] by turns" (*IAW*, 110). As LaRocque's argument suggests, negotiating gendered and racialized points of identification requires Native Canadian women to challenge the effects of ongoing colonialism within Canada while

speaking to problematic gender relationships within their own communities, taking on the difficult role of both employing and critiquing Native traditions – that which seems most necessary (resonating with Spivak’s account of essentialism) – in order to reclaim agency and devise means of empowerment.

The discussion of subject formation in Chapter Two moves, here, into the specific context of Canadian political legislation where it focuses on gender intersecting with race. For Native Canadian women, whose subjectivity has been legally defined in terms of race *and* gender through the Indian Acts, the process of confounding binaries takes on particular significance. While ensuring the racist dispossession and political adolescence of Native peoples, whose lands are held ‘in trust’ by ‘the Crown’ and whose lives are regulated by federal legislation, the paternal and patriarchal laws embedded in the Indian Acts have further disempowered Native women. The discriminatory measures of determining who is and is not ‘Native’ are exacerbated for women, whose autonomy is subsumed under male (husbands’) legal jurisdiction – first in the Enfranchisement Act (1869), predecessor to the Indian Act (1876) and associated Bills (C-79, 1951; C-31, 1985) – and for whom status is denied upon marriage to ‘non-Native’ men (further entrenched through Bill C-79) (Emberley: 1993, 87-88). In addition, the “Euro-Canadian patriarchal controls over marriage, sexuality, and reproduction” to which Native women in Canada have been officially subject since the passing of the 1869 Enfranchisement Act, and which has “clearly aided the aims of a colonialist policy of assimilation by reducing the numbers of Native people with a claim to status and band affiliation,” strengthen the sexist exclusion of Native women from, for example, land rights (upon death of a spouse); holding political positions within bands; and retaining original band membership upon marriage into a different band (87, 88). Although Bill C-31 (June

1985) was passed as a result of significant pressure from Native women and Native women's organizations, and although, through the bill, "the Canadian state gave up some part of its jurisdiction in defining the constituency of 'Indian-ness,'" (88), power over First Nations' definitions, discourses, and destinies is still largely outside of First Nations' peoples control. The ensuing difficulty with language use returns: speaking to race and gender oppression that has been 'sanctified' (by the state that describes itself as 'helping' First Nations peoples by controlling and monitoring those from whom the right to self-governance is taken) and sanctioned within legislative discourse is further complicated by having to work within the same insufficient discourses that alienate the Native female subject.

Projects of empowerment and affirmation that focus on gender must mediate the same essentialist/ constructed problematic that has remained paramount throughout this thesis: the limited usefulness of empowering the hybrid subject through increased legal recognition – i.e. the acknowledgment in Bill C-31 of women's status as Subjects – within a colonizing/colonialist framework draws both critique and commendation. Spivak's argument rehearsed in Chapter Two, for example – that contemporary critical theory's 'Subject' is a Eurocentric construct posing an inevitable epistemic challenge to the 'third world Subject' (or the Other of Europe) – suggests that focusing on multiple subject positions and the "possibility of multiple exclusions" (DeHay, 309) may in fact reinforce a colonialist paradigm. In relation to gender specifically, Audrey Lorde addresses the division between 'third world' and 'first world' feminists and the consequent, though indirect, reaffirmation of colonial discourse – the "master's tools" – by outlining the multiple exclusions (racial, gender, and national) to which the 'third world' female Subject is potentially discursively subject (Ibrahim, 147). Emberley,

conversely, argues that Native Canadian women making legal progress within the existing paradigm is an important component of decolonization. Whereas Spivak works to deconstruct and re-envision discourses through which diverse peoples can communicate, focusing on the importance of questioning “things that are extremely useful” (Spivak: 1993, 4) – in this case, the very process and means of ‘becoming a Subject’ – Emberley focuses on what she sees as qualitative gains achieved through use of the “master’s tools” and within a deeply flawed structure.

With conflicting significance, notions of gender also meet concepts of work through processes of subject-formation. In Spivak’s estimation, because the ‘Other-ed’ “S/subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters’ side of the international division of labor” (Spivak: 1988, 280), the “state can use their labour but...keep them out of civil society” (Spivak: 1996, 250). Yet Emberley welcomes the policy and legal advances, in Indigenous women’s movements for self-determination, that involve Native Canadian women in the same civil society that has excluded, oppressed, and objectified them.<sup>39</sup> Though she emphasizes the persistent fact that, through the Indian Act, “the power to define and contain the legal subjectivity of ‘Indian-ness’ still rests with the state” (Emberley: 1993, 88), Emberley is encouraged by the “transform[ation, as an effect of Bill C-31, of] the socio-symbolic inscription of Native women as legally sanctioned subjects” (89). Unlike Spivak, who argues that subject-constitution as itself a Eurocentric discourse is oppressive, and inevitably ‘violent’ for an ‘Other-ed’ Subject, Emberley is optimistic about

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<sup>39</sup> The advances Emberley cites include Bill C-31 and, at a constitutional level, the Quebec Native Women’s Association 1983 resolution to amend section 35 of the 1982 Constitutional Act by including a subsection guaranteeing aboriginal and treaty rights to men and women equally.

the legitimizing of Native women's subject-status in relation to the dominant culture that has brought political pressure to bear on the human sciences to interpret archives and cultural productions...from this positive position. (89)

Emberley gains assurance that change in and through language(s) will produce change in thinking, ideology, inter-cultural interaction; Spivak cautions against ignoring the politics of discourse, or the idea that “‘speaking’ itself belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination” (Chow, 36).

Operating within the context that Spivak and Emberley analyze and theorize, Armstrong describes the advent of her own writing as predicated on the need to “answer back”: to challenge misrepresentation through languages used to oppress, and to create space within Native and non-Native discourses to do so. Armstrong's mandate includes the pedagogical imperative described in Chapter One: the task of helping deter further destruction to Native communities within Canada by teaching non-Native people to

understand why we are here as human beings and why it is important that we all understand one another and respect one another...[while caught in the dilemma of having her writing] transferred into the dominant cultural mode...[which forces her to] talk[] in terms that aren't necessary. (Armstrong, “Writing...,” 55-56)

Armstrong's negotiation of silence and aborted meanings in “dominant cultural code[s]” illustrates Spivak's argument that the subaltern Subject occupies a problematic space within western discourses, and parallels Maracle's note that it is “difficult to critically examine our current condition while the power to alter or maintain it rests with those outside ourselves” (*IAW*, xi). Armstrong's conviction in her own philosophy, based on “harmony, cooperation, and healing” (Williamson, 10), and her “strategic use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political context” (Spivak: 1993, 3), illustrates a means of claiming control over her own subject-positions: not to be considered unquestioningly – as “one must doubt everything,” (*IAW*, 102) – but to be

considered seriously. Perhaps, in doubting everything, one learns to recognize the dangers in claims to authenticity that proscribe spaces of appropriate voice-ing, while negotiating the dangers of colonially-inscribed 'speech' articulated in insufficient discourses. No discourse can claim uncontested authority and all discourse can be interrogated (and thereby used) as under revision, continually shifting and providing spaces for counter-hegemonic narratives. As previous chapters have also shown, critiquing and reclaiming identities are dynamic processes for Armstrong and Maracle. Armstrong maintains that, through writing, she is able "to tell a better story than is being told about us" (Harjo, 498). Maracle urges her Native readers to rely on the thinking and leadership of their own people, and resist deferring to those of non-Natives:

To be critical of all and doubt everything is the first step to the creation of new thought. We were forced to look inside ourselves for the answers and not assume that if you are white you are right. (*IAW*, 106)

By negotiating diverse thoughts, stories, discourses, both writers "answer back" in ways that facilitate processes of change and engage in processes of work, disrupting falsely normalized oppositions.

Armstrong's and Maracle's respective means of "answering back" and negotiating discourse as 'subaltern women' share important similarities but carry distinct inflections. Both writers create positive images of Native Canadian women that model positions of strength; both also, in effect, illustrate the traditional notion of womanhood as described by Paula Allen Gunn:

[t]he tribes see women variously, but they do not question the power of femininity. Sometimes they see women as fearful, sometimes peaceful, sometimes omnipotent, and omniscient, but they never portray women as mindless, helpless, simple or oppressed. (Quoted in Anderson, 36)



Armstrong's poem "Indian Woman," for example, poses an overt challenge to derogatory stereotypes of Native Canadian women in order to "be sure that other Native women have an understanding of the perspectives [Armstrong has] of [her]self" (Williamson, 9). By juxtaposing oppressive and affirming images on the same page, the poem visually illustrates the possibility of freeing oneself from the indignity of interpellated colonial stereotypes to embrace one's own sense of beauty, value, and strength. Beginning with the lines "I am a squaw/ a heathen/ a savage/ basically a mammal," "Indian Woman" moves from the oppressive conceptions of Native women as vacuous bodies for child-rearing and (others') sexual pleasure, devoid of feeling, to descriptions of Native women's marked significance: "I am the keeper/ of generations/...I am the strength/ of nations...I am the giver of life/ to whole tribes...I am a sacred trust/ I am an Indian woman" (*BT*, 106-107). Maracle creates similarly positive images in her female prose characters, each of whom struggles to understand and overcome contextual limitations and actively participates in her own, and others', life(-ves). Armstrong and Maracle diverge, however, in focus: whereas Armstrong's conception of decolonization pivots on transformation through healing, on reclaiming traditions that empower all Native peoples, Maracle helps explicate the challenges to Native women's empowerment through a complementary examination of material conditions from which harmful divisions emerge.

Armstrong's desire to "be someone who's positive" rather than someone "who's negative and tears people down" corresponds with her emphasis on co-operation and mutual learning for creating change by "doing things differently" (Williamson, 15). She describes gender relations as ideally evading division but that, in practice, are inscribed by Native men's "arrogance that has been handed to [them] by this paternalistic European

society” (15). In contrast to the paternalism legalized through the Indian Act (described by the state as “essential to the needs of the Indian people not only as a safeguard to protect their treaty and property rights, but as a means of promoting their advancement” (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1)), Armstrong describes “being Indian” as involving the capacity to “reconcil[e] both male and female and the wholeness and healthiness of who we are as human beings” (Williamson, 19). A process of using “soft power” (8)<sup>40</sup> to integrate disparate parts and create a starting point for decolonization contributes to what Armstrong describes as ‘feminine’: “the capacity for compassion, love, sensitivity, and understanding that’s required by the non-aggressive approach” (19). Even as her own priority is the gender-blind improvement of all people’s lives, Armstrong’s conception of the ‘feminine’ – as primary to processes of change – accentuates the importance of women. By self-identifying “as a female and also as a feminist” (8), Armstrong recognizes difference; by arguing that “gender doesn’t have anything to do with how well we do things or how as human beings we connect to one another” (14), she undermines the potential for hierarchy through essentialized distinctions. More than Maracle, Armstrong emphasizes her sense of Self as informed by being, first, a “human being on this planet,” and, second, an “Indian person on this continent” (“Writing....,” 55), deeming race- and gender-based identification secondary to her affiliation with broader ‘humanity’ and best expressed through diverse compatibility.

Maracle’s texts also exemplify the importance of co-operation and role-sharing but her interest in context foregrounds communication – means to and control over – in

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<sup>40</sup> Armstrong attributes this term to Douglas Cardinal, a First Nations architect with whom she worked in collaboration to produce *The Native Creative Process*. She states: “Doug is one of the people I greatly admire because he understands the necessity of reconciling the two sides of ourselves in becoming a whole person. He has had to reconcile and work with the feminine aspect of power. He calls it ‘soft power’ which has empowered his thinking and philosophy” (Williamson, 8).

ameliorating the immediate, and long-term, impacts of colonialism on Native Canadian women's lives. Maracle does not identify distinctly 'feminine' traits or co-operative routes to health that may "chart the journey out" (*IAW*, xii), yet her evocation of co-operation, understood in terms of an action/consequence paradigm and the active, communicative involvement of all people, usefully broadens the term's significance. As she states, "[i]t is personally dangerous for me to live among disempowered, oppressed individuals" ("Oratory," 11); pointing beyond the theoretical significance of mass empowerment to its practical and strategic necessity, Maracle calls on Native Canadian women to "begin by talking to each other about [them]selves" (*IAW*, 139) to ensure that no individual stands alone "resisting victimization – peacefully or otherwise" ("Oratory," 11). Emphasizing, by extension, the impossibility of 'piecemeal' decolonization, the impossibility of a solitary individual being 'decolonized' within a context on on-going colonization, Maracle demonstrates that "the object of life is solidarity, [and] that there are consequences for every action" (Lutz: 1991, 172). Stressing the importance of claiming control over and sharing in the production of images, Maracle seeks to dismantle the internalized racism that has compelled her to "convince [white colonial society] of [her] validity as a human being" (*IAW*, 14). Finally, by inextricably linking co-operation with decolonization, Maracle challenges a discourse of individualism that alleges equal access to power and subverts an assumption that personal gain is qualitatively valuable when conditions remain unaltered. Although she describes her feminist thinking as having changed over time, one primary conviction – elucidated in her "Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism" – remains unaltered: "I and other Native women ought to come by our perceptions of spirituality, culture, womanhood and sovereignty from a place free of sexist and racist influence" (vii). To locate this 'free'

space, Maracle encourages her First Nations women readers to seek an understanding of themselves through themselves; to conceptualize “spirituality, culture, womanhood and sovereignty” (vii) in the context of their own self-affirming discussions and discourses; and to gain significantly from shared communication that, subsequently, resists the erasure meted through racism and sexism.

