UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

"Analyze if you wish, but listen": Aboriginal Women's Lifestorytelling in Canada and Australia and the Politics of Gender, Nation, Aboriginality, and Anti-Racism

by

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Abstract

This study examines how Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in Canada and Australia engages in the processes of decolonization and how its potential for transformation can be realized through anti-racist feminist criticism and pedagogy. Chapters One through Three locate Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling practices within the processes of white nation-building. I explore the marginalization of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in postcolonial and Australian-Canadian literary studies as an effect of an unexamined investment in nationalism. I analyze how the operations of race and nation inflect upon the categories of "Aboriginality," gender, class, and autobiography (particularly in terms of "truth" and referentiality) and influence how Aboriginal women's lifestories are produced and enter visibility, in popular readerships and university practices.

While Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling can productively be read as pedagogical in a politics of decolonization, it does not teach or transform material relations by itself. In Chapter Four I analyze how the operations of white nationalism are reproduced in the university classroom and, drawing on my experiences of teaching a university course in Aboriginal Literatures, I explore how an anti-racist pedagogy can transform the university classroom and whiteness. This is followed by detailed analyses of five Aboriginal women's lifestories: Australian Monica Clare's *Karobran: The Story of An Aboriginal Girl* (1978), Mi'kmaq Rita Joe's *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet* (1996), Lardil Elsie Roughsey's (Labumore's) *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* (1984), Cree Emma Minde's *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik: Their Example Showed Me the Way, A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures*, as told to Freda Ahenakew (1997), and Aboriginal Australian Rita Huggins's and daughter Jackie Huggins's collaborative *Auntie Rita* (1994). My readings highlight how these lifestories articulate the processes of white nationalism in producing a gendered, racialized, dispossessed labouring class and how, in mapping personal and collective histories, they theorize and imagine alternative discourses of history, place, nation, gender, and Aboriginality. And as these lifestorytellers imagine a different Canada and Australia, they also imagine a different white national subjectivity—an invitation and a challenge to white feminist/postcolonial critics to re-examine and transform our own subjectivities, locations, and practices.

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for Anna and for Paul,
for reminding me why it's important,
and for *such joy*

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Introduction:
or,
How Can a Lifestory Change the World?

> First Nations literature, as a facet of cultural practise, 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 practise.
>
> Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan), "Editor's" (8)

> The brave part is in taking on history and leaving your own story.
>
> Rita Joe (Mi'kmaq), *Song of Rita Joe* (170)

Questions of representation and subjectivity, writes cultural critic Stuart Hall, can be seen as "*constitutive* of the politics of decolonisation " (19). A counter-strategy in revolutionary politics, he suggests, is "to bring to the surface—into representation—that which has sustained the regimes of representation unacknowledged....to turn the mechanisms of oppressive signification against themselves, in order to begin to constitute new subjectivities, new positions of enunciation and identification" (19). Hall's observations are hardly new. Postcolonial, feminist, and Marxist theories have recognized for some years now that practices of representation and self-representation play a crucial role in how we view ourselves and the world and in how we imagine liberatory alternatives. It seems, however, that such theories of transformed representation have yet to fulfil their promise of effecting liberatory systemic change. Multinational capital, imperialism, sexism, and racism continue their march around the globe seemingly unimpeded by poststructuralist insights. Clearly, if issues of language and representation

are central to a politics of decolonization, they do not *constitute* decolonization on their own.[1]

Nor has this problem gone unnoticed. Aijaz Ahmad's major target in his *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992) is how the institutional dominance of poststructuralism has had the effect "of greatly extending the centrality of *reading* as the appropriate form of politics" (3) and has functioned "to displace an activist culture with a textual culture" (1).[2] Innovative literary practices have been too often and too easily named "resistant" without adequate elucidation of the systemic processes by which texts are produced and read, by whom, how, and to what material effects. The necessary connections between the transformation of subjectivity, as represented and produced through literary and linguistic transformation, and of systemic structures have not been clearly made or defined by postcolonial critical practices. This point was made several years ago by Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge in their critique of not only the "inaugural" postcolonial theory text, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, but, by implication, the institutional location and genesis of postcolonial theory and practice:

> the centrality of action in a retheorization of history as class struggle, is transformed by the writers of *EWB* into a broader, somewhat depoliticized category, the "counter-discourse." Political insurgency is replaced by discursive radicalism....The danger here is that the post-colonial is reduced to a purely textual phenomenon, as if power is simply a matter of discourse and it is only through discourse that counter-claims

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[1] In this study I use the terms "colonization," "imperialism," and "decolonization." "Colonization," in my usage, refers generally to the material practices of the creation of a colony in the expansion of the European, primarily British, empires. These material practices include legislation, physical arrival and occupation of lands, the forced removal of indigenous populations, and so on. I use the term "imperialism" to refer to both the ideology of the desirability and necessity of colonization *and* its material practices; my usage of imperialism therefore is intended to include the practices of colonization.

"Decolonization," in turn, refers to not only the "withdrawal of a state from its former colonies, leaving them independent" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 247) but to the material and ideological practices and processes of formal acquisition of such independence; it refers, in other words, to the processes by which those in colonized locations come to desire to transform the imperial framework and work towards such change.

[2] Theoretical practices, Ahmad argues, have "become more random, in this proliferation of readings, as much in their procedures of inter-textual cross-referentiality as in their conceptual constellations" (3-4), such that Marxism is viewed as merely another reading approach and discrete Marxist concepts or statements are lifted out of a Marxist paradigm and combined "with statements and concepts manifestly irreconcilable with any conceivable Marxist position" (4).

> might be made. The move is clearly aimed at making the diverse forms of the post-colonial availabe as a single object on the curriculum of the centre. ("What is" 278)[3]

In this study I explore the transformative potential of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in Canada and Australia in the *material* processes of decolonization, in the "reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practise," to quote from Okanagan Jeannette Armstrong again (8). I consider how Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in Canada and Australia, as transformative representations of the processes of subjectivity, *can* participate in both the textual and the material processes of decolonization, in Aboriginal sovereignty movements in particular—when aligned with a theory and practice of anti-racist, feminist criticism, pedagogy and activism.

I examine how imperialist, capitalist, nationalist, and patriarchal discourses have operated to construct (and have attempted to contain) the subjectivity of Aboriginal women in Canada and Australia, and how this very process, in its contradictions and fluidity, is a location of transformative subjectivity. I am particularly interested in elucidating the relationships among the operation of collective ideologies of race, gender, nation and the subjectivity and, crucially, *agency* of "Aboriginal women" lifestorytellers, at once objects of dominant ideologies and subjects of their own narratives of transformation. I therefore consider lifestorytelling by Aboriginal women as a site of the historicizing of subjectivity and a theorizing and representation of agency.

To date, no full-length comparative study of Aboriginal literatures in Canada and Australia, of Aboriginal women's literature in Canada and Australia, or of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in Canada and Australia has been published.[4] In literary studies, Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling has borne the historical marginalization of autobiographical practices generally, of those of women, and of those of Aboriginal peoples in particular. Historically seen as anthropological documents rather than literary

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[3] Recently, similar concerns about postcolonial theory have foregrounded this disjunction between a stated politics of decolonization and its inability to fulfill that promise. See the special double issue of *ARIEL: Postcolonialism and Its Discontents*, edited by Pamela McCallum, Stephen Slemon, and Aruna Srivastava.

[4] And aside from non-Aboriginal Australian critic Anne Brewster's *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography* (1996), no other full-length critical study of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in Canada or Australia has been published.

practices, these works have been forced to compete with the complex of imperialism, racism, sexism, nationalism, and Western literary assumptions in order to reach critical visibility and enter the politics and processes of decolonization. Institutionally, even as Aboriginal sovereignty movements gain increasing visibility and acceptance, Aboriginal literatures are not accorded status as part of indigenous "national" literatures in their own right but are subsumed by or uneasily extended to postcolonial and Canadian and Australian national literary studies. Postcolonial theory, Australian and Canadian comparative studies and national studies have not theorized Aboriginal sovereignty movements nor Aboriginal writing in relation to these movements. Aboriginal women's theory and praxis of lifestorytelling, then, is not particularly well-served by its current institutional location.[5]

In this study I argue that these critical absences and problems belie an unexamined investment in the maintenance of whiteness and nationalism as powerful social categories undergirding the state, the university, comparative and postcolonial studies, and our reading and teaching practices. Nation studies, feminism, autobiography studies, psychoanalysis, and Canadian-Australian comparative studies, as they have been taken up by postcolonial theory, do have many insights to offer in the criticism and teaching of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling, as this study demonstrates. However, the failure of the postcolonial field to participate in genuine systemic change regarding Aboriginal women's material realities requires further scrutiny, in terms of how the field has been constituted, in how it has taken up and used such theoretical insights, and in what it has not addressed. For example, postcolonial theory has not adequately aligned itself with critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and activism as logical extensions of the politics of literary representation.[6] And Aboriginal theoretical perspectives have not fully entered postcolonial

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[5] South Asian Canadian critic Aruna Srivastava's observation on the location of postcolonial studies as a secondary specialization for many academics is also an apt commentary on the location of the study of Aboriginal cultural production in postcolonial literary studies: "as with multiculturalism, there are many who dabble in the field, hungry for song-dance-food-costume, who create of postcolonialism a secondary specialization, without sufficient regard for theoretical, political, and cultural homework" ("Introductory Notes" 15).

[6] And yet, even critical race and critical pedagogy theories maintain the marginalization of Aboriginal theories, epistemologies, and educational practices. Until Aboriginal critical theory enters and transforms critical race theory as it is currently formulated, our understanding of how Aboriginality and whiteness are co-constructed in the classroom, and how that may be related to Aboriginal perspectives on "place" and

studies nor been granted critical authority. As First Nations theorist Marie Battiste puts it, a "postcolonial framework cannot be constructed without Indigenous people's renewing and reconstructing the principles underlying their own world view, environment, languages, and how these construct our humanity (24).[7]

While the transformation of the imperialist legacy of the category "Aboriginality" has been recognized as necessary for decolonization, there has been a failure to theorize the ongoing implication of whiteness in co-constructing this category. Recent postcolonial criticism regarding the processes of race and nation-building, for example, typically focuses on the production and location of the racialized body. But the nation-state's production of Aboriginality is also the production and reproduction of whiteness as a social and political (national) category,[8] and any analysis of the limits and conditions of possibility of Aboriginal nationalism(s) must account for this.[9] There has been, then, a failure to consider how the transformation of white subjectivity, of whiteness as a social category, not only constitutes a radical critical practice but is necessary for genuine decolonization.

This study suggests that if "we" postcolonial critics, to paraphrase Mi'kmaq poet and lifestoryteller Rita Joe, are to "listen to" as well as "analyze" Aboriginal women's

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nation, and, crucially, how those dynamics may be transformed in the interests of equitable social change, will inevitably be partial.

[7] "While over half of the Aboriginal students in Canada are in provincial schools," writes Battiste, "little has been done to develop a transformed curriculum" (19). Most teachers in public schools, she continues, "have neither taken courses about and from Indigenous peoples nor developed awareness of cross-cultural realities. To put before them the issue of inclusion in the curriculum takes inclusion to the lowest common denominator" (22).

[8] In this study I refer to "whiteness" primarily as a general category of power and privilege, not only because in postcolonial studies this area of investigation has (troublingly) not been effectively broached, but also in order to illustrate how it is deeply imbricated in the nationalism that undergirds Canadian and Australian studies, and operates globally, nationally, and locally, in the university classroom in particular, in the production of collective power/disempowerment of Aboriginal peoples.

Because whiteness is a social category with immense power, it carries with it ideologies of self and of "otherness" that do constitute the subjectivity of "white" individuals and their/our reading and critical practices, and fundamentally, how we imagine our world and live our daily lives, how we "read" and construct "Aboriginal Others." Here I also stress whiteness as a social category of collective (dominant) identification, further, as a necessary pedagogical strategy to counter the individualism and reduction of racism to problems of (only) personal attitude rather than systemic conferral of privilege that constitutes multiculturalism, nationalism, and the university classroom.

[9] As Ruth Frankenberg (a critic outside of the postcolonial field) has noted, "it has also for the most part been Other, marked subjects rather than the white/Western, unmarked subjects whose racial and cultural identities have been the focus of study. Within this framework for thinking about self and other, the white Western self as a racial being has for the most part remained unexamined and unnamed" (17).

lifestorytelling, then that *act* of listening is also an act of transformation, of ourselves, of our self-perceptions, our readerly expectations, and our subjectivities, even as they are shaped by and shape the institutions and structures we inhabit. I suggest that these narratives, as pedagogical practices, position the reader as embodied, involved listener and therefore co-participant in making meaning. This process of readerly transformation necessarily requires entering from within the problematic of White Self/Aboriginal Other in order to transform it. It means taking seriously, and embodying materially, the challenges these texts pose for their readers.

This study therefore addresses the politically fraught and difficult yet crucial questions of the location of white feminist critics, teachers, and activists regarding Aboriginal cultural production, politics, and practices of decolonization. The roles of white middle-class women in the politics of white nationalism, moreover, is an inheritance of contemporary that continues to carry race, class, gender, and ethical or moral assumptions into our reading, teaching, and activist practices and can block the creation of effective alliances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women. Ideologies of guilt, morality, redemption, and personal and collective salvation (achieved through the recovery of the homogenized, racialized, gendered Other) continue to operate, visibly and powerfully through official policies and popular ideologies of multiculturalism. Certainly,

> any attempt to formulate a feminist theory of decolonization, or to word it with a different emphasis, a decolonialist practice of feminism must resist conflating the inevitable tensions, clashes, and contradictions between the values, interests, and aims of the feminist and Aboriginal self-determination movements. (Emberley 104)

The first three chapters of this study work towards theorizing Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in processes of Aboriginal nationalism. Chapters One and Two assess the marginal location of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling generally within academic structures and the history of postcolonial studies as effects of the operations of whiteness and nationalism within academic structures. I examine how whiteness and nationalism constitute the field of postcolonial studies, Australian-Canadian comparative studies, the university, and the nations of Canada and Australia, and produce the complex and problematic category of "Aboriginality" as informing the political terrain of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling. I indicate the location of Aboriginal women's bodies, labour, and

reproductive labour in the operations of white nation-building and imperialism. I consider how the operations of race and nation produce the dominant categories of race, gender, class, and literature, and therefore the modes through which "Aboriginal women lifestorytellers" are allowed entry into national visibility, particularly in climates of official multiculturalism.

In Chapter Three I explore how questions of form and language are implicated in the ways Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling enters national visibility, and how these problematics of reception–assumptions about readers, "Aboriginal" writers, and autobiography–inform their very contexts of production. I consider how much non-Aboriginal commentary on and the popular reception of Aboriginal cultural production is underwritten by processes of white desire that profoundly affect the texts' production and reception. These include an unexamined assumption about what constitutes Aboriginality," and, in turn, "Aboriginal literature." That Aboriginal literature (and lifestorytelling in particular) is called upon to function as political tracts and social truths (Muecke 131-32) reveals assumptions about the subjectivity of Aboriginal lifestorytellers as simple, fixed, transparent—and therefore readily "knowable" (if not "already known"), and analysis of their narratives as requiring little theoretical rigour. Attention to specific textual detail then, is often lacking in discussions of Aboriginal lifestorytelling, as if Aboriginal narrative subjectivity is not a process of language, form, and creativity (Warley 66-67) but a function, though unacknowledged, of race. Such assumptions reinscribe a notion of subjectivity that has functioned to oppress Aboriginal women most efficiently (Warley 62).

Of concern here also are the issues of "autobiographical truth," of language and reference, and the limits of representation raised by poststructuralist analysis, as they pertain to readings of Aboriginal women's lifestories. I am not, of course, suggesting that Aboriginal women's lifestories represent or reflect the "truth" or have any closer relationship to the "real" than other autobiographical forms. However, there is a popular and critical desire that this be the case, and as I explore in more detail, Aboriginal women lifestories take up this dynamic in particular and strategic ways.

While I have attempted to avoid constructing Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling practices as "native informant" to current literary theories, I am nonetheless suggesting that

they do have something to teach. These narratives have much to teach in terms of revising dominant histories, of theorizing agency, of transforming not only dominant categories of race, nation, and Aboriginality but in reclaiming and rearticulating relationships to place at a time when multinational capital's grip on exploitation of resources seems almost inescapable. They are meditations on and mediations of historical and national processes, and in keeping with their generic inheritances, are pedagogical, and consciously counter-discursive responses to dominant histories of place that take the experiences of the individual storyteller as a lesson for the listener.[10] Moreover, the six lifestorytellers whose texts I analyze in detail in this study make explicit assertions that their stories be viewed as pedagogical.

But these texts do not teach in a politics and praxis of decolonization on their own. Nor are they produced or read in an ideological or material vaccuum. Rather, as I illustrate, the contexts and politics of reception inform the very processes of production of these texts. And the contexts of their reception in popular readerships and university structures in particular function to limit or enhance their pedagogical potential. The university is a site in which these dominant ideologies of race, unmarked whiteness, nation, and "Aboriginality" converge; without the intervention of anti-racist feminist pedagogy these can be and often are troublingly reproduced, forestalling the role of "representation" and "subjectivity" in a genuine politics, and *practice*, of decolonization. And, as I stress, there is an absence in postcolonial studies of theories of the location, pedagogical role, and ethics of the postcolonial critic (including white feminist postcolonial critics) in a decolonizing pedagogy.[11]

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[10] The tradition of oral history, suggests Mohawk academic Patricia Monture-Angus, is fundamentally pedagogical:

> Information that was kept in people's heads was not available to Europeans, could not be changed and molded into pictures of "savagery" and "paganism." The tradition of oral history as a method of sharing the lessons of life with children and young people also had the advantage that the Elders told us stories. They did not tell us what to do or how to do it or figure out the world for us—they told us a story about their experience, about their life or their grandfather's or grandmother's or auntie's or uncle's life. It is in this manner that Indian people are taught independence as well as respect because you have to do your own figuring for yourself. (11)

[11] As white critical pedagogy theorist Peter McLaren puts it:

> we cannot sufficiently understand our purpose and role as ethical agents and cultural workers without first examining critically how both we and our students are shaped and informed by current characteristics of late capitalism, how late capitalism shapes and is shaped by global cultures...and how capital and culture are connected to the formal and informal practices of citizenship....critical

In Chapter Four I analyze how the operations of nationalism and whiteness as they construct and create paradigms for reading "Aboriginality" are reproduced in the university classroom and how an anti-racist pedagogy, in alliance with the pedagogy and transformative potential of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling, can transform the site of the university classroom. I consider how dominant white ideologies, individualism, assumptions about Aboriginal autobiographical subjectivity, and the role of literature emerge forcefully in the university "Aboriginal literature" classroom, particularly in problematic assertions of multicultural ideologies. I draw on the responses of participants to my white anti-racist feminist pedagogy (much of which I utilized for the first time) and to course texts in an undergraduate Aboriginal Literature course which I taught. I address how white feminist anti-racist pedagogy and Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling can work to enable a liberatory transformation of dominant discourses and practices, and therefore subjectivity, and how this systemic transformation is dependent on the transformation of the category and power of whiteness. I foreground the necessity of both grappling with these complex issues as a necessary precursor to detailed cross-cultural critical practices, and of engaging with critical race theory, anti-racist pedagogy, and activism as practices extending beyond the university.

Chapters Five through Nine comprise detailed analyses of five Aboriginal women's lifestories from Canada and Australia and explore how these narratives negotiate the fraught terrain of race, gender, nation, and Aboriginality: Monica Clare's *Karobran: The Story of An Aboriginal Girl* (1978), Mi'kmaq Rita Joe's *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet* (1996), Lardil Elsie Roughsey's (Labumore's) *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* (1984), Cree Emma Minde's *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik: Their Example Showed Me the Way, A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures*, as told to Freda Ahenakew (1997), and Aboriginal Australian Rita Huggins's and daughter Jackie Huggins's collaborative *Auntie Rita* (1994).[12] In these readings, I explore how the

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citizenship must be directed toward the creation of self-consciously ethical subjects of history and should be redistributive of society's material wealth and resources. (238)

[12] The texts that I chose to teach in this particular course are not the same as those I analyze in detail. What is crucial, however, is my exploration of the university "Aboriginal literature" classroom as a site, like the university itself, that reproduces dominant constructions of Aboriginality and (unmarked) whiteness. Certainly, I am not trying to suggest that students' responses (and my own) are not affected by the particularities of the texts; I am, in fact, trying to argue in favour of their influence. However, as I hope to

lifestorytellers locate themselves in these national histories, and how in historicizing their subjectivity as objects of state control, revise dominant histories of white nation building and challenge current ideologies of multicultural tolerance.

Lifestorytelling is a process that details, re-creates, and revises an individual's history—a history that is embedded in collective histories and in national narratives. Aboriginal women's lifestories included in this study articulate the processes of dominant white nationalism in producing a gendered, racialized dispossessed labouring class, as experienced in and through gendered, racialized "Aboriginal" bodies. In particular, these narratives, in historicizing the exploitation of Aboriginal women's labour in the processes of white nation-building, and in negotiating the realities of the encroachment of multinational capital, trace the operations of the economy of women's bodies, race, nation, and indicate possible theories of resistance. They indicate that Aboriginal land claims, relationships to land, and conceptions of sovereignty are not exclusively determined by dominant structures, even as they must negotiate them. As Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling maps personal and collective histories, it reconfigures, rewrites, the maps on which dominant nationalisms are founded. More importantly, I read the lifestories of this study in terms of how they theorize and "imagine" an alternative Aboriginal subjectivity that exceeds and deconstructs imposed racial categories and suggest an alternative national subjectivity and relationship to place.[13] I explore how this lifestorytelling is potentially transformative in how it imagines and reconfigures discourses of history, local and national place, categories of race, gender, Aboriginality, and, crucially, whiteness and the white national (reading and teaching) subject. In detailing the processes and effects of colonization and mission schools on their own lives, further, some of these lifestorytellers

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demonstrate, the ideologies of race (Aboriginality and whiteness), gender, nation, and literary form need to be addressed, in criticism and pedagogy, before the particularities, and the specificities, of texts, and their pedagogical potential, can be appreciated non-oppressively.

That the texts I taught and those I analyze here are, after all, different, is an effect of a number of factors: my investment in the course as a graduate student wanting to display my "knowledge" of the field, and of "recognized" Aboriginal texts ("recognized," however problematically, by the institutions of Canadian and Australian literature and postcolonial studies); my concern in this thesis to explore texts that, unlike those in the course, have received little critical attention (and for the very reasons I explore throughout this thesis). This very "difference" in texts, then, can be productively read as part of the broader institutional critique I hope to have enacted in this study.

document the imposition of capitalism on their communities in relation to precontact economies, critique it, and emphasize that *negotiations with* multinational capital in securing land rights are necessary for the survival of those communities. Some Aboriginal women lifestorytellers draw on particular pre-contact traditions, and strategically so, as part of imagining the transformation of local and national communities and relationships to place. They reconfigure categories of race, of gender, and in taking on the form of lifestorytelling, utilize the assumptions of truth and referentiality of the genre to make their claims all the more persuasive.

I am not suggesting that Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling practices be subsumed under a reading paradigm of "nationalism" or "Aboriginality." These are not the only sites of interpellation and identification, particularly for Aboriginal peoples, and especially for Aboriginal women, but two of many multiple, overlapping and often contradictory interpellations. (Their specific articulations of relationships to place, in fact, foreground the difficulties of making easy generalizations regarding Aboriginal sovereignty.) Attending to their negotiations with the nation, however, offers a useful beginning in approaching Aboriginal women's constructions of "nation" as custodianship, as constant performances of cultural practices that re-inscribe the cultural and gender specificities of relationship to land and constitute Aboriginal women's theories and representations of "nation."

Because of the problematic imbrication of nationalism in traditional comparative studies,[14] which I explore in detail, I have attempted to locate these texts in their material

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[13] As Mudrooroo tells his non-Aboriginal Australian audience: "You have been here for a little over two hundred years and even in that little time Grandfather Tree has begun to reshape you to fit into our land" (*Us Mob* 237).

[14] As such, one polarity of the binary will inevitably be valued over another in hierarchical fashion, whether it be through the homogenizing of differences under the rubric of similarity, or vice-versa. A traditional comparative study, for example, would provide a reading of an Aboriginal woman's text from Canada alongside and against that of an Aboriginal Australian woman, with the similarities and differences delineated; the fundamental problem of this approach is that it fetishizes difference and/or similarity at the expense of an analysis of relations of power and the implications of comparative study within dominant nationalism; like imperialist discourse, this structure can construct the individual Aboriginal woman and her text as representative of her culture and race, despite the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, histories, and languages in each location. As Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin observe, "literary comparisons continue to compare two texts (one from each country), focusing on the similarities and differences between texts and by an inference that assumes the text's participation in its national culture" (62).

Alan Lawson's discussion of the practice of comparative studies would at first seem to address this problem, but in fact signals the very difficulties of thinking outside and beyond the categories of similarity and difference:

and historical particularities. Throughout, I have explicitly avoided characterizing the texts in relation to each other in the familiar comparative terms of "similarity" and "difference." I have chosen instead to analyze wider systemic contexts and concerns regarding the production and reception of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling, such as the ideology of form and language, the theorizing of gendered and racialized agency, the negotiations and transformations of nation and categories of Aboriginality. My readings highlight the particularities of these texts and their contexts even as they share these wider concerns.[15] While

> it is true that any argument that attempts to grasp the globalizing forces of capitalism must be vigilant against the risk of obscuring particularities that are crucial for mapping local political strategies, it is also true that conceiving of the world as a system facilitates an awareness of the interconnections that cut across the most disparate of situations. (McCallum, "Introductory" 19)

My readings, then, work towards making visible the global and local operations of imperialism, capitalism, and sexism, and the local and global formulations and practices of agency and resistance as the lifestorytellers articulate them.

I therefore demonstrate the necessary fluidity of the term and generic category "lifestorytelling." I use this term to describe the works in this study in order to mark their difference from canonical and dominant literary traditions, even as they are heir to them and negotiate them, and because it is the term most often used by Aboriginal writers and critics. The term "autobiography" is not often used by Aboriginal writers and critics, although lifestories are often marketed and published under this category. While heir to the

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> Comparison proceeds from curiosity. It is driven by the twin recognitions of similarity and difference. The delight in similarity leads towards one particularly important kind of question: "what are the structures that give rise to this similarity?" The delight in difference leads to another important kind of question: "what particular historical, social cultural circumstances give rise to this difference?" If comparative studies are to be of any value they must keep asking *both* of these questions. To stop asking the first —"what is similar"—is to produce a false uniqueness and a bogus empiricism. The consequences of failing to ask the second—"What is different?"—is to reproduce a monolithic *in*difference, a bogus generalization....The recognitions in comparative study are indeed *re*cognitions—new ways of knowing—ways of forcing us to ask, or to *re*-ask, what is it that we know, *how* is it that we know? (153)

[15] Postcolonial critics Diana Brydon (in Canada) and Helen Tiffin (in Australia) have suggested that there is value in comparative studies based on a shared history of imperialism, anti-imperialist nationalism, and its linguistic and literary inheritances (24) but that such study "should be grounded in the *differences* of their alternative perspectives on the world" (7, my emphasis). I would argue instead that such study must be grounded in the *particularities* of the text, their conditions of production, their cultural and historical specificities, as they inevitably negotiate dominant perspectives and discourses.

traditional form of Western autobiography (as well as, in the case of Monica Clare, the novel), these narratives bear culturally specific elements and subject-matter that mark them as transformations of traditional western and Aboriginal forms. In this study I have included texts here that range from the direct transcription and translation of a taped interview (Emma Minde's *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik: Their Example Showed Me the Way, A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures*, as told to Freda Ahenakew) to a "novel" closely based on the writer's life (Monica Clare's *Karobran: The Story of An Aboriginal Girl*) to illustrate the dynamic nature of the lifestorytelling form.

Aboriginal women's lifestories are multifaceted and their goals multi-directed, but they do carry with them, like other nationalist narratives, a nationalist pedagogy directed at Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadian and Australian readers. Often drawing on the current language of multiculturalism, Aboriginal women lifestorytellers are imagining a different Canada and Australia, and a different *white national subjectivity*, that is both an invitation and a *challenge* to re-examine, and transform, our own locations in imperialist, capitalist, race relations. Later in this introduction, and in my conclusion to this study, I have included some personal reflections on this process of transformation. They are intended to comment on how the reading and criticism of literature can transform readers' subjectivities and how this recognition can enable a self-reflexive practice that uncovers white desire, racism, privilege, and locates them in systemic structures. I would hope that these reflections be read not as an indication of my personal success or failures in my efforts to practice a politics of decolonization, in teaching Aboriginal literatures to a predominantly white class, in community activism, or in my teaching at an Aboriginal-run college and all-Aboriginal classroom—though they may also be that—but, in tracing some of the limits of my academic training as a postcolonial critic in preparing me for this work, as an example of embodied institutional critique.

An Introductory Comment on Naming and Negotiating "Aboriginality"

Part of the politics of this study involves supporting the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty movements in Canada and Australia and the necessary transformation of not

only the discourses of race, gender, and nation but the distribution of resources that such recognition entails. The material and ideological acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the 55 Founding First Nations (Dickason 11) and of the Métis[16] in what is now Canada and of the more than 200 pre-colonization Aboriginal tribes in what is now called Australia[17] involves the dissolution of both the oppressive legislative and ideological constructions of Aboriginality as well as the definition and protection of the rights of the indigenous peoples in each country. It involves, in part, the recognition and adoption of Aboriginal nations' own terms of self- and collective definition.

There has been much productive and complex debate surrounding the terminology used by non-Aboriginal peoples to refer, specifically and generally, to the indigenous peoples of Canada and Australia. As has been recognized, to engage with the naming of the indigenous peoples of formerly and currently colonized countries is to engage with the history of imperialism, with its power to produce the single category of "Aboriginality" from linguistically, culturally, and geographically diverse peoples. The imposition of foreign terminology on these diverse groups has been a particularly powerful strategy of imperialist control.

The amount of legislation directed at Aboriginal peoples in each country, despite their particularities, is an indication of the deep investment white Australia and Canada have had in suppressing Aboriginal nationalisms.[18] The similarities in legislative measures

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[16] With the passage of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, the Métis people in Canada received formal recognition as a distinct culture. The Métis people are a nation resulting from the intermixture of the French, English and Scottish fur traders with Cree and Ojibway women that began in the 1600s and reached its height in the 1800s. "With their mixed traditions and command of both European and Indian languages, the Métis were logical intermediaries in the commercial relationship" (Métis Nation History).

By challenging the Hudson Bay Company's monopoly in trading, Métis traders became proponents of Métis nationalism, and the Riel Rebellion of 1885 was an early example of anti-Canadian Aboriginal nationalism at work. The Métis people were granted some land bases in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, but typically through government policies of assimilation (land for enfranchisement, for example, or, in Alberta, for the creation of colonies of European-style agricultural communities), and this land base was generallye eroded, particularly in Manitoba, almost as soon as it was set aside as a result of various legislative practices constructed to serve settlement. Various Métis land claims are now in the courts.

[17] In Australia, tribal groupings were constructed according to language groups. While estimates of the numbers of precontact languages and groups vary between 200 and 600, most are around 250. The *Ethnologue Language Family Index*, edited by Joseph E. Grimes and Barbara F. Grimes lists 257 Aboriginal Australian Languages.

[18] For example, there are 15 treaties in Canada (with discussions ongoing), and none in Australia. Aboriginal peoples historically have been a federal "responsibility" in Canada through the longstanding Indian Act,

and popular discourses constructing "Aboriginality" are striking: residential schools in Canada and mission schools in Australia were put in place with the stated aim of assimilation and the actual goal of the production of a class of domestic and agricultural labourers; Christian churches held similar roles in the colonizing processes (though with specific ideological implications from the differences among Catholic, Anglican, and United Church theologies); reserve and pass systems were implemented in both countries to free land for colonization and to control and marginalize Aboriginal populations; the English (and in some instances in Canada, the French) language was unilaterally imposed on diverse linguistic groups; the vote was withheld from Aboriginal peoples until 1960 (Dickason 400) in Canada and 1967 in Australia; generations of Aboriginal children were lost through the mission and residential schools systems; both countries have weighty bureaucracies that circumscribe and define Aboriginal peoples' lives, and in particularly gendered ways.

In Canada, for example, the term "Indian" is enshrined in The Indian Act, the federal legislation in place since 1876 which defines in law what constitutes "Indian" identity (through the categories of "Status Indians" and "Non-Status Indians") and which, untill the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985, was an example of legislated sexism as well.[19] The

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whereas state jurisdiction held in Australia until a referendum in 1967 made Aboriginal affairs primarily a federal "responsibility, and now in both countries "responsibility" is shared between federal and state/provincial governments; the economics of the fur trade in Canada, and the influence of French colonizers in this process, do not obtain in Australia, where Aboriginal labour was not seen as a useful commodity until the creation of the pastoral industry; the widespread massacres and poisoning of Aboriginal peoples in Australia was not matched in Canada, though early bounties, participation in warfare, and disease (sometimes intentionally spread) in Canada had similar devastating effects. The history of French-English conflict in Canada and the ongoing movements for Quebec sovereignty have dominated the construction of Canadian nationalism and multicultural policies, whereas in Australia, Aboriginal nationalisms have gained more prominence in entering what historically was considered to be a more homogeneous dominant culture.

[19] The Act was set out as part of the creation of reserves and the imposition of Band (western style) governing structures, and therefore it defines who is and who is not recognized as members of Bands (as created by the government). The Indian Act's definition of "Indian," therefore, is circular (seemingly tautological): An "Indian," according to the Act, is a person who "pursuant to this Act is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian." There are currently 611 bands in Canada as a result of the Act.

The Act defines "Indians" in a number of categories: particularly, status and non-status: A "status Indian" is "any person who was a member of a 'Band' recognized for the purposes of the Act (whether or not the Band had reserve lands)." "Non-status Indians" include "Indian people who were denied recognition as 'registered' or 'status' Indians, and who were therefore denied membership in Bands" (Bill's). The differential benefits accorded members of each imposed category of "Indian" has functioned to divide Aboriginal communities.

Revisions to the Indian Act in 1951 rescinded earlier laws banning the potlatch and other ceremonies, and Aboriginal peoples were granted the freedom to enter public bars and consume alcohol. However, overall

Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, however, uses the term "Aboriginal" to refer to "Indians," the Inuit, and Métis peoples.[20] Aboriginal communities are increasingly using their historical national names (rather than Anglicized and imposed tribal or band names) as well. (People on Alberta's Blood Reserve, for example, refer to themselves, depending on the context, intention, and audience of the reference, as Blood, Blackfoot, Kainaiwa, native, Indian, Aboriginal, and First Nations.) The term "Indian" is now generally recognized as a derogatory term when used by non-Aboriginal people outside of reference to the Act itself and is rarely used except in legal discussion. However, Aboriginal peoples, by historical necessity as well as choice, have taken up and claimed this the term as their own.[21]

As in Canada, derogatory terms actively circulated in dominant Australian public discourse. At times a group's own name (such as the *Koori*, of south-east Australia) has been used by non-Aboriginal peoples for purposes of derision. The term "Blackfella" in Australia as an Aboriginal term of self-naming and self-definition takes on derogatory connotations when used by non-Aboriginal peoples, as does the term "black." The

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"government powers over First Nations life remained formidable" (First Nations in Canada). The laws determining Status and the involuntary enfranchisement clause were retained, and Status Indian women who married non-Status Indians continued to lose their status automatically. Until this amendment, the definition of a "person" under Canadian law explicitly excluded "Indians"; a person was "an individual other than an Indian"and would become a "person" under law only through voluntary enfranchisement, that is, by renouncing Indian Status (*Bill's*).

Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, passed in 1982, the sexist aspect of the Indian Act became unconstitutional, and the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985 allowed for the "limited reinstatement of Indians who were denied or lost status and/or Band membership in the past," and "allows bands to define their own membership rules" (*Congress of Aboriginal Peoples*). However, even as more than 100,000 people have acquired status as a result of Bill C-31, there are restrictions within the Bill that in the words of Harry W. Daniels, President of the Canadian Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, "actually accelerate the extermination policies--the integration of Canada's Indian population into mainstream society--that have alwas been at the heart of the federal Indian Act regime. So serious are the Bill's implications in this regard that, within a few generations, there may no longer be any Status Indians left in Canada" (1). As Daniel notes, the Bill in fact functions to expand the category of non-Status Indians but does not ensure the equal treatment of Status and non-Status Indians. Moreover, he notes,

> Bill C-31 adopts the rule that after two consecutive generations of marrying Non-Status, children of the third generation ar not eligible for Status. The same rule applies to both men and women. Is this solution that Indian people anticipated when they accepted the need to ensure gender equality? We think not, but that is the answer they got. (*Congress of Aboriginal Peoples*)

[20] Section 25 of the Canadian *Constitution Act* of 1982 describes the Aboriginal peoples of Canada as including the "Indian, Inuit, and Métis groups" and recognizes their rights to "protect the culture, customs, traditions and languages of Aboriginal peoples" as well as "any rights or freedoms that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired" (*The Contents*).

connotations of the term "black," as Aboriginal Australian Jackie Huggins points out, have changed over time for Aboriginal peoples: for her mother Rita's generation, she writes, "'Black' is only used among ourselves and with those non-Aboriginal people we trust, because to use it publicly raises negative connotations and prejudice, whereas for my generation Black has been reclaimed with pride" (*Auntie Rita* 3).

In Canada, the Constitution Act of 1982 and the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985 extended the legal definitions of "Aboriginality" to a large number of people previously excluded by the categories of the Indian Act. In terms of dominant nationalist ideologies and their reliance on strict categories of cultural and racial identities, however, this change has not yet translated into major shifts in mainstream concepts of what constitutes "Aboriginality" beyone or as other than rooted in fixed pre-colonial forms of Aboriginal sociality or as reproducing prevalent stereotypes. As a statement by the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, suggests, however, legislative shifts have enabled and responded to the concerns of peoples of Aboriginal descent regarding processes of self-definition:

> It is important to remember that whether or not you are defined as a "status" or "registered" Indian for the purposes of the Indian Act, if you are of Aboriginal descent and identify as an Indian person you are an Indian for the purposes of the Constitution—the basic law that determines what the federal and provincial governments can legally do. Whatever the Indian Act says now or in the future, if you were born of Indian descent and identify yourself as an Indian, you are an Indian. No federal or provincial law can deny your identity as an Aboriginal person, whether you are an Indian, a Metis, or an Inuk.

Other terminology to refer generally to the indigenous peoples of North America has also entered discussion: Native, indigenous, Amerindian, First Peoples, and First Nations, the latter not including the Métis people nor the Inuit, but carrying the valency of making a claim to prior occupancy of the land and sovereignty over it. More recently the prevalent term for the indigenous peoples of Australia, in law and popular discourses, has been "Aboriginal,"[22] which, along with the term designating a specific group, the Torres Strait

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[21] As a Blackfoot man in a course I recently taught put it, regarding the emergence of more non-Aboriginal names for Aboriginal peoples, "Why can't I just be an Indian?"

[22] As Mudrooroo stresses, however, the terms "Aboriginal" and "Aborigine" remain in Australia those of the "invaders" and

Islanders, was enshrined in federal legislation in 1967.[23] Internationally, the term Fourth World has been used to refer to the indigenous peoples of the world, colonized by European invaders and now occupying a location below that of the Third World in the economic worlds theory. The United Nations adopted the term Indigenous in 1977 in formulating the "Declaration of Principles for the Defence of the Indigenouse Nations and Peoples of the Western Hemisphere."

That the terminology for "Aboriginality" changes over time is pointedly indicated in the history of the term "Australian," which

> originally referred to the indigenous peoples of Australia, not to the settlers of 1788. The transformation of the meaning of the word was linked to a growing need to develop an identity for settlers who could never go "home" to Europe...and the change seems to have been complete by about the end of the eighteenth century. (Marcus 29)

Aboriginal critic and activist Marcia Langton writes that, in Australia there has been a similar process at work. According to legal scholar John McCorquordale, she notes, there have been

> sixty-seven definitions of Aboriginal people, mostly relating to their status as wards of the state and to criteria for incarceration in the institutional reserves. These definitions reflect not only the Anglo-Australian legal and administrative obsession, even fixation, with Aboriginal people, but also the uncertainty, confusion, and constant search for the appropriate characterisation: "full blood", "half-caste", "quadroon", "octoroon", "such and such admixture of blood", "a native of Australia", "a native of an admixture of blood not less than half Aboriginal", and so on. Indeed, whether or not an Aboriginal person lived in a "native's camp" even became an important issue of definition in one legal case. ("Aboriginal art" 96)

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are seldom used by indigenous people themselves, who prefer their own words. These often simply mean "people," such as *Koori* (south-east Australia), *Nyungar* (south-west Australia), *Nanga* (South Australia), Wonghi (*Western Desert*), Yolngu (*Arnhem Land*), Murri (south Queensland), and *Yamadji* (Pilbara region of Western Australia). There is no Australia-wide definition for the whole people, so Aboriginal and Aborigine remain in use until such a word can be found and generally accepted. (*Aboriginal Mythology* 1)

[23] According to the website Bill's Aboriginal links, some languages of south-eastern Australia had a word—coorie, kory, kuri, kooli, kool—which meant "person" or "people." In the 1960s, in the form koori, it came to be used by Aborigines of these areas to mean "Aboriginal people" or "Aboriginal person." It was a means of identification. But because of the wide variety of Aboriginal languages and cultures, koori has not gained Australia-wide acceptance, being confined to most of New South Wales and to Victoria.

Recent federal legislation in Australia that provides a social rather than biological definition of Aboriginality at first appears to be a tremendous move away from the biological/racial definitions of the past. The Eddie Mabo decision, which overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius*,[24] for example, has led to legal definitions of Aboriginality not based explicitly in skin colour or biological genealogy. In Australia, the legal definition of an Aboriginal person is

> social more than racial: an Aboriginal person is defined as a person who is a descendant of an indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as Aboriginal and is recognised by members of the community in which he or she lives as Aboriginal. This definition is preferred by the vast majority of Aboriginal people over the racial definitions of the assimilation era. Administration of the definition, at least by the Commonwealth for the purposes of providing grants or loans, requires that an applicant present a "certificate of Aboriginality" issued by an incorporated Aboriginal body under its common seal. (Langton, "Aboriginal art" 97)

In many ways, this definition seems to be an enormous liberatory advance. The emphasis on "specific cultural knowledges and practices as fundamental to questions of identity-subjectivity" foregrounds how Aboriginality is a cultural practice "that means more than racial inheritance" (Fielder 45). However, even this apparently liberatory gesture can be pulled back into imperialist paradigms in the material processes of land claims negotiations. The current appeal to "culture" in defining Aboriginality,

> turns out to be not so different from the explicitly racial definitions of an earlier era. It is participation in fixed pre-colonial forms of Aboriginal sociality, "native custom," which will most readily authenticate land claims....It is the erasure of historical

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[24] Britain claimed sovereignty of what is now Australia in 1770 through the doctrine of *terra nullius*, literally "belonging to nobody," which held in law until 1992. In June of 1992, the Australian High Court ruled in the Eddie Mabo decision that native title in Australia did exist outside and previous to the system imposed by the British:

> The High Court declared that Australian common law recognized native title and that Aboriginal people who could demonstrate an ongoing connection with their traditional lands could, potentially, claim them back under customary title, providing those lands had not been alienated into freehold or leasehold in the course of the conquest. (Poynton 41)

Legally and symbolically, the decision was revolutionary, overturning "at a stroke 204 years of colonial mythology about an empty continent inhabited by inexplicable nomads" (41). There was immediate backlash and fears among non-Aboriginal Australians that their lands and homes would suddenly be taken from them, but the actual effect of the decision was the watered-down Aboriginal Land Titles Act (influenced largely, critics argue, by the power of multinational mining corporations), which placed a range of restrictions on the definition of customary title. This definition of customary title, in fact rests on a reified definition of Aboriginality *as* traditional practices, which can reinforce racist assumptions and systemic racism, as it excludes a vast majority of Aboriginal peoples, particularly those in urban locations. See *Aboriginal Australia: Land, law and culture*, a special issue of *Race and Class*, edited by Peter Poynton.

> processes from Aboriginal identity which precludes many Aboriginal groups from successful prosecution of their interests in general....The irony is that it is precisely the separation of culture from historical processes which is held to provide "proof" of cultural identity; such identity is nonetheless grounded in notions of cultural continuity through time....Only an essentialised group identity is considered authentic. (Cowlishaw and Morris 6, 7)[25]

There is an ongoing tension for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Australia regarding this terminology. It has been recognized that the construction Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal sets up and reproduces an imperialist binarism that, in First Nations critic Sharilyn Calliou's words, "obscures nuanced understandings of interrelated issues of class, gender or other discrimination. Unthinking use of the terms of this dichotomy contradicts some traditional teachings, which state that all humans are members of the same human family" ("Us/Them" 28). While the recognition of the diversity of Aboriginal self-names is fundamental to the recognition of specificities and particular histories, the collective terminology is at times required for addressing systemic oppression of Aboriginal peoples as groups with similar histories. Regarding her own use of the binarism, Calliou continues,

> [a]t times I rely on the shorthand codes of *Canadians* or *Euro-Canadians*, but I find myself wincing at the inadequacy of such terms. I do not want to wield such terms as weapons; but it is obvious that someone has invaded the 17th century location of Hochelaga. There's no escaping the fact that the *Indian Act* was authored by non-Haisla, non-Iroquoian, non-Musqueam, and non-First Nations citizens. As an act of

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[25] This ongoing imbrication of race into cultural definitions of Aboriginality is visible in the current furor around the "authenticity" of Mudrooroo (formerly Colin Johnson, Mudrooroo Narogin, and Mudrooroo Nyoongah), long recognized as a leading Aboriginal poet, dramatist, novelist, and theorist. Raised in a south-west Western Australia mission school as Colin Johnson, Mudrooroo's genealogy has recently been traced by a family member as African-American rather than Aboriginal Australian, and this has been actively used to discredit his work as well as his political views as inauthentic. Despite the legislative definition of Aboriginality as cultural, social, and historical—legislation that would support Mudrooroo's assertion of his Aboriginality—the biological definitions prevail in popular and even in some academic discourses in order to challenge the legitimacy of Mudrooroo's knowledge and history.

In a comment that seems to have presaged this current debate around Mudrooroo's "authenticity," he wrote in 1995: "I do not believe that the mere fact of 'blood' denotes a possible plenitude of an original Indigenality, for though resting on heredity and descent, Indigenality includes a learnt portion, and to stress degrees of 'blood' is in effect playing the Master's game, which is always one dealing with possession, legality, paternity, and caste" (*Us Mob* 5). Because there is currently a lack of evidence discounting the specific *knowledge* of Mudrooroo regarding Aboriginal issues, and Aboriginal communities themselves have yet to come to a final decision on the matter, I draw on his work in this study because of its relevance, and the productive questions it, like his own location, raises, including those regarding what constitutes "Aboriginality."

> reciprocity, the Iroquois did not author(ize) the Anglo/French Act. So particular proper nouns to identify collectives are needed to discuss his/herstorical matters, which of course spill their effects over into the lives lived today. (28)

As I indicate in this study, the dominant terminologies are so firmly embedded in popular ideology, federal and provincial/state legislation, law, and literature that they are not easily or quickly replaced but are a site of constant negotiation and contest. The dominant terminology is also a site of shared identification for Aboriginal peoples, who, in facing the massive weight of a federal government, find in their shared histories and collective name a site of solidarity and therefore resistance, in exploiting the "Anglocentric totalisation of 'others'" (Fielder 44). The lifestorytellers in this study, for example, often take up these general, historically imposed terms, especially when discussing race relations and national issues and histories, while at the same time asserting specific tribal or national names. The "Aboriginal" critics I refer to in this study often use the general categories of Aboriginal, Native, and First Nations, for example, in discussing (dominant) national issues.

As Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling reveals, the social meanings and material effects of these categories shape—in the tangible terms of treaty rights, health care, education, and poverty, and in the processes of self- and collective subjectivity—individual and collective identity. It is politically vital for a politics of decolonization that those peoples named Aboriginal in and through various discourses and structures reconfigure those definitions, reject them altogether, and/or formulate their own, to meet their own aspirations. Aboriginal theorists adopt and use imperialist terminology strategically and often contingently in this process of transformation. At times, in using the "master's tools," writers will adopt positions of strategic essentialism to argue for the specificity of their identities, experiences, cultural practices, and rights to land; in others, arguments are made in favour of a cultural definition of Aboriginality that escapes biological or racial definitions in order to include the vast numbers of mixed-race Aboriginal peoples whose experience does not fall under familiar categories.

What is crucial in the consideration of the complex of the "naming" of Aboriginal peoples is the profound implication of the naming process in the production of identity, of Aboriginality, as a social and political category, and, as I address in more detail in this

study, as a means of constructing whiteness and allocating and denying resources according to race. Imperialism's naming constructs fixed, essentialized, ahistorical, racialized cultural identities that must constantly be reproduced and reinforced in order to maintain their power. It is a process that in marking and controlling Aboriginality in particular ways, most crucially as an irreducible racial category, is fundamental to white nation-building, to the reproduction of particular relations of dominance claimed and made to appear natural.

The central issue in the politics of naming is not exclusively "the definition of authenticity or Aboriginality, but on the contrary, how to explode the processes, energies and investments that have gone into the construction of such spurious identities" (Hodge and Mishra 115). This study argues that the categories White Self/Aboriginal Other, while extremely powerful in their material manifestations and effects, are also fundamentally ambivalent, historical, open to change, and herein lies their potential for transformation. They are, however, powerful categories that not only undergird the collectivities of white Australian and Canadian nationalism, but produce the subjectivities of individuals located within the national geography and imaginary, and how we read, interpret, and construct our (white and Aboriginal) selves, our "cultures," our national space, and "others" in it.

Aboriginality, then, is a fluid and dynamic category whose meaning is grounded in a shared history of colonization and yet is contingent on the specific discursive and material contexts in which it is used, by whom, and for what purposes. My position in this study is that "Aboriginality," while historically tied to the problematic imperialist constructions of race and certainly profoundly affected by the cultural meanings attached to "skin colour," is in fact historical, a fluid process that changes over time and participates in history. As the lifestorytellers in this study suggest, Aboriginality is a fluid enough construct to encompass the transformations wrought by imperialism and Christianity, and, crucially, these need not always be deemed as entirely negative if they provide for Aboriginal women a (self-defined) site of agency.

In this study I have chosen to use the term "Aboriginal" to refer *generally* to the indigenous peoples of Canada and Australia, recognizing that this is a contested but currently generally accepted term, particularly in terms of federal legislation, and with the

advantage of currently being in use in both Canada and Australia.[26] In my concern to privilege Aboriginal voices as much as possible, I foreground Aboriginal critics by naming them directly in my text and I typically place the names of non-Aboriginal critics in parenthetical references, or name them explicitly as non-Aboriginal.

Yet one of the most profound challenges of this type of work is the very power of this binarism of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal to reassert itself even in work that attempts to challenge it. Therefore, whenever possible or available I use the writer's own national or tribal name as she/he provides it, in order to foreground the imperialist history of the terminology "Aboriginal" and to stress the particularity and self-definitions of nations, tribes, linguistic groups, and communities within these larger collectivities of "Aboriginality" and of Australia and Canada. Further, that dominant racial categories not only are inappropriate for "defining" the identities of mixed-race Aboriginal peoples but unnecessary in a definition of Aboriginality that encompasses multiple perspectives is foregrounded by the lifestorytellers here. And in order to honour the voices and authority of the Aboriginal storytellers, whose language use is not always Standard English, I have avoided using the literary convention of "correction" of quotes (through the convention of "sic") but have left their words as they appear in print.

Throughout this study I refer to "whiteness" as a social category that undergirds imperialism, capitalism, dominant nationalism, and academic institutions and requires analysis in the processes of liberatory critical and activist practices. Whiteness, like Aboriginality, is not a fixed, essentialized identity, though colonial discourse asserts it as such, but a self-perpetuating social category that indeed, changes over time and place. Indeed, the multiplicity of what constitutes whiteness—its embeddedness in other social categories such as ethnicity, language, nation, spirituality, and so on—reveals its very constitution as a social and historical category. Because this multiplicity is often called upon in defensive resistance to anti-racist critique and functions powerfully in conjunction with ideologies of individualism, and because whiteness as a general category has received scant attention in postocolonial studies, I use the term to refer to a general (unmarked)

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[26] My usage of the term "Aboriginal" to refer generally in this study to the Canadian context is intended to include the Métis, but not, except in the most general terms of the history of colonization, to the Inuit, whose distinct culture and history is beyond the purview of this project.

social category that must be marked, made visible, and critiqued. Whiteness in this framework does maintain particular features, such as the concept of innate superiority and entitlement based on assumptions about skin colour. Whiteness is

> a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white....There is likewise no scientific (i.e. biological or genetic) basis to the concept of whiteness. There is nothing scientifically distinctive about it except skin color, and that is highly variable. All common wisdom notwithstanding, the skin colour of a person tells you nothing about their culture, country of origin, character, or personal habits. Because there is nothing biological about whiteness, it ends up being defined by contrast to other groups, becoming confused with ideas of nationality, religion and ethnicity. (Kivel 17, 19)

Systemic material realities in both Canada and Australia, particularly federal legislation that continues to define Aboriginality within the performance of the white nation, continue to determine that these definitions of authenticity and Aboriginality will remain, for some time at least, as imperialist legacies to be constantly negotiated and contested, in anti-racist praxis and embodied in self-reflexivity that locates the "self" in its systemic contexts.

Negotiating Aboriginality and Inhabiting the Self/Other Problematic

The absence of Aboriginal perspectives in literary and cultural criticism is not easily remedied by a simplistic notion of the inclusion of alternative or absent perspectives within existing theoretical paradigms. Approaching Aboriginal cultural production from within a self-reflexive location in postcolonial and feminist theory still risks incorporation of that material, and its radical potential, within the framework of the dominant, of the centre, however unintentionally. One of the very problematics of deconstructing and transforming the binarism of White Self/Aboriginal Other is its very power, its pernicious ability to reassert itself. As Ojibway/German critic Kimberly Blaeser insists, even in well-intentioned attempts by non-Aboriginal critics to read and appreciate Aboriginal literature,

> the implied movement is still that of colonization: authority emanating from the mainstream critical center to the marginalized native texts. Issues of Orientalism and enforced literacy apply again when another language and culture, this time a critical language and the Euro-American literary tradition, takes prominence and are used to

explain, replace, or block an indigenous critical language and literary tradition. (56)[27]

Recent critical practices in which critics "bare all" and identify "an individual position, and its limitations, before commencing any analysis" (Donnell 105) may not only become "meaningless" but can "actually work as a legitimation device" (106), justifying and excusing whatever problematic analysis might follow. British critic Alison Donnell quite rightly insists that the strategic preface of "as a white European feminist...etc." is a misguided process that, despite critical awareness to the contrary, attempts to fix cultural and political identity, of critics and of minority peoples, as static, and functions "to avoid the real questions concerning the negotiation of meaning that such an act should provoke" (106). The practice of naming one's critical position, although it began as a strategy to resist the reinforcement in academic work of the objective, male Enlightenment humanist investigating subject, certainly has only been partially successful. This in large part is because the strategy has unwittingly participated in the individualism of academic institutions, in the atomization and fetishization of difference on which imperialist capitalism have been grounded, and in the valorization of the idea that "any reading (rather than many readings) is 'equally valid' without consideration being given to the possibilities of multiple or contested meanings" (106). The strategy, in other words, has elided considerations of *relationality*, of the complex of power relations among the reader and the read, the critic and her subject (object).

This problem has been compounded by the way that the unmarked whiteness and the ideology of individualism have been taken up in postcolonial studies, with the effect of

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[27] I am not suggesting that Aboriginal critical perspectives are the "only" perspectives permitted in analysis of Aboriginal literatures, nor that they should be unquestioningly valorized, which functions again as a form of tokenism and marginalization. In this study, I have included the perspectives of critics (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) that have enriched my analysis. In the interests of space, I have not entered lengthy debates with critics and positions with which I disagree (among whom I include Aboriginal writers), but have tended to not include them in my discussion. For examples of my detailed critiques of Aboriginal critics, see my reviews of Janice Acoose's *Iskwewak Kah'Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws* and of Robert Allen Warrior's *Tribal Secrets*.

As Blaeser suggests, appropriate critical approaches to Aboriginal cultural production may involve an attentiveness to multiple theoretical perspectives, a recognition that Aboriginal writers and theorists are not isolated from poststructuralist, postmodernist, feminist, and/or Marxist perspectives and may utilize these strategically, in combination with Aboriginal perspectives, in their work. It is in examining the specific historical relations of theoretical perspectives that a systemic literary analysis and potential alliances among differing perspectives and approaches emerge.

reducing racism to individual psychological processes of desire, such that the institutional location of postcolonial studies and of literary studies generally in processes of imperialism go unacknowledged. In the following chapters I explore in more detail the operations of such desire for Aboriginal Otherness, locating it as part of national and global ideological and material forces. An effective historicizing of one's systemic location, of the various power relations informing and shaping critical praxes, productively moves one's critical practice from the individual (and the individualistic) to the systemic, to the relationality of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, to the co-construction of those very categories and the ideological and material power they carry.

In her article "The Problem of Speaking for Others," non-Aboriginal critic Linda Alcoff interrogates the theoretical and political implications of North American academics' responses to the "appropriation debate," to the confusion engendered by often-vehement charges by Aboriginal writers and writers of colour that academic reading practices, theories, and criticism, the very institutions in which academics work, if not clearly so, are at least *potentially* racist, sexist, neo-imperialist, hegemonic. As Alcoff observes, the typical academic response to such charges has been a move into silence,[28] supported by a claim that one can only speak for oneself, but this invidualistic response brings further complications and ethical questions:

> For example, we might ask, if I don't speak for those less privileged than myself, am I abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege? If I should not speak for others, should I restrict myself to following their lead uncritically? Is my greatest contribution to *move over and get out of the way?* And if so, what is the best way to do this — to keep silent or to deconstruct my discourse? . . . So the question arises as to whether all instances of speaking for others should be condemned, and, if not, where the line of demarcation should be drawn. (8)

Canadian academics working in the field of "postcolonial" studies remain vexed by these questions.[29] But the result of not engaging in such a discussion, "even at the risk of being

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historical relations of theoretical perspectives that a systemic literary analysis and potential alliances among differing perspectives and approaches emerge.

[28] In her ""White Feminist Guilt, Abject Scripts, and (Other) Transformative Necessities," Jeanne Perreault explores the ramifications of "white liberal guilt" as a response to similar issues.

[29] "Stop Stealing Our Stories," an angry indictment against non-Aboriginal Canadian writers and academics by Anishinaubae writer and activist Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, is but one well-known example of such criticism.

accused of cannibalizing the self in a performative gesture, might very well be the loss not only of integrity but of any genuine agency in and connection with the actual conditions of the world" (Bahri 53-54). The "appropriation debate" has led to the assertions that "we" should only study our own literature: however, the "notion that we should limit inquiries to 'our own' literature so often betrays a fear of confronting the questions 'what is our own' and, even more crucially, 'who constitutes this we?'" (Donnell 104).

Aboriginal cultural production powerfully and discomfittingly raises the specter, the repressed and denied reality, of our own continuing implication in the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, our deep investment in this structure called Canada. Silence on these issues is untenable because it reinforces rather than confronts processes of systemic privilege, as Alcoff insists:

> I certainly agree that in some instances speaking for others constitutes a violence and should be stopped....But there is no neutral place to stand free and clear in which one's words do not prescriptively affect or mediate the experience of others, nor is there a way to decisively demarcate a boundary between one's location and all others....And this is simply because we cannot neatly separate off our mediating praxis that interprets or constructs our experiences from the praxis of others. We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which each action I take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in many strands of a web in which others find themselves moving also....Thus, the attempt to avoid the problematic of speaking for by retreating into an individualist realm is based on an illusion, well-supported in the individualist ideology of the West, that a self is not constituted by multiple intersecting discourses but consists in a unified whole capable of autonomy from others. (20-21)

As Aboriginal cultural production and political practices continue to unsettle boundaries and paradigms, non-Aboriginal critics will find ourselves variously excluded, allied, re-positioned, and, most likely, persistently unsettled. (And Aboriginal peoples and critics will not automatically be in agreement, either.)[30] As Alcoff suggests, "anyone who speaks for others should only do so out of a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved....Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says" (24, 25). We will be told to "move over and not take up [others'] space"; we will also be told to "just move over and let us sit

[30] See Hoy for a white critic's careful and exemplary response to a First Nations text, maintaining throughout a sensitivity to the power relations of the reading/critical process.

at the same table," to quote from Métis/Salish Lee Maracle ("Coming" 83), but as Alcoff insists, "we have to acknowledge that the very decision to 'move over' or retreat can occur only from a position of privilege" (24). This could require reconceptualizing, destabilizing, the structures in which we work. Postcolonial critics would do well to keep Alcoff's concluding caution in mind:

> The source of a claim or discursive practice in suspect motives or maneuvers or in privileged social locations...though it is always relevant, cannot be sufficient to repudiate it. We must ask further question about its effects, questions that amount to the following: will it enable the empowerment of oppressed peoples? (29)

This is why pedagogy and activism, as material and embodied practices aimed at the empowerment of less privileged peoples, and at the unlearning of privilege of those in positions of relative power, are crucial to any practice that claims to participate in a liberatory politics. In the classroom, and in communities (which may include academic communities) is where the effects of our practices and critical discourses, our acts of representing ourselves, others, and the power relations we inhabit, can most readily be assessed. And as Alcoff points out, such processes "would be most successful if engaged in collectively with others, by which aspects of our own location less highlighted in our own minds might be revealed to us" (25).

The historicizing of white middle-class Canadian women's locations as part of an anti-racist activist politics, by historical fact, involves an investigation of the inheritances of patriarchal Christian ideologies of guilt and redemption; anti-racist activism is a collective process that white people engage in, together. The telling of personal stories about racism, guilt, confusion, paralysis, and so on, can be part of a productive anti-racist pedagogy—when clearly part of a systemic analysis of power and oppression. And certainly such self- and systemic awareness should inform all literary critical practices, just as our own personal and collective histories, and our own personal investments, inform and inhabit our critical practices.[31] How, when, where, and to what effects should white women

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[31] As South Asian postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak has suggested, the problem is not one of the authenticity of "voice," or of the radicality of the critic, but of the complex of the politics of representation. As she argues,

> there has to be a persistent critique of what one is up to, so that it doesn't get all bogged down in this homogenization, constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because of the ones who are getting access into public places due to these waves of benevolence and

speak of our racism and our racist histories? How much space should our historical tracing take up? At the expense of what kind of political action, of what voices and perspectives? What are the distinctions among accountability and solipsism, silence and complicity, speaking about myself, about "others," and representing "them" and speaking for them?

Part of the very problematic of "representing others" in literary criticism is the form and practice of literary analysis itself, as a form based in the representation of writers and their contexts, and often in the context of elucidating or "knowing" the writer, the writing subject, and the text as if they are transparent or can be made to be so: "As philosophers and social theorists we are authorized by virtue of our academic positions to develop theories that express and encompass the ideas, needs, and goals of others. However, we must begin to ask ourselves whether this is a legitimate authority" (Alcoff 7). The monologic nature of most literary criticism, and the form of a Ph.D. thesis, too, resist a critical self-reflexivity that extends beyond the psychology of its writer. It rails against the dialogic nature that I envision as necessary among white critics as part of a collective self-reflexiveness that is instrinsic to anti-oppression work. As such, my inclusion of critical reflections in this study, while not intending to abdicate personal responsibilities for my words and practices, and raising questions about the extent to which my "I" might overshadow the project, are directed at systemic analysis and change as well.

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so on. I think that as long as one remains aware that it is a very problematic field, there is some hope. (*Post-Colonial* 63)

Spivak advocates a self-reflexive critical process that persistently explores its own limits in order to expose where and how it might be reinforcing hegemonic practices. She rightly observes that "[n]o one can quite articulate the space she herself inhabits" and advocates the exploration of "this relatively ungraspable space in terms of what might be its history" (68).

Reflections on Inhabiting the Binarism

> Your desire for the other, what form does it take? To begin with there is the lure of the exotic, the other culture as exotic. In this model a centre-periphery *ratio* is set up, an anthropological model which takes the European as central, but really only makes it visible through the contrast with the exotic. The two cultures tend to be treated as separate with the researcher as a shuttle.
>
> If you reject this one, then you might have to start looking at aspects of the other culture as being the same as yours, as being quite ordinary.....Or you could take your desire as historically loaded, guilt-ridden. Do you want to study Aboriginal culture to expirtate this guilt, or display it?...Are you punishing yourself, or going to find people who will do it to you? Would this be a reversal of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic?...Desire in relation to the Other is perfectly okay. You just have to ask yourself how that desire might work for or against your thesis work, or for or against the work of the Other.
>
> Stephen Muecke, *Textual Spaces* (198-99)

How can I inhabit and perform whiteness differently? How do I explore my unconscious imperialist desires in order to transform my critical and pedagogical practices?

I have been faced with the challenge of enacting self-reflexivity, tracing the limits of my knowledge, putting forth a political argument about the limits of current theories and institutional structures, in a critical form that requires authoritativeness and, as a Ph.D. dissertation, is profoundly implicated in the operations of the university. It is a tricky dance, simultaneously asserting my own authority and challenging it as well; trying to make my authority provisional and interrogative, questioning it productively rather than providing a demonstration, through an apologist's self-deprecations, of how effectively I have internalized patriarchy and white liberal guilt. Part of my concern has always been to be vigilant that my personal processes of unlearning race and class privilege did not constitute this project. The ideology of individualism is so persuasive that I did not want to separate my own history of racism from the historical processes that produced it. Rather, I have hoped to place myself in a systemic critique and theoretical context in which my

personal grapplings would have a wider effect than that of primarily personal reconciliation.

But to what extent, I have wondered, is all criticism in a sense autobiographical, a tracing of one's history revealed through attention to particular details and issues rather than others, a projection of personal and unconscious desire?

The very process and structure of this project are in a profoundly accurate sense, autobiographical. This study is a record of my intellectual and political history, of my movement from and through the often disembodied practices of literary theory to embodied teaching and activism, from Lacan to the university classroom to the Napi Friendship Centre in Pincher Creek, Alberta, and to the Blood Reserve's Red Crow Community College.

It has been my encounter with the institution of postsecondary education that has provided me with a liberatory language for gender oppression; it was in university structures (18 years ago now!) that I first learned of the real history of the oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, shattering my complacency and ignorance and starting me on this path of learning and unlearning. It was academic accreditation that led me to graduate studies in Australia (where I wore my Canadian-ness with such pride), and where I began to develop my interest in global imperialism and the oppression of Aboriginal peoples.

I entered the field of postcolonial literary studies at the graduate level through a "back door," so to speak—as a white liberal feminist with a bachelor of journalism and Canadian studies degree and not a BA in English—and via interdisciplinary graduate studies in Literature and Communication at Murdoch University in Australia followed by more Masters-level study in Canada. This entry occurred in the period 1989-1991, a foundational period for postcolonial studies, as it achieved its institutional legitimacy, as marked by the publication of <u>*The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*</u>*, by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, and by the proliferation of articles and conferences on/in the field. This historical convergence has uniquely positioned me as at once inside and outside the discipline of literary study, or,*

more accurately, perhaps, as a curious border crosser, with particular critical absences (the traditional knowledge of the "canon") to contend with.

It has been in academia that (much more recently) I first encountered anti-racist critical theory and pedagogy, where powerfully and painfully, I began this process of trying to reconcile, intellectually and bodily, the criss-crossings of my own history of oppression and privilege. And it was through academic investigation that most recently I began to question how this necessary personal reconciliation was connected to material systemic change beyond the books in the library, the walls of the university.

The academic institution has been a powerfully enabling place for me. I am deeply invested in it. And yet, the longer I inhabit it, and as it comes to inhabit me, I see in it, experience in it, exciting possibilities and constraining limits, profound contradictions (tensions I can not always identify as exclusively mine or the institution's). These difficulties emerge for me in my ongoing struggle to speak in a voice that is mine, that will be heard and acknowledged as valid, even as I recognize the patriarchal underpinnings of what is deemed valid; the pressure to be a disembodied intellect, to erase the physicality of pregnancy (and its profound sense of bodily vulnerability), motherhood, fatigue, frustration, and even of joy is powerful. Systemic structures are, after all, profoundly efficient at rewriting women's embodied interventions into that much more fodder for the biological sexism mill. The processes of embodying and enacting a feminist, anti-racist practice within academic institutions are embedded in the very structures of the university that at once enable this inquiry and work to contain it.

White feminist anti-racist theory as practice is inherently and by necessity personally risky. This challenge of systemic authority has real (and sometimes equally effective, imagined or threatened) implications in terms of the processes of graduation, hiring, promotion, and tenure. The work of unlearning and critiquing one's (my) own authority is much less tangible, less linear. White anti-racism, perhaps inevitably, is a series of advances and retreats, moments of insight and clarity and, more often, of frustration, blindness (willful or otherwise), defensiveness, tentativeness, and fear. It is disturbingly easy to let a sense of gender oppression override awareness of power and privilege.

Particular desires for particular Aboriginal Others operate in me and through me, have informed my own subjectivity, even as I charge white feminism with these same desires. Desires for spiritual grandmothers who will gently forgive my racism, for a romanticized wholly integrated Other who experiences no fragmentation because of her uncomplicated relationship to place, and for a radical, political subject whose analysis of the operations of imperialism will teach me, all operate in the processes of my own subjectivity, and inevitably inform my reading and interpretive and pedagogical practices. My choices regarding what texts to include in this project, for example, are in part shaped by institutional realities—the lack of critical attention to Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in general, the absence of any full-length article on the pieces I have chosen, and their very specificities and their relationship to the genre of lifestorytelling. But there are other desires operating here—my delight in reading them and learning from them (learning about "the Other," and about "myself," my nation), my pleasure in discovering their "differences," and my desire to be the one who brings these texts to serious critical attention. At times, these texts did not meet my preconceived if unconscious ideas about what constitutes a radical narrating subject.

My process in developing this project has been marked by non-linearity and by the inevitable tensioned nature how white anti-racist, feminist critical awareness, and material practice, actually occurs. What began as an intellectual exercise in the application of theory on to text has become a much more complex process of locating myself, my body, my whiteness, in historical, institutional, and material contexts. The goals of this project have necessarily shifted; the original desire to value and honour Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling by bringing it to much-needed critical attention (my own narrative of salvation and personal redemption?) became by necessity also an investigation into why it has not been studied adequately, into what systemic, institutional, and disciplinary and theoretical structures have produced and maintained its marginality. The insights into theoretical issues, in turn, developed into questions about the role and location of literary analysis in processes of systemic change and activism. My encounter with anti-racist theory and pedagogy led me further to investigate my own location, my own authority and

privilege, in these systemic structures. It has become increasingly impossible for me to separate out any of these issues.

