

## REWRITING HISTORY, POST-COLONIALITY AND FEMINISM: LEE MARACLE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORKS

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### ABSTRACT

Lee Maracle's *I Am Woman* (1988) and *Bobbi Lee. Indian Rebel* (1990) are autobiographical works that rewrite the conventions of representing the Native in the context of Canadian history and society. Through her autobiographical "I", Maracle narrates herself as political representative for women and for the Métis.

This essay aims to investigate Maracle's political displacement of conventional representational practices. The importance of *LAW&BLIR* to revisionary historiography is that both works document the struggle of Natives today within a history of resistance. Writing from a position of "cultural siege", "under occupation", Maracle analyzes her position as a Native woman within an active struggle of decolonialization. Hers is a new history and historiography different from both white writing on the Native and traditional Native "historical", oral narratives. It is the history of struggle in the 1960s and 1970s in a hybrid narrative mode. As we shall argue, this is history as narrating, as telling, in traditional native fashion, but within recognizable dates and events and the conventions of "colonial" history.

Post-colonialism is simultaneously (or variously) a geographical site, an existential condition, a political reality, a textual practice, and the emergent or dominant global culture (or counter-culture). The post-colonial is a dynamic and flourishing methodology in the current domain of literary and cultural theorization. Post-colonial critics recognize that texts are involved necessarily in the making of cultural meanings which are always, finally, political meanings, they insist however that culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production and that texts are inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception in history.

Nevertheless, it would not be fair to acknowledge, in total agreement with Stephen Slemon, that post-colonialism could easily be re-defined today not as an actual, locatable activity but as a Western discursive practice. Agency is given wholly over to the colonizers who initiate in essence not only the colonial project but also the post-colonial one. Slemon writes:

The concept [post-colonialism] proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once-colonized nations but rather when it locates an anti- or 'post'-colonial 'discursive' purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations. (Adam & Tiffin eds. 1991,3)

In his seminal 1983 essay, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," Homi K. Bhabha stated a fundamental remark within the context of the politics of difference:

The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power. I do not wish to conflate, unproblematically, two forms of the marking –and splitting– of the subject not to globalize two forms of representation. I want to suggest, however that there is a theoretical space and a political place for such an *articulation* –in the sense in which that word itself denies an "original" identity or a "singularity" to objects of difference– sexual or racial. (1992,313)

This "articulation of forms of difference" that, in Bhabha's words, denies or at least puts in question the idea of an "original" identity echoes the post-structuralist attack on the unified, self-present and self-transparent *cogito*, thus rendering difficult the simplistic assumptions underlying a call to define specific post-colonial identities. The concept of identity has become suspect in recent anti-essentialist theorizations that have problematized the Cartesian notion of the subject. Jacques Derrida has displaced the subject along with other "transcendental signifieds" that have supposedly governed the play of signification within a cultural system from an assumed metaphysical center (Derrida 1972,249). Jacques Lacan has demonstrated the "subversion of the subject" as a function continually constituted and undermined in the chain of signifiers and in the "dialectic of desire" to which the self is subject-ed by its accession to language. (Lacan 1977, 292-325) In this essay, I would argue that within a Third-World context in which we could situate any claim to original identity, the postmodern announcement of the "death of the subject" sounds premature and betrays a complicity with world-capitalist systems that have already dispersed and cancelled out individual subjectivity. In an emergent culture like that of post-colonial peoples, the subject may represent a refuge and a source of resistance to hegemony. Andreas Huyssen in "Mapping the Postmodern" raises the questions of what subjectivity could mean precisely in the face of capitalist modernization:

Hasn't capitalist modernization itself fragmented and dissolved bourgeois subjectivity and authorship, thus making attacks on such notions somewhat quixotic? And...doesn't poststructuralism, where it simply denies the subject altogether, jettison the chance of challenging the 'ideology of the subject' (as male, white and middle-class) by developing alternative and different notions of subjectivity. (1984,44)

A certain Native American discourse of decolonization, I would argue, has held out for a counter-movement to modernist fragmentation and dissolution in its tendency to "develop alternative and different notions of subjectivity". In this discourse, far from having become obsolete, the subject has yet to come into its own.