#### **4.2) “Eunice” and “Who’s Political Here?”: Examples of Race/Gender Intersections**

A brief reading of “Eunice” and “Who’s Political Here?” – two of Maracle’s short stories offering particularly rich example of the race/gender interface – will help elucidate the chapter’s key problematic before exploring, more fully, the twin processes of critique and reclamation. Illustrating the existence of racism within feminist/women’s movements (expressed as an under-theorized hierarchizing of difference), and sexism within nationalist/sovereignty struggles (i.e. the predominance of male leadership in A.I.M.), “Eunice” and “Who’s Political Here” translate the question of gender onto an overtly political stage. The stories’ focus on a public versus private binary continues the discussion of the insufficiency of categories and re-envision difference through dialogue.

The distinction that results from a colonial relationship between state and (First Nations) community names a Subject either ‘Native’ or ‘non-Native,’ with the significant consequence of discursively prioritizing constructions of race over those of gender as paramount to identification. “Eunice” speaks to the effects of this prioritization, narrating a politicized (if not political) gathering wherein gender is the common denominator but race a focal preoccupation. Set at the home of Eunice, this closely autobiographical story is composed as a meeting of women writers convened to discuss a community radio broadcast for International Women’s Day. Feeling the absence of a place “for women

writers, Native or otherwise, to gather together and engage in the sort of word play which would give them the endless run of story lines or unusual turns of phrase which would ignite their imaginations” (*STOS*, 56), Lee – the speaker – agrees to attend. When Eunice, eventually, asks if Lee is Native Canadian and Lee realizes that “Nora had taken great pains to identify each woman and characterize them” (56) to her, but had failed to give the same information to Eunice, “the stiffness in the room [becomes] palpable” (62). Lee braces herself for a barrage of thinly-veiled racism; but instead, the host “looks as if she doesn’t really give a tinker’s damn about [Lee’s] race” (62), and Lee reflects on her developing ease, feeling in her silence: “I don’t feel so different from Eunice” (57). The story pivots on modes of identification and difference within a group of women representing diverse classes, ethnicities, cultures, sexualities, and abilities, and it focuses – through the first-person narrator – on the comparisons between a woman who has not left her home for eleven years, and another who feels that the “pain of being bonded to her kitchen, the imprisonment of domesticity and the joy of it could fill volumes” (57). The challenges for women to speak publicly and assert Self visibly underlies the narrative as it circles discussion of a radio program but remains in a space of intense and irreparable privacy. To this, also, Lee responds: “[w]e were both somewhat comfortable in our feminine invisibility, only Eunice stayed there, while I merely desired to” (57).

The act of demarcating public from private space, and political from personal occupation, is complicated by the fact of Eunice’s agoraphobia and the isolation in which she lives incorporates, nonetheless, an entire world of work. Just as Lee notes to herself that “[l]ife’s memories are made of the eventful not the commonplace” (59), her verdict is challenged by Eunice’s description of the ‘commonplace’ school across the street as her ‘eventful’ sociological project: “Everyday I sit here at noon and study the students.

No kidding. I have come to some interesting conclusions about teenagers” (60). As the terms of the binary are reversed, so work is infused in both, reflecting the political discussion that is moved to a private home with the intent of devising a program for action. Susie O’Brien points out that the story’s “significant action” moves away from the meeting’s mandate and becomes “the conversation of the women, the guiding direction of which is continually comprised by the difficult task of creating an atmosphere of tolerance in which to frame the discussion” (O’Brien, 94). Integral to the characters’ discussion are questions about writing methodologies and experiences, and the dramatically ironic injection: “How come women don’t write about political meetings?” (*STOS*, 62). The narrator silently responds by distinguishing between meetings and “the politics of our lives” (62) – which include preparing children, directing husbands, and collecting gas money to travel to meetings – and speculates about intersections of lives:

I relive Eunice’s poetic, locked-in existence. I imagine her words carefully chiseled from her aspirations to chart her own course. A plain grey stone that sought her own preciousness, wanted to be alone, rather than conform to all the rest. I used to think my attendance at meetings was all so essential to my writing, but I doubt that now...The faces of the other women blur while Eunice’s becomes clear. I want to tell her that she hasn’t missed anything by not attending meetings. Her life was shaped by her desire for feminism outside the isolation of agoraphobia. At home alone, she could only remember the world as it was, and reconstruct it in the way she wished it to be. It had driven her to solitary exile and she had managed to turn the exile to account. Now she wanted out...The power of her isolation, complicit as she was in its creation, escaped her. Few people possess the courage to sit in solitude with their private selves, unravel all the junk they collect by living, and then march out into the world unencumbered, with a difference sense of what they might create out there. (63-64)

By refusing to essentialize race or gender, and by denying mutual exclusivity between the poles of a (public/private) binary, “Eunice” enriches the concept of ‘Native womanhood.’

Foregrounding an intermingling of courage, isolation, work, and politics, the above quote

also challenges simplistic notions of power – as aligned with either race or gender – and gestures towards transformative possibilities in first deconstructing the “junk...collect[ed] by living,” including reductive concepts of a racialized and gendered ‘me.’

In *I Am Woman*, Maracle describes the context to which both “Eunice” and “Who’s Political Here?” respond:

I am not now, nor am I likely to be, considered an authority on women in general by the white women’s movement in this country. If I am asked to write, my topic is Native whatever, and like as not, the request comes replete with an outline and the do’s and don’ts of what I may or may not say...I am not interested in gaining entry to the doors of the ‘white women’s movement.’ (*IAW*, 18)

Maracle describes the imperative, within and beyond First Nations communities, to value women as selves (recognizing women’s abilities), and selves as women (embracing, rather than suppressing, a gendered identity), which in turn requires a disengagement with internalized sexism and an exploration of commonalities among women:

We are slaves with our own consent. As women, we do not support each other. We look at males when they speak and stare off into space when a woman steps assertively into the breach of leadership. Men who stand up and passionately articulate our aspirations about sovereignty are revered as powerful leaders; women who do so are ‘intimidating.’ We mock the liberation of women. (18)

As an early, but integral, part of this process, Maracle describes ‘awaking’ to discover an empowering sense of womanhood:

I woke up. I AM WOMAN! Not the woman on the billboard for whom physical work is damning, for whom nothingness, physical oblivion is idyllic. But a woman for whom mobility, muscular movement, physical prowess are equal to the sensuous pleasure of being alive. The dead alone do nothing. (17)

By extension, this discussion of “Who’s Political Here?” interrogates ‘waking’ and ‘action’ as terms that radicalize cross-differential relationships. Maracle’s description of the female narrator as in constant motion – watching, cleaning, and dressing children;

doing laundry; preparing meals; and exercising general ingenuity to maintain household operations – starkly contrasts with that of her ‘activist’ husband (Tom) who, watching his wife’s movement impassively, asks for rather than offers help (to find clean clothing). Soon jailed for postering, Tom’s political comrades fill his role of requesting food and drinks to facilitate their political discussions that link postering charges with the politics of apartheid.

In addition to the men in the story – Tom and Frankie (Tom’s friend and comrade with whom the protagonist has a brief affair) – one other character, a female, figures centrally. Patti is a noteworthy player in the complex nexus of activity for several reasons: she is respected for her political views and is considered an ‘activist’ rather than a ‘wife’ or ‘woman’; she, unlike other women in the story, takes on male roles and contemptuously dismisses the domestic responsibilities shouldered by women (“Most of the women who come to visit me, my friends, help with the dishes, the kids, stuff like that, while they’re here. Not this one. She acts like me and the kids are dead except when she wants some coffee” (37)); and, significantly, she is having an affair with Tom. For the speaker, shame is bound not in their sexual alliance, but in the fact that her “husband and his friends accord [Patti] her mind” (37). Rather than present a role the speaker is interested in emulating, however, Patti motivates the speaker to think reflexively about – and cease to tolerate – the ways in which she is disrespected and under-valued. Through description of Patti’s character and her affair with a married political colleague, and description of her own encounter with Frankie – in which the sexism underlying divergent expectations is humorously epitomized by their dinner ‘conversation,’ each speaking a parallel monologue that Frankie cannot comprehend – the



protagonist comes to understand the central hypocrisy in an allegedly incommensurable distinction between personal and political, gendered female and male, activity.

By the end of the narrative, the protagonist's 'action' is contextualized by an awakened sense of self-respect, and the political importance attached to her husband's work is deconstructed, enabling new possibilities for linking race, gender, and nationalist oppression in broadened resistance. The story ends with the speaker re-valuing her thoughts and ideas, and expecting that others should do the same: "Somehow what I am feeling seems more important than Tom's incarceration and I think they should see it that way too" (38). When she begins to demand deserved equality, she thinks of her grandmothers and experiences a sensation of going home, pertinently foregrounding constructions of both gender and race in potential routes to empowerment. Susie O'Brien examines the narrative and textual effects of merging action with meaning, and argues that the story's "use of free discourse signals the inseparability of description and process, interpretation and being" (O'Brien, 92). Though not explicitly reflecting on a race/gender interface, this observation highlights a related aspect of the speaker's 'awakening.' It is only when the speaker refrains from manic activity, and is provided space to realize the value of her own activity and its devaluation within patriarchal political movements, that she is able to revalue activity itself. But it is also through activity that she comes to her interpretation. The resulting interconnection between 'theory' and 'praxis' both troubles a mind/body opposition – associated with male/female, public/private – and enables the speaker's crystallizing self-respect within a frame that encourages change. The self-respect this speaker begins to nourish offers an example of increased empowerment that expands outward from the gendered individual. Attesting to the richness of Native women's lives, and the need – as explored in Chapter

Two – to seek empowerment through a dialogical understanding of (gendered) Self and Other, and of personal and political roles, Maracle argues:

We must and will have women leaders among us. Native women are going to raise the roof and decry the dirty house which patriarchy and racism have built on our backs. But first we must see ourselves as women: powerful, sensuous beings in need of compassion and tenderness. (*IAW*, 22)

Also wary of the ways particular interpretations of traditional practices endorse sexist behaviour, Maracle urges her female First Nations reader to negotiate her cultural identity with her gendered Self to arrive at a position of affirmation:

In the name of tradition we [women] consent to all kinds of oppressive behaviour from our men. How often have we stood in a circle, the only female Native, and our contributions to the going-on are not acknowledged? – as though we were invisible. We are the majority of the membership at the lowest level, the least heard and never the leaders. It is not for want of our ability to articulate our goals or lead folks, either. We have been erased from the blackboard of our lives. (21)

Having endured pervasive, systemic, and structural racism, Native women must equally resist culturally intrinsic sexism to believe in positive identities that are differentiated as well as inclusive.

#### **4.3) Critique: Maracle -- *Work, Motherhood, and Native Women's Decolonization***

Directly following from and expanding upon the above discussion, Maracle's critique of a race/gender interface focuses on the conditions of women's lives as informed by, and in resistance to, colonialism. She works from the premise that Native women's inequity is greatly compounded by the accumulated and long-term subjugation of all Native peoples. The "table of hurtful oppression and besiegement which spawned the lateral violence" (ix) of men against women, and men and women against children, erodes self-respect, cultural understandings, and confidence, and leads to the dangerous internalization of racism and sexism. coupled with the normalization of defeat, against which Maracle rages. Further, although much work has helped eliminate internalized

racism, interpellated victimhood, and intensified sexism, the larger contextual constraints creating that violence continue to circumscribe possibilities for self-affirmation. In response, Maracle attends to and moves beyond individualized experiences to teach her reader the “value of resistance [as found] in the reclaiming of the sacred and significant self” (“Oratory,” 11):

[*I Am Woman*] is a spiraling in on the self who rose above all the myriad obstacles the colonial and patriarchal process presents for women. More. The book spirals out from the self, in a dogged and heartfelt way, to touch the heart of woman. (10)

Maracle’s phrase “to touch the heart of woman” (10) figures axiomatically as well as symbolically, as her texts endeavor to move the reader emotionally as well as present “the heart,” the fundamental aspects of women’s lives, mimetically, and to ‘represent’ “the humanity that every person has the right to experience and express” (Lutz: 1991, 169).