The writing of this project has taken place intermittently over three years and has been marked by my movement away from the urban university context and into small-town Alberta community anti-racist activism and part-time teaching at an Aboriginal college. It has been shaped by the profound transformations in my own subjectivity, body, and processes of embodiment, from (perpetual, it seems) graduate student through pregnancy and parenting. The writing has been affected by my ongoing investment in the university as a site of personal empowerment and of professional, political, intellectual—and crucially, ethical—validation. It has been affected by my location as a woman graduate student negotiating that investment.

This project, then, is perhaps productively read not as an authoritative treatise on Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling but as a negotiation with personal and systemic authority as that authority relates to Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling. It is an intervention into current critical practices and an attempt to create critical dialogue (beyond the monologue of a dissertation) in which my interpretations are interrogative starting points in an admittedly (unabashedly even) utopian process. It is in part my own intellectual autobiography. And it is in part an allegory of the processes of white anti-racist feminism in the university context.

Chapter One

Locating Aboriginal Nationalisms:
The Role of (White) Nationalism in Postcolonial and Australian-Canadian Studies

> Racism was always about land. It was always about property.
>
> Janice Simcoe (Anishinaubae), "Strangers in Our Own Land"

> [Indians] provide a reason to feel superior to the Americans; they provide an excuse to feel good about British justice. But they never play themselves. They have no reality. There are imaginary.
>
> Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (81)

Introduction

To note that British empire-building was a process of the reproduction internationally of the white nation-state, as seen particularly in the characterization of Australia and Canada as "white settler/invader" nations, would appear to merely repeat a postcolonial theoretical commonplace. It is, however, a commonplace that bears further scrutiny. In recent work on nationalism by major postcolonial theorists and cultural critics, typically there is no mention of Aboriginal movements for self-determination in Canada and Australia (or of Aboriginal women's roles in those movements), either in relation to these dominant national structures or as articulations of existing national formations worthy of study in their own right.[1]

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[1] Recent studies of how nations are constructed and reproduced materially and ideologically generally continue to ignore questions of how women are located within national spaces and narratives, and how women participate in nationalist movements. "Why is it," asks R. Radhakrishnan, that the advent of the

Moreover, current postcolonial theories of nationalism not only ignore the location of women in dominant and resistant nationalisms but do not always address the specific ways in which sexism and racism operate to undermine Aboriginal women's historical agency in their interconnected roles as custodians of land, culture, and language.[2] That Aboriginal women's roles, as mothers and as political participants in their traditional communities, were so specifically targeted by state policies (most notably in the residential school system and in the imposition of patriarchal structures of governance) is a signal of their historical agency. Current theories of nationalism not only overlook Aboriginal nationalisms but doubly silence the roles of Aboriginal women, and of Aboriginal women lifestorytellers, in the range of Aboriginal nationalist practices.

In this chapter I suggest that the causes of this critical absence include the implication of postcolonial theory and Australian and Canadian national and comparative studies in dominant nationalism. To more appropriately locate Aboriginal nationalism(s) and the practices of Aboriginal women lifestorytellers in those movements, I sketch the history of the "nation" in Australian and Canadian national and comparative studies and in postcolonial theory. I draw on current analyses of nationalism within and outside of postcolonial and Australian and Canadian literary studies, and I outline some of the crucial operations of the dominant white nationalisms of Canada and Australia constructing and circumscribing Aboriginal women's historical locations, relations that they specifically negotiate.

Recent poststructuralist investigations into the narrative features of nation, while immensely useful in some aspects, have none the less disturbingly erased the materiality of the nation and its processes of racialization, the production not only of Aboriginality but also of the category of whiteness as well. To date there has been a critical inability to deal effectively with whiteness as a social and *economic* category constituting the Canadian and Australian nation-states, and to articulate the relationship between the economic and the discursive in literary practices. Postcolonial literary studies in particular do not examine

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politics of nationalism signals the subordination if not the demise of women's politics? Why does the politics of the 'one' typically overwhelm the politics of the 'other'?" (78).

[2] As Himani Bannerji has observed, "[t]hat racism and sexism are necessary social relations for the organization of colonial or modern imperialist capitalism in the West seems to figure as an afterthought in recent writings" ("But Who" 87).

exactly what "whiteness" *means*—how, why, in what contexts, and in what historical moments—in the Australian and Canadian national spheres. It does not examine clearly the operation of whiteness as the management of space and bodies *through* the processes of racialization, the conferral on white bodies and the (perceived) white national body of the ownership, management, and proprietorship of space and land.[3]

This an effect of the operation of an unmarked whiteness, of the "dominant mode of self-perception, although largely an unconscious one," in the construction and performance of white nationhood (Hage 19). In academic practices also, whiteness as a social category and location of power (the power, in fact, *to racialize*) remains intact—while racism is asserted as a "problem" (the problem *of* those racialized) rather than as "the racialized *effects* of social and economic inequality" (Morris and Cowlishaw 3).

I suggest that recognizing that nations are ambivalent or unstable formations does not *necessarily* reduce their materiality, though in institutional practice it has, but can lead to an understanding of the interconnectedness of the discursive and material. I therefore discuss contemporary literary and cultural theories, which do not adequately consider the roles of women, whiteness and of economics in the formation of the nation-state, but do provide some insights into the instability and ambivalent nature of nations as discursive performances, and thus into the potential role of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling. I indicate, in tracing the contexts of production and reception of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling practices, how literary nationalism has played its part in the formation of a national white identity, interpellating readers as citizens, or, in the case of Aboriginal peoples, historically "not-citizens" within the national imaginary. Postcolonial theory appropriately describes Aboriginal cultural production as exposing the political unconscious of the dominant formation as a profound lack of/desire for a legitimate relationship to place and the desire for a particular form of Aboriginal subjectivity and representations to fulfil this nationalist desire. This critical construct, however, *can* operate

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[3] Hodge's and Mishra's *Dark Side of the Dream* provides much excellent analysis of the formation of Australian literary nationalism, and they call for an analysis of "the structure of the racist complex, to locate its point of weakness and insecurity and deconstruct its obsessive claims to monolithic unity. This point of weakness is also the site of its most massive investment of energies: the role of the concept of purity in an impossible enterprise of legitimation" (51). But they do not analyze the role of whiteness as a political and social category constitutive of British-Empire building and of nation-building within the British colonies.

to fix Aboriginal self-representations as exclusively within, or as only reactive counter-discourse to, the dominant formation, eliding as a result the cultural specificities of diverse sovereignty movements of multiple Aboriginal communities, as well as their agency in imagining and transforming the national space outside of dominant parameters.[4] Perspectives that construct Aboriginal nationalisms as merely desires for replication and replacement of the dominating nation-state has entered postcolonial and Australian-Canadian national and comparative studies.[5]

The extent to which current theories of nation and nationalism use the language and paradigms of psychoanalysis is striking. Nations are often characterized as "imagined" communities. Aboriginal cultural production in Canada and Australia is often described as the "return of the repressed" in the already-fractured national psyche. And minority and Aboriginal claims for participation in the politics of the nation are often referred to as producing fear, hysteria, paranoia, and loss within the dominant formation. Yet there has been little attention paid to the historical relationship between psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory. Psychoanalytical approaches taken up in postcolonial theory have considered the operations of desire for the Aboriginal Other as they affect individual critics' reading practices, but the relationship of the white reading/teaching subject to the performances of the nation, in the classroom in particular, has not been clarified. This has resulted in a number of problems: the reduction of race and racism to individual psychologies, the elision of discussions of whiteness as a category for organizing and controlling the *national* space (in both its "imaginary" and material manifestations), and the avoidance of discussions of how individual and collective desires for particular forms of Aboriginality (and their concomitant allocation of space and resources) are manifested in

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[4] As Ahmad has similarly argued, "the logic of capital is now too deeply entrenched in all our societies, for nationalisms of the kind which are centred on the existing state apparatuses to *be* the answering dialectic, if they ever were" (317).

[5] This ideology is clearly and satirically described by Native American Ward Churchill as "The Great Fear," the reactionary myth that any substantive native land recovery would automatically lead to mass dispossession and eviction of individual non-Indian homeowners....I mean, what *are* people worried about here? Do y'all really foresee Indians standing out on the piers of Boston and New York City, issuing sets of waterwings to long lines of non-Indians so they can all swim back to the Old World? Gimme a break....Seriously, you can search high and low, and you'll never find an instance in which Indians have advocated that small property owners be pushed off land in order to satisfy land claims. The thrust in every single case has been to recover land within national and state parks and forests, grasslands, military reservations, and the like. (423-24).

the current ideologies of multiculturalism and reinforced in the university classroom. Issues of the mutual imbrication of race, desire, and critical and pedagogical practices are generally reduced to the psychology of the individual critics and teachers (and to *only* those academics working on literature by Aboriginal people or people of colour), rather than placed in systemic or institutional contexts in which whiteness continues to operate as an unmarked collective category of immense material and psychological power.

The following chapters therefore explore the terrain on which Aboriginal women lifestorytellers transform the very categories of gender, race, nation, and Aboriginality that ground dominant nationalism. Aboriginal women writers, in other words, are faced with the challenge of preserving and valorising a besieged culture without falling into the reproduction of stereotypes or catering to expectations regarding what constitutes Aboriginal culture (as fixed in the past).[6] Métis writer, theorist, and educator Emma LaRocque has addressed the complexity of the negotiations that Aboriginal women must make in recovering and representing Aboriginal women's traditional roles in a contemporary context, and often to a largely non-Aboriginal audience:

> 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 lies (lie) our source(s) 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?) It should not be assumed, even in those original societies that were structured along matriarchal lines, that matriarchies necessarily prevented men from oppressing women. There are indications of male violence and sexism in some Aboriginal societies prior to European contact, and certainly after contact. But at the same time, culture is not immutable, and tradition cannot be expected to be always of value or relevant 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

[6] The dominant non-Aboriginal audience, however, carries a certain amount of liberal guilt which may be capitalized on by Aboriginal writers in a politics of decolonization. Contemporary representations of an ideal, non-patriarchal, pre-contact Aboriginal culture that accorded women and mothers an equality of power, combined with mainstream recognition of pre-contact Aboriginal sovereignty, culture, and history may carry a great deal of political freight in furthering mainstream recognition of the horrors of imperialism and of current injustices.

"traditions" consistent with contemporary and international human rights standards. ("Colonization" 14)

The Unmarked Nation in Postcolonial and Australian-Canadian National and Comparative Studies.

The history of nation and nationalism as sites of interrogation within the fields of postcolonial theory and Canadian-Australian comparative studies is emblematic of the vexed and ongoing struggle to articulate the relationships among Commonwealth and Comparative literary studies, postcolonial theory, poststructuralism and postmodernism, feminism,[7] psychoanalysis and Marxism.[8] A critical commonplace has been that postcolonial theory grew out of Commonwealth Studies.[9] More recent investigations

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[7] White feminism, in positing a "universal" oppression and sisterhood of women, carried its homogenizing tendency into postcolonial studies until very recently. This historical tendency takes on a sharp visibility in the study of Aboriginal women's subjectivity and cultural production, and its focus on Aboriginal maternal agency, and is made pointedly and problematically clear in the characterization by the authors of the inaugural postcolonial theory text, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, of feminism and post-colonial concerns as *parallel* rather than intersecting and often mutually-constitutive. Women, they suggest,

> *share with* colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and *like them* they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors. *Women, like post-colonial peoples*, have had to construct a language of their own when their only available "tools" are those of the "colonizer"....Feminism has not in general provided post-colonial criticism with a model or models because its development has been rather as a coincident and parallel discourse. (Ashcroft et al., 174-75, 177, my emphasis)

This failure to address the multiple and overlapping discourses producing gendered colonized subjectivity/ agency is emblematic of the text itself, which virtually ignores the vast contributions of feminist theory and methodology to postcolonial literary studies. The text also virtually ignores the cultural production of Aboriginal peoples in the "settler" colonies of Canada and Australia.

[8]The radical claims and potential of postcolonial theory have been compromised by the theory's genesis and consolidation within institutional academic structures, resulting in a move away from historical and historicizing analysis and towards totalizing generalizations. This effect perhaps is most readily seen in the widespread appearance of the problematic terms "the postcolonial" (note the definite article) and "postcolonialism," which remain poorly defined despite their proliferation. More recently these terms have been assumed to describe not only a field of study, a political movement, and a method of analysis, but also the object of study as well—the entire world and its condition.

In many ways, postcolonial theory is currently tensioned between poststructuralist and materialist perspectives. The convergences and disjunctions between postcolonial theory and postmodernism/ poststructuralist theory, as signalled by the collection *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-colonialism and Postmodernism* (1990), edited by Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, remain to be fully worked articulated. While this ongoing debate could be a mark of the vitality of the postcolonial field, the ramifications of an unhistoricized use of poststructuralism do, in my view, resist studies of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in Canada and Australia.

[9] This can be seen, for example, in the very title of the collection *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*, edited by Anna Rutherford.

suggest that its genesis lies in a much more complex, though not clearly historicized, hybridizing of contemporary literary and cultural theories, as well as Commonwealth Studies, which, "in its early manifestations might more accurately have been termed 'comparative approaches to national literatures'" (Dale 111).

Commonwealth studies emerged in the period of optimism about the global decolonization movements of the 1960s, and nationalism, and literary nationalism, were viewed as fundamental to, if not *the* forms of, anti-imperial resistance. In this light the struggle for Australian and Canadian national literary studies against the weight of the British canonical tradition and its institutional hold need not be underestimated. It should, however, be historicized and critiqued for its wresting of authority from the imperial centre *and* for its implication in replicating coercive national structures and discourses. It is worth recalling that studies of national literary studies in Canada and Australia have only recently gained institutional "legitimacy," and postcolonial studies in Canada and Australia have not been as institutionally secure as those in England and more recently the United States. Like the national formations in which they are located, Canada and Australia, and their respective national literary studies, have not enjoyed the "privilege" of a secure post-national consciousness.

The field of Australian-Canadian comparative literary studies emerged, in turn, from this framework of Commonwealth studies, from more localized struggles for national literary identity, and from the recognition of the historical and cultural similarities between Canada and Australia as former colonies and then nations in the British Commonwealth. This grounding in nationalism has been both enabling and limiting for the study of Aboriginal cultural production in Canada and Australia. If in their genesis these national literary studies were to be celebrated for their independence from the dominance of British models, they eventually became hampered by their own paradigms of liberation, that "apparently self evident truth that it is useful and important for a people to study its national literature" (Ashcroft 148). In other words, how that nationalism in fact reproduces oppressive dominant structures, particularly in terms of the colonization of Aboriginal peoples, remained initially unchallenged.

How whiteness and white nationalism are deeply implicated in these fields is indicated by the effect on postcolonial, Australian and Canadian national and comparative studies of Frantz Fanon's critique of particular forms of nationalism in his *The Wretched of the Earth.* Fanon argues powerfully against forms of nationalism that merely mimic those of colonizing powers as ultimately ineffective for lasting anti-imperial resistance. Fanon's analysis was taken up in Canadian and Australian literary studies, and even carried into postcolonial theory, in a particularly racialized way. Coupled with disappointment at the apparent failures of the decolonization movements of the 1960s, in African countries in particular, it became another critical commonplace that nationalism was a futile and naïve form and practice, mere "myths of origin" and "essentialist, coercive totalizations" (Ahmad 12). Yet, the literary establishments of Canada and Australia continued to develop along nationalist lines while condemnations of nationalism were applied primarily to "Third World," particularly black African countries. The absence of any discussion of Aboriginal nationalisms in Australian and Canadian literary studies, and in postcolonial studies generally, suggests the denial of the validity, specificity, existence, of Aboriginal nationalisms.

More recently, postcolonial theory has characterized Australia and Canada as white settler/invader colonies and nations. As such, they "at least have the temporary illusion of a filiative relationship" with the dominating or imperial British culture (Ashcroft et al, *Empire* 26), yet they also carry the legacy of being colonizers of Aboriginal peoples. The ideology of British culture as "transplanted" onto empty colonial space has left its mark in relations with the Aboriginal peoples and in literary histories and national ideologies in both countries.

The dominant nationalist ideology of Australia has been described as based in working-class ideals, as egalitarian and critical of pretension, and as male-oriented, particularly in the bush ethos of "mateship" and in the nation's origins as a penal colony. Canada's dominant ideology has been based in its more conservative history, defining itself against the more "rebellious" United States and as the proper and obedient daughter of Mother England, and grounded in a government ideology of "peace, order, and good government." The conflicts between French and English Canada, moreover, have

dominated the national psyche, emerging in such characterizations of Canada as "two solitudes" and in official policies of bilingualism and biculturalism that preceded multiculturalism.

Literary myths of national origin as produced through literature are nonetheless specific to each country—Canada looked to white gentlewomen's accounts of "settling" the new land, while Australians drew on convict history and novels of that period for their literary self-definition (Brydon and Tiffin). This has led, further, to what Gillian Whitlock has referred to as a "moral hierarchy" between Canada and Australia beginning in the colonization period that has lingered on in popular ideologies, and manifests in class dynamics: Canada, she writes, was viewed as "the appropriate location for the middle-class settler, leaving it to Australia to be the 'workingman's paradise'" (84).[10]

Brydon and Tiffin stress, moreover, that "although the national mythologies in Australia and Canada claim what could be seen as opposing virtues, each serves in its own ways to still potential discontent by deflecting attention away from the true nature of power relationships within the country" (71). These power relationships are based in a shared history of global imperialism, the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples through similar legislative measures and structures, and as several critics have pointed out, a profoundly uneasy relationship to place and Aboriginal peoples as a result. Dominant national myths in both countries are very much dependent on geography, on a sense of alienation from an (assumed original and unchanging) mother culture.

Dominant evocations in each country of Britain as the "Mother Country" and of the colonies as "coming of age" to national independence emblematize the fact that, as populations of white, predominantly British, settlers/ invaders comprised the newly emergent nations of Canada and Australia, their national formations reproduced and reinforced the national structure of the imperial centre, intentionally and implicitly, in material/legislative practices and in ideological/cultural processes. The features of Australian and Canadian literary histories, for example, include "organicist metaphors of

[10] Whitlock continues with a piece of little known historical information that supports this assessment: "No doubt impressions of the institutional nature of early Australian settlement were also reinforced when some of the 1837 Quebec rebels were transported to Tasmania" (84-85).

coming of age"[11] that equate national maturity with the values of the imperial centre (Brydon and Tiffin 60). However, opposition to the imperial centre "often deals in similar terms, constructing arguments for a distinctive national identity based on essentialist metaphors that assume a single, unchanging identity may be claimed for each country and discovered in its literature" (60).[12]

National literary histories and values in Canada and Australia are "locked within a Freudian Oedipal structure," locating literature "between the inescapable fact of their linguistic parentage and their desire to develop a separate identity" (Arthur 5). These literary metaphors and ideologies have profound implications for critical and popular views of Aboriginal literatures as "immature" and of Aboriginal sovereignty movements as faulty replicas of Canadian and Australian national formations. However, as supposedly immature nations as yet incapable of governing themselves (as popular thinking has it), Aboriginal nations carry, for the dominant ideology, the *potential* for "mature nationhood"; therefore—if and when the Oedipal narrative is played through to its conclusion (the

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[11] Of particular significance is the roles Canada and Australia played in World War I, in which they were seen internationally as having "come of age" as (masculinist) nations through their sacrifice of male citizens for the international cause. As feminist and postcolonial critiques have noted, these myths of war and nationhood elide the roles of women and of Aboriginal men and men of colour in the war effort, and the operations of a dominant white nationalism in denying Aboriginal veterans compensation accorded white war veterans. Rather, upon their return, the estimated 3700 Aboriginal men who served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (about 35 per cent of the population of the eligible age for service), "soon discovered they were not getting the same benefits" as non-Aboriginal veterans and were once again subject to the provisions of the Indian Act: "The equal treatment they had received in the armed forces (including the right to vote) would not be extended into civilian life, a situation that still prevailed until after the Second World War, despite some improvement" (Dickason 326).

[12] Brydon and Tiffin describe the national ideologies of Canada and Australia as follows:

> we can provisionally characterise Canada, with Hugh Hood and Northrop Frye, as shaped by a conservative framework of values formed chiefly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Australia as inheriting a nineteenth century ideology formed by Benthamite utilitarianism. To the American ideal of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," Canadians oppose their more modest claim to "peace, order, and good government" and Australians their hopes to "live, let live, and allow a fair go." The assumptions about human nature and the proper role of the state on which these slogans rely reveal the different expectations of each society....William Lane's dream of Australia as a potential "workingman's paradise" and Northrop Frye's image of Canada as a potential "peaceable kingdom" in which the lion and the lamb may lie down together, suggest some of the differences between Australian and Canadian utopian visions. The Australian dream was class-based, egalitarian and male-oriented while the Canadian dream suspended the potential for violence implied by hierarchical divisions without abolishing it. The Canadian was a consensual model in which differences (whether based on class, gender, region, or ethnicity) could be tolerated to a limited extent because peace rather than paradise was the goal. The Australian model, by contrast, exhibited less tolerance of differences, including less tolerance for genteel pretensions, colonial imitativeness and traditionally sanctioned oppression. (68, 69)

production of an independent entity)—these nations pose a pose a profound threat to those in dominant locations in the national formations of Canada and Australia.

Grounded in nationalism, comparative studies have typically functioned "more often to police boundaries than to question them" (Brydon and Tiffin 16). But there is value in comparative studies if nations are seen "in terms of their silences as well as their claims" (62) and are critiqued in order to understand the power relationships and discursive strategies that make national assertions seem "natural" and some things "unthinkable" (64). National identity, write non-Aboriginal postcolonial critics Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin,

> is increasingly being recognised as a convenient, sometimes dangerous, fiction for understanding how the people in a certain place give coherence to their lives. In many ways, national identity is the last—and most resistant—fiction to be decolonised. The nation depends on the suppression of oppositional voices and the smoothing over of differences for the construction of a unified identity. Yet in countries like Australia and English-Canada it also serves as an important agent for the expression of a will to self-determination and a resistance to imperial homogenisations. This positive role suggests that if the postcolonial sense of nation can be redefined in the postcolonial context as a releasing rather than a suppressing of the contradictory histories of a place, then the concept of literary identifications with an idea of the national may retain some validity—some validity, that is, as a necessary fiction for momentarily fixing a "discursive formation" that by its nature is continuously involved in the making and unmaking of itself. (64)

Dominant myths of settlement work to make colonization and control of land appear natural, as a right of whiteness and Britishness in particular (as seen most visibly in the British doctrine of *terra nullius* in the case of Australia). But what have been described as Australia's bush ethos of mateship and Canada's "garrison mentality" (the term coined by Canadian critic Northrop Frye), and more recent popular and literary obsessions with national identity (or the lack of it) reveal the colonizing cultures' ongoing uncertainty regarding legitimate relationships to place, and to Aboriginal peoples.[13] As Brydon and

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[13]According to Marie de Lepervanche,

> The traditional sexual division of labour in the domestic sphere and workplace has been continually sanctioned in portrayals of the Australian way of life and national character, which have invariably been by white men. Until well into the 1950s, the 'typical Australian' was a white man with British forbears; he came from the bush and practised mateship. A second type of Australian identity emerged in the 1960s: although still male, Anglo-Celtic and white, he was no longer from the bush but thoroughly middle class and suburban. By the 1970s when we were urged by the state to celebrate the different ethnic backgrounds of postwar immigrants, the Australian national character transformed into a number of versions. One was multicultural and supposedly sophisticated, while another remained distinctly "ocker" and male....Throughout this literature, if women did appear they were white,

Tiffin put it, the belief in "the lack of a national myth or ideology" is "the colonial ideology par excellence" (71).

"The impossible necessity of becoming indigenous": The Role of Aboriginal Peoples in the National Literary Imaginary

Despite the significant differences in the manifestations of nation and nationalism in each country, the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples grounds the dominant national identities of Canada and Australia. Non-Aboriginal Australian critics Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra have taken up the particularities of the structural and representational ambivalence of the nation and how Australian national identity was formed in and remains shaped by the repression of the imperialist process. The dispossession of the Aboriginal population, was "not incorporated at all into the national myth, which could accommodate this major threat to national legitimacy only by not mentioning the matter" (xii). "The Australian psyche is not a unitary phenomenon, " they write, "....On the contrary it is organised around this fissure, it *is* this contradiction, and typically it projects an inarticulate, egalitarian Orientialist, a racist republican" (xiii).

Yet Aboriginal peoples in Canada, like Aboriginal Australians, have been central to the formation of the dominant national identity, "out of all proportion to their numbers for this ideological work they alone could do" and one of the most highly prized goods that they make thinkable is the possibility of a new identity" (52). Non-Aboriginal Canadian critic Terry Goldie refers to this process as "indigenization" or the desire for "indigenization"—the ideological use of Aboriginal peoples (in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand) to develop a secure sense of local and national identity:

> 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?...The importance of the alien within cannot be overstated. In their need to become "native," to belong here, whites in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia have adopted a process which I have termed "indigenization." A peculiar word, it suggests the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous. (234)

English speakers associated with domestic life where they remained rather dumb, even dangerous, greedy or distracting men from carrying out their important tasks. (42)

Aboriginal peoples, representations of Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and the cultural production of Aboriginal peoples have been located in particular ways—at times invisible, at others, hypervisible—in the service of these national formations. The all-too-familiar binarism of stereotypes of brutish and noble savagery, respectively, has served in both Canada and Australia to justify imperialist violence in the case of the former, and to elide that violence in the strategic use of the latter. Representations of the "timeless, noble savage at one with the land" have played an important role in how Canada and Australia define themselves as distinct from the imperial centre, and as such, Aboriginal cultural production is read and marketed through this imperialist lens. In Canada, "Native culture has long functioned to represent Canadian culture both in Canada and abroad, and to serve as internationally recognized symbols of Canadian-ness...the work of First Nations artists occupy [sic] a problematic place vis-à-vis a distinctly Canadian aesthetic tradition: at times included...at other times remaining on the margins of Canadian cultural production" (Whitelaw 41). "In the context of the general promotion of Australian culture," Stephen Muecke suggests, "the Aboriginal performances are wheeled on as that-heritage-lost-in-the-depths-of-time-for-which-we-as-a-nation-can-be-proud" (39).[14]

The ideological role that Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal cultural production perform in dominant narratives of Australian and Canadian "nations" is most readily seen in the representations of nations offered through tourism brochures, holidays

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[14] In his *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, non-Aboriginal historian Daniel Francis explores the "images of Native people that White Canadians manufactured" in service of a national imaginary (5); these are related to historical and current public policy, literature, the popular imagination, and how they continue to shape "the myths non-Natives tell themselves about being Canadians" (6). Within these romantic national narratives, "Indians" (the imaginary construct, he insists, not actual Aboriginal peoples), play many roles, and the persistent use of these images, is an indication "the deep anxiety that non-Natives have about our place in North America, and a deep need to legitimate our presence here" (107-08).

Non-Aboriginal Canadian critic Margery Fee's article "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature" (1987) demonstrates how Canadian nationalism "is the major ideological drive behind the use of the Indian in contemporary English-Canadian literature" (17) and that the "simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of the Native people in our literature can be explained to some extent, then, by our desire to naturalize our appropriation of their land" (24). Fee writes that:

> What is enviable in the Native people, then, from a nationalistic point of view, is their autochthonous claim to the land. Native people also possess all the other traits so important, in Romantic terms, to a great literature: an indigenous language and mythology, and a past filled with heroic deeds....One ideological function of these works, which explains their widespread appeal, is that they do for the reader what nature and the Indian do for their characters. They provide, for a brief spell, a return to

commemorating national independence from Britain, and popular art. Representations of land and Aboriginal peoples as inseparable, timeless, or living in an irretrievable past, and as defining national distinctiveness are put in service of a dominant representation that elides the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. Images of Australian Aborigines in traditional body paint at a corroborree[15] at Ayers Rock (not Uluru, the Aboriginal name), of Canadian Aboriginal peoples dancing at pow wows wearing traditional dress; headdresses: boomerangs, bark paintings, totem poles, and canoes, all produced for sale in major tourist centres, are put in service of the national imaginary and its masked capitalist processes.

Hodge and Mishra refer to the origins of dominant nationalism in Australia in the convict system as dependent on the "spectacles of punishment." The term is also an apt description of the imperialist violence inflicted on Aboriginal bodies—through disease, massacres, bounty-hunting, incarceration, sexual and physical abuse, and racism—and on Aboriginal women's and children's bodies in particular. The "spectacle" of punishment has operated to normalize the sexist violence of imperialism. The massacres of Aboriginal peoples in the Australian context, the spectacles of the bodies of the last "women" of the Beothuck and Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples, the residential and mission school systems and the white foster care systems (and their structures of abuse), the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal men, and of the murders of Aboriginal Australian men in custody, and the continuing sexual violence against Aboriginal women today all function as reflections of the national imaginary's reliance on the violence against Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal women in Canada and Australia have been located in these national formations in particular, and in particularly derogatory ways. Cree/Métis Janice Acoose

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> what is being actively destroyed around us. Nowhere in reality is there an escape from our unrelenting process of self-dispossession—not even for Native people. (18, 29)

[15] A corroboree is an Aboriginal Australian ceremonial dance:

> Some corroborees record events in everyday life and are non-sacred, public entertainments; others have a religious significance and are of great ritual importance, relating to initiation, death, fertility, disease, war, and so on. The dancers' movements are prescribed by tribal custom and their bodies and faces are usually painted in clay in traditional designs. The dance is accompanied by song, and clapping sticks and the didjeridu provides music. All these elements, as well as the dance itself, form the corroboree. (Hutchinson Encyclopedia)

Mudrooroo, in his *Aboriginal Mythology*, suggests that "'corroboree' is a *Koori* word, perhaps from the Eora language, which has been taken into English. Roughly, it means *dance* or ceremony. The suffix 'boree' shows that it refers to the *boro circles*, or ceremonial grounds" (31).

writes that Aboriginal women in Canadian literature and popular ideologies historically have been misrepresented, and this process continues: "They were generally represented in canadian literature somewhere between the polemical stereotypical images of the Indian princess, an extension of the noble savage, and the easy squaw, a more contemporary distortion of the squaw drudge" (39). In the Australian context, images of Aboriginal women have tended towards the "squaw drudge" pole of this ideological binarism. While Pocahontas has become an idealized Aboriginal female image (even more so recently with Disney's animated version) in North America, there seems to have been no similar romanticizing of Aboriginal Australian women.

What distinguishes all of these representations is the attempt to assert "national distinctiveness" through representations of Aboriginal peoples as irreducibly Other, "Other" from dominant white Australian and Canadian populations which, at the same time, claim their own Aboriginality—"the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous." The explicit racialization of Aboriginal peoples in these representations makes skin colour and Aboriginality appear inseparable and unchanging (there are never any mixed-race Aboriginal peoples in these representations) and is the cultural capital of the tourist industry. Debates about and dominant literary obsessions with "what is Canadian" and "what is Australian" continue to separate the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples from discussions of national identity and to elide the construction of the category of whiteness through the construction of the category of Aboriginality. Claims that Canada and Australia have no "identity" in fact are part of this narrative of denial of exploitation and dispossession:

> this conceptual space of alienation mediates national selfhood. It produces nationalism by continuously calling on people to reflect on their collective sense of self. The separation and distancing of Australians from their environment creates a conceptual space for the nation's identity. It posits and opens a space for subjectivity which we are invited to occupy. The construction of Australians as inhabiting a space of alienation is not a denial of selfhood as it might appear to be (or as it is claimed to be), but is part of the production of a sense of being-in-the-world. It is part of the ontological construction of the self, that is, a way of positioning the self in relationship to reality and back to itself. (Lattas 226)

The sense of alienation that originally constituted Canadian and Australian national identity has become ideological fodder for current nationalisms—the masking, in other words, of

the operations of racial and economic privilege enjoyed by white middle-class Australians and Canadians through claims of lack of identity and culture.

Nations as Narrations: The Role of Discourse in the Nation and in Imagining Alternatives

Influential analyses of nationalism since the 1980s, particularly Benedict Anderson's ground-breaking *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; rev. 1991), consider nations as narrative and ideological processes, as constituted by a constant performance, through narration, of claims and ideologies about geographical space and the peoples inhabiting it. No longer the natural given they historically purported to be, national boundaries are now seen as performances of relationships to place, of imaginary relationships (produced and reproduced through particular systems of representation) to the real conditions of imperialism, neo-imperialism, and multinational capital. The focus on the discursive aspect of nationalism is relevant, as it is through the discursive that the materiality of nation is produced and reproduced, understood and "imagined." Moreover, nations are processes of collective representation that situate individuals within that collectivity and in particular ways. Anderson's analysis productively weaves a materialist analysis with an examination of the role of discourse in the development and ongoing processes of western nation-ness. "Nation-ness, as well as nationalism," he insists,

> are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into *historical* being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such emotional legitimacy. (4, my emphasis)[16]

Anderson's striking and by-now familiar characterization of nations as "imagined communities" encapsulates the complex operation of individual and collective interpellation (through processes that include literature) that constitutes dominant national formations. His analysis has productively opened and reconfigured a critical space in which

[16]Anderson's study examines the rise of Western nationalism towards the end of the eighteenth century. He locates the rise of western nationalism in the processes of imperialism, suggesting its genesis in the colonial relations of central America. Anderson links the rise of secularism, the economics of the development of print-capitalism, and the ideological effects of that emergent form of communication, in the processes of

this troubling category of "nation" can be reconsidered in ways that are not at odds with poststructuralism's insights into the operations of language and its mistrust of homogenizing claims. Nations are "imagined," Anderson suggests, because they are produced (in part) through representation, through the dissemination of the "idea" of community, even though the diverse individuals named by, identified through (and materially located within) that idea of community may never meet each other, and ultimately may share only the *idea* of national community.[17]

Anderson's attention to the "style" in which national communities imagine and represent themselves is pertinent to the study of literature and literary nationalisms, and especially of how particular literary forms (styles) are valued as emblematic of nationhood. However, it has not been the materialist aspects of his analysis that have been immediately embraced by postcolonial theory nor by Australian and Canadian "national" and comparative literary studies. Studies of nationalism outside of postcolonial studies, in turn, while focusing on economics, have not always considered the role of literature in national formations, as one aspect of "imagining" and therefore producing a relationship to place that has material effects. The strength of the Marxist/economic analysis is that it addresses capitalism as constitutive of dominant nation-building; its weakness is its "lack of a position for the discursive, psychological and 'imaginary' articulations of a nation which a national subject...lives out" (Derksen 1). In turn, the poststructuralist or discursive approach to nation lacks a historical view of the material effects of capitalism and views nationalism as but a "coalition of discourses amongst other discourses" (1). Current theoretical investigations on nation and nationalism, then, remain somewhat divided

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nation. It has not, however, been the materialist analysis of print-capitalism, the consideration of the economics and geographies of nation-ness, that postcolonial theorists have embraced.