On the first page of her autobiographical work *I Am Woman* (1988), Lee Maracle states, "The voices of the unheard cannot help but be of value," (1988,1) this could be interpreted as: reality is more accurately perceived from the bottom of a hierarchical society than it is from the top. Canadian Native women have been long ignored, often overtly silenced, and more often than not spoken for by white Canadians. At present, they are increasingly trying to be heard, to define themselves, to banish stereotypes and to write their own stories, "in which pain [does not have to be] our way of life" (1988,4). In doing so, they aim at potential directions towards a world in which oppression on the basis of sex, race, class or sexual orientation does not have to be a structural element in social relations. However, it seems evident that they have to start from a particular place in time and specific sociocultural circumstances; as Lee Maracle puts it "once we understand what kind of world they have created then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create" (1988,116). All this involves a detailed analysis of those oppressive forces that are ingrained in Canada's colonial history.

Some of the consequences of sexism, racism, and classism for Native women in Canadian society are documented in all of Lee Maracle's published works –so far, three volumes of narrative, two of poetry and a co-edited book– and in such books as Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973) or Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree* (1984), which illustrate the truth of Maracle's assertion that, like sexism, "racism is for us, not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives" (1988,2). At the present moment, it is absolutely evident the relationship of colonialism to sexism (Europeans constructed the different "races" they encountered in their colonialist and imperialist ventures as "inferior" and "savage" in order to exploit them economically; racism provided a justification, after the fact, for that exploitation [Memmi xxiii]).

Before approaching the analysis of Lee Maracle's autobiographical works, *Bobbi Lee. Indian Rebel* (1990) and *I Am Woman* (1988), some preliminary considerations should be made upon the nature and main features of the *self* portrayed in works other than those belonging to the Western tradition. Western concepts of the self are so thoroughly committed to notions of interiority and individualism that even Anthropology tends to construct the account of the varieties of selfhood as evolutionary narratives, telling stories of a progression from the social and public orientation of ancient or primitive self-conception (the self as social "person") to the modern, Western, "civilized", egocentric/individualist sense of self.

Marcel Mauss's classic 1938 essay, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; the Notion of Self" is interesting as long as it tells about the emergence of the *moi*, the Western post-romantic self as a milestone in the history of the West, as a construction that surpasses the models of ancient societies, non-Western societies and Native peoples, all those models that Mauss calls *personnage*. For Mauss, the

self-consciousness of these peoples was well defined by the etymology of the word *person* (*personne, personne*), from Latin *persona, per sonare*, as this referred to the mask through which the actor spoke his role in public. Not an individual with rights and responsibilities before the law (this must await the Roman addition of the right to a personal *praenomen*, or “forename”), the Native American was rather the representative of his ancestor or his clan, an actor who merely performed his appointed character. He (she was rarely at issue) knew nothing of that consciousness which is self-consciousness as an act of the *self*.

Later, in the nineteen forties and fifties, we get a redescription of the Native American sense of “self” by such writers as Dorothy Lee and George Devereux, among others. It was Devereux’s opinion that for the Native Americans, “maximum individuation and maximum socialization go hand in hand” (1967,291), while Lee concluded that Lakota cultures demonstrate “autonomy and community in transaction,” (1986,41) For both authors, Native Americans found a way to reconcile the Euro-American opposition between self and society.

In any event, it is very difficult to attempt to generalize about the Native American self from the scarce available studies. Nevertheless, Arnold Krupat states

that [Native American] self would seem to be less attracted to introspection, integration, expansion, or fulfilment than the Western self appears to be. It would seem relatively uninterested in such things as the ‘I-am-Me’ experience, and a sense of uniqueness or individuality. More positively, one might perhaps instantiate an I-am-We experience as descriptive of the Native sense of self, where such a phrase indicates that I understand myself as a self only in relation to the coherent and bounded whole of which I am a part. (1990,174)

Krupat, basing his argument on the linguistic relations that certain rhetorical figures draw up in discourse, suggests that metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony, may be taken as a model of the relations that hold between the individual and society and so may provide terms for a theory of self-conception in the texts we call autobiographies. Due to our interest, we will focus on metonymy and synecdoche. Krupat points out that both rhetorical figures involve relations of part-to-part and part-to-whole respectively. Thus, where autobiographical accounts are marked by the individual’s sense of him/herself predominantly in relation to other distinct individuals, one might speak of a metonymic sense of self; where narration of personal history is more nearly marked by the individual’s sense of him/herself in relation to collective social units or groupings, one might speak of a synecdochic sense of self. Following this line of argument, Krupat holds that, “Native American autobiography has been and continues to be persistently synecdochic, and that the preference for synecdochic models of the self has relations to the oral techniques of information transmission typical of Native American culture.” (1990,178)