One of the most important observations emerging from Maracle’s critique is the extent to which agency is restricted by context, emphasizing that individual- and community-based empowerment must take place in tandem with broader socio-political change. Exemplifying a potential, but difficult, strategy for empowerment, the recall and reconstruction of tradition (to be further examined later in this chapter) harbours numerous barriers that impede the simple “re-creat[ion] and re-build[ing of] family systems...[and] political institutions and governing systems of the past” (*IAW*, x). Integral to these constraints is a crossover between dispossession and limited access to knowledge of traditional linguistic/ socio-cultural/ political structures, making blunt the tools of empowerment:

We [re-build systems] in a terrible vacuum, a vacuum created by the absence of context. the lack of knowledge and the death of those who might have been able to teach us. We do so in a state of uncertainty created by the beliefs about ourselves

which we inherited and internalized, a state of being which causes us to doubt our own feelings, our spirit, our thinking. We did not create this history, we had no say in any of the conditions into which we were born (nor did our ancestors), yet we are saddled with the responsibility for altering those conditions and re-building our nations. (xi)

Because Native Canadian peoples have been denied access to traditional structures, practices, and languages through processes of assimilation, and are born into conditions determined by external socio-political and economic contexts, claiming agency and “re-building...nations” (xi) is made problematic by the double responsibility of resisting oppressive contexts and re-creating empowering structures with few appropriate tools.

Within this demanding mandate for change, First Nations women face the additional challenges of resisting production-oriented and sexualized stereotypes in order to re-claim and enact empowering versions of motherhood and of work. It is in relation to diverse notions of ‘work’ and ‘worth’ that the rupture between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ is most apparent. Maracle’s conceptualization of work provides comprehensive consideration of the economic nature of Native women’s oppression, and incorporates, also, the nurturing role of parenting:

It is for them [children] that I write the tragedy of our lives and the truth of our emancipation. It is the children who will have to learn to claw, to dig and scratch in unison if we are to get out of this deep shaft. The truth is that few miners caught in a shaft ever dig themselves out. (12)

Parenting, as an important site of power and influence, requires careful vigilance for fostering empowering identities and guiding processes of decolonization that are progressively effective across generations. In conjunction, however, Maracle’s use of mining imagery to describe the position into which her children are born and against which those children must resist links biological, physical and psychological abuse with economic exploitation and market productivity. Recurring throughout her texts,

Maracle's imagery evokes 'work' in a modern economy as a palimpsest of racism, sexism, slavery, colonialism, and capitalism. Under a 'double patriarchy' of racism and sexism, the Native Canadian women in Maracle's texts are caught between a supposition that wage work stipulates improved socio-economic status and the contextual reality of forced participation in the lowest positions of an industrialized economy.

Consistent with Maracle's attentive use of language and concurrent disruption of overdetermined signifiers, her texts associate the term 'work' with both exploitation and freedom. Counterbalancing the extreme degradation of (low, deregulated) wage labour that insufficiently substitutes for access to and use of (First Nations') lands, decolonization requires a type of labour that bears utmost significance and relevance to individuals' and communities' lives. Both freedom and exploitation revolve around notions of work and it is the marked contrast in the configuration of each that requires careful negotiation. As Maracle recounts:

I used to consider myself a liberated woman. I woke up at the bottom of the mine shaft one morning, darkness above me, screaming, 'I'm not like the rest...I'm not an alcoholic...a skid row bum...a stupid Native,' ad nauseum...It was the attempt to convince them [white colonial society, of my humanity] that made me realize that I was still a slave...In these pages I recount the colour of traitorousness and my decision to reconnect myself to all of us struggling to remove the burden of a recent colonial history. (14)

In this passage, race ("colour of traitorousness") appears to supersede gender as an imagistic focal point, but the concerns Maracle outlines take on gendered connotation in her discussion of work. Economic enslavement and entrapment – appropriately enclosed within the image of a mine – correspond, above, with the psychological subjugation of internalized racism and the need to 'struggle' (i.e. work) to disempower the oppression of "a recent colonial history." Precisely because, as Maracle states, "[b]ondage is paralysing and removing chains is painful" (viii), the work of decolonization carries two

ostensibly contradictory discourses of struggle: one, to overcome the paralysis of bondage and the enslavement of internalized racism; and two, to endure the pain of re-learning freedom.

For women, these struggles are added to the struggle of deconstructing sexism, and the consequent work required of empowerment juxtaposes the labour extracted through economic exploitation, exposing a further 'traditional'/ 'modern' discrepancy in the notion of ownership. Referring to *I Am Woman*, Maracle states: "[the text] was intended to release me from the chains with which I bound myself, chains which were welded to me by a history neither I nor my ancestors created" (viii). Distinguishing between a past she did not create – wherein bondage was acted upon her – and a current perpetuation of that bondage for which she takes very circumscribed responsibility, Maracle locates her responsibility in unlearning racist and sexist internalization. Resonating with Judith Butler's paradox of subjectivity (discussed in Chapter Two), Maracle's program of 'liberation' involves actively combating devaluation in its various forms – effecting agency by challenging the terms of subjugation – and learning to act responsibly towards one's Self and community. "Bertha" and *Sundogs* both dramatize this work – of exploitation as well as of freedom – as integral to the characters' instructive experiences. "Bertha," the story of an aging woman's painful life working in a cannery, clearly evokes the economic and gendered exploitation to which (colonized) Native peoples are subject; and *Sundogs* expands upon the demands of decolonization to focus on the work of negotiating cultures and languages alongside gender and race. Rather than denote access to and accumulation of capital property, ownership receives attention in these texts as the ability to exercise agency – to work in effective and affirming ways – in order to control one's own ideas, images, actions, choices. In this sense, 'ownership' is similar to having

the ability to act – to do work – in ways that (actively) exercise empowerment rather than (passively) result from oppression. Maracle's protagonists expose the effects of restricting 'ownership' to mean only capital gain, illustrating what Angela Miles outlines: that expanded market production (integral to colonization) creates gendered effects by removing the means of subsistence from individuals and communities; institutionalizing men's reliance on wages and women's reliance on men; and concentrating wealth and power in the hands of non-accountable Transnational Corporations (Miles, 166). Kim Anderson, who provides a complete strategy of resistance for Native women, also argues that the "shift from subsistence to production-for-exchange economies marginalized Native women from economic participation and the authority that went with it" (Anderson, 62). As non-capitalist notions of productivity are erased, women are re-figured as empty vessels, valuable only for their capacity to be filled and denied recognition within mechanisms of subject-formation.

#### **4.4) "*Bertha*": Economic Exploitation and the 'Lineage House'**

Maracle states that the "road to freedom is paved with the intimate knowledge of the oppressed" (IAW, 139); for this, "*Bertha*" provides poignant illustration. The story's title character ends her life in a way that emphasizes the paradox of the oppressed: that freedom is predicated on the "knowledges" of, yet remains unknown to, those at the lowest socio-economic strata. Janice Acoose/ Misko-Kisikawihkwe points out that "[a]s critical readers we must ask ourselves how stereotypical images like the Indian princess or easy squaw affect our values, beliefs, and attitudes" (Acoose: 1995, 49). More specifically, in the case of "*Bertha*," we must ask ourselves about the context in which women like *Bertha* live their lives, and ways in which unchallenged assumptions – political, social, cultural, sexual – aid in its propagation. Discussing the construction of

knowledge, Acoose draws upon Ngugi, who argues that “the product of a writer’s pen both reflects reality and...attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude to that reality” and that images, language uses, literatures, “embod[y a] community’s way of looking at the world and its place in the making of that world” (Ngugi, *Writers...*, 7). Similar to both Armstrong and Maracle, Ngugi emphasises the need to control one’s own image-production in order to determine routes for empowering movement; he also argues that all human communities are necessarily based in the land, that “without the soil, without land, without nature there is no human community” (7), and that it is from a community’s relationship with the soil – the ways in which labour-power, technology and knowledge are used to maximize that soil – that a community first develops its “strateg[ies] for survival” (7). “Bertha,” in contradistinction, illustrates a community’s lack of control over its primary relationship to the land and every succeeding expression of survival: economic, political, cultural, social. By drawing attention to the context in which Bertha’s life is lived and lost, the story shows the emptiness of stereotypes but also the qualitative and quantitative exploitation that derogatory images engender and sustain.

In the story itself, the dehumanization of Bertha and her co-workers – indeed of entire First Nations urban communities – is first reflected in the description of Bertha’s surroundings. This account of a life ending begins not with characters, but with rain, “gutter bound” (*STOS*, 15); the drenched cannery row “resounded with the heavy rhythm of pelting rain” (15) against which Bertha enjoys no defense. Pointedly, Bertha is introduced as a mere “distorted bulk of the staggering woman” (15), subsumed in her own brand of liquid, not rain but alcohol. Impervious to the same rain that frames her story, the aged woman concentrates on walking ‘home’ from her drinking grounds – a hill outside the city that starkly contrasts the “autumn hills of her youth” (19) – but



consigns herself to crawling “the rest of the way to the row of shacks” (15). Her extra clothing becomes, in the downpour, a water-logged burden that “make[s] it impossible for her to move” (18) just as the dwelling that acts as ‘home’ is barely inhabitable. “With blurred vision she peered towards hut number nine. It wasn’t home. She had no home. Home was fifty years ago and gone” (22). Similar to a legal system created by a colonial structure and imposed upon colonized peoples, the story of “Bertha” illustrates the degradation that is ensured by that which is designed to protect. Emblems of safety, comfort, community become worse than a mockery when implements of security are inverted to cause damage and homes are not only insufficient but decrepit, uprooted and often far from dry:

None of the buildings are situated on the ground. All were built of only the sturdiest wood and were well creosoted at the base to fend off rot for at least two decades. Immersed in salt water and raw sewage as they have been for this past half century, they are beginning to show a little wear...At high-tide each dwelling, except the few nearest shore, was partially submerged in water. It wasn’t really such a great bother. After all, the workers spent most of their waking time at the cannery – upwards of ten hours a day, sometimes this included Sunday, but not always – and the bunks were sufficiently far from the floor such that sleeping, etc., carried on unencumbered. A good pair of Kingcome slippers [hip waders] was all that was needed to prevent any discomfort the tide caused (16, 18).

Further emphasizing the alienating conditions under which Bertha and her co-workers live, most characters in the story remain unnamed. Even Bertha’s name is more a label than an affirmation, resented by its bearer as the name which was not hers in her youth, “[o]n the hills, basket on her back” (19). “She wanted to hear her name again, but something inside her fought against its articulation. In her new state of shame she could not whisper, even to herself, the name she had taken as a woman” (19). In an account of a “usual Saturday night rough-housing which takes place on a pay night” (16), featuring “X” and “his brother” arguing over whether the appropriate designation for their foreman

was dog or pig, proper names are withheld entirely. The fact that this argument leads to fatal violence, that neither man is named, and that virulent hatred for the foreman – whose racism proves more durable than the shacks’ paint (of which he is so proud (17)) – can be only internally or laterally expressed underlines the extent to which the economic exploitation of First Nations peoples coupled with systemic racism is dehumanizing. The paradox and hypocrisy of capital development is accentuated throughout this story by the distance between the impoverishment of Bertha’s and her co-workers’ lives and the profit for which their labour is used. Though working in an industrialized setting – evidenced by the company’s “modern machinery” that has revolutionized the cannery from one forced to “employ a larger number of workers to produce less fish” (16) – Bertha and her co-workers are forced to help advance the development of an economy that offers, in return, only alcohol and slave wages.

Maracle’s sardonic tone, familiar from much of her fiction and critical work, is especially potent in this story. The workers’ disempowerment is expressed through layers of irony: workers are described as the “very fortunate employees of the very harassed and worried businessmen” (15); their poor living conditions explained by a simple statement of priority, rendering new machines and increased management salaries “more important sources of squander for [the company’s] profits” (15) than insulation for employees’ residences, a “luxur[y] [for] the producers of its canned fish” (15). Even the company’s substitution of paint for whitewash, for use on the ‘residences,’ maintains the frugal practice of using non-coloured materials to ensure that the company does not “spoil its workers with excessive finery” (16). Throughout, Maracle’s categorical condemnations are phrased as deftly sarcastic praises for the cannery’s simultaneous profit advancement/labour exploitation. In interviews, Maracle has emphasized the

strategic importance of humour – to speak about that which is most difficult to articulate and reflect upon – in both engaging a potentially unsympathetic audience and clarifying the profundity of particular injustices. “Certain things can’t be said outside of humour” (Lutz: 1991, 171); throughout Maracle’s writing, context is foregrounded as crucial to understanding predicaments and humour is deployed against the revealed desolation. Yet the injustices are unmistakable, regardless of (and perhaps in part due to) the tone used, and “Bertha” exemplifies the dangerous consequences of internalized patriarchal structures and capitalist priorities.