[17] The nation, Anderson writes,

> is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.
>
> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion....Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/ genuineness, but *by the style in which they are imagined*" [my emphasis]....The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations....It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm....Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (6, 7)

between Marxist and poststructuralist perspectives or, in other words, the economic and the discursive views (1).[18]

Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha's work on nation and nationalism is explicitly grounded in the discursive view.[19] Bhahbha explores nations as narrative performances which, because they are based in language, carry the ambivalence of language and are inevitably required to constantly reproduce their own national self-image, endlessly attempting to cover over its own fissures and splits.[20] Bhabha focuses on the relationship between temporality and narrativity in the production and reproduction of the nation, and in the emergence of minority or resistant nationalist or alternative discourses within those processes. What is required, Bhabha asserts, is "another *time* of writing" a different form and practice of temporality, that will enter the fissures and cracks of the performance of nation, and its claims to historical teleology ("DissemiNation" 293). This formulation of temporality, he argues, involves the recognition that the nation is narrated and that national subjects are interpellated in a contested process of "double time." On the one hand, people are the objects of a narrative of history that derives its authority from claims to pre-given origins; on the other, and simultaneously, people in the national space are subjects of a

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[18] This can be seen most pointedly perhaps in the (unnecessary) opposition between the Marxist Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992) and the poststructuralist perspective on national formations taken by Homi Bhabha in his collection *Nation and Narration* (1990). This opposition in many ways has forestalled more productive investigations that connect the economic/materiality and discursive/ideological aspects of national formations and processes.

Ahmad, for example, reads Bhabha's work as positioning "poststructuralism as the alternative to nationalism" (68). This reading dismisses too easily the potential contributions of particular aspects of poststructuralism for analyses of nation and nationalism, including Bhabha's. But the strength of Ahmad's argument is his critique of the class implications of an argument such as Bhabha's, emerging as it does from a privileged institutional location, with the operations of that location masking its complicity with dominant forms of nation and multinational capital. "Bhabha, of course," he writes,

> lives in those material conditions of *post*modernity which presume the benefits of modernity as the very ground from which judgements on that past of this *post-* may be delivered....Those who live...in places where a majority of the population has been denied access to such benefits of "modernity" as hospitals or better health insurance or even basic literacy; can hardly afford the terms of such thought. (68-69)

[19] In his introduction Bhabha stresses that his intention in producing the collection was the development of readings of nation that "engaged the insights of poststructuralist theories" (4).

[20] He considers

> the nation-space in the *process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are *in medias res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of "composing" its powerful image....What emerges as an effect of such "incomplete signification" is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated. ("Introduction" 3, 4)

process of signification, of imagining a nation, that must necessarily erase any other prior claims to occupancy and must constantly perform itself as the "living principle of the people." The modern nation, then, in his view, is inevitably split by these two conceptions of time, the cumulative, linear, historical, and the immediate, performative (297).

Nations, then, require at once the production and assertion of a particular version of history (an "imagined community") that gains authority from claims about a (celebrated) past, but this past is in itself a narrative performance that requires constant repetition in order to maintain its authority. What is pertinent is Bhabha's argument that the production of a dominant narrative of national origin requires an active forgetting of an aspect of the past, a historical amnesia that must be reproduced continuously within the performance of the nation: "It is this forgetting—a minus in the origin—" he writes, "that constitutes the *beginning* of the nation's narrative. It is through this syntax of forgetting—or being obliged to forget—that the problematic identification of a national people becomes visible" (310). The foundational structure of the dominant discourses of Australia and Canada, then, can be seen as the active, collective forgetting of the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples (and the implication of race, gender, and class politics and economics that are *constitutive* of that dispossession) and the simultaneous insertion and repetition of white "settlement" and pioneer mythologies of conquering the unpeopled, "uncivilized" frontier. Bhabha's analysis, however, is limited by its failure to examine the materiality of the processes of narrating the nation, the necessary relationship between the management of physical space, resources, and bodies, and discursive processes.

Moreoever, that these "major" theorists—Anderson, Bhabha, and Ahmad—share a failure to refer to Aboriginal sovereignty movements in Canada and Australia is a troubling indication of the class problematics of postcolonial theory that Ahmad sets out to critique, and, I would add, of the dynamics of race and nation embedded in Canadian and Australian and postcolonial studies.[21] Ahmad's focus on the construction and commodification of "the

[21] Crucially, the arguments of Ahmad and Bhabha need not be seen as oppositional but rather as at once more complementary, and disturbingly similar, than has been recognized to date. Ahmad's critique of the critical tendency to homogenize "nations" and "Third World" literatures as a form of homogeneous anti-imperialist site of resistance, for example, rests on the recognition of the multiple configurations and contradictions, or in Bhabha's terms, "ambivalence," of dominant national formations. Culture, Ahmad writes,

Third World" in the academic marketplace, and Bhabha's failure to specifically historicize or materially locate his analysis, function once again to foreground the location and absence of Aboriginal cultural production and nationalist politics within academic analysis. In postcolonial theory and academic institutions, this area is an unprofitable commodity in academic exchange. This dynamic too comfortably elides the location of academic institutions in dominant nationalisms, imperialism, multinational capital, race politics and the operation of unmarked whiteness, particularly in relation to Aboriginal peoples. Here is yet another erasure of the fact that for Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Australia—who continue to be segregated in law, ideology, and (through the reserve system) geography—and have yet to achieve their nationalist goals, decolonization is anything but past. "There's been no revolution in this country. We're still colonized...We're still fighting classical colonialism," states Métis/Salish writer and critic Lee Maracle ("Coming Out" 83). The "nation," then, retains its usefulness as an analytic and political category when it is recognized as discursive *and* economic, performative *and* material:

> one struggles not against nations and states as such but *for different articulations of class, nation, and state*. One strives for a rationally argued understanding of social content *and* historical project for each particular nationalism. Some nationalist practices are progressive; others are not. (Ahmad 11, my emphasis)

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is always a major site of resistance, but cultural contradictions within the imperialized formations tend to be so very numerous—sometimes along class lines but also in cross-class configurations, as in the case of patriarchal cultural forms or the religious modes of social organization—that the totality of indigenous culture can hardly be posited as a unified, transparent site of anti-imperialist resistance. (12)

Bhabha, in turn, notes the problematic tendency in some poststructuralist readings of the "*discursive* conception of ideology" to separate ideology and materiality: "The Janus face of ideology is taken at face value and its meaning fixed, in the last instance, on one side of the divide between ideology and 'material conditions'" ("Introduction," *Nation* 3). This affinity between the studies of Ahmad and Bhabha, finally, functions as an indication of how ongoing binaristic or too-easy oppositional thinking continues to dominate academic work, particularly that on nation and nationalism, which, as both influential critics point out, has unnecessarily separated the "ideological" or discursive from the material, and the temporal from the spatial.

It Isn't that Obvious: Exploring the Relationship between Psychoanalysis and Postcolonial Studies, or, The Erasure of White Bodies in Postcolonial Theory

Even though the language of psychoanalysis pervades contemporary postcolonial criticism, and, as I have illustrated, nation studies, one of the most telling processes of this study has been my nearly fruitless search for a clear historicizing of the relationship between psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory, as specific fields of inquiry with their own paradigms, limits, and perspectives.[22] The work of Frantz Fanon, particularly his *Black Skin, White Masks*, is generally recognized as profoundly influential in postcolonial studies for offering "one of the most thoroughgoing analyses of the psychological and sociological consequences of colonization" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Empire* 124). And yet what remains in practice in postcolonial studies is a dehistoricized echo of his work, which is complicated by the not-always complementary influences of Lacanian psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, Marxist, and feminist approaches[23]

Certainly, Fanon's "investigation of colonial psychology remains an implicit but relatively unexamined part of his legacy" (Bergner 75).[24] His influence lies in how he

> transposes psychoanalysis—a theory of subject formation based on sexual difference—to a register where it accounts for race as one of the fundamental differences that constitute subjectivity. He asks how sexuality and language, the primary constituents of the symbolic, are inflected by race, as well as how they

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[22] I did not find a clear articulation of the relationship between the two fields in any of the following major postcolonial theory texts and anthologies: *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *The Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, edited by Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly, and *Postcolonialism and its Discontents*, special double issue of *ARIEL*, edited by Pamela McCallum, Stephen Slemon, and Aruna Srivastava.

[23] Critiques of Lacanian psychoanalysis have pointed out how it assumes a universal construction of gender, family, sexuality, class, race and language which in fact is a reconstitution of the white, middle-class, patriarchal, European nuclear family as norm, regardless of the particularities of location, culture, and history. Because Lacanian psychoanalysis is dependent on poststructuralist insights into the systemic nature of language and its "decentredness" as a system in which meaning is perpetually deferred, a certain ahistoricism has not only crept into the practice of psychoanalytical readings of literary texts, but is one of its basic features.

Moreover Aboriginal theorists in Canada and Australia have not readily embraced psychoanalytic perspectives. Clearly, psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity cannot be easily transplanted to account for Aboriginal locations and perspectives without thorough critique. And only with the theorizing of subjectivity from Aboriginal theorists will these issues be fully addressed.

[24] In my graduate-level courses in literary theory/postcolonial literatures and theory (comprising part of two Masters and a Ph.D. programs), for example, Fanon's work was never required reading, and appeared in only one course as recommended reading.

> construct categories of race...By transporting psychoanalysis from its European origins to the colonial sphere, Fanon releases the theory from its class, race, and historic specificities. *Black Skin, White Masks* effects, then, a paradigm shift that reconfigures psychoanalysis to account for racial identity and that enables a psychoanalytic critique of racism. (Bergner 76)

Fanon's project was both psychoanalytical and materialist; it was, in Stuart Hall's words, to "consider the conditions for the production of a new kind of subject and the decolonisation of the mind as the necessary subjective conditions for the decolonisation of the world" (19).[25] However, this "new kind of subject" seems to have been implicitly racialized to the extent that in practice it refers *only* to the objects (i.e., racialized Others) of imperialism. How decolonising the white mind is possible and necessary has only been indirectly addressed in postcolonial studies.[26]

In its reconfiguration of poststructuralist psychoanalytical insights on the operations desire in terms of colonial desire for the racialized Other, postcolonial theory has reinforced the tendency of psychoanalysis to reduce systemic material relations to the individual level, eliding whiteness as a collective and material social category. Moreover, the linguistic focus of poststructuralist psychoanalytical approaches has been taken up institutionally by postcolonial studies to once again elide the necessary exploration of the materiality and practices of decolonization. The location of the white subject in terms of

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[25] In his article "The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks*?" Hall offers an analysis of the relationship between postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis, as revealed through the history and status of the work of Fanon. Hall notes that Fanon's psychoanalytic exploration of the psychic mechanisms of colonialism and racism are particularly important in foregrounding how "racially neutral, how strikingly *un-raced*, Lacan's discourse is, and how rarely this unmarked whiteness of his language has received comment" (26). This signals at once the ahistorical tendency of Lacanian theory, but also the unmarked—unremarked upon—whiteness of postcolonial studies. This problem emerges most forcefully in assumptions regarding the nature of "Aboriginal subjectivity," particularly that of Aboriginal lifestorytellers.

Hall goes into some detail regarding the history of Fanon's approach to psychoanalysis, pointing out his engagement with the French psychoanalytic and philosophical traditions, and moments at which he diverges significantly from the Lacanian model. In the case of the latter, Hall points out the significance of Fanon for postcolonial studies: whereas Lacan's suggestion of the splitting of the subject is constructed as a "mechanism of misrecognition which provides the conditions of existence of all identification," Fanon locates this process in the "*specificities of the colonial relation*" (26).

[26] Of deep concern in terms of the unmarked whiteness of postcolonial studies is how part of the attraction of Fanon's analysis may be his location as a racialized "speaking object" within the racial dynamics of the colonial relation: "Whereas Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis usually concerns itself with tracing the subject formation of the one who sees—the boy-child—Fanon speaks as the one who is seen" (Bergner 79). I am somewhat suspicious that part of postcolonial theory's sense of itself as "radical" has been involved in

individual desire has been recognized, but how this white subject must also be transformed into a "new kind of subject" as part of the transformation of the Self/Other binary has not been addressed. The materiality of the white body and how it signifies in systemic/national terms and is related to the allocation of space and resources remains tellingly obscured. There has been no clear articulation of how the desire for the Other at the individual psychological level operates in material terms, how it is related to the operations of dominant white nationalisms, its ramifications for critics and teachers of Aboriginal writing, and its relationship to anti-racist pedagogy and activism. In this study I therefore work to locate individual psychological desire for and constructions of "Aboriginality" to wider discourses of race and nation, in order to resist the individualism of western culture (and of psychoanalysis) as well as multiculturalism's reduction of racism to individual attitude.

This problem has been reinforced in how Fanon's work has been institutionally elided by the work of Homi Bhabha, who draws heavily on both Lacanian psychoanalysis and on Fanon's work in his exploration of colonial subjectivity. The influence of Bhabha on postcolonial studies (and this study) cannot be underestimated. Drawing on insights into the fissured and unstable nature of language, Bhabha, particularly in his "The Other Question" and elsewhere has explored the nature of the psychology of the colonizer, his desire for/need for an undifferentiated, knowable, inferior colonized Other in the production of the Colonial Self and the resultant production of persistent stereotypes of colonized peoples. In considering the ambivalent nature of the imperial psyche and of imperialism generally—its need to reproduce itself persistently—Bhabha's work has also explored the possibilities of agency of colonized peoples in working through and against the fissures in the processes of the reproduction of empire.[27]

Yet, postcolonial studies as an academic field *and* an institutional location, while certainly drawing on the work of Bhabha and Fanon, also carries with it a tendency to

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how Fanon's work has been readily taken up, and quickly written over, as if his appearance as "speaking Other" somehow represented the accomplishment of anti-racist politics and practices.

[27] Bhabha's work in itself is not necessarily ahistorical; there are plenty of references to specific locations, histories, and people (agents) in his writing, but these examples, be they to the circulation of rumours of chapatis made with animal fat by the British during the Indian "Mutiny" ("In a Spirit of Calm Violence") or the circulation of the Bible in India ("Signs Taken for Wonders") tend to be taken up institutionally as representative of a universal imperial process.

universalize the construction of subjectivity (as male), and therefore of colonized (and colonizing) subjectivity.[28] Bhabha's insights do inform this study, but the institutional proliferation of his work has occluded local culturally specific perspectives on the nature of gendered and racialized "subjectivity," particularly Aboriginal perspectives in Canada and Australia. I have not found in Bhabha's work a single reference to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and Australia,[29] and while his work is institutionally deemed "necessary" for the study of Aboriginal cultural production, this critical absence can function to reinforce the institutional exclusion of Aboriginal critical perspectives.[30]

Race, Nation, Literature, and Desires for Autobiographical Aboriginality

Non-Aboriginal Australian critic Stephen Muecke has begun to productively use psychoanalytical insights to address the relationship between non-Aboriginal reading subjects, the desire for "Aboriginality," and their implications in nationalism.[31] He considers the vexed issue of what he calls the "ease of acceptance" by non-Aboriginal

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[28] Fanon has been critiqued for his elision of gender, not because he fails to reveal "women's role as objects of exchange in the homosocial, heterosexual colonial economy" (85)—in fact, he demonstrates this—but because his "description of colonial psychodynamics as a relationship between white men and black men—a relationship that is, at times, mediated through women's bodies—removes feminine subjectivity from the center of his analysis" (Bergner 85). And as Gwen Bergner notes, Bhabha "exemplifies the critical tendency to gloss over Fanon's elision of gender" (84).

[29] Two moments in Bhabha's chapter "DissemiNation" in his collection *Nation and Narration* are particularly troubling: first, his characterization of "those peoples whose histories of marginality have been most profoundly enmeshed in the antinomies of law and order—[as] the colonized *and* women" (302, my emphasis), which suggests that these are mutually exclusive categories; and in keeping with the metropolitanism of postcolonial theory, his insistence that "it is the city which provides the space in which the emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out. It is there that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced" (320). The two moments effectively erase the political and cultural significance, if not the materiality, of the lived experience of Aboriginal women living on reserves and in rural areas in Canada and Australia, and the political potential of their own cultural productions in troubling the dominant national formations.

[30] I would suggest that a return to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* would be particularly instructive for the analysis of Aboriginal nationalisms, and to his *Black Skin, White Masks*, in terms of Aboriginal men's sexual desires for white women as implicated in colonization; writings such as Howard Adams's revisionist history of the Riel uprising and autobiography, *Prison of Grass*, Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*, which considers the gender disparities in the Red Power movement, and Lee Maracle's *Sundogs*, which addresses the sexism of Aboriginal sovereignty and activist movements, would be interesting in this light. Adams writes, for example: "Native women were the symbol of oppression and white women were the symbol of freedom. Every time I put my arm around a Native girl, I embraced oppression, but when I hugged a white girl, I hugged freedom" (142).

Australian readers of Aboriginal Australian lifestories *My Place* by Sally Morgan and *Wandering Girl* by Glenyse Ward. He argues that grounding the popular success of these texts is the "repressive hypothesis." This he describes as a western, Enlightenment and literary concept of a "technology of the self," in which coherent subjectivity is not so much produced but pre-existing and then liberated, freed, through "expression."[32] The origins of this concept, he argues, are in Christian doctrines of confession. It operates disturbingly, he suggests, when it is used to explain the emergence of Aboriginal literatures, particularly autobiographies, to describe a "technique for the psychological construction of a specific sort of Aboriginal subject" (125). The popularity of this model, in his words, can only "make the radical critic uneasy" (135) as it reveals the non-Aboriginal desire for a "specific" Aboriginal subject—namely, one who is liberated, coherent, who represents her entire race, and whose words will function as "social 'truth'" for a non-Aboriginal audience (131-32). It reveals the imbrication of non-Aboriginal assumptions about Aboriginality, race, literature, the publishing industry and what constitutes a "successful" Aboriginal text (despite persistent calls by Aboriginal writers to avoid the constraints of traditional literary and racial definitions).

While Muecke does not extend his argument in this direction, this "repressive hypothesis" and critical and popular approaches to Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling (and storytellers) is in keeping with white Christian and national inheritances, in both Canada and Australia. The ideology of "out of repression, expression," in other words, can translate into a reading of Aboriginal women's oppression as a necessary precondition for the expressive, realized, "politicized" Aboriginal self. In this paradigm, an unmarked also racism operates such that she is often read as speaking *on behalf of her people* and, in the

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[31] The chapter of Muecke's *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies* which addresses this issue was originally published as an article, "Aboriginal Literature and the Repressive Hypothesis" (1988).

[32] While in general I agree on many points with Muecke's analysis, his brief discussion of the relation of feminism to the "repressive hypothesis"—that "out of silence or absence comes the reconstruction of self-hood" (126)—certainly requires careful elaboration. He is correct to point out, however, that assumptions about the repressed self in combination with assumptions about the "quasi-ethnographic realism" of Aboriginal autobiography compound troubling assumptions about female Aboriginal subjectivity.

I find his suggestion that *Wandering Girl* is constructed or structured around food rather simplistic, moreover, as food in this text functions powerfully as a metaphor of the complex class and race dynamics of the relationship of the propertied white class and the dispossessed of Aboriginal domestic labouring class.

politics of multiculturalism, in particular ways.[33] With the power of ideologies of multiculturalism in which minorities are hailed to speak of tolerance and conciliation rather than of oppression and violence, it is not surprising, then, to find (as I have, through my teaching of Aboriginal literatures to a predominantly white Canadian university class) that there may be a desire in white readers for a spectacle of past oppression, from which the narrating subject (happily) recovers, and from which the reader can feel at once informed and assuaged, comfortably distanced from history. The assumption that Aboriginal lifestorytelling is *only* political commentary (though it may in part be that) certainly functions to marginalize this writing, but it is also revealing of the operations of unacknowledged whiteness, nationalism, and guilt, both in popular and academic audiences. An alternative to such reading practices, therefore, involves attention to textual detail and to the texts' conditions of production and reception as a "necessary part of the aesthetic" rather than a site of the liberation of the desire to speak (Muecke 138).

Poststructuralist perspectives on the nature of subjectivity at first appear to counter assumptions of a simplistic, transparent "Aboriginal subject." However, poststructuralist perspectives have also been used to shore up dismissals of Aboriginal women's writing as naïve, non-self-reflexive, "realist," and therefore premature or in the early stages of its development and not warranting inclusion in the canons of Canadian and Australian literature.[34] The laudable quest for liberatory systemic change in the era of late capitalism involves a search for alternative forms of subjectivity. Often, these alternative forms are imagined as collective rather than individual. This desire, however, can be coupled with stereotypical assumptions about Aboriginal peoples' identity as static, as pre- or anti-capitalist, environmentalist, and anti-individualist.[35]

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[33] As I explore in more detail, this reading practice is imposed upon texts and is not the same as practices of Aboriginal lifestorytellers who explicitly take up this role as part of her own politics of representation, though both dynamics may be negotiated in the process of narrative production.

[34] While Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* is a novel rather than a lifestory, its hearty reception by the Canadian literary establishment as a postmodern work certainly marks the operation of this valorization of the "postmodern" novel as the literary ideal.

[35] There is much to the suggestion that pre-contact Aboriginal communities were structured vastly differently from that of their Western European colonizers, and that as a result Aboriginal subjectivity was historically more influenced by beliefs regarding the significance of the collective in relation to the individual. And, as I am suggesting, culturally specific discourses and practices regarding Aboriginality certainly do continue to inform the processes of Aboriginal subjectivity today. Certain traditions, discourses, and practices have been more effectively maintained in some locations than in others, and in some cases a more traditional

White middle-class feminism and postcolonial critical approaches may involve such a desire for the salvation of the transparent Aboriginal subject—in fact a salvation of the white reader—that functions to appease uneasiness regarding ongoing participation in white patriarchal capitalism and imperialism. White feminists in particular, whose ideological inheritance involves moral guardianship of the nation, need to be particularly wary of how our desires for social justice are implicated in Christian ethics of redemption (our own, and that projected on to Others) and how our constructions of ourselves, particularly as ethical political agents, are intimately connected to our constructions and readings of Aboriginal women's subjectivity. "The white woman as saviour of less fortunate women is a narrative that is centuries old" (Razack 5).

Non-Aboriginal critic Tim Rowse, in "The Aboriginal Subject in Autobiography: Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*" intriguingly takes on the issue of how to read Aboriginal subjectivity in Aboriginal Australian women's lifestorytelling unoppressively. He asks himself if in his reading practices he is unconsciously setting up a particular norm against which these narratives fail, "seeking, and finding absent, a coherent, knowing, self-possessed subject of a particularly masculine and premodernist kind" (17)[36]. Rowse explores how poststructuralist readings of autobiographical subjectivity reject any sense of teleology of the self constructed by autobiographers as patriarchal and imperialist. The non-chronological episodic form is set up as the critical ideal, and this functions to marginalize some autobiographical narrators' processes of subjectivity, as in the case of Ruby Langford's "clearly announced teleology of self" (17).

Rowse encourages a "certain ethics of reading in which the reader is free to adopt" the author's process or narration of this teleology in order to avoid the imposition of

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construction of Aboriginality may persist. But to suggest that *all* Aboriginal peoples by definition are somehow exclusively or primarily "collectively identified" outside of the operations of late capitalism and individualism, is in fact an expression of a white desire, again, for a particular form of Aboriginality against and through which whiteness can identify itself.

Arnold Krupat's "Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self" (in his *Ethnocriticism*) is an example of an attempt to theorize the specificities of Aboriginal Subjectivity, as suggested in lifestorytelling, as being culturally specific and as appropriately read in terms of collectivities and communities. However, in stressing the role of the collective in the construction of the self, Krupat's position tends to lose the specificity of the writing subject and can be taken as an endorsement of reading the individual as representative of, rather than in relation to, specific communities.

[36] What is particularly rare in postcolonial literary studies is Rowse's willingness to, and practice of, exploring and critiquing his location of privilege (as a white man) in terms of race and gender.

poststructuralist biases on subjectivity. I find Rowse's position refreshing and intriguing (though his reading of the text somewhat problematic, as it imposes his own reading/narrative of the breakdown of kinship ties as *the* organizing feature of the text). His call for a critical self-reflexiveness regarding what kind of "subject" the critic may be seeking and for what (unexamined) purposes, as well as his insistence on an attentiveness to the structural and linguistic features produced in the text as one of the possible starting points for critical study, are points well taken. I am not suggesting, however, that the author's stated politics be the only guiding factor in an ethical criticism, for certainly a range of critical approaches can illuminate aspects of the text of which the narrator herself may be unaware, enhancing the richness of the text and its potential meanings and effects. But I do agree that an ethical and productive criticism is grounded in the particularities of each narrative, its historical conditions and contexts of production, its narrative strategies, its subject-matter, and the many negotiations with its particular audience it makes.

What underpins these assumptions about Aboriginal subjectivity and literature, finally, is anxiety about racial and cultural "authenticity" and purity. Questions regarding mixed-writers' claims to Aboriginality betray this anxiety most pointedly. In Canada to date, no Aboriginal writer's "authenticity" has been directly challenged[37] (although several white writers writing "as" Aboriginal, particularly Anne Cameron and W.P. Kinsella, have been taken to critical task). Non-Aboriginal anxieties about authenticity emerged in Canada most forcefully however in the "appropriation debate" of the early 1990s, in which white writers struggled to understand why Aboriginal writers demanded they stop writing of Aboriginal subject-matter, particularly from Aboriginal perspectives, and charged Aboriginal activists with censorship.[38]

Joy Hooton's 1990 study, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women* is an interesting though troubling example of these

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[37] I am particularly curious about this and wonder if, in part, this is an effect of the ongoing marginal status of Aboriginal literature (i.e., it remains non-threatening to the status quo), and also if the "status" of some of the major writers (i.e., Campbell, Maracle) as Métis (or part Métis), who as a group have fewer material rights than Status Indians in this country, render them less materially threatening to the economic status quo.

[38] See, for example, Lenore-Keeshig Tobias's "Stop Stealing Native Stories," and the collection *Language in Her Eye: Writing and Gender, Views by Canadian Women Writing in English*, edited by Libby Scheier, Sarah Sheard, and Eleanor Wachtel, and Lee Maracle's interview "Coming Out of the House," for further discussion on this issue of "cultural appropriation" in the Canadian context.

multiple dynamics of white critical desire at work. Hooton begins her study with an astute feminist analysis of the relationship of Australian women's autobiographical writing to the tradition of autobiographies by men and to the Australian literary canon. The very structure of her text, however, makes it very clear that she is excluding Aboriginal women from the category "Australian Women," placing them—containing them—firmly within the unproblematized categories of race and Aboriginality in her late chapter entitled "Black Narratives." In other chapters, all dealing with non-Aboriginal and predominantly white autobiographers, Hooton addresses, rigorously and persuasively, such areas as representations of mother and father figures, the relationship of Australian women's autobiographical writers to national myths, and the importance of childhood homes and of place in these texts. She provides in each chapter a detailed summary of the text and its time and place of writing and publication. She does not, however, give any consideration to the representation of Aboriginal peoples in these narratives, even as she quotes white women autobiographers' racist commentaries on Aboriginal peoples (171, 361) nor to the role of these representations in white nation building. She does not comment on the absence of these narratives in the national canon.

Hooton's shift into "Black Narratives" refuses any relationship of Aboriginal women's lifestories to these concerns. The texts' specificities, their publication histories, their geographical and historical particularities, are tossed aside in favour of the presentation of a series of what Hooton suggests are shared thematic concerns. Any sense of the particularity of the writer is eschewed in favour of the collective, representative model of Aboriginality, as revealed in such statements as the following: "If white women value relatedness, it is a religion for black women" (315) and, regarding Aboriginal women autobiographers' hesitancy to detail sexuality, "it is the group which matters to the black female writer" (331).[39]

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[39] Hooton's troubling assumptions about the simplicity of Aboriginal women's subjectivity and self-representations continue throughout: despite an entire chapter devoted to representations of mother figures as powerful absences or presences, all Hooton says about Glenyse Ward's representation of herself as motherless in the mission school is that "she had grown used to the fact that she is not allowed to see her mother" (320); Labumore's return to tribal life after the evacuation of the mission school on Mornington Island is described as a discovery "that the black way is less easy physically but that it is full of colour and interest" (321).

In Australia, issues of Aboriginal writers' authenticity emerged with *My Place* because of the mixed-race status of its writer, and because of the way the form and content of the text were linked in a climate of heightened national self-awareness (the 1988 bicentennial and the accompanying celebrations and Aboriginal protests).[40] Non-Aboriginal Australian audiences readily absorbed the text as representative of Aboriginality, because of white nationalist desires for legitimacy. The white Australian readership, suggests Mudrooroo,

> at last found an Indigenous text which did not shout at them and in fact mirrored their concerns as to their place in Australia....*My Place* as a romance dealing with the discovery of origins is important in that such a story (whether it is fictional or not) struck a chord in a general readership who were coming to grips with what precisely it meant to shift one's origins from overseas to the land of Australia. *My Place* in this scenario is a text of Australian nationalism and identity, rather than a text of Indigenality, and this explains its great success.
>
> Australianness is where the value of *My Place* lies, not it any assumption of an Indigenality, which, to give it meaning, anyway, needs to have "Australian" placed before it. (195-97)

Mudrooroo, as in his 1990 *Writing the Fringe* (published under the name Mudrooroo Narogin), continues in his *Milli Milli Wangka* to criticize the text as not adequately Aboriginal: "What Indigenality is in the text has come from a white readership who *My Place* might be said to open up the hidden agenda of reconciliation found in more strident texts" (197).[41] There were charges that Morgan had "jumped on the Aboriginal

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[40] Non-Aboriginal Australian critic Anne Brewster points out the debates about Sally Morgan's authenticity as "Aboriginal." She writes that *My Place* has been dismissed for articulating a "bourgeois individualism," "'an acceptance of middle-class values,'" lacking in terms of traditional Aboriginal genres, and of impure spirituality because it is "filtered" through Christianity. (14). Brewster also reports that Aboriginal writer Jackie Huggins has criticized *My Place* "by saying that 'Aboriginality cannot be acquired overnight'" (*Reading* 14).

[41] Mudrooroo continues:

> Her book, with its individual concerns of tracing a family history and thus an Australian identity, reached the world just when many other (often female) Australians were engaging in a similar project of seeking to understand their connections with the land and with the Australian past in general. The newly identified Indigenous woman, Sally Morgan, more rather than less, became the authority on such quests. The structure of her story gave a foundation to this self-reflective site on which the national home could be built. Well-written and edited, and structured around the quest and confessional modes, *My Place* enabled Australians of a similar bent to uncover a similar though not identical "truth" in their own genealogies, which they knew had always been there. What was more, any politics of difference was downplayed and the Australianness of everyone was emphasised to such an extent that the original British invaders were seen to have Indigenous ancestors...Essentially, the message is "we are all Aussies, aren't we", and any differences are covered over in a wish for a post-reconciliation republic governed by a benign president. (193-94)

bandwagon" (Brewster, *Reading* 14). While the debates surrounding the "Aboriginality" of this text are beyond the purview of this study, what is revealed in them are not only dominant anxieties about cultural purity but also myths that being Aboriginal is becoming economically profitable, and, in keeping with stereotypes of noble savagery, that Aboriginality should "never have anything to do with making money" (Muecke 164). Moreover, they indicate that the debates about what constitutes Aboriginal identity and authenticity also circulate in Aboriginal communities, though in particular ways and, ultimately for vastly different purposes.

A Question of Spirituality

While the destructive role of Christianity in imperialism has been addressed by postcolonial theory, and the processes of the internalization of Christian ideologies recognized in psychoanalytic approaches to postcolonial literatures as well, the role of spirituality as a discourse in the construction of subjectivity in general has been institutionally avoided. Traditional Aboriginal spirituality continues to be aligned in the dominant imagination with skin colour and with authenticity. That Christianity is tacitly understood in critical practice as a signal of victimhood rather than as a potential site of agency for Aboriginal women—as they see it—marks how myths of purity, race, traditional spirituality, and the secularism of the university converge.

Postcolonial criticism is appropriately wary of how investigations of indigenous spiritual traditions may too easily reproduce a construction of Aboriginality in terms of noble and spiritual savagery. But in failing to address Aboriginal theories of spirituality as, in fact, related to identifications with and claims to territory, processes of identity formation, agency, gender roles and motherhood, and to language, and even cultural production, our investigations of Aboriginal subjectivity in decolonization will inevitably be partial at best. Critics, located as we are in secular institutions, continue to be wary of considerations of Christianity as an inheritance that carries into our theoretical investigations and politics. Yet ideologies of guilt, redemption, ethics, and morality inform not only national ideologies of multiculturalism, but structure our reading and pedagogical

practices in ways that we have not even begun to consider. There has been no thorough investigation in postcolonial theory, for example, of the implicit though untheorized notion of the ethics of postcolonial criticism and its practitioners as intrinsically "moral' and "good" and as an inheritance of Christian ideology.[42]

Critical responses to Aboriginal women's writing in general, and to Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in particular, rarely mention spirituality except in binaristic terms—in terms of the preservation of disappearing traditions and in terms of the destructive internalization of Christianity.[43] There is here, then, a denial of history and the possibility that both Aboriginal and Christian spiritual traditions are not static but fluid and cultural and can be both transformed and transformative. Aboriginal Australian use of Christian stories and symbolism, writes Mudrooroo,

> is often seen as an anomaly and condemned as an alien influence, but since so many Indigenous people have been in missions and been subjected to such pressure by missionaries and evangelists, it would be absurd to pretend these influences did not exist. In fact there have been recent efforts by Indigenous people to take Christian beliefs and make them more responsive to Indigenous spirituality. (*Us Mob* 37)

My concern here is to recognize the critical desire for a pure, "uncontaminated" spirituality that reinforces imperialist assumptions about Aboriginality and authenticity, and which imbues criticism at the expense of an analysis of the transformative agency of Aboriginal women in the contradictions, and convergences, of Aboriginal and Christian traditions. As I suggest in my readings of individual texts in this study, the prominence given by some Aboriginal lifestorytellers to spiritual traditions (Christian and Aboriginal) is significant, in

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[42] One place to begin a more appropriate theorizing of the relationship of spirituality to subjectivity is in the recognition of how the division between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the bodily, in Christian ideology does not necessarily obtain in Aboriginal traditions, such that "spirituality" in itself cannot be separated out from the daily activities of living. Certainly Christian ideology informs the everyday practices of those who identify as Christian, and imbues dominant culture generally. But it may be that Christianity's division of body and spirit, profane and sacred, in part produces the white critical desire for the holistic spiritual Aboriginal Other.

Moreover, concentration on the traditional aspects of Aboriginal spirituality as they inform cultural production denies agency to those Aboriginal peoples and writing subjects who espouse Christianity in a variety of ways. Certainly, there is much to critique in the practice of Christianity, particularly in terms of gender and in terms of its destructive role in colonization, but this should not be sufficient to deny Aboriginal peoples the agency they claim for themselves by identifying as Christian.

[43] Little critical commentary, for example, has been made regarding the visions of angels related by Sally Morgan's mother in *My Place*. A brief exception is Anne Brewster's recognition of the mother's hybrid spirituality, which Brewster does not explore (*Reading* 27).

terms of recognizing the contradictions of discourses imposed on Aboriginal women, the negotiations they must make in writing for a non-Aboriginal audience, and in how they theorize identity, Aboriginality, and nation.

Chapter Two

The Race of/for the Nation: Aboriginal Labour, Gender, Whiteness, and Property in the Production of the White Nation

> Canada is systemically one of the most racist countries in the world. You can't [under the law] practice racism individually, but the whole system is racist towards me as an Aboriginal person.
>
> Jeannette Armstrong, "Deconstructing Race"

Introduction

Postcolonial theory has recognized how the process of empire building was also a process of racialization—of categorizing as inferior "Other" non-white peoples in order to justify imperialist violence and dispossession. Drawing on the work of Edward Said's *Orientalism,* it has theorized that imperialist ideology operates through a binarism of Imperial Self and Colonized Other, the Imperial Self requiring the construction of a negative racialized "natural" and unchangeable image against which it defines itself. As I have illustrated, these theories recognize that in what is now called "Canada" and "Australia," diverse cultural and linguistic groups, and the specificities of gender roles within those groups, were and are homogenized by imperialist ideologies and representational strategies into a single category, "Aboriginal Other." These analyses, however, tend to be framed in terms that elide the *particular* relationships among imperial ideologies and the roles of the white nation states in the specific racialization and production of the categories—classes—of female and male Aboriginality.[1]

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[1] As Paul Gilroy, in his study of racism in Britain in the 1980s, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987), appropriately asks, "[w]hy is the racial inflection in the language of nation continually overlooked?" (55-56).