Linking up with our subject, in her autobiographical works *I Am Woman* (1988) and *Bobbi Lee. Indian Rebel* (1990), Lee Maracle elaborates a synecdochic sense of self and produces her particular “I” out of a close relationship with her community. *Bobbi Lee* is the first work she wrote, though in fact it was published after the second part of her autobiography *I Am Woman*. *Bobbi Lee* is the product of Maracle’s close collaboration with her editor Don Barnett, president of the Liberation Support Movement, fellow-member of the Native Study Group and socialist activist. Maracle dedi-

cates the two volumes of her autobiography to the memory of Barnett, who died in 1975. In her prologue to *Bobbi Lee*, she points out that there are two voices in the pages of this book, hers and Don Barnett's:

In the end, the voice that reached the paper was Don's, the information alone was mine./ At the time, I did not know enough to do it myself, nor argue him out of the way in which my life was presented (...) What began as a class to learn how to do other people's life history, turned into a project to do my own." (1990,19)

We are thus facing a complex text, the product of a collaboration, a special modality of writing essentially bicultural. *Bobbi Lee* narrates the history of Maracle from her childhood until the feverish political activity of the nineteen eighties. As Jeanette Armstrong writes in her preface to Maracle's book, "This book spoken and then edited into written form, is reflective of the wonderful orality that the spoken version must have been delivered in" (1990,15). As a matter of fact, *Bobbi Lee* retains a multitude of signs of orality and grows out of the tradition of Native story-telling that, in one of her latest books, Maracle defines as follows:

Our story-telling is much different from the European story. Like in a European story there is a plot—that is, something happens, events occur, characters are caught in a dilemma—and there is a conclusion. The difference is that the reader is as much a part of the story as the teller. Most of our stories don't have orthodox "conclusions"; that is left to the listeners, who we trust will draw useful lessons from the story—not necessarily the lessons we wish them to draw, but tall conclusions are considered valid. The listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it" (1990b,11-12)

Moreover, Maracle acknowledges, "Always I clung to the principles of oratory" (1990b, 11). *Bobbi Lee* and *I Am Woman* share the assumption underlying Native oral narratives, according to which, and in Maracle's words, "As listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose." (1990b,13)

In *Bobbi Lee* there is a chronological succession of Maracle's life episodes with no interruptions to intercalate stories of other people as occurs in *I Am Woman*. The epilogue works as a special chapter in which the whole narration is so far revised. Maracle attempts to fill in the gaps of her memory and warns us readers of the continuation of the partial portrait of moments of her life in *I Am Woman*: "...I picked up *Bobbi Lee* and realized how unreliable a child's memory is. I was a child when this book first hit the press, at least in the sense I was not an adult (...) The epilogue is intended to fill in the missing pieces that came alive in my memory through the long process of unravelling that began in 1975 the year I realized I was too young to write *Volume Two* with any accuracy" (1990,200-201). In the epilogue, Maracle informs her readers of the events prior to the publication of her first book. *Bobbi Lee* was first printed in 1975. At that time, Maracle felt, "paralysed by huge amounts of garbage collected for some twenty-five years" (1990,199). The terribly painful process of writing this text, made her refuse straightforwardly to embark upon a second volume,

and her manuscript found its way to an old box where it lay buried year after year, “until my memories came back and I could be sure of who I really was” (1990,199).

The epilogue of the book, made up as a mosaic of intertwined memories collapses the chronological order and combines personal circumstances with revolutionary thinking and political activism on the side of the struggle of Native peoples and minorities who have been marginalized in Canada’s recent history. Maracle’s portrayal develops a synecdochic sense of self, in such a way that we would never be able to understand her personal history apart from inscribed in the ups and downs of the intrahistory of the Native Canadian Movement.

During her adolescence Maracle realizes that there are no books written by Natives in the libraries. She also explains the gestation of revolutionary thinking that, on the part of Native communities in Canada, enormously encouraged interracial solidarity among minorities. From the nineteen sixties onwards, Maracle learns that Indian thinking is plural –“We are all Indians, one people with many cultures. Thinking of all sorts blossomed among us. A ground swell, a tide, everywhere in the country little groups of Red Power youth were springing up. I remember thinking what a miracle the Indian way of being was” (1990,208-209)– and she actively participates in its construction and in the Indian political struggle. So, in *Bobbi Lee* chapters VI, IX and XI, Maracle tells of the arousal of her political awareness during her stay in Toronto, her contribution to the establishing of the National Alliance for Red Power (NARP), and her readings and group discussions of Marxist and Maoist texts, as well as of anti-racist texts such as Fanon’s classics *Black Skin, White Mask* and *Wretched of the Earth*. She also writes about the relations of the Native Movement with other leftist organizations such as the Progressive Worker’s Movement (PWM), Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) and even the U.S. Civil Rights Movement with Martin Luther King as its leader.