Returning to Bertha’s introduction – as a “bulk” rather than a person; seen (object) rather than seeing (Subject) – Maracle’s comments are telling:

[t]he denial of Native womanhood is the reduction of the whole people to a sub-human level. Animals beget animals. The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female. The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women. (*IAW*, 17-18)

In conjunction with Bertha’s (literal and final) erasure, it is significant that her description throughout is both formally and thematically located within a larger context that serves as a backdrop to and a metanarrative for the final subject of the story: not Bertha’s life, but her death. (Bertha is preceded by a description of the setting and is described only briefly before the narrative focuses on either her environment or her memories, both of which are set at a distance from her present experience.) The same context frames an additional mode of disempowerment that further removes Bertha from agency: debilitating weariness. Describing the fatigue she endures as a result of constant resistance, Maracle underscores the relationship between work and leisure – involving, by extension, the ownership of and control over bodily activity – as emphatically determined under colonialism by capital gain:

I tire easily these days. Sometimes I feel the exhaustion is rooted in the sense of defeat that the 1950s represent for our people. Sometimes I feel the tiredness is old, as old as the colonial process itself. On those days I am energized by the fact that it is not my fatigue but the fatigue of the oppressor's system which haunts me. On other days the fatigue is personal. It is the fatigue of a three-year-old hauling buckets of crabs, racing against the tide when she should have been sitting in the sun on the beach playing with a bucket of sand. (x)

The image of seashore as workplace for the child who must "rac[e] against the tide" (x) rather than play in its alternating shore poignantly illustrates the "oppressor's system" (x) as that which defines work in relation to leisure. If leisure acts as a barometer for control over one's own activity and fatigue a measure of energy expended, the enjoyment of leisure is associated with a freedom Maracle's childhood lacked, marked instead by the dehumanizing labour that her adult work must address.

A significant part of 'women's work' in this instance involves the negotiation of traditional concepts of 'Native womanhood' (introduced earlier) and what Maracle calls the 'lineage house.' Kerrie Charnley argues that colonialism depends upon the disempowerment of Native women who, in traditional cultures, were "central to the perpetuation of the matriarchal and co-operative spirit and values of First Nations" (Charnley, 11). Similarly, Anderson notes that "Indigenous systems that allocated power to women were incompatible with the kind of colonial power dynamics that would be necessary to maintain colonial power" (Anderson, 58). Read as the ability to define one's own work, Maracle's evocation of ownership, emphasizing non-capitalistic and non-hierarchical ancestral relations, becomes a crucial aspect of re-claiming definitions of 'value' and re-writing the roles to which women are relegated in an environment of hyper-productivity. To challenge the normative standard of capitalist concepts of ownership, Native women must also challenge the appropriation of their lands and bodies as property of a colonial power. Interrogating the individual's relationship to the wider

community focuses, in this instance, on the gendered effects of an individual's disconnection from her community. Janice Acoose states that in "naming and recognizing the coercive and oppressive roots of...patriarchal institutions, [she] ha[s] been able to reconnect to the vital source of [her] strength: [her] family, [her] relations" (Acoose: 1995, 10). To understand the necessity of "reconnect[ing] to th[at] vital source" (10), Maracle's notion of a 'lineage house' – a pivotal nexus of family, work, ownership, decolonization, and self – is revealing. Within the concept of a 'lineage house,' (physical) work is aligned with (cerebral) thought, family with solidarity, and decolonization with the enactment of empowering forms of ownership:

For us, thinking is a complete and total process. In a sweat, or the Big House or wherever, around the pipe, you harness all your energy, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual, and you retreat into solitude to work out the nature of your particular solidarity with creation. And you retreat into lineage, as well, because the farther backward in time you travel, the more grandmothers you have, the further forward, the more grandchildren! You actually represent an infinite number of people, and the only physical manifestation is yourself. Also, you own your own 'house' and that's all you own. It's this 'house' that I live in. The 'I' that lives in here is the thinking 'I,' the being 'I,' the 'I' that understands creation, understands that the object of life is solidarity, understands that there are consequences for every action. (Lutz: 1991, 172)

"Solitude," here, is figured as requisite (rather than antithetical) to understanding "your particular solidarity with creation" (172) and your connection with an infinite number of people, and the roles ascribed to work, ancestors, and decolonization as mutually informing and strengthening.

This description names "harness[ing] all your energy, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual" (172) as the most crucial aspect of decolonization; as previously noted, however, one purpose of this process – altering material conditions – is also the most difficult to achieve when control over the shape of those conditions is consistently withheld. By extension, the concept that "the only physical manifestation [of an infinite

number of people] is yourself" (172) must be negotiated within a capitalist and colonialist nation-state on terms antithetical to the most important tenets of a 'lineage house.' Most simply, claiming ownership over material possessions – land, bodies, cultural products – is rendered highly problematic for Native Canadians by a context built upon their own dispossession and denial of self-determination:

Before 1961, we were 'wards of the government,' children in the eyes of the law. We objected and became, henceforth, people. Born of this objection was the Native question – the forerunner of Native self-government, the Native land question, etc. (*IAW*, 16)

When the external naming resulting from (unequal) conflicts in discourses determines so immediately the terms and restrictions of subjectivity, drawing upon internal and communal concepts of strength – like those found in a sense of lineage – offers a powerful form of resistance. As illustrated throughout this thesis, there is no clear delineation between what is and is not empowering for resisting systemic inequities, yet gaining control over the ability to perceive-of-Self and act-as-Self, and providing a model upon which to build an alternate means of self-representation, is mandatory in re-writing the terms of political engagement.

Commenting, by extension, on socio-economic development appropriate to First Nations communities, Maracle states:

There is a contradistinction between the destructive kind of economic development that created urban centres, urban madness if you will, and the kind of development that we imagine could be. ("An Infinite...", 167)

Her conception of a 'lineage house' – in effect, one's own Self – poses a significant paradox for the concept of ownership: the 'house,' by Maracle's description, is the only thing of which dispossession is at once possible ("you own your own 'house' and that's all you own" (Lutz: 1991, 172)) and impossible (immaterial, it is the abode of thinking

and being can be neither physically shared nor stolen). Within this framework, ownership denotes a psychological self-possession and a psycho-social connection to cultural heritage more than a material-based form of control. Development, therefore, is not primarily economic, as advancement, ownership and gain are not exclusively commodifiable. Colonialism's marked disruption of Maracle's conception of ownership destabilizes the latter's very foundation by replacing community-oriented and immaterial priorities with individualistic and material needs.

In response, Kim Anderson argues (and Maracle demonstrates) that the "way in which past, present and future are understood to be inextricably connected" (Anderson, 15) in traditional Indigenous societies enlivens a need to not only recognize the roles women have played and can play in diverse forms of development, but also to situate one's understanding of Self – gendered, racialized – on an infinite continuum of past, present and future relations. Because, in Maracle's analysis, women were traditionally in charge of food production and distribution, with economic authority extending to goods brought into communities (the excess of which was given back to men for trading purposes), both men and women traditionally participated in a community's economic development (from Anderson, 61). Consistent with her "essential disagreement....[with] all of the European philosophers [she] read...[which focused on] the relationship between thinking and being,...and the objectification of thought" (Lutz: 1991, 172), Maracle's conception of ownership, property, knowledge and power as 'aphysical,' immaterial, and partially contingent upon self-awareness suggests that women's empowerment requires knowledge and adaptation of traditions without designing tradition-oriented formulas for gendered empowerment. Barbara Godard's work is useful in this respect for providing literary analysis of the role of 'grandmother' figures in Native women's texts. Most

importantly, Godard emphasizes the ways in which individual women's voices are, far from objectified, couched within and framed by cross-generational voices of grandmothers:

The connection with the grandmother, wise storyteller and enabler of life and creativity, is present even in narratives that have their origin in written form and are preeminently autobiographical. It is as though these narrators...feel hesit[ant] about telling their own life stories and do so only to justify the wisdom of their grandmothers. (Godard: 1985, 18)

What Maracle's texts illustrate are the ways in which individual women live through processes of cultural disruption and appropriation that affect their ability to identify as a part of an empowered heritage of women.

The effects of this disruption are clearly illustrated in "Bertha," where the destruction of 'womanhood' denotes individuals' alienation from 'lineage' and the consequent inability to either fulfill or benefit from the empowering role of 'grandmother(s).' The title character's interaction with "the young girl leaning out of the doorway" (*STOS*, 22), named only "the giggle," exemplifies ways in which economic enslavement destroys traditional roles of Native women as elders, grandmothers, educators. In stating that Bertha "had no home" (22), the narrator draws attention to the absence of cultural community in her current circumstance:

Home? Home was a young girl rushing through a meadow, a cedar basket swishing lightly against dew-laden leaves, her nimble fingers plucking ripe fat berries from their branches, the wind playfully teasing and tangling the loose, waist-length black hair that glistened in the autumnal dawn while her mind enjoyed the prospect of becoming...becoming, and the words in English would not come. (20)

Home was her education forever cut short by christian well-meaning. Home was the impossibility of her ever becoming the intellectual she should have been; it was the silence of not knowing how it all came to pass. (22)

Denied access to intellectual training in her culture's language and traditions, Bertha is unable to impart knowledge to this younger woman already "burdened with a toothless



grin before her youth was over” (23). Maracle herself recounts the childhood experiences that “created in [her] an outlook which defied everything that existed in the outside world” (*IAW*, ix), an outlook gravely missed by Bertha and her young counterpart:

I trotted about with my mother to the homes of great intellectuals among the Squamish people...[including] Andy Paull, a statesman and British Columbia’s first constitutional lawyer, and his son, Percy...who came by their knowledge against the will of the state...; Khatsalano, the first Native to create a province-wide organization to represent the decolonizing aspirations of Indigenous people; Ta’a, my great-grandmother, whose eyes spoke love, discipline and wisdom when words failed, and a host of elders. (viii-ix)

From a young age, Maracle gained exposure to strong people within her own community – women as well as men – and learned to respect the same wisdom that a young Bertha remembers accessing, before “her childhood memories [stood alone, unanchored] against the stark emptiness of the years that stretched behind them” (*STOT*, 20). But her own community’s teachings, transmitted in myriad forms, are absent from Bertha’s life which is subject, instead, to the “rupture of the old and the [consequent] rift [whose creation] was swift and unrelenting” (21).

Neither Bertha nor the young “giggler” benefit from the strength and knowledge of their cultural grandmothers, and neither are able to enact their teacher/learner role in relation to one another. As Godard notes, “[m]ost native women’s narratives are...perceived by their tellers to be traditional, empowered by the grandmother who is the true author of the text” (Godard: 1985, 18). This story shows, instead, the significant loss that Native women undergo when access to the empowering influences of grandmothers and traditional structures are dislocated. Directly linking Native women’s disempowerment with the incursion of catholicism and its conversion of not only people, but of “stories, empowering ceremonies” into “pagan rituals full of horrific shame” (*STOS*, 20), “Bertha” describes the expulsion of women from “counsel seats at the fires

of their men” (20) and the move from bighouses into “tiny homes isolated from the great families...that separated each sister from the other” (20-21). The loss of traditional value and respect for motherhood, and its concomitant pedagogy, is what Bertha most laments:

the circle of memory that crept out at her from the fog dimmed, but refused to recede. You had another upbringing before all this, the memory chided her. The efforts of the village women to nurture her as keeper of her clan, mother of all youth, had gone to naught...In the autumn hills of her youth the dream of motherhood had already begun to fade. Motherhood, the re-creation of ancient stories that would instruct the young in the laws of her people and encourage good citizenship from even the babies, had eluded her. (19-20)

The failure of this great responsibility – to “instruct the young in the laws of her people” and foster “good citizenship” – weighs heavily upon a broken Bertha who remembers enough to recognize her aborted position. Instead of sharing empowering stories with her young interlocutor, Bertha speaks insufficient words that are not understood:

Bertha wanted to tell her about her own unspoiled youth, her hills, the berries, the old women, the stories and a host of things she could not find the words for in the English she inherited. It was all so paralyzing and mean. Instead Bertha whispered her sorrow in the gentle words of their ancestors. They were foreign to the girl. The touch, the words, inspired only fear. (24)

The enormous distance separating Bertha from this young worker reflects the distance between Bertha as a young girl and the “distorted bulk” (15) who remembers, recalling the “endless stories told to her, the careful coaching in the truth that lay behind each one, the reasons for their telling” (20). Reflecting that, as a child, “[e]ach girl was born in the comfort of knowing how she would grow, bear children and age with dignity to become a respected matriarch” (19), Bertha’s disempowerment is shown to be an extension of that of the women in her village, who, “stripp[ed] of women-power [once it was] transfer[ed] to the priest[,]. . .ceased to tell stories and lived out their lives without taking the children to the hills again (21). Near the end of her life, Bertha feels that

distance and the loss in the unrelated stories, “but she could not, after fifty years of speaking crippled English define where it was all supposed to lead” (20):

The brutal realization was that she, Bertha, once destined to have been this young woman’s teacher, had nothing to give but stories – dim, only half-remembered and barely understood – brought her up short. Guilt drove her from the chair before the bottle was empty. (24)

Bertha’s destination is a mean and solitary death, devoid of power and armed only with stories she does not comprehend, fortifying her alienation from grandmothers and emphasizing the consequent annihilation of traditional notions of womanhood.