The nation-state has been fundamental in producing and controlling Aboriginality, with the treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Australia standing as "probably the most conspicuous and enduring examples of the state-defining processes [of ethnicity] in Western liberal democracies" (Weaver 182). As I indicated in my introduction, federal legislation in both Canada and Australia explicitly defines "Aboriginality" but not any other "racial" or cultural group. These constructions of racial identity through difference from the unmarked white norm function as a form of ruling, of interpellating concrete individuals within the daily operations of the state. Assimilationist policies directed at fair-skinned mixed-race children, particularly in Australia, with its legacy of the Stolen Generation of mixed-race children abducted and fostered into white homes, reveal not only the sexual violence directed at Aboriginal women by white men but the profound anxieties surrounding racial and cultural "purity" as necessary for the nation-state. This is not to suggest, however, that the nation-state *equals* race or is able to contain it; nor is it to suggest that the nation is the sole site of individual and collective interpellation and identification, for either dominant or minority groups:

> "Race" has to be socially and politically constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain different forms of "racialization" which have characterized capitalist development. Recognizing this makes it all the more important to compare and evaluate the different historical situations in which "race" has become politically pertinent....Accepting that skin "colour," however meaningless we know it to be, has a strictly limited material basis in biology, opens up the possibility of engaging with theories of signification which can highlight the elasticity and the emptiness of "racial" signifiers as well as the ideological work which has to be done in order to turn them into signifiers in the first place. This perspective underscores the definition of "race" as an open political category, for it is struggle that determines which definition of "race" will prevail and the conditions under which they will endure or wither away. (Gilroy 38-39)

Yet in the search for what Ahmad calls "different articulations of class, nation, and state" (12), race must be considered as constituting (in part) both dominant Australian and Canadian national formations, and, therefore, of Aboriginal forms of resistance and nationalism, caught as they are within these dominant formations. As Gilroy notes, the "form of the state structures the form of political struggles. Where state institutions impose racial categories, the struggle against racism will be a struggle against the state" (33-34), and, in turn, struggles against such states will necessarily be struggles against racism.

The operation of whiteness as an organizing principle of Canadian nationalism can be seen in institutional structures regarding immigration, citizenship, enfranchisement, and property rights. The "white body is a culturally organized site of nationalism which has come to represent what it is to be defined as a Canadian. The white body is read as a semiotic for nationality: it is the white body that ...has 'always been here'" (Schick 4). In liberal democratic nations, "the notion of the individual presumes a white identification in which *whiteness is a fact of property* (5-6 my emphasis):

> This is not just about the ownership of property, but that whiteness itself is a tangible asset which can be used as collateral. It can be exchanged for consequences, rights, and privileges to which one is justly entitled, that is, nothing less than the rights accruing to the status of personhood. The loss of land on the part of Native Indians and the appropriation of land by European settlers is more than a structural transfer of land ownership. It also signifies the racial domination that whiteness confers *as property, whiteness being the signifier by which property could be rightly bought or sold.* (6, my emphasis)

Many Aboriginal women lifestorytellers demonstrate how whiteness operates in their lives in terms of the conferral of property—the creation of the reserve and mission systems, for example; at the same time, they assert their own historical relationships to place, which, they insist, continue despite colonization. And some explore the location of white women, their roles in the mission and residential-school systems, in the processes of colonization and nation-building.

In the histories of colonization in Canada and Australia, white women certainly enjoyed status, privilege, and power; yet these were conferred by and negotiated through patriarchy, through marriage, association with the dominant white male class, and through their reproductive capacities. They were assigned the role of moral guardians and reproducers of the white national race.[2] There were, of course, hierarchies of class, nationality, language, and religion operating within this category of white women (with the

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[2] In the Australian context, the height of nationalist politics culminating in Federation in 1901 clearly indicated the imbrication of patriarchy and nation-building. The rising feminism among white women, who were demanding improved education and birth control, were met with accusations of anti-nationalism and "race suicide" (de Lepervanche 42-43). By 1919, white Australian women, according to one authority at least, were also responsible, as mothers, for problems of criminality: "police and punishment could be scrapped "if only mothers would understand their duty and learn how to do it'" (46). The abortion debates in Parliament in 1979, further, blamed contraception and women's right to choose an abortion on declining population rates and the need for increased immigration (49).

British middle class as dominant). White women in the colonizing process shared racial privilege (in relation to Aboriginal peoples), particularly in achieving property rights and the vote through the grossly misnamed "universal suffrage movement" decades prior to Aboriginal peoples being granted the vote. However, even as Aboriginal writers and theorists articulate this role quite clearly, little critical attention in postcolonial studies has been paid to the historical role of white women as moral guardians and reproducers of the white nation. "It is not difficult to see that this overwhelming sense of guardianship of women's bodies amounts to a dictate for white women to reproduce more and for non-white women to reproduce less" (Bannerji, "Insider-Outside" 10). This legacy of moral guardianship (and their implications in ideologies of guilt and redemption) and capitalist nation-building informs, and, if unrecognized and challenged, limits the relationship of white feminism to Aboriginal women's processes of decolonization.

The White Nation and the Production of Gendered Aboriginality

Legislation banning Aboriginal languages and cultural practices, the production of the reserve systems, the imposition of imperialist and patriarchal government structures (such as male-dominated band and tribal councils), specific legislation targeting Aboriginal women and their reproductive labour and parenting roles and denying them Aboriginal status because of marital status (in Canada) or skin colour (in Australia) have all functioned to rob Aboriginal women of their traditional power bases.[3] As I discussed in my introduction, in Canada, Aboriginal women who were Status Indians under the Indian Act lost their status and their treaty rights if they did not marry a Status Indian (Bill C-31, enacted in 1985, was designed to remedy this legislated sexism). In Australia, mothers of mixed-race Aboriginal children were powerless as their children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in white foster care as a result of sexist and racist assimilation policies. It was the erasure of Aboriginal women's roles as mother that was a prime target of both official and unofficial assimilationist policies in Canada and Australia.

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[3] As Himani Bannerji observes, in Canada the "disenfranchisement of the indigenous peoples, both socio-economic and cultural, has been genocidal and patriarchal" ("Insider-Outside" 8).

Okanagan Jeannette Armstrong stresses that in the Canadian context, imperialism and specific government policies were aimed directly at the destruction of Aboriginal women's roles as both mothers—as reproducers of the "Other" "race"—and as cultural caretakers, educators, and politicians. The residential and mission school systems are but the most visible example of how Aboriginal maternal roles were actively destroyed in a process of white nation-building. The effects of these systems continue to resonate through white welfare and foster care systems that continue to take Aboriginal children from their communities, as Armstrong suggests:

> It was through the attack on the power of Aboriginal woman that the disempowerment of our peoples has been achieved, in a dehumanizing process that is one of the cruellest on the face of this earth. In the attack on the core family system, in the direct attack on the role of Aboriginal woman, the disintegration of our peoples towards genocide has been achieved....The struggle has been just to keep our children with us. ("Invocation" x, xi)

As many Aboriginal women writers in Canada and Australia insist, traditional mothering practices are inherently political in that mothers are the primary transmitters of cultural and linguistic tradition. In Canada, as in Australia, the design of the residential and mission school systems was directed towards the production of a labouring class (of a domestic labouring class in the case of Aboriginal girls), and the destruction of Aboriginal women's roles as mothers and cultural and political agents. In Canada, the architect of the residential school system, Nicholas Flood Davin, proposed the system as "providing the care of a mother" (Royal Commission 1:334).

The possibilities of theorizing the cultural specificities of Aboriginal maternal agency, and of examining the specific implications of the forced absence of mothers and mothering practices through assimilationist policies, the foster care, mission and residential school systems, and urban and rural poverty, have gone virtually unnoticed in postcolonial theory. The absence of Aboriginal maternal voices in particular, in dominant patriarchal structures and critical theories, however, does not mean that women, and mothers, have in fact been voiceless, silent, or entirely powerless in their specific locations. As Anishinaubae Kateri Damm states: "we are not, and never were, wordless" (23). Alienation from the dominant culture, in other words, does not equal powerlessness.

Among the most knotted issues in addressing Aboriginal representations of maternal agency is the convergence of historical diversity of Aboriginal mothering practices, the overwhelming effects of imperialism on these practices and their partial survival, and the implications of diverse representations of motherhood in a politics of decolonization. Aboriginal lifestorytellers in Canada and Australia who deal with such questionsare faced with the immense task and politics of recovering practices so violently subsumed by imperialism that they may be altered, partial, unrecoverable, or unrecognizable.[4] The increasing publication of residential and mission school narratives, for example, also painfully marks the absence of the voices of the mothers, and fathers, whose children were stolen from them, and their inability to protect their children against an overwhelming assimilationist machine.[5]

While Aboriginal women's lifestories detail the violent history of imperialism as written on and through their bodies, their communities, and their homes, there is the political desire to represent positive images of Aboriginal women, to recover and represent traditions in which they were, and may still be, powerful. And, it must be stressed, there is much sociological and anthropological research to indicate that many pre-contact Aboriginal cultures accorded women far more power, within the family and the community, than in western cultures (or more than western theories have acknowledged).[6] In the North American context, there has been anthropological speculation that in retaining their role as mothers and primary transmitters of culture to young children, "native women have had a less traumatic transition than men under colonialism, because their routines, duties, and consequent self-images have been less drastically altered than those of males"

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[4] Blackfoot women in the courses I teach at Red Crow Community College, for example, have discussed and researched how traditions surrounding the maintenance of good health during pregnancy, the early bonding with newborn babies, breastfeeding and childcare, postpartum recovery, and the maintenance of cultural traditions through the teaching to children of the Blackfoot language, storytelling, and "discipline"/teaching have been so drastically disrupted by the imposition of the residential school system that there is a large number of Kainaiwa people unable to form long-term relationships and/or properly care for their children.

[5] In addition to the texts in this study, a few of many possible examples include Glenyse Ward's *Wandering Girl* and *Unna You Fullas*, Isabelle Knockwood's *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*, and *The Lost Children*, edited by Coral Edwards and Peter Read.

[6] See, for example, *Women of the First Nations*, edited by Christine Miller, Patricia Chuchryk, et al., *Women's Rites and Sites: Aboriginal Women's Cultural Knowledge*, edited by Peggy Brock, and Diane Bell's *Daughters of the Dreaming*.

(Wong 174).[7] As sociologist Peggy Brock puts it, it is "dangerous" to assume that motherhood among Aboriginal peoples carried the same cultural and political value as in western cultures. "Aboriginal women had greater control over their own bodies and their children's inherited rights because acknowledged social paternity was not necessarily associated with physical paternity" (Brock xxii). There is a consistency in both the Australian and Canadian literary contexts specifically, as well as in anthropological research, to indicate a *historical* tendency towards some gender equity, at least in relation to western European society. Aboriginal women critics often cite that violence against women was unheard of in precontact societies, and Peigan Betty Bastien's summary of Aboriginal women's roles in North America is typical:

> One of the major roles of Indian women has been to maintain "tribal identity" for their children and their children's children. Tribal identity is based on the collective experience, in which relationships are characterized by the interdependencies of self with others, in which partnership is the basis of life and the force through which life is strengthened and renewed, and in which children experience themselves as tribal people rather than as individuals. The collective experience is strengthened and renewed in ceremony, where children are empowered with the knowledge of the sacredness of relationships, which itself comes from the knowledge that tribal peoples are connected, in a web, to all of creation. Within this web, a Native woman gives her child unconditional love as she receives it from Mother Earth. She teaches her child a reverence of and a profound respect for all creation, because everyone participates in a manner that perpetuates and strengthens life. Father Sun teaches woman that life grows in the web of creation. In raising her child, a Native woman teaches that responsibility lies in nurturing and renewing the relationship with all creation. This is ceremony—the direct processes of relationships and the obligation to renew these relationships. (127)[8]

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[7] Métis/Salish Lee Maracle makes this point creatively in her novel *Sundogs*, which explores, in part, the sexism of Aboriginal politics in Canada:

> But somehow we left our men somewhere a long way from the home fire. Maybe our resistance stayed alive because white women aren't expected to be responsible for anything but children. They are not considered intellectually astute either. In an odd sort of way, the world treated our women and white women the same. Maybe we are intact because we never left our traditional labor behind. Before they came, we worked, loved, reared children, and kept the social relations of our families sane. We continue to do that.
>
> Our men have been denied work, denied their role as providers, governors of our destiny. They were shoved under some rug after society performed a mass lobotomy on their brains. Stripped of their minds, they were left powerless with only their maddened violent bodies to beat out a terrible mourning song on the backs of their women. Lady killers and cultural genocide. (89)

[8] Jeannette Armstrong, too, has characterized the traditional, pre-contact roles of Aboriginal women in Canada as equal to those of men:

> It is the spirit of the female, holding in balance the spirit of the male, in a powerful co-operative force, that is at the core of family and community.

I am not, suggesting that these observations are applicable to every Aboriginal woman in Canada and Australia today, and to representations of and by them (a typically imperialist gesture). Certainly, imperialist history has intervened in so many overwhelming ways to disrupt Aboriginal women's roles, including the imposition of imperialism's patriarchal structures, and the virtual erasure of the role of Aboriginal mothering through assimilationist policies, missions, and residential schools, that such generalizations are rather facile. Nor, as Métis Emma LaRocque has suggested, were all pre-contact traditions necessarily equitable for women ("Colonization" 14). Nor do representations of cultural traditions as locked in the past necessarily work in favour of supporting the diversity and fluidity of Aboriginal culture today. Without romanticizing this sense of relatedness into imperialist paradigms of Green Indians,[9] noble savages, or New Age earth mothers, and imposing these paradigms on every Aboriginal woman's text, it is perhaps possible to historicize and theorize representations of Aboriginal maternal agency, particularly by drawing on Aboriginal critics and writers.[10] The family, "because it is a woman-centred

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> It is the strength of this female force that holds all nations and families together in health. It is the bridge to the next generation. It is this female power that is the key to the survival of us all, in an environment that is becoming increasingly damaged and unfit for all life forms. It is woman who holds this power and becomes powerful only when catalyzing co-operation and harmony, and therefore health, at all levels—from the individual, outward to the family, to the community, and to the environment. Without it, all becomes chaos, despair, hostility, and death. That is immense power. ("Invocation" xi-xii)

Hertha D. Wong, suggests that the inter-relatedness attributed to western women can be easily and erroneously transposed on to North American Aboriginal cultures and make them "appear to be female-centered because they value interconnections rather than ruptures, cooperation rather than individualism" (175). In this transposition, cultural attributes that Native Americans call "Indian" would be inappropriately called distinctly female. And, she suggests that in Native American communities, defining oneself in relations to others is not a confusion over ego boundaries but an appropriate way to recognize the relation of the individual to others (175).

[9] The term "Green Indian" refers to another prevailing image of the "Imaginary Indian," namely, the image of Aboriginal peoples as "the original environmentalists" (Francis 140). The "greening of the Indian," Daniel Francis suggests, is an extension or update of the "Noble Savage" stereotype, and refers to the association of Aboriginal peoples with environmental movements. I am not suggesting that such association is necessarily negative, particularly in local struggles against land development in which non-Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal peoples are allied, but that such alliance should not be assumed but created.

[10] Thomas King opens his anthology *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Fiction*, with a discussion of the cultural specificity of "relatedness":

> "All my relations" is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, "all my relations" is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have

arena, is a site of women's knowledges and practices," can also be a site of resistance against sexism, racism, and other effects of imperialism: and this resistance is often encoded in the family histories of Aboriginal women's lifestories (Brewster, *Reading* 11, 12). Aboriginal women lifestorytellers powerfully explore the personal grief and collective loss to the community of the continuing loss of family and children first to mission schools and residential schools, and more recently to violence, incarceration, addiction, and death. Aboriginal women lifestorytellers delineate the differential impact of colonization on Aboriginal woman and men. Their representations of mothering, child-rearing, and their relationships to imperialism and cultural traditions negotiate the difficult terrain of recovery, maintenance, and re-creation, or creation, of those roles in vastly different and diverse circumstances. While describing and mourning the loss of traditional roles and power bases, at the same time they often explore the dynamics of sexism, within their communities and in the complex of racism and sexism operating systemically. Some critique how Aboriginal men have been privileged by sexist legislative and governing structures that accord more political power to Aboriginal men than to Aboriginal women, through such imposed political structures as band and tribal councils and government departments.[11] Métis/Salish writer and critic Lee Maracle discussed this issue in an interview:

> I think [Aboriginal] men have a vested interest in holding on to the issue of racism, because then the enemy is external. I can understand an Oka situation developing, where racism becomes primary. However, I think that very often racism operates as sexism in our community and often sexism operates as internalized racism. I see it just as much going one way as the other. I have not found a Native man whose sexism extends to white women in quite the same way that it operates in our communities. If we're sitting at a table and there's one white woman and four Native women and one Native man, very often the exchange will take place between the Native man and the white woman and then there will be silence from the four Native women. That's how racism operates at the table of sexism. Now, when you have life inside the home then sexism is operative, it becomes operative on the personal level. Outside the home, the racism is operative. It just depends on where he's standing. I

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within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations).

Within Native cultures, as within other cultures, this world of relationships is shared through language and literature. (ix)

[11] In Australia, Aboriginal women with extensive knowledge of sacred sites, particularly those traditionally defined as women's sites, often are not consulted during land claims negotiations. (See Beckett.)

> don't think those two things are separate phenomena in our communities. ("Coming" 80)

Wendy Grant-John, a former Musqueam Chief who made headlines in the summer of 1997 for nearly winning the office of Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in Canada, articulates in an interview some of the negotiations she has had to make with a patriarchal dominant nationalism which has been reproduced, through the structures of the Indian Act, into patriarchal Aboriginal national politics in Canada. She notes, first of all, that what mainstream Canadian culture considers "women's issues," such as child care and family health, are community issues in Aboriginal contexts. But, she adds that she has faced sexism in achieving her political, national, aspirations:

> I come from a matriarchal society, which made it more acceptable for me to run for the position of AFN Grand Chief. But some areas of the country, whose social orders are more patriarchal in nature, felt that women shouldn't hold positions of decision-making....I can also tell you that, when I'm part of a traditional ceremony, I know exactly my role as a woman, and it's not necessarily out in front. There's a separation there that needs to be acknowledged as well. (17)

The lives of Aboriginal women are circumscribed by sexist and racist dominance, and Aboriginal women lifestorytellers detail their operations in their own histories, as internalized in their own processes of subjectivity, and as internalized by the Aboriginal men in their lives.

In her examination of Aboriginal Australian women's life stories in her study *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, Nationalism, Globalism* (1995), non-Aboriginal Australian criticAnne Brewster addresses how Aboriginal women writers are producing representations of strong Aboriginal mothers, taking on leadership roles in the family and in community and national politics. She cautions, however (drawing on the work of Jan Pettman), that while the traditional power of Aboriginal women may be historical fact, it may be erroneous to "romanticise Aboriginal women as matriarchs" (44). Such views overestimate Aboriginal women's abilities to protect and sustain themselves and their families in the face of immense economic poverty and a range of social and institutional discrimination. "We need to remember," she insists, "that the 'black matriarchy' is a product of the poverty-induced conditions of a racially oppressed proletarian subgroup" (44). Some of the more immediate economic factors producing—forcing—the leadership role of

Aboriginal women include the high rates of unemployment, imprisonment, and alcoholism among Aboriginal men, and a welfare system that provides more money for Aboriginal men living away from their families. In other words, the imperial and nationalistic processes of the racialization and criminalization of Aboriginal men has not only been unspeakably destructive to their roles as fathers, but has reshaped—enforced—a concomitant change in Aboriginal women's mothering roles, as well as their roles in community and national politics.[12] As Aboriginal Australian activist and writer Roberta Sykes noted in 1984,

> one in four black males will be dead by the age thirty, and two of the remaining three will be incarcerated or caught up in the justice system. This means that...at least three out of four black women will sleep alone, will bring up children without the benefit of black paternal presence, and will have no black male with whom to share their lives. (qtd. in Brewster, *Literary* 42)

Some Aboriginal women writers explore in painful detail how imperialist patriarchy imposed on and internalized by their communities has led to violence, sexual assault, substance abuse, and suicide. How residential and mission school narratives address and reconstruct subjectivity, and maternal agency, through maternal absence is a particularly powerful case in point. This maternal absence in many ways functions metonymically as a besieged culture, an absence from which writers try to reconstruct, transform, and imagine maternal agency.

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[12] And, further, analysis of Aboriginal maternal agency by necessity would also extend into attention to the roles of Aboriginal fathers, or their absence. As I discuss in detail, Monica Clare's *Karobran* in particular explores the relationship of the operations of racism and the state and the agency of the father. Glenyse Ward's *Unna You Fullas*, which details her experiences in a mission dormitory, powerfully addresses the effect of paternal absence:

> Sr Ursula spoke to me in a soft voice. "Girl, you father vas killed today. A vater tank felloff zer back of a truck oontz rolled on him. Vere he vas vorking." I felt a numbing sensation all over my body as we recited after Sr Ursula the prayers for the dead. "May the souls of the faithfully departed through the mercy of God rest in peace, Amen."
>
> After the prayers we girls remained kneeling on the ground. I didn't feel the hard stones under my knees. I was waiting for Ursie to hit me. It all seemed so strange. I wanted to say, "That's my father over there. He's all right," pointing to Fr Albertus who was standing over by the buildings in his cassock. He was the only father I knew. (47-48)

A Note on the White Nation and the Production of Male Aboriginal Criminality

The structure of the European nation-state of which Canada and Australia are heirs also functions to maintain its hegemony through its ideological processes of defining and racializing criminality, and gendering it as male. Paul Gilroy, in his *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack,* argues that the development of the nation-state in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided the context for contemporary legal institutions and the "moral regulation of citizens and their property became a primary object of state intervention. The identification of law with national interests, and of criminality with un-English qualities, dates from this process of state formation and has a long history which remains relevant to the analysis of 'race' and crime today" (77):

> The ability of law and the ideology of legality to express and represent the nation state and national unity precedes the identification of racially distinct crimes and criminals. The subject of law is also the subject of the nation. Law is primarily a national institution, and adherence to its rule symbolizes the imagined community of the nation and expresses the fundamental unity and equality of its citizens. (Gilroy 74)

Gilroy notes that dominant (white) national formations define themselves as "homogeneous and continuous" against and in relation to "alien strains" (46), which are then, particularly in times of national instability, described as threats to that national unity and homogeneity, and are often described in military terms of "war and invasion" (45). The meanings of race in relation to nation do change, however, according to material and ideological change—where "sexuality, miscegenation and disease" were central in earlier discourses of race, he argues, crime has come to signify, in the British context, "black culture." (110). In the dynamics of race and nation, the "'thin red line' of troops in the colonial front line, standing between us and them...has been translated into the 'thin blue line' of police, personifying the law" (110).

In the still-colonizing nations of Canada and Australia, while the "thin blue line" of police enforcement is certainly dominant, the "thin red line" of colonial troops has not disappeared. Canada's Oka Crisis of 1990 (in which the Quebec provincial and then the national armies were called in against a small group of Mohawk protestors at Kanehsatake who were resisting the appropriation of part of their land for the expansion of a golf course)

made this all too clear. Male "Aboriginality" in the dominant discourses of race and nation in Canada and Australia has indeed been rooted in discourses of sexuality, miscegenation, disease and criminality. Aboriginal men in Canada and Australia were, and continue to be, popularly perceived as sexually violent (and therefore as a sexual threat to white women and by extension to the national body politic),[13] and as deviant and criminal, "as a series of problems" that are claimed to be natural and biological rather than historically produced. This is clear in the amount of legislation demarcating Aboriginal peoples' lives: in the violence against Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal men in particular by police forces, in the incarceration of Aboriginal men in Australian and Canadian prisons at rates far out of proportion to their numbers in the national populations, and, in Australia, in the racist violence against and murders of Aboriginal men in custody.[14] It is with troublingly ironic accuracy that Native American Ward Churchill observes that in the "development" of North America, Aboriginal peoples "never even figured out that turning prison construction into a major growth industry was an indication of social progress and enlightenment" (442). And as Mudrooroo observes, for "many adult males, a gaol sentence may be accepted as an indicator of Indigenality" (*Us Mob* 15). Such vastly disempowering material realities shaping Aboriginal men's lives inevitably shape the contexts of Aboriginal women's lives, their sense of identity, and therefore their self-representations.

Aboriginal protests, usually surrounding land claims, are certainly presented in the media in military terms, in terms of "invasions" and military threats to the national fabric.

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[13] No literary references to the supposed violent sexuality of Aboriginal men comes to mind in the Canadian context (though the figure of "Jimmy Blacksmith," emblematized in Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, is a ready Australian example), although hints at the supposedly excessive or overt sexuality of Aboriginal men (and the anthropological obsession with dress, or lack of it, and practices of polygamy and premarital sex) appear in Anna Brownell Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*.

Further, I have certainly observed and experienced the operations of this assumption in my teaching and in my community. That white men ask my white partner if he has put a gun in our vehicle for my "protection" when teaching on the Blood Reserve is an example of the doubled dynamics of sexism, racism, and the assumption of Aboriginal male criminality and sexual violence.

[14] While there have been some gestures on behalf of the federal governments of Australia to acknowledge that the high incarceration rates of Aboriginal men are a result of historical abuse and oppression, particularly in terms of the effects of residential and mission schools, the perpetual ineffectual Royal Commissions (most recently on Residential Schools in Canada and on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in Australia—and the entirely inadequate compensation and responses to them indicates that dominant assumptions about the "naturalness" of Aboriginal criminality prevail in the Australian and Canadian national imaginations. (There has been, for example, no outcry from non-Aboriginal Canadians regarding the paucity of funding for residential school survivors announced by the federal government in response to the Royal Commission.)

Mainstream representations in Canada of Aboriginal protests, and of the Oka Crisis and the Gustafsen Lake and Ipperwash incidents in recent years,[15] have typically used terms such as "militancy" and focused on the assumed violent nature of Aboriginal male protestors and without recognizing that these protests and their accompanying violence are a direct result of an imposed history of violence and systemic racism. These dominant representations, too, criminalize Aboriginal men and can elide the participation of Aboriginal women in these protest movements.[16] What these dominant constructions of Aboriginal male militancy and criminality have so effectively masked, however, is not only the struggle over whose "symbols of ethnicity will prevail" but the unequal "*allocation of resources to these minorities*" (Weaver 183, my emphasis). These representations of racialized criminality and deviance have masked the *actual* allocation, or more appropriately, the dispossession and denial of those resources in a convenient national narrative teleology that naturalizes this dispossession in terms of protecting the state's interest.

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[15] Gustafsen Lake, located in southern British Columbia, was the site of a vision of Shuswap elders in 1989-90 and was chosen as a site for an annual Sundance ceremony. The site was located on the property of a local rancher, and when Aboriginal participants erected fences and shelters on the site, the RCMP were involved in what became a summer-long standoff. British Columbia at the time had no formal treaties with Aboriginal peoples, and claims regarding the unceded nature and therefore Aboriginal title to this piece of land were being made at the international level. Two elements of the incident stand out in terms of the politics of white Canadian nationalism: popular and media arguments against the Sundancers were based on arguments about authenticity, that the Sundance was not a traditional Shuswap ceremony and therefore, did not indicate any traditional tie (and therefore title) to the location; and, Bruce Clark, the unconventional lawyer for the Sundancers, insisted that negotiations with the Aboriginal peoples has to be conducted with the Queen of England, as original title had never been ceded to the Canadian government. Clark's radical and provocative argument, however, was generally vitiated by a conservative media that labelled him as eccentric (See *Chronology of the Gustafsen Lake Standoff*).

In September 1995, some members of the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation in southwestern Ontario occupied the Ipperwash Provincial Part adjacent to a military training base, Camp Ipperwash to protect a sacred burial ground. The Kettle and Stony Point First Nation had sought the return of Camp Ipperwash lands that had been the Stony Point Reserve before it was appropriated by the federal government under the War Measures Act in 1942. (A 1981 Order in Council had committed the government to return the lands when no longer needed for military purposes, and in July 1995, military personnel withdrew after a confrontation with the members of the First Nation.)

In September 1995, Anthony (Dudley) George, a member of the First Nation, was fatally shot and two others were injured in a confrontation with Ontario Provincial Police. Acting OPP Sergeant Kenneth Dean was found guilty of criminal negligence causing death, but was spared jail and sentenced to two years less a day of community service (Edwards).

[16] Goodleaf's *Entering the War Zone*, Alanis Obomsawin's film *Kahnesatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, and Christine Welch's film *Keepers of the Fire* detail the fundamental participation of Aboriginal women in processes of activism and decolonization. Goodleaf and *Kahnesatake* focus on the Mohawk people at Kahnesatake, and Welch's film details Aboriginal women's activism across Canada, in protesting the sexism of the Indian Act and in land rights battles.

With the rise of Aboriginal activism in Canada and Australia since the 1960s, a more accurate picture of national histories is emerging. Myths of courageous white settlers triumphing over a barren and hostile natural environment (and of hostile savage "natives") are effectively being disrupted by Aboriginal perspectives as well as by the development of individual and collective self-examination by non-Aboriginal peoples of our histories in colonization. Aboriginal peoples are rewriting the dominant narratives of nation through their insistence on their prior occupancy of the land and in their telling of the imperialist capitalist drive that produced a racialized, demonized, gendered labouring class of dispossessed and segregated peoples. They are rewriting, in particular, dominant narratives of race and labour to unmask how popular assumptions in which Aboriginality is equated with non-productivity in the capitalist economy (as in popular stereotypes of "laziness," etc.) operate to reveal the interdependence of racism and class relations, or what Cedric Robinson calls "racial capitalism" (qtd. in Gilroy 31). As Hugh Brody puts it in the Canadian context: "The fur trade needed Indians who needed the fur trade" (56). Aboriginal narratives are working to revise the accepted histories of the fur trade in Canada and the pastoral industry in Australia to reveal that it was exploited Aboriginal labour, often in conditions of near-slavery in Australia, and not simply white pioneer industriousness, that founded these "national" industries. (This is not to dismiss, however, the role and exploitation of other "racialized" classes of labourers in the production of the economies of the white nation states—the Chinese railway workers in Canada and Melanesian and Asian indentured workers in the plantation industries of Australia, for example.) Aboriginal peoples, writes Métis Howard Adams,

> were the original source of labour that created the wealth of this country and thus we contributed to the development of the existing colonial system. Consequently, it is quite impossible to separate the development of Canadian society from the growth of our colonized conditions. Therefore, if the society is going to be changed to meet the needs of the Indian and Métis people, the problems of the entire society will have to be resolved at the same time. The native movement cannot avoid tackling the basic problems of the entire Canadian society. In this way our liberation struggle automatically involves the Canadian whites. (180)

Locating Aboriginal Nationalisms in the Multicultural Minefield

Resistant nationalisms are inevitably caught within the terms of the dominant.[17] The operations of imperialism and nationalism are manifested locally and "give rise to their own forms of race and marginality" (Morris and Cowlishaw 2); it is also the specificities of the local, in the agency of those targeted by these systemic processes, that enable the emergence of specific formulations of nation/sovereignty. There is no homogeneous entity called Aboriginal sovereignty, nor is there consensus among the multiple Aboriginal constituencies about what forms and processes movements for autonomy should take.[18] "We are many mobs with many countries," writes Mudrooroo (*Us Mob* v). It is in its very multiplicity that the potential of Aboriginal sovereignty movements lies.[19] The "revolution," in the words of Métis Howard Adams, "has to be brought about by the masses through the unique struggles that embody their politics and culture. It is from locally based struggles that true revolutionary theory evolves, a revolutionary theory functional for those who must liberate themselves" (183).

Resistant and alternative conceptions of and struggles for Aboriginal self-determination must indeed negotiate for their realization through the structures and terms of the dominant national state formations. Aboriginal nationalisms are therefore multiply directed—negotiating with federal and state/provincial structures and therefore developing pan-Aboriginal politics, while asserting local autonomy and distinctiveness, and always adapting to the dominant and popular discourses of Aboriginality, be they through constructions of "race" and/or "culture." As Mohawk theorist Gerald R. Alfred observes in

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[17] As Terry Eagleton has noted, nationalist struggle, like feminist and class struggle, will

> necessarily be caught up in the very metaphysical categories it hopes finally to abolish; and any such movement will demand a difficult, perhaps ultimately impossible double optic, at once fighting on a terrain already mapped out by its antagonists and seeking even now to prefigure within that mundane strategy styles of being and identity for which we have as yet no proper names. (24)

[18] For example, Donna Goodleaf, in her *Entering the War Zone: A Mohawk Perspective on Resisting Invasions* insists that "Self-Government (which does not mean sovereignty) is one of the most dangerous agreement or deal ever crafted by the federal and provincial governments. It is a deal in which some of our own leaders who are selling out their people are trying to convince the people that Self-Government means the same thing as Sovereignty" (173).

[19] "Relying on indigenous values and principles and on unique conceptions of key terms in the debate," writes Mohawk nationalism theorist Gerald R. Alfred, "many Native communities have embarked on a radically different path than the integrative processes represented by claims for self-government of aboriginal rights" (8).

his *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism*,

> There are major commonalities among the thousands of North American Indian and Inuit communities, yet the differences are so substantial as to make the concept of a single affiliation impossible. There is no doubt that at the community level, each tribe, band, or nation constitutes a political community which is best thought of in terms of a distinct group. There is within each community a clear set of axes around which identities and institutions are formed. These differ radically from those of non-Native society and substantially from those of other Native communities....Conceptualizing each community's struggle in terms of a distinctive nationalist movement is the most effective way of understanding what at times may seem like a confusing array of tactics, strategies, and goals. But they remain confusing only as long as the observer fails to recognize the localized basis for Native organization and the nationalistic (not just tribal) nature of Native objectives.
>
> Understood properly, Native politics is the self-assertion of nationhood on different axes and to differing degrees by various distinct political communities. (12, 13)[20]

The assumption that Aboriginal movements for and conceptualizations of "sovereignty" merely replicate dominate national formations is a false one—an effect, in fact, of the ideology of dominant nationalism at work. Aboriginal peoples in Canada view non-Aboriginal institutions as "transitory and superfluous features of their political existence" (7):

> [t]he dominant form of nationalism lacks the necessary depth to incorporate the experience of political communities reacting to Western political and cultural hegemony. To a certain extent it represents a theoretical construct and understanding of history which has come to signify Western civilization, yet it truly incorporates a

[20] The goals of aboriginal nationalism(s) in Canada are not the replication of dominant forms of nation and must be theorized as particular forms of relationships to place and existing state formations: the focus on "self government" or enhanced "aboriginal rights," Alfred states, "are narrow views which assume that Native politics functions in an environment created exclusively by non-Natives" (7). His description of Aboriginal nationalism in Canada, what he terms a form of ethno-nationalism, is a relevant model for Aboriginal movements for self-determination in Australia as well. Ethno-nationalism is

> a form which seeks to achieve self-determination not through the creation of a new state, but through the achievement of a cultural sovereignty and a political relationship based on group autonomy reflected in formal self-government arrangements in cooperation with existing state institutions.
>
> "Community sovereignty" and "state-based" nationalist movements have essentially different natures. Whereas the state-based form undermines the structural integrity of the state within a specified territory in the attempt to replicate state institutions for a more limited constituency, the community sovereignty form seeks only to limit the extent of the state's jurisdictional authority in the attempt to promote the distinctiveness of a limited constituency. Where the state-based nationalist project is geared toward displacing the existing state in the creation of a new one, community sovereignty nationalism accepts the state's present existence and attempts an accommodation that preserves the integrity of both the challenging ethnic group and the state itself. (14-15)

> selective memory of the European experience in nation-building. Theorists have created a model of nationalism based upon a narrow view of one aspect of European history and applied it as the global standard. (9)

As demonstrated by the Oka Crisis of 1990 in Canada, the culturally specific aspirations of a single community, such as the Mohawk people of Kahnesatake and Khanawake, can too easily be filtered by popular thinking (backed up by the federal government and national army) to represent all Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and in ways that maintain dominant nationalist thinking. This is not to downplay the role the crisis/resistance has had in terms of unsettling dominant narratives of nation and in forging a sense of Aboriginal solidarity. In the case of Aboriginal groups whose cultural, historical, political, and geographical specificities have been homogenized by imperial structures, particularly by legislation, and whose political power has been effectively dissipated and dispersed, that homogenizing tendency can be used in a pan-Aboriginal strategy in both legislative and cultural politics.