Maracle’s thinking is shaped through her reading of Fanon, particularly from his ideas on Native/settler relations, and Marx, adapting both of them to the postcolonial situation. Drawing from their theorizations, she states, “That the revolutionary proletariat of today is mainly in the super-exploited Third World and not in Canada and other rich capitalist countries (...) my experience made it impossible for me to think about Canadian or American workers liberating Indians and humanizing the system” (1990,196)

The practice of writing runs parallel to Maracle’s political activism. Side by side the pamphletary writing designed as her contribution to political concentrations and demonstrations, she starts the task of artistic creation. First of all the urgency of putting a life into words, poems and stories in the line of the Native tradition will come later. Maracle declares, “I began writing stories about this time to save my sanity. Poetry and the comfort of my diaries –my books of madness I called them– where truth rolled out of my inner self, began to re-shape me (...) I became a woman through my words” (1990,230).

In her second autobiographical work, *I Am Woman* (1988), Lee Maracle extensively analyzes the situation of the Native within the context of a politics of decolonization and demonstrates how marginality has been constructed by the hegemonic forces of imperialism and capitalism. The emergence of this counter-discourse on colonialism as a contestatory politics of representation is patent in the change of form developed by Maracle, she turns the romance quest into autobiographical mode, imitating –and displacing– the dominant genres in which the “imaginary Native” has been represented. As I will try to illustrate, *I Am Woman* is a pre-



eminently historical narrative which seeks to deconstruct and re-write the colonial history of Native peoples in Canada. Hers is a new history and historiography different from both white writing on the Native and traditional Native “historical”, oral narratives.

Colonialism, the resulting oppressions, and their effects on Native people provide the background for Lee Maracle’s *I Am Woman* (1988). *IAW* is a self-published book. On the back of the title page of this volume one is directed only to “Write-On Publishers Ltd. 1988”, a publisher set up for the occasion. It is evident that Maracle wants no mediators between herself and her potential readers and strives to overcome the coercive powers of the dominant literary institution which would make her “speak it right” either by refusing to publish her text or by shaping it through the editorial process to fit the conventions of Native life-writing, as happened to Maria Campbell’s novel *Halfbreed*. In the acknowledgements section she expresses her debt to “Native people, Palestinians, Chileans, Philipinos, Eritreans, Ethiopians, El Salvadorans, Anti-apartheid activists and Black Canadian and American people” (Maracle iv). Maracle foregrounds the context in which her text is inscribed as one of anti-imperialist resistance to the dominant white, Westernized and elitist literary institutions.

Dennis A. Maracle, publisher of *IAW* opens the book with a brief introduction illustrated by the decentralizing rhetoric of the journey:

This book is a journey. A journey down a path that is at the same time: thick with the dust of the ages; clear, virgin, untrodden; strewn with the refuse and casualties that are the trademarks of colonialism-cum-imperialism (....) [*IAW* is] a significant contribution to our collective search for a path to re-gain our humanity. (Maracle 1988, x-xi)

The publisher reminds us of the multiplicity of voices and stories that find place in the book, “The voices and stories of our grandmothers, the dispossessed, the lost and confused, the dead rebels, the hopeful energetic youth, channelled through the pen of one recently de-colonized woman” (Maracle 1988, x).

On the first chapter Maracle tells us about the difficult material conditions in which she writes: “Scribble...scribble...scribble...I gathered up a host of paper napkins, brown bags and other deadwood paraphernalia, most would call garbage on which I had scribbled the stories that people gave me and worked them up for publication” (Maracle 1988,1). She writes with passion and engagement, addressing “the Native people in desperate circumstances, who need to recover the broken threads of their lives” (Maracle 1988,11). Maracle does not intend to write for the European and European descendants established in their land.

In *IAW*, Maracle sets up to narrate stories, mostly from women and children that have stepped in and out of her life and whose single common thread is the fact that “racism is for us, not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives” (Maracle 1988,2). Self-conscious of her literary effort, Maracle defines the project of her book as a composite of stories of her life, stories of other’s lives and some pure fabrications of her imagination, discriminating fiction from non-fiction and stating that even in the autobiographical genre, “Hindsight is always slightly fictitious” (Maracle 1988,4).

While there are many continuities between Maracle’s work and the earlier cultural productions of Native women, notably in the strategic use of the miscellany, of

traditional oral narrative forms, *IW* explicitly situates itself as writing of resistance, and historically, within the project of the contemporary Indian movement. Moreover, as we noticed before, our text is located within publishing projects run by Natives to diffuse their self-representations. No longer locked into silence as a discrete oral event or within the confines of a Native language, *IW*, written in English, takes as its interlocutor the dominant tradition in a polemic which is overtly conspicuous within the text.