#### **4.5) *Sundogs: Negotiating Translations, Affiliations, Identities***

*“During the Elijah hours I realize I have been hauling ass across foreign terrain carrying two additional burdens on my back: racism and patriarchy” (SD, 76).*

Though dealing with similar challenges, *Sundogs* offers – over a much longer narrative – a diversity of characters in relation to whom Marianne can understand and articulate herself. *Sundogs* also explores more fully the ways in which individualistic and communal notions of ownership disrupt one another, dramatizing the difficulties involved in negotiating discourses. Nearing the end of the novel, for example, Marianne is still reluctant to be “persuaded of this collective point of view” (SD, 202), unsure of the cost of relinquishing her sense of Self-as-autonomous. It is through the collective experience of the Peace Run that personal pronouns become plural, and the activities of individuals gain strength in combination: “The run re-created each of us. We’re-imagined in every step of the run ourselves and acquired a vision of a different world” (197). Chapter Three’s questions about discursive negotiation and liminality resurface to interrogate constructions of race and gender specifically. Through Marianne’s negotiation of languages and cultures, Maracle’s consistent critique of the context of women’s lives

exemplifies the decolonizing work of moving towards an understanding of multiple differences and an increased awareness of one's own 'lineage house.'

Anderson underscores the confusion that helps characterize Marianne's Self-understanding: "Like many Native people, I struggle with my identity...From this confusion [created by racism, cultural genocide and oppressive political policies], we must struggle to re-name ourselves and to understand what that means" (Anderson, 23). Although she offers no specific directives in response, Maracle contends: "I root my heart in the sense of justice my mother struggled to impart" (*IAW*, xi). Resonating with the 'crippled English' "Bertha" addresses and extending from the discussion in Chapter Three, *Sundogs* evokes language as a literal as well as a metaphoric medium of communication. The people around Marianne "struggle to impart" (xi) these languages – perceived as 'riddles' – but must compete with Marianne's defensive remoteness, her ability to "withdraw emotionally and let [others'] words drift into the dead file in [her] mind without feeling them" (*SD*, 4). Increasingly, female relations prove central to Marianne's 'discursive' maturation as she learns to negotiate the difficult task of "re-constructi[ng...] our houses" (*IAW*, x) in the "vacuum created by the absence of context" (x). Her reconstruction of a potentially safe place – home – rests partially on validating her own, and others', subjective expressions of 'Native womanhood'; remembering and rendering visible diverse cultural contexts, Marianne must employ creative efforts that exceed formulaic solutions expressed in singular discourses.

Marianne's struggle to understand Momma's 'riddles' and locate herself within a divisive context encompassing both school and home attests to the possibility of maintaining an intra-cultural dialogue even at the level of Self:

We [Marianne and her mother] have never spoken in a language both of us agree upon and understand. The cultural genocide plot my mother insists keeps these people motivated is, on one level, absurd, yet, between the lines of her insistence on their plotting lies a powerful sense of truth. (SD, 80-81)

At the scene of her niece's funeral, however, the difficulties Marianne has with that discourse are expressed as overwhelming anger and frustration at the volume and depth of missing knowledge, keeping her beyond the folds of community:

Everything is too late, too late to teach me the language, too late to teach me the protocol for the ceremony that holds less significance to me than my fading Catholicism. I am a genuine heathen. I attended the Catholic church mindlessly for eighteen years, grew disillusioned, left it and now I stand before my family, a non-Catholic. (144)

Continuously learning throughout the narrative, Marianne's changing perspectives modify her gendered and racialized sense of Self to eventually accommodate, while on the Peace Run, a third person's translation of Momma's ideas. This, in turn, allows Marianne to translate her own inter- and intra-cultural dialogue onto a larger stage:

'The people have a right to be free. The individual has a right to cooperate. Everyone is obligated to speak their piece....' Joan says slowly and carefully, without a hint of hostility or accusation...This new way of being puts me squarely in charge of myself, but at the same time it is a self that stands in the center of a community of selves all tough and resilient with each one owning their own views. (202)

Understanding gender as an aspect of identity both draws upon a potential blueprint for all people – discourses of the 'individual' – and interrogates the specific locations from which gender constructs emerge. In introduction to *I Am Woman*, Maracle uses her mother's words to illustrate (both in their use, and in their meaning) the significance of what Marianne endeavors to appreciate: ancestors' words, in conjunction with individuals' responsibilities, as 'labouring' participants in broader family and community contexts:

Our mother insisted that those who eat must work, those who work are entitled to participate in the general management of the family and those who participate must be prepared to make intelligent choices about their life and family context. (*IAW* viii)

Emphasizing the role of the self-critical individual, Maracle defines the term 'responsible' as "having the ability to respond to a given situation. (This has nothing to do with laying blame)" (91). Appropriately, Maracle's own Salish cultural context involves learning ways "we don't spin the web of life, we're responsible for its continuation" (Lutz: 1991, 173); developing, in conjunction, creative means for ensuring the web's "continuation" (173) involves making "intelligent choices" (*IAW*, viii) and thus contributing to, as well as learning from, a larger context that depends upon and renders meaningful the work of each individual. Maracle attributes her own "deep sense of hope for the future" (viii) to her mother's teachings, and promulgates the possibility for equality among people through active engagement with empowering practices: learning, exploring response-ibilities, teaching, and thus growing. As Marianne learns to apply her "ability to respond" (91) to a life informed by multiple cultural contexts, she also learns to "respond" to difficulty without castigation; as she becomes more fluent in the languages (metaphoric more than literal) and practices of her mother, she increases her ability to participate in and "make intelligent choices" (viii) for herself, eventually believing that "our responsibility is to ensure that [our children's] survival is painted in full colour richly textured with hope and joy" (*SD*, 156).

*Sundogs* complements its thematic illustration of negotiation by formally "conveying a sense of speech and activity as continuous" (O'Brien, 92) through an unbroken,<sup>41</sup> but fluctuating, narrative, and demonstrates that fostering continuity (neither

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<sup>41</sup> *Sundogs* does not have any chapter or section breaks.

transparent nor nonresistant) and “theory presented through story” (Maracle, “Oratory,” 10) requires constant interpretation between, within, and across discourses and people. Part of Marianne’s struggle to “dissipate [the] effect” of known ideologies (Spivak: 1993, 5) alongside a dual exclusion – perceived as “not Indian enough [at home] and...much too Indian [at school]” (10) involves negotiating the effects of community-level language loss. Maracle, like Armstrong, describes this loss as rooted primarily in the experience of residential school:

When they [Maracle’s parents’ generation] came out, my great-grandmother used to call them crippled two-tongues. They couldn’t speak either language as adults. When you’re an adult, it’s time to marry, procreate, work, provide for your family, not the time to learn to speak a language. (Maracle, “An Infinite...,” 166)

As suggested in “Bertha,” language acquisition may be read metaphorically as cultivating knowledge of cultural ‘codes’ that determine ways to act, think, prioritize and value and live. As Margery Fee argues, a way of talking represents “a whole system of solidarities and identifications” (from O’Neill/Boyle). Similarly, Armand Garnet Ruffo insists on what he calls “cultural initiation,” requiring understanding of cultural codes and contexts (which, according to John Fiske, “interrelate dynamically”) for appropriate ‘de-coding’ of text and discourse (Ruffo, 163).<sup>42</sup> Though not part of a generation subject to residential school, Marianne must perform her own multi-cultural decoding; her simultaneous immersion in predominantly non-Native environments and isolation from communities like her sister Lacey’s – “a village in the middle of Vancouver...full of Natives from all kinds of nations all sorts of occupations,...but all of them bronze with corn husk and

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<sup>42</sup> Ruffo is referring specifically to critical approaches to Native literature in an, inevitably, multi-cultural context; his comments, however, are pertinent to reading cultures both from within and beyond the bounds of cultural ‘inclusion.’

violins in their voices” (*SD*, 162) – effectively occludes literal as well as metaphoric fluency in Native and non-Native cultures.

The earliest narrative indication of the consequent distance between Marianne and her mother focuses on emotion, rather than language, but corresponds to ways each knows the world:

It takes a lot of years of schooling to numb out like this. Momma knows a lot, but she didn't attend much school. She can't be numb about anything. She shed crocodile tears for that guy, Martin Luther King, when he died and everything and everyone else who suffered too. (4)

Marianne's liminal position of willed sedation reflects her initial approach to gender, as well as race, and her suspicion of (and resentment towards) Lacey's feminism: “In the hierarchy of [Lacey's] burgeoning feminist mind, my mother ranks first on the talk list, Rita is the last, and I have no place at all” (49-50). Though by the end of the narrative “Lacey, whose feminism always scared the hell out of [Marianne], starts to make sense” (75), the duration of the novel traces Marianne's own recognition and rejection of internalized sexism and racism to arrive at a place defined not by multiple cultural and discursive exclusion, but by multiply-rooted cultural pride. For Marianne, then, unlearning the debilitating duo of internalized racism and sexism and critiquing the colonial process as more than “theory – divorced from living people” (155) unfolds through her relation to family members; her partner Mark; and fellow students at university (primarily James, who first speaks to Marianne when Elijah Harper and Meech Lake begin “re-shaping the direction of Canadian sociology” (82)). Before participating in the Peace Run Marianne asks herself: “The steady encroachment [through unequal exchange economics], how does this affect our perception of one another?...What is the precise nature of encroachment?” (155). Upon its completion, Marianne can confidently



state: “I found the self I needed to believe in” (194). This ‘reliable’ Self is able to make sense of colonization’s effects on gendered individuals by first understanding Selves in relation to others; interrogating male violence against women, by extension, requires attention to racism as well as sexism in a context ensuring men like Marianne’s brother are “allowed only the procreator of [their] race to blame for the disemboweling of all [their] sensuous humanity” (86).

Marianne’s ability to name internalized devaluation is narrated through her reactions to a succession of events: her sister Rita’s decision to leave her husband; her brother Rudy’s abusive treatment of his family; and her partner Mark’s unchallenged, though repeatedly staged, assumptions about race and gender:

[Mark] can’t possibly know the wire I am walking on is this tight. He cannot guess his remark would bring razors to my gut and that these razors would begin singing dangerous songs of resentment against the world, against the denial of language, against my womanhood... He can’t possibly know I hate him at this moment. (116)

When Aunt Mary alerts her to the hypocrisy in her castigation of Rita, Marianne reflects: “Bill is a drunk. I know it, but somehow I think Rita ought to learn to live with it, or, like Rosie, die with it” (31).<sup>43</sup> Though appalled to recognize ways in which she dismisses Native women as invaluable and undeserving, Marianne succinctly links that dismissal to the concurrent problem of internalized racism. Soon after learning of her sister’s broken marriage, for example, Marianne must face her brother’s violence as it destabilizes her sense of justice and security:

I will never again believe in the fineness of the world. The world is a whirl of emotion and movement, horrific realization, and painful sounds...[I]mages of Rudy obstruct my ability to grab hold of myself for the kids’, Paula’s, or anyone else’s sake. Rudy bandages endless cuts and bruises, tell [*sic*] jokes that allay fear, that

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<sup>43</sup> The narrative indicates the Rosie died as a passenger in a car accident when the driver – her husband – was intoxicated.

drive pain away, gets me to howl at the moon with him, rides the same merry-go-round, laughs at the wickedness of the world, faces storms, storms of lightning and Daddy's disappearance from the world. Rudy, what happened to you?...Rudy, handsome Rudy, ladykiller Rudy, and Iretch. (53-54)

In her struggle to understand rage born “before [her] memories began” (54), Marianne becomes motivated to apply sociological training onto her own context (as discussed further in Chapter Three) and thereby acknowledge the depth of her self-degradation: “I am more than aware of how many of us are on welfare in this city. I just don't feel the same about it as my mom. It shames me some to hear the statistics about us in class. The shame burns holes in whatever sympathy I may have for Indians” (3). Remembering her earliest encounters with racism at school (which propel her, in stark contrast from her mother, to perfect a state of ‘numbness’), Marianne invokes images long dormant – preserved in the present tense of their telling – that speak to identities shaped by and responding to race as well as gender:

At night I weep, pray to God to wake up white. I refuse to look in the mirror, can't accept the twinning of my face. I stop looking at boys and bury these new passions somewhere between the pages of books. I hurl my womanhood at libraries full of imaginative escape from my body. Dream myself onto the pages of Zola, Dickens, even Shakespeare. Othello becomes a woman, a desirable black woman. I blacken Cleopatra, become her. She becomes me. I dream. (141)

Marianne's difficulty with naming and claiming an empowering ‘Native womanhood’ gains clarity within this context, where comfort is derived only from European texts that themselves enter into, rather than negate, the construction of gender- and ‘colour-coded’ evaluation. Early in their relationship, for example, Marianne resents Mark's assumption that ‘work’ is unnecessary for conducting a relationship with a Native woman; yet race and gender again interact without clear parameters when the work of expending effort gets termed ‘dating,’ and becomes negatively associated with a standard demanded from white women. Wanting to resist structures of Eurocanada, Marianne has

difficulty negotiating her need to be valued with her need to be critical of ideological influences: “‘Maybe you see dark meat and don’t think of my right to be...’ Be what? Treated like a white girl, taken to dinner, adorned with flowers and endless phone calls – dated?” (117). Responding to Mark’s disdain for feminism, however, Marianne defends its ideals – effectively opposing the processes that overlook and silence experiential divides between Native and non-Native women – but remains (at this point in the narrative) unable to find voice in the confusion:

‘Why do only men retreat to the backrooms to discuss strategy? Oh please. You aren’t a fanatical feminist are you?’