Aboriginal "national" movements therefore are not simply entering and exposing the contradictions and gaps in the dominant national formations of Canada and Australia, though they do so quite effectively. Aboriginal Australian protests at the 1988 Bicentennial Celebrations (an explicit performance of Australian nationalism), Canadian Elijah Harper's historic stoppage of the Meech Lake Accord (proposing to grant Quebec distinct society status without the consultation of Aboriginal peoples) in 1990, and planned boycotts and protests at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney (nationalism performed on a global scale), are but three visible examples.

That such legal and theoretical concepts as Aboriginal "self-determination" and "sovereignty" are so troubling to the dominant national formations, in part resulting in current neo-conservatism and racist backlash in both countries, is a signal of their very transformative potential. Nor are these shifts to the political right in terms of cultural and racial politics[21] disconnected from the role of multinational capital in destabilizing the power of individual nation-states to determine their own economic futures, and, consequently, diminishing the real and imagined power of the dominant national ideology.

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[21] The rise of the One Nation Party in Australia, and of the Freedom Party and the Reform Party in Canada signal a desire for a homogeneous white national identity.

"As national boundaries become economically insignificant, as national governments become less and less able to influence national economic forces, there seems to be a reaffirmation of the cultural reality, value and autonomy of the nation-state" (Marcus 31). Yet, as destructive as multinational capital has been to indigenous communities,[22] it is also in part through the negotiations *with* multinational capital (regarding mineral and excavation rights, the development of tourist industries, and the challenges that land claims and arguments about collective property rights pose to a structure based on individual rights), that Aboriginal communities are developing their own economic autonomy on which to base their nationalist aspirations.[23] As Alfred suggests, this process is creative as well as pragmatic; Aboriginal peoples

> are re-examining the roots of their own Native political institutions and the canon of Native thought in a conscious effort to re-discover a set of values and political principles. And in this process of political revitalization, Native political thinkers have been as innovative as the most creative artist in re-orienting traditional forms to suit a new political reality. (7)

Negotiating Multiculturalism

Official policies of multiculturalism in Canada (1988) and Australia (1989),[24] which formally declare acceptance of cultural diveristy, can be seen as manifestations of a collective desire to assert a unique national identity. Official multiculturalism, while claiming to acknowledge and "celebrate" cultural diversity, actually functions as a strategy of construction and containment of difference such that the dominant white Anglo-Christian culture remains firmly as the norm against which "others" and "hyphenated" Canadians or Australians are located and judged (as lacking). These policies continue to

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[22] The vast destruction wrought by the James Bay hydroelectric projects, in which vast amounts of Cree lands in northern Ontario and Quebec were flooded, and without the permission of the Cree and Inuit peoples there, is a case in point.

[23] See, for example, Peter Foster's article in the *Financial Post*, "Exploring Mackenzie."

[24] In Canada, multiculturalism dates to the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* (1967-70), and first became nationally prominent in 1971 with a policy paper drawing on the Royal Commission and designed primarily to quell Quebec nationalism. It became official national policy in 1988 with the passage of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Bill C-93). In Australia, official multiculturalism developed through the dismantling of the White Australia immigration policy in the late 1960s, and through a series of policies in education and social welfare from 1970s on, culminating in the 1989 policy "National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia."

operate as the nationalisms and national policies that preceded them—policies to manage "race" yet leave the ideology of the dominant white population as central, and intact.

Cultural difference is produced through multiculturalism in particular ways and "allowed" expression only through "acceptable" and non-threatening activities such as food, dress, art, and music, and, in South Asian Canadian critic Louise Saldanha's words, "as an alternative lifestyle rather than as an oppositional subjectivity" (1). The dominant narratives of national identity (and national subjectivity) as narratives of isolation and alienation are allowed to replicate themselves and to mask the economic and social privilege (and the accompanying identity this provides) of those in this position. Any problems arising from structural inequality then are seen as inherent in the minority rather than in the operations of imperialism, capitalism, and sexism (Hesch 105). Moreover, the interests of Aboriginal peoples, particularly in terms of sovereignty issues and land claims, are not easily served by an alliance with official multiculturalism or the minority groups named by it. Non-white immigrants to Canada and Australia and their descendants, while subjected to a range of systemic oppressions, including racism and sexism, in the history of nation-building have also benefited from the historical dispossession of Aboriginal peoples and from governments' persistent attempts to deny land rights and sovereignty to Aboriginal peoples in favour of (largely European) occupation (Regnier 76). Any alliances between groups named by official multiculturalism and Aboriginal peoples based on similar victimization and oppression by the state, then, must support Aboriginal land claims and "be formulated within clearly distinctive possibilities for coliberating initiatives" (77).

The failure of official multicultural policies (national ideologies) in both Canada and Australia to even recognize Aboriginal peoples as constituting part of the national fabric is also a signal of the very threat to an imagined national cohesiveness posed by Aboriginal sovereignty movements, by their prior occupation of land on which multi-culturalism is now overlain. In his *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* Australian critic Ghassan Hage suggests that nationalist practices of exclusion are conducted by those who see themselves as occupying a "privileged position within national space such that they perceive themselves to be the enactors of the national will within the nation." What or whomever stands "between them and their imaginary

nation is constructed as an undesirable national object to be removed from national space" (47).[25]

The historical removal of Aboriginal peoples from the national space onto the margins of reserves and the refusal to grant Aboriginal nationalisms entry into discussions of national "multicultural" politics are signals of these practices of nationalist exclusion.[26] Moreover, the supposedly secular nature of the national formations of Canada and Australia tends to occlude the role of Judeo-Christian constructions of morality, of individual and collective redemption, articulated most specifically in law, but, I would also argue, in the dynamics of white liberal guilt and the politics surrounding multiculturalism, as a possibility and a promise of national collective redemption.

The discourses of race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism and nationalism are the terrain on which Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Australia are fighting for recognition (Stratton 18); these are the discourses and ideologies that they must simultaneously negotiate. In his *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, non-Aboriginal Jon Stratton's brief reference to Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders includes the assertion that they explicitly adopt the language of race in their politics of liberation. They have "tended to racialise themselves in an attempt to avoid the homogenising ethnicisation—that is being constructed as having a particular ethnicity—and marginalisation of official multiculturalism" (18). In her "What Use Is Ethnicity to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada?" non-Aboriginal Canadian critic Margery Fee suggests that at this historical juncture neither

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[25] The material and ideological separation of the dominant national body and those named Aboriginal has crept into postcolonial studies as well, such that marginality is not seen as constituting the centre, yet is called upon to define it. Seshadri-Crooks writes of this problem:

> Affirmative action and multiculturalism in their liberal modes, conceptualize the margin spatially, as the excluded and unintegrated other. In some ways, these initiatives posit a utopian moment in which the marginal as such will cease to exist, with power circulating freely and fluidly connecting and equalizing all points of habitation. In this conception, the marginal is the space of agitation, subversion, and thus of theoretical innovation....What is worth noting here is the way in which the spatial margin, that is, margin as subject position, becomes also the source of rejuvenation of the centre, where knowledge as positive knowledge becomes possible. The academic industry of postcolonial studies has gained the status of a phenomenon within this paradigm of positivity. (53)

[26] This is a practice Hage's own analysis reinforces, as he recognizes. He effectively critiques the absence of attention to Aboriginal issues in discussions of multiculturalism as an effect of "the uncritical product of an institutionalised division of labour between academics interested in 'Aboriginality' and academics interested in 'multiculturalism.'" Such an academic divisions, he suggests, are an effect of governmental policies that separate "White-Aboriginal" relations from "Anglo-Ethnic" relations, with the result of leaving "Aboriginal-

race nor ethnicity is particularly useful to Aboriginal peoples in their processes of decolonization. Ethnicity, she suggests, can be problematic in a pan-Aboriginal politics because of its potential to be divisive along cultural and linguistic lines, and race has already been entrenched in law and popular thinking. Rather, while recognizing that the discourses of race, ethnicity, and nation will continue to be reconfigured, she suggests, "most of the breakthroughs that these peoples have had in their dealings with the Canadian state have come through a discourse of citizenship" (684). Processes of decolonization are far more multi-dimensional than these analyses suggest. The "production of Aboriginal writings takes place in the context of a whole series of representations which is being used to produce definitions of Australian culture and nation....constructions of Aboriginality will have to be deconstructed and reconstructed for specific political purposes" (Muecke 55).

Clearly, Aboriginal peoples make strategic choices regarding their negotiations with state formations and popular discourses and representations.[27] Aboriginal sovereignty movements have effectively appropriated dominant nationalism's concepts of time/history, tradition, and biologism or "blood" to some political advantage. While maintaining the structure and terms of the prevailing national narrative, such terms, when taken up by Aboriginal theorists, hold the unique potential of overturning, for example, dominant claims and myths about national origins as white, European, Christian, and male (exemplified in pioneering mythologies), making persuasive claims of prior occupation and collective possession of the land. Such claims, in other words, function so effectively in part because they are able to stake an inarguable claim to a prior position in the teleology of the entrenched dominant national narrative.[28]

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ethnic relations highly unexplored" (24). Jon Stratton's *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis* also excludes discussion of the specific location of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.

[27] In his *Us Mob*, for example, Mudrooroo muses on the relationships among tourism, Aboriginal art, dominant assumptions about Aboriginality, and the marketing of Aboriginal culture, at once noting the problems of dominant ideology and the strategic response of Aboriginal artists: "Some decades ago now, Indigenous bark painting began to be influenced by tourism and the size of the painting was determined by the suitcase. This was called 'suitcase art'" (160).

[28] And as contradictions in dominant legislation regarding land title and ownership at the time of contact and settlement come to be exposed, most visibly through the Oka Crisis in Canada and the Mabo decision in Australia, for example, such claims of historical occupancy and ownership gain both legislative authority and popular support (even where that support is driven by liberal guilt).

Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling practices are location in this web of national and nationalist politics, as they negotiate imposed discourse that have secured white-nation-building, as they re-imagine and reconfigure a relationship to place and history. As Alfred suggests, this "symbolic aspect of nationalism must be recognized, and the multiple meanings of various symbols and words must be integrated into the analysis" (14). That the weight of dominant nationalisms and their attendant representations, their operations in the publishing industry, and even their internalization by Aboriginal peoples in the processes of imperialist hegemony, must be negotiated constantly by Aboriginal women writers is a point many Aboriginal theorists, including Métis Emma LaRocque, make:

> For the last two decades we have been faced with the weary task of having to educate our audiences before we could even begin dialoguing with them! Our energies have been derailed from purely creative pursuits. Many speakers and writers have been cornered into the hapless role of apologists, incessant (and very patient) explainers, and overnight experts on all things Native. And in response to the negation and falsification of our histories and cultures, some have been pushed to cultural romanticism, even perhaps cultural self-righteousness. But, incidentally, nobody on earth has ever romanticized their culture to such mythic proportions (cowboys moving west and killing Indians being equated with moral and human progress) as white North Americans. ("Preface" xxii)

As I discuss in the next chapter, the ideologies of race, gender, and nation intersect with the ideologies of literary form to shape not only the contexts of reception of Aboriginal women's lifestories but inform their very conditions of production. Aboriginal women's lifestorytellers negotiate the specific ideological inheritances of the form of autobiography in English (including assumptions about authorship, autobiographical subjectivity, language, orality, referentiality, and truth) as these converge with desires for particular forms of "Aboriginality" within the operations of dominant multicultural nationalism.

The role of Aboriginal spirituality in nationalist resistance in one sense replicates the imperialist assumptions, and dominant national stereotypes, of Aboriginal peoples as "mystical," "spiritual," and "in touch with the land"; but these constructs, too, can be used to political advantage. Traditional Aboriginal spirituality (even in its contemporary hybrid forms) is also culturally specific and inextricably related to the materiality of land ownership/custodianship, and its context and political potential lie far beyond this initial deconstructive strategy.

Chapter Three

The Ideology of Autobiographical Form meets the Ideology of White Nationalism

> Nearly everyone producing literary or cultural studies makes no allowance for the truth that all intellectual or cultural work occurs somewhere, at some time, on some very precisely mapped-out and permissible terrain, which is ultimately contained by the State.
>
> Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*

> Many Indigenous writers have had the unpleasant experience of not meeting someone else's stereotype.
>
> Kateri Damm (Anishinaubae), "Says Who" (13)

Métis writer Marilyn Dumont has outlined some of the negotiations Aboriginal writers face in Canada, particularly the imperialist expectations of what constitutes Aboriginality and therefore Aboriginal literature:

> If you are old, you are supposed to write legends, that is, stories that were passed down to you from your elders. If you are young, you are expected to relate stories about foster homes, street life and loss of culture and if you are in the middle, you are supposed to write about alcoholism or residential school. And somehow throughout this you are supposed to infuse everything you write with symbols of the native world view, that is: the circle, mother earth, the number four or the trickster figure. In other words, positive images of nativeness. (47)

And for those Aboriginal writers whose experiences or writing do not meet these expectations there is the pressure to reconstruct such elements in order to "write about them in 'the authentic voice,' so you can be identified (read 'marketed') as a Native Artist" (47).

The Anglocentrism of dominant nationalisms in Canada and Australia (reinforced in postcolonial theoretical practices), moreover, also shapes the terrain of the production and reception of Aboriginal women's lifestories. In taking up the autobiographical form, Aboriginal women are making transformative interventions into this complex of form, race, language, and nation.

Specific literary forms, as Fredric Jameson has argued, do not emerge spontaneously or exist independently of their conditions of possibility (even as they may claim to do so) but as "solutions to problems and contradictions" in concrete social situations and power relations ("State" 20). The autobiographical form is historically a particularly Western, Christian, Enlightenment *male* genre, which has not easily accommodated women's perspectives, locations, and self-understandings. (Women autobiographers, particularly in the English literary tradition, however, have none the less continued to challenge and transform the genre of autobiography, as their self-representations articulate their own locations, histories, and processes of subjectivity as linked to social processes.) The emergence and ideology of traditional Western autobiography has been interpreted as an effect of the ideological shifts of the Industrial Revolution that produced a (false) sense of the autonomous male self:

> A new image of the individual was in the making as old economic and social structures crumbled. The individual then "disencumbered" could look within himself as an isolated self-directed unit who could assume command of his life. Though the goals were different, the concept merged with the topic of pervasive "spiritual autobiographies" of Christian inspiration. (Brée 173)

The autobiographical form has depended on a belief in the "givenness" of the Enlightenment self/individual as the originator of meaning and carries with it particular notions of mimesis, truth, and subjectivity. However, because it has been perceived as a "personal" practice (particularly in the case of women autobiographers), autobiography has also been denigrated as a lesser form in processes of national canon formation, in part because of its refusal, in form and practice, to make the same claims for the (problematic) "universal" and "imagination" as made by the novel. It has not, in turn, been called upon in service of dominant nationalisms, as the novel has been in the Canadian context:

> Probably no cultural form in English-speaking Canada has been so closely worked over as the novel, with a view to finding in it some figurative reflection of an elusive

> cultural identity. Since the 1920s, when it began to supplant poetry as the paradigmatic national form, "the Canadian novel" has been asked to perform an inordinate amount of cultural labour within the ideological work of group solidification, and thus it has become a major participant in cultural debates about nationality, ethnicity, and regional identity, and more recently, aboriginality, gender, and sexuality. This *use* of "the Canadian novel"...has also contributed to the systematic devaluing of other kinds of literary and non-literary writing within the various Canadian canons. (Slemon, "Novel" 1114)

Generic laws have been part of the processes of imperialist hegemony, at once valorising and imposing the European tradition and erasing, displacing, and denigrating indigenous literary forms that constructed indigenous subjectivity and collective identity in ways that did not satisfy colonialist intentions. The taking up of this form, or the reproduction of this ideology of form, in colonized locations dislocates, alters, both the form and its attendant ideology.[1] Its study can contribute to a general understanding of how "the genres by which cultures tell their personal and communal stories" function in self- and collective definition" (Longley 370-71)[2] as well as of the problems and contradictions in the social structures that produce them.[3]

Precontact Aboriginal literary traditions did not include autobiographies in the western sense, and, moreover, western concepts of autobiographical authorship do not necessarily apply to contemporary Aboriginal cultural production. "Rules of authorship, ownership, and authority, for example, are so differently understood by Aboriginal people

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[1] The form of the novel, too, has been problematically called upon in service of emergent anti-imperial nationalisms. Fredric Jameson's article "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," for example, has been castigated for imposing a reading of literatures from emergent nations as national allegory, although I would argue that Jameson's piece is a much more complex examination of the *desire* for this type of reading. See Timothy Brennan's "The National Longing for Form," and Aijaz Ahmad's response to Jameson in his *In Theory*, for further discussion of this question.

[2] While Longley suggests that Aboriginal women's use of the autobiographical form is ideal "because it has the authority of a primary historical record while enjoying the freedom of an unashamedly personal vision" (371), I would concur only with her former point, as each of the terms "freedom," "unashamedly," and "personal" requires historicization in the context of the ideology of the form—assumptions of the writers as well as of the readers.

[3] Little research has been conducted on the relationship of the western autobiographical literary form and precontact Aboriginal literary traditions in Canada and Australia to see if a form of what western criticism calls "autobiography" or a form similar to it actually existed in precontact times. Certainly people told stories of their experiences and their lives, but it is not clear whether such stories were presented in a particular form with affinities with Western autobiography. As Mudrooroo (then Colin Johnson) suggested in 1985, stories and songs of the Dreaming Ancestors which detail their lives and travels "are clearly biographical or autobiographical" but it "remains to be seen if this tradition was used to detail the lives of ordinary people" ("White" 230).

that the term *autobiography* is immediately problematized when it is used in an Aboriginal context" (Longley 371). Non-Aboriginal readers are often unable to grasp the "compromises that have to be made in order for Aboriginal people to offer their personal stories to a white reading public....Much Aboriginal history is difficult to relate because it is literally unspeakable" (370).[4]

Historically, imperialist ideologies and practices of autobiography (while certainly devalued in relation to the realist novel) functioned to grant individuality to western subjects while simultaneously constructing the non-Western subject as a collectivized generality typically racialized, classed, and gendered in pejorative, often objectifying, ways (Smith and Watson xvii). That "postcolonial autobiography" and Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling practices in Canada and Australia in particular have not been granted entry into the postcolonial curricular orbit (with the novel typically being favoured) as a subject of study in its own right, signals a troubling repetition of this process. Historically, non-Aboriginal readerships have denigrated Aboriginal women's self-representations for not meeting up to dominant norms, and this denigration has often been repeated in non-Aboriginal editors' and translators' forewords to texts that cater to white readers.[5]

Many Aboriginal women's autobiographical narratives contain features of other genres such as the memoir, the testimonial, the polemic, and the apology (Brewster, *Reading* 9). And what has been "designated as Western autobiography is only one form of 'life writing.'" argue non-Aboriginal critics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson: "There are other modes of life story telling, both oral and written, to be recognized, other genealogies of life story telling to be chronicled, other explorations of traditions, current and past, to be factored into the making and unmaking of autobiographical subjects in a global environment" (xviii). The insistence on the fluidity of the genre of lifestorytelling, like that of autobiography, is necessary in recognizing both the limits and possibilities of the form as writers in specific locations take it up, particularly from locations unlike those from which

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[4] While postcolonial theory has appropriately characterized and often celebrated indigenous written literary practices as "hybrid" in form and practice, I would caution in the wake of poststructuralism's ahistorical valorization of playful pastiche that this hybridity is an effect of profound imperialist violence. It is, in fact, constituted by violence—physical, sexual, psychological, epistemic—and must be historicized as such.

[5] While I explore this I more detail in relation to each text I analyze, it is important to note that the history of non-Aboriginal editorial commentary as frame for Aboriginal women's lifestories, too, is undergoing a powerful transformation as Aboriginal publishers and editors become involved in textual production.

the form first emerged—those of women writers and Aboriginal women writers, for example. Recognizing at once that the texts and categories under discussion here inherit, transform, and have affinities with the traditional autobiographical form (even as it is constantly changing), and some have affinities with the novel, I characterize them as "lifestorytelling" to at once mark their specificities and urge a flexibility of formal categorization.[6] Feminist theory and practice of autobiography have usefully developed the term "life writing" to more appropriately describe narratives that challenge the ideology of autobiography as the writing of a self (falsely) separated from social contexts and collective histories. In many ways, the characteristics of life writing are shared by the lifestories of Aboriginal women. In both, there is a recognition that "self" is socially constructed, not always coherent or contained, and certainly not isolated from others or from history, which shapes the events of a particular life and the individual's perception of that experience.

The narratives I describe as *lifestories* however, are further marked by their specific relationships to oral literary traditions, especially their conceptions of story as pedagogical (though I would not assert that every lifestory by an Aboriginal woman is necessarily or directly derived from such traditions). Aboriginal women's published lifestorytelling practices, moreover, also have some affinities with the novel, particularly in texts that take the form of autobiographical fiction or fictionalized autobiography, such as Lee Maracle's *Sundogs* and Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*, in Canada, and Monica Clare's *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl.* Such texts do not carry the assumption of historical truth attached to some of the others in this study, but rather utilize the concepts

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[6] The difficulties of defining "Nativeness" and "Native Literature" in Canada are profoundly implicated in the problematic constructions of Aboriginality already outlined. The provisional definition "Native literature is literature produced by Natives," writes Native American writer and critic Thomas King, has the advantages of including both contemporary written works and traditional oral literatures, and the recognition that it is produced by Aboriginal peoples, and that being Aboriginal is "a matter of race" (x). However, as he notes, a definition on the basis of race also falls into a trap, such that it is assumed that "race imparts to the Native writer a tribal understanding of the universe, access to a distinct culture, and a literary perspective that is unattainable by non-Natives" (x). King suggests that his definition "suffice for the while providing we resist the temptation of trying to define a Native" (11). Similarly, in her introduction to *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature*, Okanagan writer, critic and activist Jeannette Armstrong rejects imperialist and external definitions of Aboriginal cultural production, suggesting that "First Nations Literature will be defined by First Nations Writers, readers, academics and critics and perhaps only by writers and critics from within those varieties of First Nations contemporary practise and past practise of culture and the knowledge of it" (7).

of novelistic universality, and racialized representativeness, in particular ways and with particular effects.

A distinct advantage for Aboriginal women taking up the form of lifestorytelling (as opposed to the anthropological lifestory) is that it does provide a form in which the individual writer is granted a particularity and a subjectivity previously refused by imperialist paradigms. Autobiographical language "may serve as a coinage that purchases entry into the social and discursive economy.... Deploying autobiographical practices that go against the grain, she may constitute an "I" that becomes a place of creative, and, by implication, political intervention" (Smith and Watson xix). The form of autobiography, a genre that historically depends on the coherence of the subject, may provide for Aboriginal women "an ideal platform from which to reveal the fragmentation of the subject and of the culture that has occurred as a result of these women's displaced cultural situation" (Longley 371). I would caution, however, that to read the histories of the subjectivities traced in Aboriginal women's lifestories *only* in terms of the destructive effects of imperialism is to elide Aboriginal women's agency through a construction of their subjectivity as exclusively "victim."

Yet, perhaps because of its assumed personal nature, autobiography historically has also been *popularly* viewed as somehow having a closer relationship to "truth," historical accuracy and referentiality (even as this is constructed as "individual" truth) than other forms of literature. Herein lies part of its potential in a politics of decolonization. Aboriginal women's lifestories are not, of course, transparent reflections of the Real. But the form itself, in tracing the processes of subjectivity and subject formation, is one that historically, generically, is not as stringently required to smooth over the contradictions of the processes of subjectivity as required by the "classic" novel. Nor have its truth claims historically been subject to the rigorous investigation attenuating other forms, an effect, again, of its already denigrated status. The assumption of the transparency of the form functions in conjunction with imperialist and nationalist assumptions about the ready knowability of the Aboriginal subject and the desire that Aboriginal literature stand as "social truth" (Muecke), such that these narratives purchase a certain amount of (circumscribed) authority in national climates of collective guilt regarding the colonization

of Aboriginal peoples.[7] Certainly, Aboriginal women lifestorytellers are aware that non-Aboriginal readers may construct them as "representative" of their race and culture and their narratives as "social truth," and many of the writers *do* make such claims.

Further, the imposition of racial categories and the "burden of representation" placed on minority peoples as representatives of their entire "race" certainly play their roles in the choices lifestorytellers make. This is not to suggest, however, a reading practice that makes the story of the self simply representative of the writer's culture and nation, eliding the specificity of the writer, and her text, and her creativity in order to make claims about the collectivity. I am suggesting, however, that many Aboriginal women writers are all too aware of non-Aboriginal assumptions about their "representativeness" and take up this dynamic strategically to create solidarity among Aboriginal women and to raise awareness of the systemic nature of the oppression they detail.

Given the power of white reading audiences to incorporate Aboriginal women's lifestories into imperialist paradigms, Aboriginal women lifestorytellers are acutely aware of the risks involved in disclosing particular types of information and opinions and in presenting a subjectivity that may be read quite differently in mainstream and local Aboriginal community contexts. It is therefore "necessary to examine the enunciative conditions of these texts; in the telling of Aboriginal life stories, the decision as to who tells what to whom is always a considered and inevitably a political choice. The discursive inscription of identity in Aboriginal women's narratives is thus politically strategic" (Brewster *Literary Formations* 37).

One of the most powerful ideologies of the form to be negotiated is that to which I have previously alluded to: the "repressive hypothesis: out of repression, expression" (Muecke). Here, the dominant expectation of the autobiographical self is that of full disclosure—exposure—as a necessary precondition for the teleology of the healed (confessional) and therefore liberated and coherent self. Silences, absences, and gaps in the

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[7] In many ways, Aboriginal women's life stories transform the personal into the historical, such that individual events and stories are located in the larger narratives of Aboriginal history and the histories of nationalism and imperialism. Howard Adams' *Prison of Grass* and Maria Campbell's *Half-breed* are particular examples in Canada of lifestorytelling that is firmly located in a revisionist history of the Métis people, and of the Riel "Rebellion" in particular, in Canada. This process of embedding the personal in the historical, the political, and the collective *may* emerge from local literary traditions.

narratives may indicate in some instances the unspeakability of particular issues—for example, Rita Joe describes her memories of childhood sexual abuse in foster care as a "bundle" she is "not ready to open"—and are powerful narrative moments and significant in terms of the narrator's self-construction and processes of subjectivity. Other moments of silence may indicate a different kind of strategic choice—the refusal to grant further access into Aboriginal experience and culture to the voyeuristic imperialist non-Aboriginal reader, even as that narrative is addressed in part to that very reader. Certainly, too, the lifestory-tellers in this study are aware that the representation of their lives inextricably involves the representation of other people in their lives, and are cautious of the reception of those who may recognize themselves in the narratives. This is perhaps a signal of their recognition of the effects and responsibilities of their narrative practices, as they perceive them.

As the taking up of the autobiographical form by Aboriginal women, particularly in Australia, is related to the history of anthropological "as-told-to" life story, these texts that emerge from that history and/or are read through that paradigm carry some of the advantages and disadvantages of that form and its reception. If the advantages include a popular assumption of ethnographic and historical truth, its disadvantages include those of representativeness and an erasure of literary creativity. That Aboriginal literature is often didactic has been a particularly potent site for its dismissal by non-Aboriginal critics in this era of poststructuralist skepticism of meaning. Yet the recognition of the hybridity of form of Aboriginal women's lifestorytellers should account for and historicize, in its specificities, the function of these narratives and their didacticism as seen by, produced by, their communities and contexts of production. As many Aboriginal critics have noted, story is an integral aspect of instruction and cultural reproduction in Aboriginal communities, and therefore by definition is didactic in nature, intention, and practice. As Métis/Salish writer, theorist, and activist Lee Maracle suggests, the concepts of "story," "theory," and teaching are inseparable in Aboriginal literary practices:

> Among European scholars there is an alienated notion which maintains that theory is separate from story, and thus a different set of words are required to "prove" an idea rather than to "show" one.... There is a story in every line of theory. The difference between us and European (predominantly white male) scholars is that we admit this, and present theory through story. We differ in the presentation of theory, not in our capacity to theorize. (*Oratory* 3, 7)

Elements of Aboriginal lifestorytelling that to a non-Aboriginal critic may appear to be limited —for example, the use of dialogue and its implicit suggestion of the infallibility of memory, even over the course of decades—may, for example, be quite beside the point in specific contexts of reception that consider dialogue to be provided as an example in a pedagogical practice rather than as an accurate reflection of events.

Yet, if non-Aboriginal critics generally are uninformed, or misinformed, about traditional Aboriginal narrative forms, we cannot assess accurately to what extent the genre is being transformed, how, and to what effects. Without knowledge, for example, of the oral literary forms of the Mi'kmaq or Lardil people[8], we cannot effectively articulate what is particular to each lifestoryteller, what is a use of a traditional form, and so on. Cree editor and translator Freda Ahenakew describes the formal structure of Emma Minde's lifestory as "classical in form; within the overall genre of the *âcimowin*, the factual account, she alternates between the autobiographical text or *âcimisowin* and the counselling text or *kakêskihkêmowin*" (xv). Ahenakew also remarks on the similarities between the counselling passages with Catholic traditions, such that the text is a transformation of Cree and English traditions alike. Critics of Aboriginal writing, and lifestorytelling in English, then, need to develop particularized knowledge on the formal generic traditions from which each text emerges before we can make accurate statements about the hybridity of literary form. As Aboriginal writers, editors, and translators take control of the entire literary process, from writing to translation and publication, these specificities are coming to the fore and enabling a more rigorous critical appreciation of the particularities of form and narrative.

Questions of Authorship

In precontact Aboriginal Australia custodianship rather than individual ownership or even authorship of stories was the norm (and in some instances is still so), such that

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[8] David McKnight's *People, countries, and the rainbow serpent: systems of classification among the Lardil of Mornington Island* (1999) might provide a useful starting point for a more thorough investigation of this question in the case of Labumore's narrative.

individuals are only temporarily holders of particular forms of cultural expression: they are "not so much the creators of traditions but they are holders of it and they repeat it" (Muecke 45). Similar points have been made about authorship of Aboriginal literature, particularly oral literature, in Canada. An inherent danger for non-Aboriginal critics with awareness of this general history of custodianship is the assumption that all Aboriginal literature must by definition fall into the category of stories that are collectively owned and entrusted via verbal copyright. This can elide the particularity, and the creativity, of individual writers (in this case, lifestorytellers, whose narratives may of course include such collectively owned material) and function to deny them entry into and recognition in the mainstream publication and academic marketplace. Moreover, it can function to reinforce the racial dynamic in which Aboriginal-woman-equals-Aboriginal-culture.

Yet in many Aboriginal women's lifestories the narrators "see themselves as custodians of knowledges that must be recorded and passed on," primarily to Aboriginal communities but also to a non-Aboriginal audience as well (Brewster, *Literary* 59). Aboriginal women lifestorytellers in this study construct themselves as at once typical of those of Aboriginal women in their respective countries and communities, and yet also as unique, particular, and, most often, as survivors of and agents of resistance against the processes of imperialism. Their self-constructions as authors often seem to emerge from their perceptions of themselves in the roles of mother, and often, elders (in both broad and specific senses) in their communities with a particular responsibility to share not only their stories but their accumulated knowledges. These narrators do not refer to their stories as significant in and of themselves in terms of an intrinsically interesting "self" but as providing experiences and knowledges that they view as instructive. Dedications, for example, are made typically to other Aboriginal women, family members, and future generations of Aboriginal peoples, implying a recognition of the collective identification of the author as well as a perception of personal responsibility to that community.[9] Local perceptions on the roles of authors, elders, mothers, and storytellers may converge or conflict with dominant assumptions about autobiographical "authority." This may suggest

[9] As Anne Brewster suggests, many of these texts "examine the author's own life within the context of other family members, and the life histories or biographies of other family members often have an important place in these narratives" (*Reading* 9).

an author function that mediates the relationship between the individual author, her community, and her broader audience in ways that are specific to her community yet also work to gain purchase in the dominant realm of publishing and authorship.

To Gloss or Not to Gloss: A Comment on the English Language, Dominant Nationalism, and the Absence of Aboriginal Languages in Postcolonial Literary Studies

Much has been written on the threat to, and in fact, the extinction of, the diverse Aboriginal languages in Canada and Australia as part of the hegemonic processes of imperialism.[10] One of the fundamental tenets of postcolonial literary theory, too, is that a shared feature of "postcolonial literatures in english" is the appropriation of the imposed English language and its literary forms, and the subsequent adaptation, remodelling, and transgression of that inheritance to articulate local perspectives.[11] In many ways this insight is useful in exploring the power relations involved in the imposition of the English language and its ideologies, and the agency and creativity of writers in utilizing a foreign language.

The critical focus of postcolonial studies, however, typically located in university English departments, remains on the English language in its many permutations, with an ongoing erasure of non-English, particularly Aboriginal languages. These receive occasional comment but few efforts are made to include them in the curriculum.[12] The question remains as to what extent our postcolonial interpretations of Aboriginal literatures, even as they are produced in English, may be limited by our lack of knowledge of Aboriginal languages, and as a consequence of the Anglocentrism of postcolonial studies,

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[10] As Verna J. Kirkness writes in "The Critical State of Aboriginal Languages in Canada":

> More than 60 Aboriginal languages were once spoken in what is now Canada. Of these, eight are already extinct, 13 are near extinction (with fewer than 40 speakers of each remaining), and 23 are seriously endangered (with only a few hundred speakers each). It is projected that at the current rate of decline only four (Cree, Ojibwa, Inuktitut, and Dakota) of the 16 remaining languages have a reasonable chance of surviving over the next century. (95)

[11] "The appropriation of the english language is the first of a range of appropriations which establish a discourse announcing its difference from Europe. These include the adaptation or evolution of metropolitan practices: for example, genres such as 'the ballad,' or 'the novel' or even epistemologies, ideological systems, or institutions such as literary theory" (Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 78).