Embedded within the historical and material conditions of their production as a politicized challenge to conventional literary standards, resistance narratives are examples of what Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia” and Barbara Harlow defines as texts with “composite forms as historical document, ideological analysis and visions of future possibilities.” (Harlow 1987,75,99)

Resistance writing draws attention to itself and to literature in general as a political and politicized activity. As Harlow asserts, it requires an immediate and direct involvement in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production (Harlow 1987,28) As Abdul JanMohamed has observed, this political engagement is concomitant with “formal experimentation.” (quoted in Harlow 1987,96) Narrative is a way of exploring history and questioning the historical narratives of the colonizer which have violently interposed themselves in place of the history of the colonized. Experimentation, especially with structures of chronology, is part of this challenge, a radical questioning of historiographical versions of the past as developed in the “master narratives” in order to rewrite the historical ending (Harlow 1987,85-6).

Another remarkable characteristic of resistance literature is that it be produced within a struggle for decolonization. Contemporary history is the history of decolonization, the struggle to rewrite history by those without a history (Harlow 1987,4). History as a discipline has been predominantly the story of what the white man did, histories of colonialism written by imperialists. At present, the awareness of the dialectical relations of the role of culture and cultural resistance as part of a large struggle for liberation has involved theorizing different strategies and practices for the writers of these resisting texts. Moreover, they may as well write from positions of exile or under occupation (Harlow 1987,2-3). This latter is the more complex, setting up a within/without posture for the writer in struggle under “cultural siege.”

Resistance literature takes up a position which explores the interference of a struggle for power on the transmission of a cultural tradition. It takes as its starting point the radical fact of its present situation as the culture of a colony. This insistence on the “‘here-and-now’ of historical reality and its conditions of possibility”, is the *sine qua non* of resistance literature (Harlow 1987,16). Central to the struggle is not just an attempt to reconstruct the history of the relations of power between those groups in struggle, by giving access to history for those who have been denied an active role in history and its making, but to transform historiography itself on the contested terrain of (re)writing “history” from the grounds of a “genealogy of ‘filiation’ based on ties of kinship, ethnicity, race or religion, to those of an ‘affiliative’ secular order” (Harlow 1987,22). In the process, however, the objectivity and distance of imperial “affiliative” historiography is contaminated by “filiative” genealogies. What is foregrounded in this way is history as narrative, history as telling, as an unfinished process of unfolding of local stories, or provisional truths –narratives that make no claims to universal Truth.



Through her autobiographical discourse, Maracle sets herself up as a political representative for women and for the Métis. All this is effected in a complex intertextual game, for masked in her title is *I Am an Indian*, an anthology of the first Native writing that emerged from the Indian movement in the sixties.

Maracle's political displacement of conventional representational practices of the Native is immediately evident in the contestatory politics revealed in her text. Indeed the specific frame of her ideological manoeuvre is the vindication of Native Canadian rights within the context of anti-imperialist politics, both at the local micro-political level, in the discussion of aboriginal land claims, and also on a continent-wide level in the emergent political force of AIM (American Indian Movement) whose history and activities are outlined in "The Rebel", chapter that narrates the history of Native Canadian resistance in *LAW*.

Immersed in the aftermath of the colonial process, Maracle states that in our world today there are only two points of view: the view of the colonized and the view of those who would effect liberation (Maracle 1988,129), the latter should be responsible for the task of rewriting history, "A new history will only be written by those that would change the course of history." (Maracle 1988,116)

Maracle takes the figure of the rebel as the legitimate representative of Native rights and emblem of resistance. Moreover, in *LAW* the rebel is fundamentally gendered female: "To most of the elite [of the Natives], the re-writing of our history is equal to dignified betrayal. To the rebel it is the altering of her condition that will re-write her life onto the pages of a new history. Only rebellion, the spiritual cleansing of the bad blood that separates her from her womanhood can appease the rebel. But we need to know that we can win." (Maracle 1988,121)

The importance of *LAW* to revisionary historiography is that it documents the struggle of Natives today within a history of resistance. Writing from a position of "cultural siege", under occupation, Maracle analyzes her position within an active struggle of decolonization. Hers is a new history. It is the history of struggle in the 1960s and 1970s in a hybrid narrative mode. *LAW* presents history as narrating, as telling in traditional Native fashion, but within recognizable dates and events and the conventions of "colonial" history.