‘Oh please, you aren’t a fanatical patriarch are you?’ I scrape the words out across layers of stone sharp and unrelenting. I want to finish with some sensible treatment on how fanatical patriarchs create fanatical feminists; they don’t just drop from the skies all ugly and witchlike...I know the words will come out cutting so I just stare at him...Halfway home I ask him to let me out, I want to walk...His face has softened and he studies mine for a moment, then whispers good-bye. In that moment my life hangs in mid-air, still and mutable. I want to say it’s O.K., but I know this would mean killing little pieces of me. I know the dagger he offers will be swung by me. I know to hold women inferior requires help from the victim, so I leave. (79-80)

When she and Mark arrive at the office together the morning after ‘Elijah’s triumph,’ (discussed in Chapter Three), Mark’s arrogant pride objectifies and infuriates her – “I feel like the pride of the Indian Nation” – as she struggles with emotions “paradoxical and contrary, argu[ing] in parallel lines” (110). To move beyond, or in spite of, paradox, Marianne refuses to acquiesce to victimhood and seeks to reject the degradation imposed upon her, in the harsh recognition that “[w]e had to love the enemy to hate ourselves” (70). “Momma blames them, but I know, we had to give up on ourselves and our families for the plot to work. We held the knife that cuts us from our past” (70). Marianne’s emphasis on implication (i.e. the idea that subjugation relies, in a circumscribed sense, on accepting the terms of subjection – a configuration of power that

allows for and demands, in Foucault's estimation, resistance at every point of contact in a social relationship) does not equate a defeatist and de-contextualized belief in responsibility for one's own disempowerment. It underlines, instead, a conceptualization of power as something other than a quantifiable commodity of exchange.

Illustrating power as non-quantifiable and non-absolute, Marianne's active interest in the value of women emphasizes the impermanence of any primacy between racism and sexism, and increases in accordance with her challenge to cultural barriers within the family. When Marianne learns of Mark's marriage, for example, she refuses to act in a way that would demean another woman, even as she comes to a greater understanding of the racial and political contexts for sexism in First Nations communities: "I betrayed Rita when I held Bill's heart up higher than hers. I can't betray this woman who has become a member of the family of Native women Lacey has inspired me to love" (138). But in the same instance, Marianne appeals to a wider, gender-inclusive group allegiance: "Momma, I am not culturally dead" (138). By integrating feminist concerns with cultural practices, Marianne effectively subjects racist and sexist treatment to the same scrutiny in the view that, culturally, her "whole philosophy, [her people's] way of being, precludes the mistreatment of anyone" (77). Without proper tools and sufficient practice for respecting the disrespected, an earlier Marianne felt pain for Rudy's abused wife and children but was unable to disconnect that ("moderated") pain from the "blind love" she felt for Rudy himself (77). Increasingly, Marianne interrogates Rudy's experience of racism in tandem with his expressions of sexism to better understand her own persistent loyalty, and its legitimization of abuse:

I want to reconsider Rudy, who could never be this soft [like James], who could not afford to be this sensitive and vulnerable. Rudy's sweet youth was whited out by boys who drove fast cars and played chicken with Indian pedestrians every Friday

night...This death sport aimed at his whole race coupled with his coming into manhood crushed him...The inability of our men to sit in stark libraries and contemplate life from lofty intellectual places becomes obvious. Rudy had his body, his tensile strength and his agile good looks...‘Ladykiller’ is what they left him. And the ladies to be killed were limited in number and confined to our race... The hoarding of intellect, it’s [*sic*] monopolization by white men, reduced Rudy to a body without language, love, or thought. (86)

It is in the same context that Marianne comes to understand her own self-directed shame and her fear of Lacey’s feminism as she recognizes “the absence of [her] own” (160).

Poignantly, Marianne delivers a sociological verdict on her own situation:

Erase yourself or consent to shame. That is the sociology of being Native and woman in Canada. It is the result of besiegement, encroachment, small neglect, impoverishment, and mass death. I had my mind and spirit crippled by the choices they left open to me as though there were no others. My mother’s response ‘love one another’ was simple but in the face of the colonial colossus it looks insane. (161)

Because the mother’s optimism is unintelligible to the daughter, however, different paths of negotiation must be found and followed.

These paths focus, once again, on language and fluency and making sense of hitherto unintelligible codes. A crucial insight for Marianne comes at the expense of recounting painful experiences, past and present, while trying to appreciate what Mark’s look(ed) like. She consents that her university environment, due to increased diversity of thought within a broader student body – “feminists and Asians dot the landscape of racist and patriarchal university students” (162) – is less oppressive than high school, but also notes that “most [even at university] are not free of racism” (162). Racism and sexism again form a fluctuating dyad of devaluation: “Women whether we are white or not are all besieged. Some of us know it” (162). Marianne’s process of negotiating cultural, metaphorical, or codified languages with literal languages, and coming to ‘know it’ through an intersection of fluency and (dis)empowerment, involves deconstructing her

linguistic-based exclusion from her mother to arrive at a place where she can feel proud of her own gendered and racialized 'home':

I watch these women and I feel like nothing could be more wonderful than growing old like them, like my mom, like all of our women. Laughter colours the world glorious in the worst moments of our lives. Humor lights up bleak days. (196)

Particularly significant instances along Marianne's 'path' circle back to Elijah Harper's seminal speech, discussed in Chapter Three – the literal act of voicing around which the First Nations communities in *Sundogs* renew self-respect and “fall[] in love with the prospect of dignity” (112) – and the activities within Marianne's family as they are gathered for the televised speech. Marianne's ignorance of cultural codes is epitomized in her painful question to Monique, asking why she and Joseph (Marianne's brother) have no children: “Disappointment in my complete alienation from my family hangs thick in the air around me. The horror of the violation is that I didn't know the question was taboo until the moment of shocked response – Momma must know this” (103). In this same passage, Marianne recounts her mother's decision to leave her village and considers the importance of lineage to identity, suggesting that – just as Monique was orphaned by Native parents and raised by white parents, disconnected from her 'biological heritage' – Marianne feels the effects of “an uprooting of an entire lineage” (104). This is particularly acute in relation to her niece's knowledge and compassion: “Dorrie walks beside Mark and me, upright and dignified, almost defiant. She wants the room to know she feels no shame for me” (105). Through her painting, noted earlier, Dorrie “drew lines of hope across our despair, the despair of ugliness erased not by burying images but by painting thin rays of beauty and hope on our faces” (141). On the night of Elijah Harper's speech, Dorrie declares that she will depict Marianne as a bridge:

**'I am going to paint a chasm, deep and dark traveling along a tornado path to white hot light. I am going to paint us young people clutching at the edges of the chasm, barely hanging on and our elders will stand away from the chasm with their backs half-turned. Between our elders and ourselves, I am going to paint cities, red with war, and between it all, coming magically from the whole center of the work, I am going to paint Marianne, one hand pushing up on the city and the other hand reaching out to the young and old.'** (106).

And it is within the tragedy of Dorrie's death that Marianne realizes her desperation for understanding: "I can't lie, not now, not anymore. I am about to enter the funeral place of my niece as a foreigner, one of them, a white person" (144).

Better versed culturally and linguistically, Dorrie is also better received than 'Baby' Marianne on the night of Elijah Harper's speech. "[Dorrie] stands in the center surrounded by her adult world. She is getting ready to speak; everyone feels it and gives way for her" (105-106). Whereas Marianne is considered lucky to have had "no obstacle like language to overcome" (146) but resents her consequent cultural exclusion, Dorrie's early induction into adulthood comes at the cost of being "too old to be in eighth grade" (146). Comparing the two routes allocated to aunt and niece, Marianne realizes that Dorrie "lost two years struggling for bilingualism" but does not consider those years wasted, and wonders about the "decision our parents all had to face" (146):

**Did Lacey know it is better to impede her [Dorrie's] European education with this other language in order to ground her child in a world of thought a European education could never provide? (146)**

Literal and metaphoric language – "a world of thought" – combine to constitute that which Marianne lacks, as consistently evoked in her relationship with Mark. Often described as silence filled by paragraphs, unspoken, Marianne's difficult communication with Mark is illustrated in their exchange following Dorrie's announcement (on the night of Elijah Harper's speech). When Mark tells Marianne that he wants to leave, and Marianne erroneously assumes means alone, she thinks:

A moment ago I felt lineage, powerful in my veins; now terror peers through the gashes of rage's razor. Mark's decision to leave catalyzes a hacking ritual inside me...Between his announcement and my angry words lay whole speeches, words, too many for a not yet romantic couple, one of whom is dying to watch Elijah and the other of whom is just dying, to articulate. (106-107)

Effectively similar to what Marianne describes, Sky Lee refers to a coupling of silence and rage that mixes with fear, but offers a potentially radical tool:

Audre Lorde said it isn't the anger that kills; it is the silence...Without outlet [anger] turns easily into separatist fear, which is trickier but still containable...Audre also said this if that anger can be focused with precision, it could bring about radical change. (Maracle et. al., 184).

Maracle's use of language imagery foregrounds the centrality of communication, discussion, learning, and the potential for radicalizing anger through words. Also in reference to Mark, Marianne feels:

I have created a whole new crisis of such severe dimensions that they were all driven to expose me to the language I didn't speak. Whole paragraphs crawl around. Paragraphs without order, structure or end. (114)

Attempting to speak thoughts and words still unfamiliar to her – in form and meaning – Marianne resists silence in favour of unpolished articulation. Her discomfort with simply accepting the victory of Elijah Harper as an unmitigated success, for example, adds to her discomfort with Mark's proprietary treatment, which is compounded by the potential movement from declarations of pride to acts of abuse (remembering Rudy) when sexism remains undeconstructed within racist structures. Though Marianne's critical attitude causes others to question her community loyalty, her expression of frustration invites discussion which helps her frame her emotions and thoughts: "Elijah may have stopped the process of constitutional betrayal, but Canada has yet to change" (112) Marianne says, stating as an example Canada's intended involvement in the Middle East, to which her colleague responds without conviction: "It isn't the same...what has Iran, Iraq, got to



do with us...they'll never send the military on us" (112). The almost immediate eruption of Oka exposes the dramatic irony of this woman's statement, but the need to negotiate imperfect languages, structures, and means of identification remains. Marianne's pointed observation about imagery and naming in English emphasizes the tremendous possibility for continued devaluation, irrespective of political advances: "Dark. Light. Endarkenment. Enlightenment. This language has no discipline. It is used to brighten the world of white men and darken those who insist on their darkness" (111).