[12] Graduate studies, for example, require some knowledge of a second or third language, but typically, European languages are required and Aboriginal language instruction is not available at many institutions.

the field is participating in the operations of dominant white Anglo nationalism.[13] (That in Canada Quebec's language laws and the relationship of language to constitutional claims for "distinct society" status receives widespread attention belies once again both the central importance of language in nationalism as well as the marginal status of Aboriginal languages in the national and critical arenas.)[14]

Knowledge of one Aboriginal language would not, of course, grant widespread authority on or insight into the wide-ranging *body* of works called "Aboriginal literatures." (and indeed, most Aboriginal literature is published in English, and written by authors without extensive, or any, knowledge of their ancestral language). But the problem lies once again with that initial construction of Aboriginality itself, embedded as it is in dominant nationalism. Until the literature and literary traditions of each Aboriginal nation is recognized as a "national" literature in its own right, we are caught in this conundrum of categorization. Reframing the issue with a grounding in the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty foregrounds the operations of dominant nationalism in postcolonial studies' elision of Aboriginal languages: Is knowledge of the Kainaiwa language, not, after all, necessary, or even useful, for the critical appreciation and understanding of the Kainaiwa literary tradition, even as that tradition has been transformed by the imposition of the English language?[15]

Certainly, the processes of imperialism and concomitant destruction of Aboriginal languages have been so devastating that many Aboriginal writers do not know their ancestral languages. But this fact should not justify the ongoing marginalization of Aboriginal language study at the postsecondary level. If postcolonial theory's claims to a politics of decolonization are to be taken seriously, its practitioners must become involved

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[13] Questions of the effects of the imposition of other European languages, with their own constructions of temporality and gender, have yet to be fully examined. The linguistic effects on Aboriginal language use of French colonization of what is now Quebec in Canada, and, in both Canada and Australia, the effects of German and French missionary school teachers who taught often-faulty English rarely receive critical remark in English programs.

[14] In what follows I draw on a range of diverse examples to raise the possibility that culturally, historically, and geographically specific linguistic systems and their philosophical underpinnings may carry traces into the use of the imposed, appropriated, and now common "English" language. In what follows I use what sources on Aboriginal languages were readily available to me—a signal and symptom of the very problem I am addressing.

in the protection and revitalization of Aboriginal languages[16] (in Canada, as a treaty right, as a national *obligation* and *commitment* to the Aboriginal First Nations and Métis people, as enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms). And Aboriginal critics and activists certainly foreground how it is necessary for critics to appreciate the fundamental relationships among Aboriginal languages (in their specificities and in their shared and threatened location within the national space), culture, and the politics of decolonization. As First Nations critic Marie Battiste suggests, non-Aboriginal researchers will be

> required to learn the Indigenous languages and world views rather than try to be an oracle. As outsiders, Eurocentric scholars may be useful in helping Indigenous people articulate their concerns, but to speak for them is to deny them the self-determination so essential to human progress. (25)

Issues of language surface in a number of ways in the interpretation of Aboriginal cultural production, but the primary problem is that Aboriginal narratives in English, either in translation or written in English, may be easily interpreted through, incorporated into, Anglocentric paradigms. Monolingual English speakers (myself included) may not recognize specific metaphorical uses of language by some Aboriginal writers, and may assume understanding based on direct translation and stereotypical assumptions. "People do not think in identical terms," Mudrooroo cautions, "as a cursory consideration of the different concepts such as that of 'self' found in languages bears out, as do the structures of languages themselves" (*Us Mob* 179).[17]

Okanagan Jeannette Armstrong has detailed the problems of the imposition of the English language and the resulting obstacles to effective cross-cultural communication. She

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[15] Many of the Blackfoot participants in my literature courses at Red Crow Community College on the Blood Reserve, for example, have commented on how, even though they do not understand Blackfoot, were raised in specifically Kainaiwa storytelling/child-rearing practices.

[16] As Kirkness writes:

> It is the position of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada that the protection of their languages is an inherent right, a treaty right, a constitutional right, and an Aboriginal right. It was believed that the treaties entered into at the turn of the century would protect their way of life so that their values and practices would continue "as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow." Further to the treaties, subsequent international and national legal foundations support the claim that Aboriginal languages must be protected, revitalized, and maintained for the use of future generations. (96)

[17] As LaRocque suggests in her preface to *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*:

> My primary socialization is rooted in the oral literatures of the Plains Cree Métis, which does not separate the word from the self and certainly knows the difference between atowkehwin (stories of legendary bent or sacred origin) and achimowin (factual and objective accounts). ....I may not always speak in my own voice, but when I do I experience no disconnection between my "self" and my footnotes. (xxi)

connects assumptions about language to the operations of racism and the power relations that demand Aboriginal peoples speak in the terms of the dominant culture:

> Words have a covering of meaning derived from unique relationships to things, beyond the generally accepted descriptive sensory symbol. Thousands of generations of relating to things in a given way give rise to cultural meaning attached to words. Thus, even though I might translate *tree* into an English word, my cultural meaning remains intact as though spoken in my language while your cultural understanding of the word remains locked within the context of your culture. Unless you also speak my language, or permit me to fully interpret my meaning, the *tree* of which I speak remains a *tree* cloaked in my culture and language which excludes my meaning.
>
> Words, in being shaped through language emerging out of culture, have a rootedness in meaning which renders them exclusionary. My very real situation is that I am here speaking not my language to you, and in doing so, realize that it is I who must frame my thinking into another language. A language which excludes all of my Okanagan cultural understanding as though it were non-existent. In so doing, I also realize that you and I will likely remain in this position, and as long as this is so, racism will continue. ("Racism" 76)

Postcolonial theory has certainly been instrumental in raising the following questions, but it has done little to attempt to answer them: How can the specific relationships between words and things in Aboriginal languages be understood in non-Aboriginal contexts? What are the philosophical and historical underpinnings of Aboriginal languages in terms of words and meaning, signifier, signified, and referent? People and place? Subject and history? If some Aboriginal cultures were historically matriarchal, are there not linguistic traces of it in some Aboriginal uses of English, despite and through imperialism?

That the destruction of Aboriginal languages was a process of such great imperial investment indicates the intricate relationship of language to culture. It also foregrounds how Aboriginal languages, as sites of relationships to place and people, and of agency, threatened European hegemony. Several Aboriginal writers have noted that Aboriginal languages construct both gender and kinship, or relationship, in particular ways that are central to identity and cultural survival. Eli Taylor, an elder of the Sioux Valley Reserve in Manitoba describes his language as embodying

> a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other...it gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, to ties with the broader clan group. There are no English words for these relationships because your social and family life is different from ours. Now if you destroy our language, you not only break down these relationships, but you destroy other aspects

> of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describe man's connection with nature, the Great Spirit, and the order of things. Without our language, we will cease to exist as a separate people. (n. pag.)

Without knowledge of Aboriginal language use, even as it operates in English, we are unable to assess what Métis scholar Emma LaRocque calls the "dialectical relationship" of Aboriginal writers in Canada to the English and French languages. "Not only do we have to learn English," she writes, "we must then deal with its ideology. To a Native woman, English is like an ideological onion whose stinging layers of racism and sexism must be peeled away before it can be fully enjoyed" ("Preface" xx). Only language and literature, writes Anishinaubae Johnston, "can restore the 'Indianness'" (10) and non-Aboriginal scholars must have knowledge of Aboriginal languages:

> Language is essential. If scholars and writers are to know how "Indians" perceive and regard certain ideas they must study an "Indian" language....As rich and full of meaning as may be individual words and expression, they embody only a small portion of the entire stock and potential of tribal knowledge, wisdom, and intellectual attainment, the greater part is deposited in myths, legends, stories, and in the lyrics of chants that make up the tribe's literature. Therein will be found the essence and the substance of tribal ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, values, beliefs, theories, notions, sentiments, and accounts of their institutions and rituals and ceremonies. Without language scholars, writers, and teachers will have no access to the depth and width of tribal knowledge and understanding, but must continue to labour as they have done these many years under the impression that "Indian" stories are nothing more than fairy tales or folklore, fit only for juvenile minds. (12, 13)

Aboriginal writers continue to encounter the power of poststructuralism to incorporate or denigrate alternative forms of language use. Several Aboriginal writers in Canada have commented on the "sacred" nature of language in its origins and in its power to affect listeners and readers,[18] and such statements are susceptible to dismissal by poststructuralism's insistence on the centreless nature of language and to reincorporation

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[18] When Anishinaubae Basil Johnston explains concepts of language, truth, and reality in his culture, these could be read as "already poststructuralist" in their refusal to centre truth, thus erasing their cultural specificity:

> When an "Anishinaubae" says someone is telling the truth, he says, "w'daeb-awae." But the expression is not just a mere confirmation of a speaker's veracity. It is at the same time a philosophical proposition that, in saying, a speaker casts his words and his voice only as far as his vocabulary and his perception will enable him. In so doing the tribe was denying that there was absolute truth; that the best a speaker could achieve and a listener expect was the highest degree of accuracy. Somehow that one expression "w'daeb-awae" set the limits of a single statement as well as setting limits on all speech." (12)

into stereotypical paradigms of Noble Savagery. Métis/Salish Lee Maracle writes of words as "coming from original being—a sacred spiritual being....Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples" (*Oratory* 3). Derridean deconstruction in particular is adept at dismissing such perspectives in favour of a view of language as decentred and meaning as perpetually deferred, not only valorising particular forms of cultural production[19] but separating them from their material contexts and effects as well. However, it is possible that particular Aboriginal perspectives on language may also be read problematicly as aligned with, or even *as* poststructuralist, despite their specific contexts and conditions. As Anglo-Canadian critic Helen Hoy suggests, Métis writer Beatrice Culleton is "attentive to the politics of representation" in her *In Search of April Raintree*, but that her work need not be co-opted into poststructuralist paradigms:

> Native traditions are notable for their respect for their power of language and their sensitivity to the dangers of its misuse. To cite only one example, Douglas Cardinal (Métis) speaks of the human potential to shape reality through language, in ways reminiscent of contemporary theory but deriving from an entirely different cultural tradition. (176)

It is extremely difficult, moreover, to fully assess Aboriginal writers' constructions of the traditional distribution of power along gender and kinship lines, as well as relationships to place, without knowledge of how the traditions and languages of those writers produced those relationships. Speech taboos and the naming of kin provide an indication of social structuring, and therefore of subjectivity, but without this specific knowledge, non-Aboriginal critics are likely to either read such relationships once again within European constructs or to assume Aboriginal peoples and their subjectivity and relationships as irreducibly Other.[20]

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[19] Such may be the case with the critical reception of Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. King acknowledges the storytelling practices of the Blackfoot people of southern Alberta as influencing his work, but his writing is typically read as postmodern.

[20] Labumore, in her lifestory *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* provides a specific detailed example of the naming of relationship, kinship, through the Lardil language. This indicates the specificity of this naming process in the formation of individual and collective identity:

> Grandfathers and grandmothers of each sides of grandchildren from the father or mother are called gangugurrida, for grandfather's dead grandchildren's sake. Grandmother is called bubbigurrida for losing her daughter's child, either a girl or a boy. We call the grandmother bubbigurrida...no grandchildren. To a brother, maybe eldest brother is called for his small brother's sake, is called

In her introduction to *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik: Their Example Showed Me the Way, A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures*, Ahenakew stresses that the English concepts and terms of legal discourse, particularly those of "guilt" and "innocence" in the criminal justice system, when translated into Cree "differ dramatically from their English models in that most of them include a presupposition of guilt; they have a built-in sense, which may well reflect the realities of a small-scale, band-level society, that to be accused is to be guilty" (xix). How this shift from the "innocent until proven guilty" supposition of Canadian and Australian law interacts with a national ideology that criminalizes the "native other" in literary representations is provocative and serves as a caution against what would on the surface appear to be a direct correspondence of meaning through the use of the same term.

Gender too is a relation constructed in language that may be produced in particular ways in Aboriginal languages. In English, gender is a grammatical classification of objects "corresponding to the two sexes and sexlessness" (*Concise Oxford* 410). According to Ahenakew, gender in Cree refers to noun classes of animate and inanimate and not to sex or sexual identity. "The animate class covers nouns for all living creatures," she writes. "This group also includes such objects as rings, pants, stockings, stoves, pots, flour and stones. Since such things seem lifeless to speakers of English, animate nouns for such items create confusion in the classroom" (*Cree* 18). And, I would add, for the astute literary critic. Unless one is familiar with such concepts (and remembering that Cree is but one of 11 language families, and contains numerous dialects as well, in Canada), problems of translation of Aboriginal terms and concepts into English, or of the interpretation of the culturally specific use of English words (stones as animate for example) are inevitably fraught, and it will not be possible to accurately determine to what extent linguistic differences may produce cultural difference. The fundamental difficulty is that we cannot assess what in fact might be similar—if, for example, language acquisition is a "universal" process—without the knowledge of specific languages. Without such knowledge,

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gungugurrida...no small brother. For small brother, to a big brother is called thabugurrida. Big sister died of a small sister is called yagoogurrida. Big sister is called goonoogurrida. Goonoogurrida means small sister has no big sister. Your uncle is called jumbagurrida...means no niece or nephew. Auntie is called marrkagurrida. Gandagurrida is a person with no husband. Yugudbagurrida is a man who has not wife...who died. (200)

postcolonial critics are at a loss to determine whether or not a simple address in Blackfoot, *Oki napi* ("Hello, my friend"), spoken only by men to other men, is an indication of a strict process of gendering, or not, whether it is at all comparable to the commonplace "Hey, bud," used by white men in addressing each other in English, or whether it is entirely inappropriate to try to create such a similarity.

Importantly, Ahenakew notes that there is a historical tendency for translators to focus on, and stress "difference," even when there are striking cultural similarities in concepts, beliefs, and language use :

> Beside those areas where Cree and Roman Catholic traditions are most sharply in conflict, there are many others where they are fully in concord: the need to provide for one's children, above all, but also for the orphans; the virtue of providence and hard work; charity towards the old and the poor; etc. In the absence of conflict, however, such topics tend to receive very little attention from missionaries, historians, ethnologists and those who themselves live at the intersection of these two worlds.
>
> Paradoxical as it may seem, scholarly neglect of how closely structured configurations may be matched across cultures even extends to topics which are otherwise of perennial interest. In the case of arranged marriages related in this text, the most striking pattern illustrated is that of patriarchal control, with the key rôle readily passing from Cree fathers (or older brothers) to Roman Catholic priests. (xxxii) [21]

In my readings of the lifestories I take up some of the particular problems and writing strategies Aboriginal women lifestorytellers have encountered and adopted regarding language. Here, I discuss issues of translation, the imposition and reformation of the English language, the politics of glossing Aboriginal words for a non-Aboriginal readership, for example, as they relate to negotiations with the historically western form of autobiography.

In the next chapter I turn to a discussion of how the imbrication of the politics of race, gender, whiteness, dominant nationalism, multiculturalism, and "Aboriginality" circulate in, and are reinforced by, university structures. I illustrate how desires for particular forms of Aboriginal subjectivity undergird multicultural (white) nationalism and

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[21] Ahenakew addresses other questions of translation. She stresses that Cree proper names are "notoriously difficult to translate" and "many names resist morphological analysis and etymological interpretation" (xli). Further, she offers an example in which a direct translation of Cree words "would be unacceptable (and an insensitive translation might even give offence)" (xliii).

intersect with the ideology of literary form in the responses of students to Aboriginal women's texts in a university "Aboriginal literature" classroom.

Chapter Four

Negotiating Aboriginal Women's Lifestorytelling, White Multicultural Nationalism, and Anti-Racist Pedagogy in a University Classroom

> Anti-racism is the willingness to confront the pain of self and others, to challenge the denial from self or others, and to create change for self and others.
>
> Sharilyn Calliou, "Peacekeeping Actions at Home" (63)

> To study any kind of human violation is, *ipso facto*, to be engaged in ethical matters. And we must respond—as scholars, as men and women, Native and white alike.
>
> Emma LaRocque, "The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar" (12)

South Asian Canadian writer, critic, and activist Ashok Mathur has characterized pedagogy as both the "the act or study of teaching" and as ways in which "writing exists, insinuates itself, and thereby 'teaches' in the worlds it inhabits" (5). In this chapter I am concerned to address how "Aboriginal literature," particularly "Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling," is constructed and read in and through white-dominated university structures, and how, in alliance with feminist, anti-racist pedagogy, can "teach" in that location.[1] I address how the assumptions about Aboriginal and white subjectivity, literature, particularly "autobiography," and multicultural/ nationalist ideologies that I have traced emerge in the classroom as ways of organizing national and ideological space according to class, race, gender, and cultural divisions which leave whiteness and dominant

nationalism as unmarked norm.[2] The "nation," in other words, is performed and reproduced through the interpellation of individuals within academic structures and classrooms.

I am especially interested in how participants in the "Aboriginal literature" classroom locate themselves in relation to/against dominant narratives of nation and their current manifestations in ideologies of "tolerance," "diversity," "multiculturalism," and individualism. This ideological complex is what South Asian Canadian critic Aruna Srivastava appropriately calls "the cult of multiculturalism": "the wholesale and largely uncritical acceptance of Canadian multicultural ideology as a fact, rather than a questionable construct with a distinct history" ("Cult" 2-3). I am concerned with exploring the relationships among the ideological repertoires participants bring to and are supported by the academic institutional space—ideologies of knowledge, literature, rationality, objectivity, race—and their imbrication within nationalist ideologies of "multicultural tolerance." I am interested, then, in exploring how imperialist/multicultural ideologies emerge through and reinforce readings of Aboriginal women's lifestories and assumptions about Aboriginal women's subjectivity, and how Aboriginal politics and cultural production in turn function to resist such readings, and, crucially, *as* anti-racist pedagogy.

I assess my attempts to enact a critical anti-racist feminist pedagogy in a course on Aboriginal literatures that I taught at the University of Calgary (English 385: Special Topics in Aboriginal Writing), and I draw on the responses of course participants. It is our shared grappling with the subject-matter and its historical contexts, as well as with pedagogical practices, that both the university's implication in imperialist capitalist relations and the limits and possibilities of a white anti-racist feminist politics are most clearly foregrounded. I am grateful to each participant in the course for her/his involvement in the process and pedagogy of the course.[3] I have learned from each of them, their perspectives and processes, and in particular from those 17 participants (12 white/Anglo

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[1] I would like to acknowledge Ashok Mathur, whose formulation of pedagogy as activism has been profoundly influential in this study, Aruna Srivastava, whose own anti-racist pedagogy provided a model for my own teaching, and Jeanne Perreault, who provided invaluable critique of earlier drafts of this chapter.

[2] As Anglo-Celtic Canadian critic Carol Schick notes, the histories of white nation-building as a claiming and marking of space and producing difference along cultural and racial divisions is not separate from the structures and operations of the white Canadian educational system (5).

women, three Anglo-Canadian men, one Aboriginal woman, and one South Asian woman) who granted me their permission to quote from their journals.[4] Their interests, responses, and insights have profoundly infllluenced this entire study. In drawing on participants' work, I am not investigating the specificities of individual responses (although that certainly is part of the journal writing and evaluation process in the classroom), but rather *patterns* of responses that indicate systemic processes[5] as they converge in the reading of "Aboriginal" literature in the Canadian university classroom.[6]

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[3] In a class of 45, four participants identified themselves as Aboriginal or Métis, one identified as a woman of African-Caribbean ancestry, and one as South Asian. The remainder of the class comprised white women and three white men.

[4] See Appendix A for a copy of the course outline, and Appendix B for a copy of the permission form signed by the participants included in this chapter.

[5] There is a risk in this process that I "homogenize" whiteness and further reinforce the binarisms that imperialist processes, and the course itself, have so effectively set up. As I stressed in my introduction to this study, even the naming—the re-naming—of "Aboriginal" students and literatures reproduces to some extent the imperialist structure, re-names and fixes "Aboriginal" students in particularly problematic and uncomfortable positions within the predominantly white classroom —as the "Others" to be studied, as Native informants, representative of entire "races" and cultures and so on. I therefore requested that those granting permission regarding their journals identify themselves with as many "markers" (cultural, disciplinary, age, race, ability, gender, survivor status, sexuality, and so on) as they felt comfortable naming.

Also, part of the pedagogy itself involved a "target group" exercise in which participants located themselves physically in the classroom according to their location in particular power relations (i.e., male/female, teacher/student, white/non-white, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal/Métis, survivor of abuse, etc.) in order to disrupt the simplistic binarism of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal on which the course, institutionally, has been structured.

[6] Moreover, there are other ethical concerns involved in the use of students' journals, particularly when permission is sought during the course itself—before, in other words, final grades are assigned. While I made it clear that the research was separate from the course, there may have been on behalf of students an expectation that participation in the research might improve their grades (which, in fact, it did not affect).

Overall, those who granted their permission were also those who, in my assessment, had generally done well in the journalling process by engaging energetically and exploring with commitment and often with courage their own responses and histories.(I did not ask for any clarification as to their reasons for granting permission.) 16 of the 17 participants who granted permission received B or better on the journal. There were at least three others, further, who stated that they had found the journalling process so useful that they were keeping their journals for their own reference and research as they entered graduate school.

There is, of course, the risk that in quoting from these students as "examples" of particular ideologies that I am simplifying their very intricate critical processes. This is not of course my intention, and upon reflection of this issue I realize that I have quoted from the most complex rather than the most simplistic responses. This issue of homogenization and simplification is one of the risks of such analyses, which attempt to theorize the dynamics of the classroom. As I have considered this question, I have found that it extends to the problematics of the politics of the academic quotation generally—the extraction of another's words and their insertion into another context and framework.

Further, such research leads to the question as to whether or not participants simply said what I wanted them to say. In considering this complex issue, I return, first, to my acknowledgement that in teaching this course and in this way for the first time, I truly did not know what to expect. Of course, however, I did want students to "agree" with my anti-racist and feminist politics. This is not surprising, and I don't think that academics can claim that we don't want participants in our courses to "agree with" or at least understand the critical approaches and principles we are using and teaching, even as we recognize the diversity of critical

I explore how institutional academic structures reinforce these power relations such that Aboriginal cultural production, Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling, and even Aboriginal peoples (as faculty in particular) continue to be marginalized.[7] This analysis foregrounds in turn the failure of postcolonial theory, by remaining focused on textual politics, to engage effectively with the question of the relationships among literary production and analysis, anti-racist activism, pedagogy, and material social transformation. As bell hooks has argued, theory "is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end" (61).

Moreover, as this course has demonstrated to me, there is also an urgent need for a critical language and praxis of "postcolonial" ethics. This is required in terms of considering Christianity as constitutive of national and individual identity as it circulates in (supposedly secular) university structures and multicultural ideologies as promises of collective redemption regarding past and present injustices conducted in the name of "nation." Histories and ideologies of Christian morality are part of how students in an anti-racist Canadian university classroom read and construct the instructor as "moral guardian," and in how they (white students in particular in the anti-racist context) construct themselves in terms of good/bad and innocence/guilt. (Instructors are not immune from this process of self-construction either.) There is a need for a critical language that clarifies on what principles, ethics, we theorize and enact transformative agency, and recognize both our authority and the limits on it, in doing so. As white critical pedagogy theorist Peter McLaren suggests,

> radical educational theorists as a group have eschewed trying to develop a radical theory of ethics that can either justify our own language or legitimate the social

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views and focus our attention on enabling students to more clearly articulate those positions. I do not, after all, agree with the student's comments regarding alcoholism among Aboriginal peoples, which I quote at length later in this chapter, but neither was her work assessed on whether or not I agreed with it.

Assessment of anti-racist work in the university classroom, finally, cannot be based on a linear progression of movement to a single way of seeing, being, or thinking. What can be assessed is the process of *movement*, as verb, of thinking through previous patterns to new ways of seeing, however partially. See Appendix C for the instructions I provided for students regarding journalling.

[7] That many participants indicated that they had expected the instructor of the course to be Aboriginal is at once troubling and telling in this regard. This expectation could be a reinforcement of ideologies of Native Informants or an indication of students' awareness of issues of equity and representation in the workplace and in education.

> practices necessary for defending a particular vision of what schools might become. Caught within the paradox of exhibiting moral indignation without the benefit of a well-defined theory of ethics and morality, we have been unable to move from a posture of criticism to one of substantive vision. We are caught on a shifting ground regarding ethical principles that inform such a discourse. We have rarely discussed what the moral referents might be for defending particular social and cultural practices, nor do we have a clear sense of what values need to be defended in the interest of an emancipatory vision of schooling. (19)

Moreover, we need to consider what other perspectives on ethics, morality, and spirituality—and processes of subjectivity—are excluded by a focus on Christianity (or by an unexamined acceptance of its unexamined "givenness"). As Aboriginal pedagogy theorist Sharilyn Calliou (of Alberta's Michel Band) suggests, anti-racist pedagogy theory, while discussing the need for a "holistic approach" continues to be western based and has excluded the "spiritual":

> "Good" anti-racist citizenship, no matter how cogently argued, is a puzzle to me if the *spiritus* is excluded. We more readily trade discussions and debate about "isms" than spirituality because secular rationality excludes this aspect of who we are....anti-racism contents itself with the absence of conflict and hierarchy rather than with the active courage of peacemaking. A peacemaking pedagogy invites each of us to become peacemakers in our own hearts, in our own communities, and in our shared world, where unconditional respect, compassion, participatory democracy, strength, courage, and reverence are daily lived ideals." ("Peacekeeping" 70)

In the "old days," students of literature "were constantly being told that reading great literature would make us better people" (Gunew and Longley xix). Poststructuralist theories certainly have effectively challenged the ethics and the ideologies of this assumption, particularly in terms of its separation of aesthetics from politics. But there is none the less a complex of students' beliefs that knowledge, and therefore personal enrichment, can be obtained through the study of literature. While in many ways this idea that literature can improve us personally can be framed conservatively (by excluding the political and systemic from the personal and the aesthetic) to maintain assertions of "innocence" in the history of colonization and the essential moral "goodness" of white individuals, it can also, I think, be drawn on in an anti-racist pedagogy. This is so if it is framed not towards making students (and instructors) "better people" in a vague and undefined (though ultimately hegemonic) sense of morality, but in terms of enabling the

development of a transformative agency in movements for social justice as based on a clearly defined ethical and political ground.

In the following, I locate English 385 in terms of its institutional location, discuss my use of critical anti-racist theory in developing the course, and explore my own location as a white, anti-racist instructor. I then move to analyze specific patterns of student responses. The processes of the course were of simultaneous and interrelated learning and unlearning rather than a linear progression, and often individual participants' responses returned to concerns that were of particular interest or frustration for them. I therefore structure this chapter around clusters of issues as they arose around individual texts. I focus on Mohawk Beth Brant's *Writing as Witness*, which in this group evoked the most powerful and vehement negative responses among non-Aboriginal students, and for me revealed the intersecting operations of white defensiveness, individualism, and the ideology of multiculturalism as they circulate and are reproduced through the education system and popular discourses. While the responses to the text proved perhaps one of the largest teaching challenges of the course, it also led, eventually, to some of the most probing critical analysis and self- and cultural critique of several participants, myself included.

I then consider the responses to Métis Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* and Métis Maria Campbell's *Half-breed*, which revealed the reassertion, operation and intricacies of whiteness through enmeshed assumptions about autobiography, truth, authority, history, women's agency, poverty, and addiction. I then move to responses to *My Place* by Aboriginal Australian Sally Morgan to explore what responses reveal about assumptions about Australian "Aboriginality," awareness of global imperialism, sexism, and racism, and nationalism as it applies to comparative studies and paradigms. (Interestingly, each of these texts is by a mixed-race Aboriginal woman. Yet participants generally continued to construct the authors/narrators in terms of the binarism Aboriginal/white, an indication of the informing national discourses and their uneasiness with the ambiguities of mixed-race identity as disjunctive within multiculturalism.)

Locating the Course, Myself, and My Pedagogy

> Critical pedagogy is ultimately a dream, but one that is dreamed in the wakefulness of praxis.
>
> Peter McLaren, *Revolutionary Multiculturalism* (13)

As critical pedagogy theorists have argued, the classroom is a site of the production and reproduction of hierarchical and individualist modes of knowledge, in processes claimed and perceived to be neutral, unmarked by relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality.[8] Educational institutions and individual classrooms are not

> mere sites of instruction. They are also political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies. Thus teachers and students produce, reinforce, re-create, resist, and transform ideas about race, gender, and difference in the classroom. Also, the academic institutions in which we are located create similar paradigms, canons, and voices that embody and transcribe race and gender. (Mohanty 43)

Critical pedagogy theorists analyze how sexism, racism, classism, and other forms of oppression become normalized through the education system, its curriculum and its pedagogy, to the extent that they become "commonsense." For students and teachers alike, "[s]exism and racism *are* normal ways of seeing, thinking and acting" in the classroom and the world (Ng 133). The Enlightenment legacy of rationalism and its separation and hierarchization of mind over body operates in university structures and classrooms such that participants do not recognize themselves in the classroom as embodied, nor the spaces they occupy as embedded in and reproducing relations of power. A fundamental goal of critical pedagogy, then, is to make these normative processes visible through student-centred practices in order that these processes be challenged and transformed.

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[8] Louis Althusser suggested decades ago in his "On the Reproduction of the Conditions of Production" that the education system is a semi-autonomous state apparatus that interpellates concrete individuals in the processes of the state and but in service of capitalism.

The competitiveness and individualism of advanced capitalism are reproduced in the university classroom, particularly through the ideologies of meritocracy (and increasingly so with the corporatization of education occurring across Canada). The forms of knowledge produced and reproduced and the standard forms of pedagogy and student assessment construct individualism as norm and buttress this process through assertions of democratic, equal-opportunity classrooms—as if, in other words, sexism, homophobia, racism, ableism, classism, and heterosexism are conveniently left at the classroom door by teachers, students, and curriculum alike and somehow do not constitute classroom interaction. The general rejection of concepts of collaborative learning and teaching in support of individualist methods of producing and assessing knowledges (as in the "essay," the "class presentation," and later, the graduate student conference paper, etc.) all work to support the ideology of individualism and competition, the bulwarks of capitalism. The goal of education, after all, has been identified by governments in terms of employment—conformity in the competitive economic marketplace, masked in multicultural ideologies of Canada as a political and economic level playing field. As Srivastava insists, there is a need to interrogate "the everyone-is-equal individualism that underlies liberalism, multiculturalism, and the university" ("Cult" 4).

The Aboriginal or "international literature" classroom, typically an elective rather than a core program course, generally comprises white middle-class individuals whose ideological inheritance is just this "everyone-is-equal individualism." This is not to dismiss these participants' genuine interest in the course materials, but to note that their ideological inheritance through education and national interpellation encourages them to see the subject-matter as "marginal" to the "real" work of university education (which fundamentally, is to gain the qualifications for employment). White middle-class participants in such courses typically do not recognize that their interests and responses are formulated by and filtered through a liberal ideology, through the "commonsense" operations of racism and sexism, which masks its imperialist heritage and its concomitant assumptions about "literature," "race," and "Aboriginality."

The classroom as an extension of the public sphere is a site in which the identity of the white bourgeois subject is not only affirmed, but produced, in relation to and against

the production of racialized identities, of "racialized Others" (Schick 6). The elite educational structure functions in a mutually constitutive process, in which white undergraduate students need the university's legitimizing function to secure their dominance, just as the university structure requires white students (the reproduction of whiteness) to normalize its own power (Schick 1). The ways in which white students generally affirm their dominance, particularly in anti-racist classrooms, include identification with the "ideological space of rationality and objectivity," claims for civility, rationality, reason, and self-control, and the insistence that "differences on issues of race and gender can be discussed as intellectual topics" (12). This process of securing their location of dominance involves the performance of self as "belonging 'in here', a place characterized by abstraction, objectivity, and rationality; and quite unlike 'out there' where others belong and which participants describe as political, embodied, and not necessarily rational" (2).[9] Here, the liberalism of multiculturalism continues to reassert itself as a performance of whiteness, and in assertions of tolerance.

Critical pedagogy theory has drawn contemporary theory in recognizing that subjectivity is produced through a range of often-contradictory discourses. The importance of language, and in turn, literature, is the fact that "through language we both *name* experience and *act* as a result of how we interpret that experience" (McLaren 26). As South Asian Canadian critic Louise Saldanha insists, however, regardless of the multiple and often contradictory subject positions inhabited by readers, "official multiculturalism, as a national Canadian ideology, permeates reading practices wherein textual representations of race and ethnicity are managed through Eurocentric normative ideals" (3). Dominant categories of otherness are reproduced and stabilised, she writes, such that texts from minority locations are labelled

> with the rather dubious honour of universalism or, forgiven [their] rather unfortunate subject matter by representing racism tastefully. If, on the other hand, readers of these texts do not, or cannot, read the representations of "difference" ethnocentrically, within established multicultural interpretations, the books in question are reprimanded for being polemical...not believable...or downright rude. (3)

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[9] Carol Schick observes: "As participants see themselves as possessed of intellectual control, they dismiss negative remarks on the basis of their own rationality and moderation. Their performance as rational, reasonable people also accomplishes their claim as non-prejudiced supporters of tolerance" (9).

Multicultural education, in such contexts, then, "can be viewed as a strategy of the state to secure hegemony in the field of race relations" (Hesch 105).

Critical pedagogy draws on strategies to interrogate subjectivity critically, to reflect on the subject positions we have been assigned through dominant structures as privileged or oppressed, and to interrogate ways in which we can transform the relations producing those very subject positions.[10] The goals of my teaching are multiple: to counter one of the major obstacles in the analysis of Aboriginal literatures—the vast lack of knowledge regarding the histories of colonization in Canada and Australia; to resist the commonsense sexism and racism that attend literary studies, academic and popular culture, and ideologies of multiculturalism; to engage participants as active critics of their own cultural norms as products of history, as active producers of knowledge; to enable the recognition that as "students" and as concrete individuals we all are both subjects and agents of history; to begin to lay some of the groundwork necessary for a rigorous critical analysis of "Aboriginal" cultural production to even begin.

The focus of English 385 was clearly on the history of Aboriginal peoples (primarily in Canada, though some attention was paid to the Australian context), the implication of sexism and racism in that history, and their relationships to "Aboriginal" "literature." Much of my pedagogy was directed at foregrounding "whiteness" as a social category with profound effects on the history of colonization, current inequalities, reading practices, and classroom dynamics. This was so in part because this is a location I inhabit and from which I therefore speak, but also because of the unmarked operation of whiteness in university structures as unmarked and the necessity of making it visible. A pedagogy that challenges the ideology of meritocracy, of multicultural liberalism and nationalism, suggests Charles A. Gallagher, automatically raises what for white students is the "irritating issue of white privilege" (9).

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[10] Critical pedagogy theorist Peter McLaren describes this process as follows: "critical pedagogy can help us to critically interrogate these discourses, allowing us to develop a sense of 'critical agency.' Agency in this case refers to the ability of individuals to analyze subjectivity, reflect upon subject positions they have assumed, and choose those which are least oppressive to themselves, to others, and to society as a whole" (29-30). The difficulty I have with McLaren's formulation is that subject positions, in my view, are not freely chosen, assumed, or discarded as easily as he suggests; rather, the transformation of subject positions (as opposed to individual subjectivity) requires systemic as well as individual change.