Maracle's text adds a crucial dimension in its explicit analysis of the interlocking oppressions of sex and gender. Foregrounding the question of gender in the second chapter, "I Am Woman", Maracle charts the evolution in her thinking on this question as she moves from a belief that "it was irrelevant that I was a woman" (1988,16) to her present understanding of the centrality of this denial of womanhood to the imperialist project.

*LAW* was not intended as a coherent whole, but rather as a collection of autobiographical pieces, poems, tales and testimonials that would give voice to the complex and often contradictory experiences of Native women and women of color in North America. By giving voice to such experiences, Maracle believed she was contributing to develop a theory of subjectivity and culture that would demonstrate the considerable differences between Native women and women of color and Anglo-American women, as well as between them and Anglo-European men and men of their own culture. Her self-conscious effort to gain voice and become visible—"By standing up and laying myself bare, I erased invisibility as a goal for the young Native women around me" (Maracle 1988,9)—has led her to take a position in conflict with multiple intercultural and intracultural views and interpretations in an

effort to come to grips with “the tonnage of oppressive dirt that colonialism has heaped upon us.” (Maracle 1988, 11-2)

In *IAW* Maracle states, “Racism is recent, patriarchy is old” (1988,23). Both forms of oppression are closely connected. To both white and Native men, women are considered mere “vessels of biological release” (1988,27), and Maracle seeks to make a clear distinction between sex and love. In raising this issue, she confronts the feminist movement too which, she says, has been embarrassed by the word “love” (1988,31). Putting in question the assumptions of feminist thinking in the eighties and left-wing and Native movements, Maracle denounces their insensitivity to the vindications of Native women from different communities. She writes:

No one makes the mistake of referring to us as women either. White women invite us to speak if the issue is racism or Native people in general. We are there to ‘teach’, to ‘sensitize’ them, or to serve them in some other way. We are expected to retain our position well below them as their servants. We are not, as a matter of course, invited as an integral part of ‘their movement’ –the women’s movement. (1988,20-21)

In this regard, Maracle’s self-presentation in *IAW* functions paradoxically, since Maracle positions herself as Native woman *intellectual* who is a school drop-out, but who quotes T.S.Eliot (1988,88) and writes poetry: “I here, now confess, I am an intellectual (...) I am lonely” (1988,130). Maracle’s position violates all the norms for the category “intellectual”. Her discourse presents no guarantee of truth, in fact, as she remarks:

There is nothing worse than being a woman who is dark, brilliant and declassé. Darkness is the absence of natural (normal?) class polish. Admit this, all of you. I laugh too loud, can’t hold my brownie properly in the polite company and am apt to call shit, ‘shit’. I can’t be trusted to be loyal to my class. In fact, the very clever among the elite know that I am opposed to the very existence of an elite among us. (1988,131)

Although the text is presented as first-person narration –the textual marker of oral narration– Maracle is well aware that this is not presentation, but representation. Her text is a compilation of stories, a miscellany: although they give the illusion of truth, the anecdotes are fictional. Self-reflexively, she asserts:

It is the practice of writers to fictionalize reality and prostitute the product of their licentious fantasies. ‘Artistic license’, they call it (Whoever ‘they’ are) Being not different, I have taken both the stories of my life, the stories of other’s lives and some pure fabrications of my imagination and re-written them as my own...Usually when one writes of oneself it is called non-fiction –I disbelieve that. Hindsight is always slightly fictitious. (1988,3-4)

This idea of writing as the construction of the fictions of identity is crucial to Maracle’s utter disagreement with the institutions of knowledge which she contests from her position as “intellectual”. Writing, especially the writing of history, is a terrain which for her is mined with the racist texts of white dominant society. It is the

educational system which valorizes and propagates writing. But it is also the site where the dehumanizing gaze of the colonizer is most present, teaching the Native child that he is a “cannibal” (1988,103). The educational scene that Maracle reproduces is a scene of mere repetition, where the Native parrots the anthropologist’s discourse without understanding one single word. This is also the scene in which the Native child reads the history book, a practice designed to integrate the child into European society.