Finally, the images that "dance inside" Marianne are of Momma, "adamantly insisting on old codes of conduct and [Marianne] wishing she were not so archaic" (69). Recognizing that she fundamentally lacks "the affection to believe in [her] mother," Marianne is able to envision its repair:

Elijah restores this affection. The nattering, the abuse, catalyze self-inflicted wounds and I, and children like me, grab daggers, aim them at our mothers' hearts, and gash holes in their hopes, dreams, and codes of conduct. Rudy, poor arrogant Rudy, becomes a casualty in a war we wage against ourselves. A war made of silence, despair, and hopelessness. (69-70)

Repeatedly, Maracle's texts forward affection as the basis for respect – of Self and others – and the requirement for change, but one which is predicated on the ability to negotiate languages, cultures, and ideologies in the service of effective communication. Arguably the most painful section of *I Am Woman*, "Rusty," illustrates the obliteration of affection for women at all levels – external and internal – as the most destructive effect of a racism/sexism nexus. Marianne's experiences, fears, aggressions, motivations, pride, are all embodied in the voice of "Rusty," who states:

I have withstood quite well the insult to my womanliness that racism naturally gives rise to. It is common practice for white and non-white boys to acquire their first taste of sex at our expense. It is not required that anyone love us – we are by definition incapable of womanly love. It is aggressive sex that we get – passionate body language but no spiritual affection. (IAW, 61)

Learning to negotiate discursive, linguistic and cultural discrepancies, Marianne matures into her own position of ‘multi-lingualism’ where she can, most importantly, expect and receive the respect she deserves: as a woman, a Native, a person.

#### **4.6) Reclamation: Armstrong – ‘Soft Power’**

As the previous discussion of *Sundogs* illustrated, in Maracle’s texts, reclaiming and reconstructing empowering notions of native womanhood requires a certain fluency in the art of negotiation. This final section will consider Armstrong’s slightly different conception of ways in which Native womanhood can be reclaimed and reconstructed. Whereas Maracle evokes a notion of ‘lineage houses’ and focuses on the need to understand oneself in relation to one’s history, family and culture, Armstrong evokes a notion of ‘the feminine,’ introduced earlier in this chapter, that is incorporated into her notion of healing (as discussed in Chapter Three). To compare each writer’s approaches and summarize previous arguments, the following quotations will be helpful:

There are a number of amazing women struggling to re-create and re-build the family systems of our past. There are also a number of men struggling to re-create and re-build the political institutions and governing systems of the past. We do so in a terrible vacuum. (*IAW*, xi)

I have always thought of my larger community as those who choose a way of life which protects and treasures the splendor of difference, as a way to carry health in a non-adversarial approach to being human. (Armstrong, Quote in Harjo, 498)

The internalized racism and sexism against which Maracle struggles is clearly named in the above quotation as that which deepens the problems created by a rupture from the past, from traditional institutions, from cultural learning, causing the uncertainty that impedes action. Though Armstrong’s statement does not contradict Maracle’s, its emphasis is on co-operation as the integral ingredient for attaining health and moving forward. Notably, Armstrong also names her “larger community” as one that prioritizes

and protects diversity; the parameters and criteria for that community remain unclear, motivating one to interpret Armstrong's vision as potentially inclusive of all peoples given an optimally healthy social environment.

This conceptual shift in Armstrong's work links health most decidedly with survival. Remembering the problematic set up by Spivak and Emberley regarding the location of Native women's voices within imperialistic and patriarchal discourses, Armstrong's work uses "discourse as a means of survival" (O'Neill/Boyle). Her novels, *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadows*, negotiate essentialist and constructivist arguments to strategically adapt traditional notions of Native womanhood and implicitly address the paradox of non-Native peoples appropriating First Nations' stories, voices, cultural practices, while failing to "appreciate or...recognise that these things of beauty arise out of the beauty of [First Nations] people" (Armstrong, "The Disempowerment," 240). A central distinction between Native and non-Native ideologies and practices in Armstrong's work is summarized in the following passage:

The concept of colonization of one group of people by another group of people lies outside the understanding of those whose language and philosophy strive for co-operation and harmony wherever possible with *all* things, as a *necessary* means to survival. It is impossible to dominate or coerce another when these basic principles are childhood requisites in the learning of a social order. Traditionally, it was women who controlled and shaped that societal order to the state of harmony, which in this time of extreme disorder seems nearly impossible. ("Invocation," ix-x)

All of Armstrong's and Maracle's texts challenge the erasure of First Nations peoples by asserting and affirming Self(-ves) and identities through the strategic employment of language and discourse that undermines appropriators' establishment of a "coercive" value system that privileges their version of 'truth' over all others'; what Armstrong

offers more specifically is a notion of 'soft power' that focuses criticism of binaries on holistic health framed by 'feminine' characteristics.

Building upon previous argumentation, research and writing that emphasizes the positions of power held by, and respect afforded to, pre-colonial Native women provides a useful anchor – for shattering persistent images of degradation and silence – in its effort to redefine the valuation procedures of colonizing discourses. Janice Acoose/ Misko Kisikawihkwe explains:

our cultures became closed and static, albeit they were once inclusive of and supported and strengthened by Indigenous women's full participation; progressively adaptive to new ideas; flexible in terms of social, political, and economic evolution; and distinguished from one another. Our once community- and consensually-based ways of governance, social organization, and economic practices were stripped of their legitimacy and authority by white christian males, who imposed an ideologically contracting hierarchical structure. (Acoose: 1995, 46-47)

In Armstrong's texts, the strategic invocation of gender-specific sites of strength help refigure dualistic relationships between people to be integrative rather than simply inverted. They also illustrate Anderson's argument: "I think we can be selective in our use of tradition because, like our ancestors, we must work with those things that suit our present reality," which is particularly important for women, when "many of our own Indigenous traditions have been twisted to meet western patriarchal hegemony" (Anderson, 36). Rather than romanticize the equality of pre-colonial gender relations, Armstrong focuses on changes created by a paternalistic state, and evokes "traditional approaches which inform modern solutions [to] provide a source of strength and truth [that] combat[s] generations of misinformation" (Currie, 151). Within this context, the practical differences that Armstrong does ascribe to women focus emphatically on "family stability" and healing (Williamson, 12):

Because the women are the central backbone of the family and of the next generation, a healing in terms of ourselves first needs to be understood by Native women and carried out before healing in the family and outward to the rest of the community can take place. (9)

Though this passage is essentialist in tone, Armstrong's distinction between men and women relies upon the roles women play rather than the 'inherent' ability of any particular group of people. As illustrated by Penny in *Whispering in Shadows* and Maeg in *Slash*, Armstrong faces the difficult task of delineating and embracing the significance of motherhood without re-inscribing biological essentialism. Describing Okanagan culture Armstrong states:

The culture doesn't separate by gender – though it recognizes that certain things are attached to male and female out of necessity – but in terms of who we are, what we do, and how we think and feel, and gender doesn't have anything to do with how well we do things or how as human beings we connect to one another. (14)

Though women's capabilities and strengths inevitably involve biological aspects, Armstrong argues that those aspects are most usefully appreciated as roles played rather than intrinsic skills enacted: "I was told that as a woman I would bear the children. I had the prime responsibility to be sure that I was in control enough of my own life to be able to provide for them" (12). Here, Armstrong's use of the term 'control' suggests a working understanding of Self in personal, family, and community contexts, that provides alternate means of conceptualizing identity. In conjunction with her emphasis on co-operation and reconciliation, Armstrong's assertion of women's need for control disrupts the discourse of reductive biological productivity by infusing her conception of health and productivity with a constructed notion of strength as well as of femininity that is required by both men and women.

#### 4.7) *Slash: (Gendered) Bodies and Health*

Just as “[c]leaning out our individual and collective metaphoric houses [might be considered] Maracle’s strategy for undoing colonialism in Canada” (Warley, 74), founding ‘houses’ on health is Armstrong’s strategy for surviving destruction. In each instance, the physical body is the central player in negotiating essentialism to arrive at strength. For Armstrong, the body figures as that which acts through healing: in *Slash*, Tommy Kelasket survives a series of emotional and physical challenges to be able to begin, at the novel’s end, a life as someone for whom “defeat is a stranger and pain an everyday reality” (*Slash*, 253); in *Whispering in Shadows*, Penny loses her fight against cancer but inspires others to appreciate her conviction in the centrality of relations – human, environmental, spiritual – and of one’s interactive place in each context. Where Maracle laments the scarcity of tools necessary for “the re-construction of our houses” (*IAW*, x), she joins Armstrong in pointing to her physical self as a site of strength:

The tools I pick up are rooted in my body. My body, conservative and cautious though it is, desires liberation. The heart, the body, the spirit of me sense something and my mind strives to name it. Understanding – what I am standing under – challenges me to re-create the tools inside. The systemic breakdown Indigenous women suffer from was predicated on the same fundamental lies which plague all women in the world today. Women are not deserving of power because we are emotional beings, beings who are incapable of ‘objective, rational’ thinking. This is especially true of Native women, whose cultures require that we put our hearts and minds together in the thinking process. (xi)

Locating power in the (female) body carries the potential to both perpetuate and confound stereotypes; as a physical structure, indelibly marked by biology, the “body is of course essentialism’s great text” (Spivak: 1993, 2), pervasively used to legitimate the “fundamental lies” (*IAW*. xi) of Native women’s inequity. As active movers rather than passive consumers, however, female bodies are positively redefined in Armstrong’s and Maracle’s texts. Because combating derogatory notions of women as receptacles for

production draws upon the same discourse of biological primacy, strategic use of ‘body discourse’ – linked to ownership in Maracle’s concept of the “lineage house” wherein the ‘I’ is both physical and metaphysical (being and thinking); and to “the essence of being human” (Armstrong & Cardinal, 14) in Armstrong’s concept of co-operation – is necessary to re-claim the value of physicality without separating it from the “complete and total process [of] thinking” (Lutz: 1991, 172).

Interestingly, Armstrong’s and Maracle’s conception of feminism resonate, in this instance, with Hélène Cixous’ in characterizing the binary oppositions underlying European “literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection” as a battleground, whereupon resolution always means “the same thing: things get hierarchical” (Cixous, 578, 579). In response, Cixous proposes a radical ‘re-visioning’ of Self/Other by merging notions of Self with “an abundance of the other, of variety” (581):

There have always been those uncertain, poetic persons who have not let themselves be reduced to dummies programmed by pitiless repression of the homosexual element. Men or women: beings who are complex, mobile, open. Accepting the other sex as a component makes them much richer, more various, stronger, and – to the extent that they are mobile – very fragile. It is only in this condition that we invent. Thinkers, artists who create new values,...inventors and wreckers of concepts and forms, those who change life cannot help but be stirred by anomalies – complementary or contradictory. (581)

In relation to Armstrong specifically, Cixous’ concern with increased diversity as facilitated through women (“in the movement of a text that divides itself...regroups, remembers itself, is a proliferating, maternal femininity” (581)) bears interesting similarity to Armstrong’s interest in “the feminine aspect of power” (Williamson, 8): the “empowerment of people through love, and compassion, and spirituality” which she considers “fundamental to our thought as humans, and the real humanity in us” (Lutz: 1991, 18). Though Cixous focuses on sexuality and Armstrong on gender, both seek to

exceed and thereby disempower models of oppositionality by exploiting the complexity in each mode of difference; in building upon and transforming ideas of the body, they concurrently reformulate discourses of ownership, resistance, and power by prioritizing complexity, flux, and radical processes of creativity over singular, reductive dualism.

As explored in previous discussion, Maracle's conception of complexity involves immaterial connections to the past – ancestors, grandmothers, creation – that strengthen affirming connections to the present and precede material improvements for the future. Armstrong's conception is not dissimilar, but its focus on “how this feminine process can work in healing both the world and the individuals in the world, including males” (Williamson, 8), aligns complexity and difference with complementarity and cooperation in a perhaps paradoxical effort to confront gender-based inequities and overcome gender distinctions with a gendered concept of health. Yet Armstrong navigates this paradox by focusing on the endpoint of particular ways of thinking, and on adopting the discourse most likely to ensure empowerment, rather than on naming the process. *Slash*, narrated by a male protagonist with the express purpose of exploring the diverse experiences and repercussions of A.I.M., raises difficult questions about the representation of gender. When asked her reason for using a male protagonist, Armstrong speaks of the very sexism against which the project of *Slash*, seeking continuities, speaks:

One of the practical reasons that I chose a male character was the politics at that time – the Native male was at the forefront and engendered the thought of the American Indian movement. There were a lot of things wrong with this, including the male ego and a displaced philosophy regarding what role the Native woman played. I raged against this at the time, as did many Native women, because we knew it was wrong and false and that any movement forward for Native people, any healing, needed to reconcile this. (Williamson, 14)

The sexism experienced in Armstrong's communities during the novel's historical timeframe is also the central reason Armstrong provides for privileging a male



perspective. Feminist literary critics have published concerns with the novel's treatment of gender: in addition to having a male protagonist, *Slash* presents two important female characters, both of whom prove central to Tommy's personal and political development, but neither of whom survives. Mardi – highly astute, politically active, and formative to Slash's developing political consciousness – “disappears” from the narrative, presumably lost in a political battle that is increasingly bloody but without foreseeable victory, leaving a sacrificial trace (*Slash*, 195). Maeg, likewise, offers Slash a required complement and helps him continue mining his accumulated insight and revised perspectives, but dies – after giving birth to a son, who arguably signifies the grandchildren Armstrong names as the desired audience – leaving the trace of a martyr.