As “the mark of unregenerate savagery” (Hulme 1986,3), “cannibalism” displays the uncanny quality of binary oppositions: it is a sign both of animalistic nature and cultural practice; of affection and aggression; of transgression and consecration; of indigenous custom and European imputation. In remarking “cannibalism”, Native texts participate in a common intent to invert and reinscribe the hierarchies implicit in a colonial discourse on cannibalism; to create a synthesis of disparate cultural elements, but especially those linked with the Natives as ancestors, in the common impulse to decolonize an autochthonous cultural identity; and to open up to new and empowering articulations of the subject. All this implies that the “métissage” or “transculturation” in Native American/Canadian discourse leads first not so much to a synthesis or a plenitude but to an annihilation of the subject, a strategy that constitutes the first defense against the colonial imposition of identity and which in turn produces what Roberto González Echevarría has called “a void where elements meet and cancel each other to open up the question of being” (1980,10). What is lost in such a cancellation is a mystified notion of identity as grounded in primordial origins; what is gained is a certain self-consciousness and freedom for a process of identity-creation that establishes subtle links with different social forces in the present.

In any case, the educational institution is the primary rape of racism. For Maracle, “schools have showed themselves to be ideological processing plants” (1988,113). However, rather than abandoning the scene of writing to the colonizer education system, Maracle has devoted herself to write in order to subvert those representations of the Native as cannibal, as madman or ignorant, to bring to light the ideological foundations that are reproduced and perpetuated through such representations. Maracle explores new alternatives to the “only” truth of the colonizer and claims, “your knowledge is not the only knowledge we seek” (1988,112). These other knowledges would make neither claims to the universal, nor to the monopoly of truth; they would rather acknowledge their provisionality and partiality.

There is no doubt that *IAW*, along with the 1980’s writings by many women of color in Canada and the U.S., has problematized many a version of Anglo-American feminism, and has helped open the way for alternate feminist discourses and theories. Presently, however, the impact among most Anglo-American theorists appears to be insignificant because, as Jane Flax has recently noted, “The modal ‘person’ in feminist theory still appears to be a self-sufficient individual adult” (1987,640). This particular “modal person” corresponds to the female subject most admired in literature which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak had characterized as one who “articulates herself in shifting relationship to...the constitution and ‘interpellation’ of the subject not only as individual but as ‘individualist’”(1985,243-4). Consequently, the “native female” or “woman of color” can be excluded from the discourse of feminist theory. The “native female” –object of colonialism and racism– is excluded because, in Flax’s terms, white feminists have not “explored how our understanding of gender relations, self, and theory are partially constituted in and through experiences of living in a

culture in which asymmetric race relations are a central organizing principle of society” (1987,627).

The female subject of *IAW* is highly complex. She is and has been constructed in a crisis of meaning situation which includes racial and cultural divisions and conflicts. The psychic and material violence that gives shape to that subjectivity cannot be underestimated nor passed over lightly. The fact that not all of this violence comes from men in general but also from native men and even women renders the notion of a unitary category of woman/women problematic.

In *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1983), Alison M. Jaggar, speaking as a socialist feminist, refers repeatedly to a variety of works by Native women and women of color. In that work, Jaggar states that subordinated women are unrepresented in feminist theory. Jaggar claims that socialist feminism is inspired by Marxist and radical feminist politics though the latter has failed to be scientific about its insights. Jaggar charges that “[r]adical feminism has encouraged women to name their own experience but it has not recognized explicitly that this experience must be analyzed, explained and theoretically transcended” (1983,381). Many of Jaggar’s observations are a restatement of Lee Maracle’s challenge to Anglo-American feminists of all persuasions, be it Liberal, Radical, Marxist, and Socialist, the types sketched out by Jaggar. For example, “[a] representation of reality from the standpoint of women must draw on the variety of all women’s experience” (Jaggar 1983,386) may be compared to Barbara Smith’s view in *This Bridge Called my Back* (1981), “Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women” (1981,61). Jaggar continues, “Since historically diverse groups of women, such as working-class women, women of color, and others have been excluded from intellectual work, they somehow must be enabled to participate as subjects as well as objects of feminist theorizing” (1983,386). There is a clear political identity –gender/class/race– encapsulated in the idea of Native women or women of color that connects Maracle’s views in the different chapters of *IAW*. The different pieces reiterate the structure of splitting apart into “vertical relations” between the culture of resistance and the culture resisted or from which excluded. The problems inherent in Anglo-American feminism and race relations are so locked into the “Self/Other” theme that in the foreword to the second edition to *This Bridge Called My Back*, co-editor Cherríe Moraga would remark, referring to the United States : “In the last three years I have learned that Third World feminism does not provide the kind of easy political framework that women of color are running to in droves. The idea of Third World feminism has proved to be much easier between the covers of a book than between real live women” (1981,n.p.).

Linking with our concern at the beginning of this essay, the crucial question is how, indeed, can Native women and women of color be subjects as well as objects of feminist theorizing? Lee Maracle in *IAW* leads us to understand that the silence and silencing of people begins with the dominating enforcement of linguistic conventions, the resistance to dialogue, as well as the disenabling of peoples by outlawing their forms of speech. In chapters ten and fourteen of her book, Maracle states, “Despite all my grandmother’s efforts, I am still a crippled two-tongued slave, not quite an ex-Native” (Maracle 1988,109) and regrets the inadequacy of English to express Native people’s spirituality, “English does not express the process of ceremony. Yet,

we are forced to communicate within its limits. We must differentiate and define our sense of spirituality in English.” (Maracle 1988,149)

Anglo-American feminist theory assumes a speaking subject who is an autonomous, self-conscious, individual woman. Such theory does not discuss the linguistic status of the person. It takes for granted the linguistic status which founds subjectivity. In this way it appropriates the category woman/women for itself, and turns its work into a theoretical project within which *other* women are compelled to “fit”. By “forgetting” or refusing to take into account that we are culturally constituted in and through language in complex ways and not just engendered in an homogeneous situation, the Anglo-American subject of consciousness cannot come to terms with her own class-biased ethnocentrism. She is blinded to her own construction not just as a woman but as an Anglo-American one. Such a subject creates a theoretical subject that could not possibly include all women just because we are women. It is against this feminist backdrop that many Native women and women of color have struggled to give voice to their subjectivity and which, in 1988, effected the publication of *IAW*.

Consciousness as a site of multiple voices is the theoretical subject, par excellence, of *IAW*. Concomitantly, these voices (or thematic threads) are not viewed as necessarily originating with the subject, but as discourses that transverse consciousness and which the subject must struggle with constantly. Maracle declares alternately in her book: “I used to consider myself a liberated woman... It was the attempt to convince them [= white colonial society] that made me realize that I was still a slave” (Maracle 1988,15), and “I here, now confess, I am an intellectual. I was, at one time dismissive of this class but have since realized that, stuck within it as I am, alone with but half-dozen “radicals” who are also attacked by this class; I am lonely” (Maracle 1988,130). The need to assign multiple registers of existence is an effect of the belief that knowledge of one’s subjectivity cannot be arrived at through a single unifying “theme.”

Socially and historically, Native women and women of color have been now central, now outside antagonistic relations between races, classes and gender(s); this struggle of multiple antagonisms, almost always in relation to culturally different groups and not just genders, gives configuration to the theoretical subject of Native women and women of color feminism. It must be noted, however, that even Maracle in her positing of a “plurality of self”, is already privileged enough to gain voice and reach an audience. This should suggest that to privilege the subject, even if it is understood as multiple-voiced, is not enough.

Maracle raises her objection to the homogeneizing Anglo-American tendency advocating a culture of difference. She asks herself: ““Why can’t we be just people? Do you hear what you say? When did we ever question your right to be considered people? Do you question mine? I know what you think you say. You want me to consider myself, not Native, not Cree, Not Salish, but a person, absent of nationality or racial heritage. All of us just people, without difference” (Maracle 1988,105).

With regard to the women’s movement, Maracle seems to suggest that the pursuit of a politics of unity solely based on gender forecloses the pursuit of solidarity through different social, political, racial, sexual and other formations, and the exploration of alternative theories of subjectivity. Acknowledging and even celebrating differences among women, Maracle proclaims: “The women’s movement is all about the liberation of humanity from the yoke of domination. It is all about the fight against racism and sexism and its effects on our consciousness, no matter

what color you are. It is all about the struggle for unity between oppressed women and men” (Maracle 1988, 181).

It is now my turn as critic to say that as world history enters into a new and perhaps decisive moment of the colonial encounter, writers, teachers and critics should clearly align ourselves with *The wretched of the Earth*. Given John Frow’s intelligent description of the fundamental changes marking modernization and late capitalism in his essay “What Was Post-Modernism?” (1991) hyperflexible capital being pursued by mass migrations of poor people, as well as the insidious effects of such a situation: totalized mapping of the globe, state intervention on behalf of capital, massive urbanization, the triumph of instrumental reason, and the ‘secularization and automatization of the spheres of science, art and morality,’ (Adam & Tiffin eds. 1991, 140) we need public intellectuals willing to challenge what appears to be heretofore unimaginable domination and human exploitation. As Fanon concludes his great anti-colonialist manifesto, *The Wretched of the Earth*:

If we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. If we wish to live up to our people’s expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe. Moreover, if we wish to reply to the expectations of the people of Europe, it is no good sending them back a reflection, of their society and their thought with which from time to time they feel immeasurably sickened. For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man. (1961,315-316)

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