But in response to criticism of *Slash*'s representation of women, criticism focusing on the fact of a male protagonist and the resulting mediation of females through the title character, it is imperative to remember the representation of Native women in non-Native texts – as “powerful Mother-Goddess, source of all wisdom, accessible through Shamanic initiation” – against which Armstrong writes (Godard: 1990, 206).<sup>44</sup> Contrasting ritualistic rite, the health for which Armstrong struggles is grounded in “the reconciliation of both male and female and the wholeness and healthiness of who we are as human beings” (Williamson, 19). The characterization of Maeg helps support this, drawing ‘tradition,’ cross-generational collaboration, ‘soft power’ and non-aggression into one, and acting with “a deep respect and understanding of what she did” while appearing

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<sup>44</sup> Barbara Godard argues that Armstrong “has engaged in a hidden polemic with the discourse of white feminists” by disrupting the representation of Native women “as the mystical, oracular wise woman” and providing, instead, actual women struggling with actual material and political conditions (Godard: 1990, 206, 207). Godard's articles outline ways in which “the Canadian feminist movement... has invested so heavily in the representations of Native women as it develops a ‘radical’ feminism” (206). Unfortunately, these representations cannot be properly discussed within the confines of this project, but Godard's

*unexpectational* (Slash, 227). When she meets Slash at a meeting concerning uranium excavation on sacred sites, Maeg is careful not to misrepresent herself as an “expert...know[ing] something about Indian ways that [she] do[esn’t]”; instead, she speaks the words of her mother, “a medicine person, very well respected and known for her wise counsel to people” (226):

‘My people,’ she said, ‘My mother has a suggestion you might find worthwhile. She suggests that we approach this whole question in an Indian way. We are not aggressors. We must simply resist for as long as we can the kind of destruction we are talking about here. Resistance must mean we will not participate in destruction and that we will inform as many people of our resistance as possible...It is the resistance of our forefathers and the continued resistance of our fathers that has left us with something to call ours. It was not negotiating on our rights to this land. They can pass any legislation they want but they know and we know that the land belongs to us unless we sell it out for money. As long as we don’t sell it out we still own the land, and we shall retain the right to resist destruction of it and of the people and living things on it. Thank you.’ (225)

Through this statement, Maeg invokes the “Indian way” but refuses her own authority, simultaneously gesturing towards and repudiating essentialist discourse. This speech also signals the beginning of her significant role in facilitating Slash’s movement to a position of ‘wholeness’ – a movement Armstrong describes as “an important one for males” (Lutz: 1991, 18) – by integrating resistance with non-aggression, and ‘Indian ways’ with respect and balance (rather than a fetishized version of ceremony and spirituality). Playing this central role confounds Maeg’s narrative displacement as a supporting character; in conjunction, Maeg’s explicitly public activity confounds the images of isolated shaman performing acts in secrecy, and both assert a female position of strength that cannot be subsumed under a range of generic expectations.

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argument that the ‘white’ feminist community requires “strong women as the primordial focus of ‘good’ women’s writing” (206) is important for contextualizing Armstrong’s work.

Another striking aspect of Armstrong's explanation for a male protagonist joins the sexism in A.I.M. with the protection of voice. After completing extensive research into the historical period (as noted in Chapter Three), Armstrong began to consider "whose story" *Slash* would be (Williamson, 18):

It couldn't be one person's story because no one person could have experienced all those things...Even at that point, I hadn't decided on male or female. I could have had powerful female characters, but female leaders in the American Indian movement were very few and unique in terms of personality and development. I didn't want to be untruthful and emulate one of those very rare and beautiful individuals like Anna-May Aquash and other women who are still alive at this time. But I didn't want to be dishonest and create a general female character because I know the powerful role those unique females played and I didn't want to mess with that. (19)

Thus using a male protagonist satisfies a practical representative concern (the fact that more men than women were involved in A.I.M.), but it also attends to the problem of appropriation of voice: with so little female presence and so much documentation of the period, in Armstrong's possession, the risk of creating a fictional character too close to an actual person is great. To avoid telling an individual woman's story in the guise of fiction, Armstrong focuses instead on the racism/sexism interface within and beyond the movement; relating the history through a male lens heavily modified by his female relationships, Armstrong endeavours to "present an alternative" (14) that inspires all people to consider both pedagogy and practice based on balance and health rather than antagonism and opposition.

As an explicitly instructive tool, *Slash* provides important socio-historical insight into a diversity of socio-political approaches to and ideas about First Nations' peoples in a relatively contemporary Canada. Within this, gender constructions and stereotypes are challenged; though no book should be read uncritically and the representation of women in *Slash* begs further examination, the text itself functions as a significant attempt to heal

through criticism of “the male ego and a displaced philosophy regarding what role the Native women played” (14). The process of the text, also, provides rich ground for Armstrong herself “to uncover...what [her] own hang-ups were in terms of the male role in Native society” (14), and demonstrate those findings as part of a growing body of published philosophies from within First Nations communities. Armstrong feels that as the novel ends, *Slash* “moves a lot closer to the philosophy which allows changes in the male role. That’s where the concentration of work has to be done” (14); in a context of patriarchal power structures, Maracle speaks to male power in an attempt to understand and trouble it, and help others transform it, by unearthing/ deconstructing sexism and exploring/ appreciating the richness of diversity reconciled in single bodies. Evocatively, Armstrong states: “[s]exism – whether you’re male or female – is against doing it differently” (15). A central part of her attempt to “do[] it differently” involves modeling the alternative and believing in its effectiveness:

I wanted to give my grandchildren what I felt, and what others felt through that time. I wanted to give it to them from our perspective, as truthfully as I could. I wanted to be able to hand it on. I wanted them to know the heart of the people during that time. (Lutz: 1991, 14-15)

The collective – “our” – aspect of perspective is consistently emphasized in Armstrong’s texts, just as, above, the focus on her own feelings is directly linked to a collective experience wherein gender distinctions are less important than co-operation between all differentials. Emberley, speaking to the spectre of racism in un-self-critical feminist practices “within the structure of internal colonialism when the specificity of gender and sexism is removed from the larger social context,” cites the controversy *Slash*’s male protagonist inspired at the Third Annual Feminist Book Fair conference, Montreal, June 1988 as an example of conflict that becomes divisive when race is not theorized in

conjunction with gender (Emberley: 1993, 148). Armstrong's difficult alignment of gendered characteristics with the potential health of all people, and her focus on process in change rather than discourse and language ('female power'; 'soft power'), might be considered – appropriately – part of a larger discourse of identity. This broadened discourse struggles with the same negotiations demonstrated throughout this thesis, of having to effect actual change with the simultaneous use and deconstruction of impractical, illusive, insufficient language, and can perhaps be usefully mapped onto a dialogue between theory and practice.

#### **4.8) *Whispering in Shadows***

The representation of gender in *Whispering in Shadows*, Armstrong's second novel (2000), conspicuously diverges from that in *Slash*: the protagonist is a woman whose affirming identity comes into shape through her exploration of race/ gender intersections, and her simultaneous negotiation of personal and political roles. Like *Slash*, however, the novel presents a framework within which to conceive of identity as both community- and individual-based, and to recognize – but seek to make complementary – gender differences. The fact and use of creativity is integral to *Whispering in Shadows*, and is foregrounded as necessary to achieving and sustaining health and balance. Near the end of her life, Penny maximizes time spent with family and minimizes time spent on both political and artistic work; she discovers comfort in understanding “change as the natural outcome of any creative process” and balance as a way of creating change “in a deliberate, mutually beneficial pattern as an enrichment process” (Armstrong & Cardinal, 18):

In those long days that followed, days caught like bits of silk thread on blackberry branches, in those brief and momentary flashes of brightness lost among greenness, she could sometimes find herself. (WS, 277)

Armstrong describes “the unique creative process used by Native people [as] one which could make a necessary contribution to the thinking of many peoples” (8); dramatizing this argument through Penny, whose creativity is used politically and artistically to evoke reflection among herself and others, Armstrong also demonstrates the argument through her own text which juxtaposes exposition with poetry to challenge multiple ideological and literary conceptions.

This focus on creativity helps expand the parameters of ‘creative work’ to encompass both political activism and philosophical inquiry. Penny’s negotiation of identity – involving her diverse types of work (discussed in Chapter Two) – also involves identifying as a woman, a Native person, and a human being; her combined work focuses on substantiating the last (the broadest identifying frame) through creatively applying the special knowledge gained by the first two. The text is markedly woman-centered and clearly evokes the sexism of the larger context, but Penny’s relationships with Native and non-Native men and women all contribute to her developing philosophy of complementarity that helps her combat the “deep and silent rage” she feels “somehow complicit in, simply by being” (*WH*, 184). It is significant that this rage is increased and contextualized through a political trip to Mexico – which also becomes a foundation for the direction of her painting – where she becomes better able to conceive of and formulate the terms and effects of global economic politics as a successor of colonialism. Out of her despair comes hope, but the hope is framed within the work and creativity of all people. Articulating her emerging thoughts to David, Penny states:

Somehow, together as human beings, we have become a force. A large movement of change. Maybe change which is now inevitable...It seems to me that the most basic of instincts instructs us to yearn for peace and health. Cooperation provides a better chance. Everything in nature counts on this and learns it or perishes...I

believe that peace is survival...And so we must continue to find ways to increase the possibility of this happening wherever we can. (188-189)

This goal of co-operation, of creatively and co-operatively communicating across Selves, is also reflected in her relationship with David. Eventually working in conjunction with Penny, David actually represents her (while she is sick, unable to speak) at a forum that, itself, reflects collaboration – “a coalition and strategy meeting of church, environment and Indian organizations against commodification of the sacred” (254). As demonstrated in this instance, creativity is required for making connections across diverse topics, issues, problems, demands, and having to imagine one’s own subject-position through the perspective of another’s to settle on common priorities through a diversity of approaches.

Conversely, Penny’s cancer becomes metaphorically aligned with imbalance and destruction of harmony through multiple forms of exploitation; that exploitation results from a lack a collaboration between stakeholders, and a lack of creativity in asserting one set of particular interests (in this case, economic) over all others (environmental, social, cultural, etc.) without recognizing myriad trails of interconnection. Yet Penny’s death is portrayed as more affirming than hopeless as her healing goes beyond the physical Self to effect the spirit. Following Penny’s last letter to Gard – a writer she meets by chance, with whom she shares the difficulty of negotiating creative processes with interpersonal relationships – which, in her reaching out, provides a final indication of the importance of connections between all people, the narrative shifts to poetic fragments and descriptive prose. In the unsent letter to Gard, Penny relates:

*I wanted to tell you how much I have appreciated your words. Your mind. Your integrity...I wanted to tell you something I think you alone can understand. I should have painted what I saw. I should have let the images come out which shouted at me. I could’ve gotten it to a better place. I knew that putting images out there changes the world, yet I feared the shadows. I know now that one should not*

*fear them...I should have shown you that saints and sinners are alike, too, in everything under the sun. It's all in the story and how it unfolds. (293)*

Though feeling that her work is left undone, Penny perhaps more importantly comes to understand the strength of her own thinking, and the potential for change in its practice, without denying the power of fear that requires overcoming. Feeling this affinity with a man, little known, demonstrates an overcoming of gender boundaries that is particularly striking against her parallel affinity with Tupa, her grandmother. Recalling Tupa's practice of burying copper as a process of attaining medicine, Penny's thoughts leave the reader with three short passages converging on the strength of women, the earth, and solace, that illustrate Penny's attainment of a spiritual 'balance':

Copper is what the mountain was called. It was a woman. She was radiant when she took the colour of the sun and she pursued for her beauty but she had more to offer. She had a vast love for humans. The ones who dreamed... (294)

Momma called, her voice coming from far away.

Penny sat in the willows by the creek watching tiny spotted fishes darting around....

"Wait, I want to stay just a little longer".... (295)

I said that I would  
give my flesh back  
but instead my flesh  
will offer me up  
and feed the earth  
and she will  
love me. (296)

Just as Armstrong leaves her reader with images of the strength – in women, and the earth; in both solace and community – reflected in the words and memories of grandmothers, this thesis ends with a thought about creativity broadly. Creativity's integral role in processes of mobilizing, adapting, and expressing the strengths Armstrong and Maracle invoke becomes particularly important when effective change is envisioned as necessarily always in progress. To continually move beyond 'end-points' and circle



back to converse, creativity is demanded in multiple senses. Both writers provide fertile and evocative ways of thinking about the continual disruption of 'ends' as liberating rather than disorienting and productive rather than blindly recurring, showing that consistent and vigorous questions interrupt one another, defy stagnancy, instill motion, and change.

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