However, any anti-racist pedagogy, if it is to be effective, depends on the active recognition of the ways in which oppressions are linked and multiple; it is not possible to discuss racism, for example, without considering its implications in and for sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression, such as sexual abuse, ableism, ageism, and so on. The recognition of multiple oppressions is particularly productive in countering white defensiveness in predominantly white classrooms, the "Us/Them" dichotomy of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal, and in creating a sense of classroom community. None of us, teachers included, is "immune to or separated from" the power relations in which we live and act (Ng 133). As Chandra Talpade Mohanty suggests, if conflict in the classroom

> is seen and understood in personal terms, it leads to a comfortable set of oppositions: people of colour as the central voices and the bearers of all knowledge in class, and white people as "observers" with no responsibility to contribute and/or nothing valuable to contribute....Thus, while it appears that in such a class histories and cultures of marginalized peoples are now "legitimate" objects of study and discussion, the fact is that this legitimation takes place purely at an attitudinal, interpersonal level rather than in terms of a fundamental challenge to hegemonic knowledge and history....all of us (First and Third World) share certain histories as well as certain responsibilities: ideologies of race define both white and black peoples, just as gender ideologies define both men and women. (51)

Sharilyn Calliou of the Michel Band of Alberta argues that Canada is multicultural "in name only" and the ideology of multiculturalism poses a profound challenge for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers (47). In her "Peacekeeping Actions at Home: A Medicine Wheel Model for a Peacekeeping Pedagogy," Calliou argues that multiculturalism, "a glamorous *National Geographic* voyeurism, can become meaningless if racism is not named as the impetus behind the need for racial harmony" (58, 59). The familiar multicultural catch-word of "tolerance" is an indication of

> the limited hopes of multiculturalism, for it suggests no more than the strength of will needed to visit the dentist or discharge an unavoidable social obligation. Tolerance more often implies differences than similarities, and naming differences begins the dance of "otherness" that obscures the shared humanity of classroom communities—communities which are themselves sites of the dialectical tensions of power, privilege, and state policy....Multi-ethnic sharing will stimulate community education on the need for inclusiveness only if discussion of underlying issues is as freely accessible as bannock and chapatis. (47-48)

In the predominantly white anti-racist university classroom, as I explore in further detail, the location of the white instructor is, of course, fraught. It does have a singular advantage, however, in resisting the "dance of otherness" that Aboriginal instructors and instructors of colour must contend with and which manifests in the familiar "you have a chip on your shoulder because of your race" charge. There is here, rather, a possibility of identification of white students with the white instructor as mentor and ally in grappling with racism. There is an embodiment, in other words, of racism as a systemic (white) problem rather than one located in minority peoples.

Locating the Course

In the multidisciplinary "Aboriginal literature" classroom there is a fascinating institutional and ideological complex at work that functions to construct, contain, "Aboriginal literature" in particular ways even before the course begins.[11] Perhaps the largest hurdle is the vast lack of knowledge regarding the histories of colonization in Canada and Australia. This produces a vast array of assumptions and stereotypes about "Aboriginality," history, nation, and literature that must be vigorously addressed before a critical assessment of Aboriginal writing, (one at least wary of stereotypical assumptions) can be initiated.

The marginal institutional location of English 385: Special Topics in Aboriginal Writing has a strong influence on what happens within its particular class time. It is a non-core half-credit undergraduate English course offered by the Department of English at the University of Calgary, and until very recently its position in the curriculum was consistently tenuous—it was offered only when an instructor (usually tenured faculty)

[11] Ideas of literature as an apolitical, disembodied act of the romantic "imagination" which serves a primary function of personal enjoyment escapism from the work of the "real" world of scientific, "objective" inquiry, actively circulate even before the first course text is opened. For example, there are lingering ideas that "literature" is an act of the imagination, with little, if any, relationship to the "real" world of power relations; yet in this traditional construct is the concept that through this act of the imagination, a (white) reader can be "transported" to another place and time and is invited to inhabit the "world" of the story in a process of "identification." Indeed, this process of "identification" is the canonical pact of writer and reader and the mark of "good" "literature" in the realist tradition, particularly when, from the white reader's point of view, one is able to "learn something positive about oneself" and can—in a pleasant, enjoyable, non-threatened manner—empathize, sympathize or "identify" with the narrative, its situations or characters.

expressed an interest in teaching it. The course and its subject-matter are systemically marginalized, then, in relation to the English program and the English literary canon. Moreover, the course is multidisciplinary, serving as an English elective for a diversity of programs across campus, such that for many participants 385 serves as the only English course of their university careers.

Canonical and popular assumptions about "literature," particularly "autobiography," imperialist assumptions about race, the operation of whiteness and multicultural and Enlightenment ideologies, and specific disciplinary structures and approaches to "literature" also circulate to shape assumptions about the course. Imperialist ideologies of the knowability and representativeness of the Aboriginal Other are transposed by non-Aboriginal participants on to literary texts, particularly autobiographical narratives. The literary work is then viewed as cultural and historical artefact, representative of a collectivity (race, culture, nation), and its writer as spokesperson, regardless of her/his claims on the matter. As one white woman participant of English 385 commented (and then later critiqued), her interest and reading practices are indications of "a fascination for a life very different from my own."[12]

This desire to "know the Other" is part of the process of the consolidation of the white self, either through the incorporation of difference into similarity ("I can relate") or by the reassertion, reconstruction, of assumptions of absolute difference ("they," "them"). This desire to "identify with" and "relate to" texts and characters becomes an imperialist gesture, what Gayatri Spivak refers to as the attempt "to 'identify' (with) the other as subject in order to know her" (*In Other* 254).[13] This Other is needed to define the self, either as absolutely different or as Same. In this course, the prevailing response of most, if not all, non-Aboriginal participants, was to try to "identify" with this Other, with the narrator of the texts, by saying "I can relate to that experience"; when they could not find easy connections, a common complaint was "I found this book hard to relate to," and, more revealing of multiculturalism's codes for addressing systemic racism, what amounted to charges that the writers "aren't doing it properly." This desire to know the Other also elides

[12] This participant identified herself as a white, straight 20-year old, 2nd-year English/Management major.
[13] As postcolonial theory has explored, this is, in fact, the pedagogical process of literature within imperialist hegemony—the interpellation of white readers as "good" colonial subjects and national citizens.

the specificity of the text as a creative act. This dynamic is further complicated by inherited assumptions about autobiography, authors and authority, and truth that operate in support of imperialist ideologies of the knowability and transparency of the Aboriginal autobiographer.

This is not to suggest, however, that Aboriginal students or students of colour are immune to these problematic assumptions (or that the multiplicity of subjectivity does not nuance each participant's responses). Nor is it to suggest that the desire to "identify with" the text is a homogeneously imperialist process that holds no valency for Aboriginal constituencies reading Aboriginal literature nor that it might be an effective *starting* point for white feminists to explore their/our *relationship*, as readers, to the systemic contexts of the production of the text, as I discuss. As the one (mixed-race) Aboriginal student in the course who gave permission to quote from her journal suggests in her response to *In Search of April Raintree*, "identification" from particular and previously occluded locations is pedagogically and politically crucial:

> This book triggered within me a sorrowful, empathetic memory. I can find many parallels between April's experiences and my own on several planes. Reading literature such as this is truly an experience where I can relate my trials and tribulations as a "half-breed" to the greater forces that created them. Am I making sense? I'm not certain. However, I shall continue. This book made me cry, not little tears of sympathy—"Oh dear, how sad!" But a release of sorrow. On a personal level, I related to April's experience of castigation and ostracization directly. I recalled, as I read, the humiliation and stupefying shock of being called "squaw" and other unflattering names, only because I was part Indian. Yes, I remember sitting at my desk, as April sat on the bus, the burning of self-esteem within and the stoic expression without whilst the whole classroom resounded with Indian war cries. The teacher only smiled.
>
> I seem bitter, I know. It is difficult to believe in the ideology that one of mixed descent can be a bridge between two worlds when one is viewed disparingly as taking on the image of the detested cultural group. Squaw-white bitch. Same dif. It hurts equally on both sides....What is very sad about this book is the reality that the afflictions of First Nations can be traced back through history to a causal, primordial event. It is true for all First Nations people, including myself. For I have as well experienced the angst of the street claiming and re-claiming a close family member ....But what is the message to non-Natives? I'm not certain, but I can testify that her writing in this book creates a window of insight into the reality of being of aboriginal ancestry in this society.

Many white women responded to the texts initially by seeking gender identification. Many noted that they had experienced sexism in their lives, and, as they had a systemic analysis to critique sexism, this not surprisingly was the lens through which they tried to make their readings intelligible (and I recognize that this has been by own history of reading Aboriginal literatures as well) . Pedagogically, this was a useful starting point towards the recognition of power relations of race, class, and sexuality as complicating feminist identification, though initially it did not forestall the reproduction of the middle-class and race assumptions.[14] White women students in particular struggled to reconcile their feminist awareness of the need to value the personal with their defensiveness and inherited repertoires of sense-making that did not easily allow ready systemic analysis of the texts' strategies and contexts.

Embodying Pedagogy, Negotiating Authority

I came to teach this course because as a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English eligible for a Graduate Teaching Fellowship (in which candidates are given an entire course, preferably senior level, to organize, teach, and evaluate), and because of my research interests in Aboriginal literatures in Canada and Australia. That I was a graduate student with a good deal of personal and professional investment in this course certainly had an impact on how I set up the course. (In retrospect this investment indicates to me how many of the norms of the academic institution I had internalized. I felt that this was my "one shot" to show my knowledge and skills, and that I needed to make the course "marketable" in my prospective job hunt. I wanted to show that I could teach a "postcolonial," a "feminist," *and* a Canadian-Australian Aboriginal literature comparative course, and be an anti-racist instructor as well—all in thirteen weeks.)

Clearly, the location of the white anti-racist feminist teacher in a predominantly white Aboriginal literature university classroom is a complex mix of negotiations with

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[14] One such response is the blaming of the victim for her oppressed circumstances, as in one white 23-year-old woman's complaints regarding Maria Campbell (as person), which she later critiqued: "I did not understand why she had three children when she could barely take care of herself. She obviously didn't want them. Was there not birth control available in the 60s? I'm surprised they weren't taken away by social services."

authority. While women university teachers do have institutional authority in the classroom, this authority is persistently undermined by existing gender relations operating in both university structures and society at large (Ng 135), and by the hierarchy of faculty seniority (from tenured professors to sessional instructors to graduate students who do not yet have the designation "Dr." or even "MA"). As feminist research has shown, student assessments of interactions with female instructors are not gender blind nor tenure blind (Basow). As the dominance of rationalism in the university prevails in conjunction with patriarchal constructions of women in the all-too-familiar tropes of sexism, feminist perspectives tend to be seen as "biased knowledge, vis-à-vis pure knowledge" (Ng 136), as in the familiar "you have a chip on your shoulder and you're just saying that because you're a woman" argument/defence/offence. At the same time that women instructors' knowledges are devalued, we are expected, in S. S. Friedman's words, to be "the all-forgiving nurturing mother whose approval is unconditional" (qtd. in Ng 138). One of the most difficult conundrums for women instructors wanting to utilize feminist materials and pedagogies, then, is the risk that our work and our politics will simply be reincorporated into and defused by a masculinist paradigm once again.

For white feminist anti-racist instructors, the institutional risks to our authority are increased as, in enacting a non-traditional pedagogy, we are likely to encounter a great deal of resistance to our praxis. The dance with patriarchal institutional authority in the anti-racist feminist classroom is a difficult one, particularly when the interrogation of emotional responses is a constitutive feature of the pedagogy, and is located in a larger institutional context that is likely to read the pedagogy derogatorily as "therapy" and "anti-intellectual." Anti-racist pedagogy unleashes a torrent of emotional response: anger (sometimes directed at the instructor), confusion, grief, frustration, defensiveness, often-paralysing guilt, and sorrow. It has the potential to re-open wounds. It requires compassion, and patience, and sometimes a good dose of humour. It requires, in other words, a teacher with attributes traditionally ascribed to women within patriarchy. We must be vigilant, therefore about persistently clarifying, to administrators and to classroom participants, how our pedagogy is a *critical* process that interrogates the mind/body, rational/irrational binarism underlying academic and popular thought in order to ensure that our praxis is not reduced to the

emotional, even as we insist on the necessity of the inclusion of the emotional in the classroom. And it is crucial, as Mohanty suggests, that we take "responsibility for the material effects of these very pedagogical practices on students" (49).

What is particularly risky, but eventually empowering, is that one cannot be entirely prepared for the mix of dynamics that might emerge among any particular group in an anti-racist classroom—dynamics of open hostility, racism, sexism, homophobia, silences of defeat and of privilege, and quite understandable terror of Aboriginal students and students of colour at the prospect of being the objects of investigation and of racism yet again. Nor can an anti-racist teacher adequately prepare individual students for their own unlearning processes; describing grief, anger, defensiveness, and pain *in advance* is not adequate to the task of experiencing them. As Calliou suggests,

> Racism must be named, and teachers must know that in doing so emotion will emerge from the underground of denial within individuals, lunch rooms, classrooms, textbooks, media, or schoolgrounds. These events can provide the occasion for lessons to unlock the cycle of denial and begin the dialogue to generate awareness. The emotional content enables both parties to link experience to the theoretical knowledge of racism's poor science, overt consequences, and continuing denial of full citizenship to some members of society. Racism cannot be unlearned like mistaken geographical knowledge can be unlearned. Instead, emotional life history needs to be relived and re-examined and emotional impacts felt in the presence of compassionate teachers and learners who wish to understand and confront what happens when denial stops. ("Peacekeeping" 58)

In this course, participants recorded, perhaps for the first time in their academic lives, their shock, horror, sadness, anger, and fear upon reading Aboriginal writing. Participants grappled with feelings of guilt, sorrow, grief, and a sense of powerlessness in the face of overwhelming systemic processes. And, until they were assured that an "emotional" response is part of a critical process, many often "apologized" in their journals (to the instructor/reader? themselves?) for what they saw as their emotionalism, their loss of rational objectivity: "Am I talking in circles? I sort of feel as though I am, but I hope this all makes sense...."; "I am embarrassed by the emotional response to the book." For the instructor, assessing and entering each individual's journal is immensely instructive, typically exhausting, often frustrating and, in seeing the process of unlearning unfold, immensely exhilarating. (And it is worth remembering the *agency* of participants in

classrooms in taking up these processes—while white participants may express feelings of being emotionally manipulated or "made to feel guilty," I cannot literally make anyone "think" differently unless there is at some level a readiness to do so, or at least the recognition of some flaws in existing patterns of thinking. Withdrawal from the course is an option immediately made clear to participants.) Anti-racist pedagogy, then, is not just an encounter with unknowability (Ellsworth 320) but in many ways its active exploration, the making visible the limits of knowing, which, once again, is counter to the traditional structure of the university.

One of the biggest advantages for the white anti-racist teacher in the predominantly white university classroom, none the less, is her whiteness. Unlike Aboriginal instructors and teachers of colour, white instructors do not have to face the charges that our anti-racist work is a personal vendetta or that we have chips on our shoulders because we are white. Our anti-racist work therefore is more easily seen by classroom participants within the framework of the university as an intellectual and rational exploration and critique of dominant ideologies and power relations. Moreover, in classrooms in which the majority of students are white women, the location of the white, female, feminist instructor can be invaluable in terms of providing role models for women's survival in academia and for the difficult personal work of anti-racism and of the institutional pressures against such work. It is a valuable location in terms of being able to provide examples of how the personal is political, and of how whiteness operates, from a location within whiteness, especially when that pedagogy involves "naming, witnessing, and accounting for [our] whiteness in the same way that [we] account for other politicized identities" (Mayberry 16). Speaking from a position of authority and from within whiteness can go a long way to defusing defensiveness, guilt, and paralysis, particularly when systemic analysis is accompanied by strategies for action, for activism. White professors who examine and question their own location within whiteness can "help engage white students in similar kinds of critical analyses" as well as demonstrate to non-white students that "allies can be found to fight the war against racism" (Peterson 35).

There are, none the less, limits to this location, and systemic problems inherent in it. Just as we encourage participants to acknowledge the operations of power in society and in

our personal lives, and just as we might use our own experiences and histories as examples of how we are not as teachers immune to these power relations, we may unwittingly re-enact some of the very dynamics we hope to resist. As Ng notes, "the people to whom we defer and over whom we exercise power and authority are all constitutive and reflective of the patriarchal and racist ordering of the society of which we are a part" (143). For white women instructors, the deferral to men and/or the most vocal students, and the patronizing and racist calling upon of students of colour and Aboriginal students to speak on behalf of their cultures are perhaps the most common pitfalls, which, as we are in the position of authority in the classroom we must be particularly guarded against. Moreover, white anti-racist instructors are not immune to the dynamics of white liberal guilt, such that minority students' responses and perspectives may not be critiqued and examined as rigorously as those of white students.

Perhaps most significantly, we must explore the role and location of the white instructor in a classroom on Aboriginal Literatures in relation to the absence of Aboriginal faculty, in this classroom, on this topic, and throughout the classrooms and disciplines of the university. This question, of course, is part of the larger issue of identity politics as they circulate in the university and beyond. Katherine J. Mayberry refers to the "debate over identity-based credibility (teaching what you are versus teaching what you're not)" as "currently the most visible expression of identity politics in higher education" (3). (In the height of the "appropriation debate" in Canada in the early 1990s, this concern was dichotomized between whether or not "white" professors "should" be teaching Aboriginal materials.) One of the most vexing and challenging inheritances of imperialism for the anti-racist teacher is that of the construction of social categories which, while having no material or scientific basis, continue to have damaging material effects, particularly in terms of the paucity of Aboriginal faculty in English departments across Canada.[15]

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[15] The advocacy of recruiting and hiring Aboriginal faculty will necessarily involve an interrogation of the criteria by which faculty are hired and what kinds of qualifications have historically been deemed "acceptable" and why by white-dominated institutions. It will have to negotiate conservative approaches to identity politics that would charge that recruitment of Aboriginal faculty is relying on biologist categories of identity (the "reverse-racism" argument).

While much radical theory espouses the embracing of alternative forms of knowledge, the academic institution, in its hiring practices, continues to eschew these forms of knowledge in its hiring practices in favour of the "Ph.D." (If, for example, an Aboriginal elder applied for a teaching position, how would that

My work as a white anti-racist feminist dealing with Aboriginal issues is focused on a critique of dominant assumptions about and of "Aboriginality" that is necessary in order for a self-reflexive critical appreciation of Aboriginal writing to even begin. In recognizing the histories of misrepresentations of Aboriginal peoples I am wary of reproducing those misrepresentations, even as I am aware that in order to critique constructions of Aboriginality and in order to introduce Aboriginal perspectives and theories into the classroom, I am in some ways still "representing" Aboriginal people as "them." While my pedagogy attempts to resist what I initially interpreted in white students as a defensive desire to "leapfrog" over the difficult personal and cultural work required for self-reflexive literary analysis, as well as the operation of a familiar binarism, I also recognize that the unlearning of dominance in many ways creates a vacuum—ethical, emotional, as well as intellectual—that does require consideration.

My concern, then, is that as a non-Aboriginal person introducing Aboriginal perspectives and theories, regardless of the extent of my expertise on Aboriginal cultures and histories, and regardless of how careful I am not to speak for or on behalf of Aboriginal peoples but to shift attention to the Aboriginal theorists' and literature, I will be reinvoking the white "authority" on Aboriginal material: I will still be speaking "about them." While perhaps there are no easy answers for this dilemma, it is crucial that this problematic be made visible through a critical pedagogy; in this case, I put my location as a white instructor, and the scarcity of Aboriginal faculty on campus, on the table for discussion and critique.

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application be received, and why? And, further, is the university, structured as it currently is, in fact the appropriate place to introduce this knowledge? What alternatives are possible?)

Nor is the "presence" of Aboriginal faculty sufficient in and of itself as an indication of genuine systemic transformation, as it can result from and function as tokenism. While many participants of English 385 indicated that they had expected the course to be taught by an Aboriginal instructor, the presence of such an instructor would not necessarily forestall the students' construction of that instructor as (literally) Native informant and, as the "minority" person, as responsible for challenging racism in the classroom and the world. (Indeed, to even assume that an Aboriginal instructor is "automatically" anti-racist is troubling in itself.)

This is not to suggest, finally, that non-Aboriginal instructors are preferable to Aboriginal instructors, but to highlight some of the complexities of each location, particularly as this issue revolves again around the binarism of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal. I certainly have a great deal of personal and professional investment in receiving institutional recognition through being hired to teach, etc., and my own self-construction as or desires to be a "good" anti-racist teacher (or a "good" white woman in all of its problematic permutations) are inevitably bound up in the binarism I am attempting to deconstruct and in the very ethical problems I am trying to address.

This concern, too, extends to the possibility of adopting or adapting Aboriginal pedagogical practices as part of an anti-racist classroom. Calliou intriguingly proposes a pedagogy based on medicine wheel philosophy, for example. Yet I find myself uneasy about adopting such a strategy in my own classroom for fear of misinterpreting and appropriating an Aboriginal philosophy. And yet I am also uneasy with the (apparent) alternative of teaching only through the (often problematic) methods and philosophies of my own inheritance, however radical from within they might be. To remain in this pedagogical either/or, however, is an indication once again of some of the problematic aspects of identity politics as they are constructed in the university and by the political right. As Barbara Dibernard suggests, "[l]ike all dilemmas, it is too neat and false when it implies I must do one or the other" (150), and in this case, suggests, ultimately, that white feminists have no place in anti-racism, or, that we cannot simultaneously explore the social construction of identity, foreground their material and institutional effects, *and* advocate for equitable representation of Aboriginal faculty and faculty of colour in universities.

None the less, even the deconstruction of the histories and assumptions behind dominant concepts of "Aboriginality" in the anti-racist Aboriginal Literature classroom continues to invoke the category Aboriginal, and in doing so, re-names and re-locates particular individuals in the classroom as "Aboriginal" in the process. Even as my overt pedagogical practice is to focus on whiteness, to name it and mark it, in so doing I am once again marking those "not white" in the classroom, in which they are already, in terms of race, less privileged than the white participants.[16] While generally this is profoundly empowering for minority students in that for many, for the first time in their educational lives, systemic oppression has been overtly named and identified in the classroom, it can also have the negative effect of re-naming and reinforcing oppressions and categories in

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[16] Certainly, however, class dynamics function to mediate and shape race relations. For example, I have taught young South Asian women whose middle-class backgrounds had led to some relative position of privilege in Canada and for whom being named as "oppressed" by anti-racist pedagogy was disturbing, shocking, unsettling (even if eventually empowering). As one woman said: "I always thought I was part of the dominant society." My pedagogy, however, while certainly focusing on race, was designed to explore the multiple and mutually inflecting nature of oppression, such that middle-class students of colour could not simply focus on racial oppression, and newly and solely identify as oppressed as a result.

Interestingly, one white woman in the course indicated the prevalance of ideologies of the nuclear and biological family (which function to support dominant nationalism) by pointing out how, in the range of

ways that are less than liberating for those in less privileged locations. Moreover, it has the effect not only of eliding the very multiplicity of subjectivities, and therefore of both multiple oppressions and privilege, and potential sites of alliance among individuals, but of erasing the reality of mixed-race identity in the classroom by collapsing race back into a binarism.

One of the complications of "'teaching what you're not,'" is "'teaching what you're not in the presence of those who are'" (Dibernard 132), which refers not only to the problem of white instructors reimposing racial categories on less powerful participants in the classroom but as the challenge (and fear) of encountering the emergence of one's own racism yet again (as in constructing these individuals within the category of Other/I'm not).[17] And as I am a white woman in authority in the classroom, it is not likely that an Aboriginal student or student of colour will challenge me on the ethics or effects of my practice—unless, of course, I make interrogation of the course an intrinsic part of it (which I attempted to do but which few took up).

The predominance of white-middle class participants in conjunction with my location as a white instructor, however, did determine the class dynamic to a large extent. Even as I attempted to critique whiteness, its processes of defensiveness, individualism, anger, guilt, grief, and genuine frustration at a process and pedagogy that were new and unsettling (and by extension its re-naming and relocating of Aboriginal participants in ways that were less than liberatory) ultimately took over most class discussion. As one small discussion group including Aboriginal students astutely (though only partially "anonymously" in an exercise in which participants posed questions coming up for them on the chalkboard) asked of the course, course materials, and the issues these raised, "Why is everything focused on white...? Why is it always 'white against....?" The question

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privileges/oppressions mentioned and discussed in class, the location of white/Anglo survivors of the adoption and foster care system were not included.

[17] In my teaching of this course, for example, I was very anxious about the responses of the Aboriginal students, noticing and worrying about their occasional absences from class in ways that I did not consider for the white students. My concerns were in many ways valid (was there something racist going on that I wasn't noticing, in a course that labelled them so directly?), but also indicative, I think, of more problematic dynamics: my own racism emerging here, in assumptions about these students as Native Informants who (naturally?) could challenge my authority, insight, or expertise because of their cultural and racial difference, and my *desire* that they see me/construct me as an ally (my desire to be seen as a "good" anti-racist) and that they willingly play the role of caretaker of the white anti-racist.

certainly struck at the heart of my anti-racist politics and pedagogy at the time—to say I can only teach from my own location is at once accurate and yet perhaps inadequate to the huge task of making a predominantly white classroom genuinely non-oppressive. My actual response to this group (in a later group discussion where I indirectly raised the question) was to extend the discussion to an analysis of whiteness as dominating and constructing the university and therefore the necessity of its deconstruction, *in conjunction with* a critique of my own institutional location and the absence of Aboriginal faculty.

My intention in teaching this course was to provide a forum in which participants could explore and critique their own repertoires of knowledge regarding Aboriginal peoples, the histories of colonization, and inherited ideologies of race as a starting place for a non-oppressive reading practice. I saw this process as supplemented not by my "authority" or "knowledge" as lecturer *per se* but by the introduction of crucial issues regarding racism and the perspectives of Aboriginal theorists. Aside from framing some introductory classes with lecture-style overviews on cultural assumptions and the necessity to historicize our locations as readers, I did not conduct formal lectures nor did I attempt to always facilitate discussion with the entire class. In fact, the large-group discussions proved in many ways, in my view, to be the least productive element of the class as it was here that white students, and therefore "whiteness" dominated discussion (and my lack of experiencing in refocusing such discussions more productively showed visibly). In this particular case, a self-assured and vocal Aboriginal man self-consciously took up the role of Native informant, and while his contributions to class discussion were invaluable and powerful, there was nonetheless a dynamic operating that I was particularly unprepared to negotiate effectively, to name and critique for the white students without re-naming this particular student. I generally chose instead small-group discussion directed by particular issues and questions raised by me and by participants in the class. This was done in part in recognition that as a white woman I was not a "spokesperson" for or expert on Aboriginal culture, history, and politics, but co-learner and facilitator for that learning. It was also part of a strategy to de-hierarchize the classroom as the site of the reproduction of authority (though of course that authority does not disappear.)

My selection of texts for the course was also to some extent shaped by my assessment of institutional expectations of an Aboriginal literature course as providing some historical context for the developing Aboriginal literature canon in English. Hence, I included Maria Campbell's *Half-breed*, Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*, and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. However, I had concerns about setting up a course chronologically in that these this structure can function to reinforce ideologies of Aboriginal writing in English as undergoing a teleology of development towards the English standard (the "stages" theory). Here, earlier works are seen as only weak precursors to the more contemporary texts with the postmodern novel form generally seen as the goal and ideal (as seen in the critical reception of Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*).

I wanted participants to experience some agency in their reading, and as such, offered a large reading list of which they were required to read and journal on seven. Crucially, however, I made three texts mandatory reading and journalling for the early weeks of the course: non-Aboriginal Canadian Daniel Francis's *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, *Looking at the Words of Our People*, edited by Okanagan Jeannette Armstrong, and Mohawk-Anglo Beth Brant's *Writing as Witness: essay and talk*. Francis's *The Imaginary Indian* is an excellent and highly readable analysis of white Canadian cultural history from the nineteenth century and of the production and prevalance of dominant images and ideologies of Aboriginality through legislation, art and literature, official history, the Hollywood film, and so on (in his categorizations: "the Vanishing Indian," "Performing Indians," "Green Indians", The "Bureaucratic Indian" and of course, "the Noble Savage"). For most non-Aboriginal students in the course, this was a particularly unsettling but productive place to begin, as they recognized how heavily influenced their perceptions of Aboriginality and Canadian history have been and are by non-Aboriginal and racist views. At the same time, non-Aboriginal students in particular registered profound frustration at not receiving the "accurate" or "true" picture of Aboriginal peoples and history with which to replace the "false" one. Aboriginal students, in turn, registered their own recognition of the internalization of some of these images, and more significantly, their frustration at having to deal once again with dominant histories, paradigms, and misrepresentations.

The course assignments also included a series of class presentations on historical events and current issues, such as the Oka Crisis, the Métis in Canada, residential schools, Aboriginal languages, and the report of the Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991). Essays were included as an option for final projects, but because the essay is not only discipline-specific and therefore a disadvantage for some in a multidisciplinary classroom but an individualistic form of knowledge, I provided options for creative and collaborative projects.[18] As I discuss in my conclusion to this chapter, it was in the range and depth of participants' final projects that the value, and transformative potential, of anti-racist pedagogy, emerged most visibly. As well, an Aboriginal speakers series on campus that semester also facilitated the inclusion of a number of Aboriginal guest speakers (writers, educators, and cultural workers/researchers) in the class schedule.

Central to my pedagogy was the use of journal writing as a critical process that connects the particularities of individual histories and assumptions to systemic processes and cultural/historical inheritances (as opposed to popular assumptions about "journals" and "diaries" as private, individual, and therefore not open to critical analysis). In the words of Aruna Srivastava, from whom I have energetically borrowed this practice, the journal writing process supports a "politicized reader-response approach to cultural texts" that engages participants in "self-reflection and critique of the repertoire of beliefs they bring to reading literature and their world" ("Cult" 3). It opens participants to how their "literary reading strategies are remarkably similar to, and often informed by the same presuppositions as their 'reading' of people, other cultural texts, different cultures, races, genders" (3). This practice works to connect the emotional and the intellectual as both critical responses; to break the mind/body split and therefore the rational/irrational construction of Otherness; therefore the journal, typically considered a "personal" form and in part taken up as such, enables the expression and critical examination of responses and ideas of embodied individuals with specific and systemic histories. Central to the process is the concept of "unpacking," which requires participants to persistently critique their responses and their historical/cultural sources, such that, particularly in the case of

[18] Participants were required to write a project proposal for approval, and to critique their project/essay in either written form or an interview.

whiteness, but also in terms of other forms of privilege, retreat (usually unconscious) into defense strategies and the reassertion of dominance are explored and resisted.

In enacting a process that is in many ways autobiographical, critical journalling enables a reconsideration and a reconceptualization of the discourses that shape the "individual's" responses as cultural, historical, and therefore open to change. It can generate a transformation of "subjectivity" that is individually empowering, as many of the participants indicate, but also politically vital for systemic change. The journals are a site where contradictions in the processes of subjectivity are made visible—for white women their/our location as both oppressed by sexism and privileged by race, for example. The recognition of these contradictions, moreover, while painful for many, is also part of the process of the desire to develop and transform a coherent self that overcomes, resolves, the intolerability of such contradiction. And as many participants came to recognize, this resolution requires not only a personal transformation in terms of how one's own location is read, but the necessity of structural and systemic change—in other words, activism. "I don't know what to do," and "What can I do?" were common questions posed by white participants grappling with the new awareness of the immensity of historical, institutionalized, and personal processes of oppression.[19]

In my own practice I attempt to foreground the systemic relations of my own location as instructor (graduate student not tenured professor, for example), and explicitly recognize that I do have authority in terms of assigning grades. It was not until my experience of this course, however, that I became acutely aware that I also had a personal and ethical authority I had not entirely recognized or theorized, particularly as the reader, audience and grader of individual journals. As one white woman said to me in reference to the self-censoring she enacted in the process of journalling (and to which several white women around her nodded their agreement), "I don't want you to think I'm a racist." My initial (unspoken) response was that she was correct, and that this was positive in the larger scheme of anti-racist politics. My actual response to the participant was that the important

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[19] Anti-racist pedagogy and the use of journal writing as a central component is an exhausting, and often emotional critical *process*, that shifts through simultaneous and interrelated issues, questions, and power relations as participants work to make visible the connections between their personal and collective histories. And this process of making visible can never be one of full recognition of the totality, to use Fredric Jameson's formulation in his *The Political Unconcious*, but of a persistent gesture towards that recognition.

thing in the journal is to critique one's initial reactions as a process of moving through them—not that it was "okay" to say racist things, but to record your response, however problematic, in order to interrogate it.

Her comment highlights for me the processes of surveillance that undergird the university structure as a whole but which are foregrounded in a course such as this, in which personal information and histories constitute the pedagogy. In disclosing the information that they do, albeit under structured circumstances in which they are not in power, participants are engaging in a process of self-exposure that is personally risky, institutionally new (in foregrounding what they do not know rather than what they do), and requires a particular amount of trust in the instructor as audience of the journal if the process is to be effective. One of the dangers of journal writing when structured as a "personal" form is that is may be read as a site of freedom to be a racist (Asante), and in order to forestall this I had been very clear from the outset that the journal was not "personal" but critical, and would be assessed as such. I had not, however, considered the journal or the pedagogy to be sites through which participants saw or constructed *me* as a moral guardian on racism, particularly as I felt that I was just beginning my own processes of unlearning racism.

This brief but telling moment in the classroom revealed to me how, as a white anti-racist instructor feeling relatively powerless in institutional structures, I carried the privileges of whiteness and professorial authority in ways that were not readily evident to me. It also indicates how predominantly Christian ethics of (individual) judgement, guilt, punishment, and redemption are structured into the education system's evaluative criteria and circulate as norm, despite the overtly secularly nature of the university.[20] It suggests, too, how much of Christian ideology is built into multiculturalism's assertions of "tolerance" and "acceptance," how much official multiculturalism is undergirded by Christian concepts of guilt, and how its popularity with white Canadians (and Australians) may rest on its unspoken promises of personal and collective redemption. There is a need, then, for a critical language of ethics, for a critical pedagogy that includes examination of

[20] We need only ask how many students we have encountered whose sense of self-worth is dependent on their academic success to get an indication of the pervasiveness of the imbrication of Christianity—in conjunction with capitalist individualism and competitiveness—in the education system.

morality, of Christianity, of other forms of spirituality and hence subjectivity, if the classroom is to be truly inclusive and transformative.

Writing as Witness witnesses White Defensiveness

> A lack of ethnic identity...has created an emptiness that is being filled by an identity centered on race.
>
> Charles A. Gallagher, "White Racial Formation" (7)

Beth Brant's *Writing as Witness: essay and talk* is a powerful collection of writing that actively blurs traditional generic boundaries. It includes a revision of the Pocahontas myth, a critique of the New Age Movement's appropriation of Aboriginal spirituality, imaginative pieces that explore, from Brant's location as a mixed-race lesbian, the power of spirituality and sexuality (one piece connects histories of the theft of Aboriginal children in the colonization period to current systemic discrimination against lesbian parents), and a conference presentation targeted at the racism of white academic feminists ("From the Inside—Looking at You"). Consistent throughout the collection generally is Brant's passionate expression of anger and grief regarding Aboriginal women's and Aboriginal lesbians' historical victimization, the role of Christianity in imperialism, and her passion for change. Crucial in this context is Brant's use of the second-person plural pronoun "you" as reference to her audience of "white people" the "white race," "white feminists" and in conjunction with such adjectives as "racist," "homophobic," "sexist," "hypocritical," and so on.

I chose this text as required reading early in the course for a number of reasons: its refusal to adhere to traditional generic form; its foregrounding of the operation of the multiple oppressions of racism, sexism, and homophobia as they affect Aboriginal women; the issues it raises about the locations of mixed-race Aboriginal peoples, and of the Mohawk people, whose territory, in straddling the US-Canada border, effectively disrupts

simple notions of national borders; and its interrogation, in "From the Inside—Looking at You," of the problems of white academic feminism. This was the only text on the course written from a gay or lesbian perspective, and I had anticipated that participants' responses revolve around issues of homophobia and questions of literary form.

I was not entirely prepared for the intensity and complexity of negative responses to the text from white women in the course. The responses so intricately embedded defensiveness, guilt, anger, genuine confusion, and the reassertion of whiteness as norm through ideologies of liberalism/multiculturalism that they were extremely difficult for me to recognize, separate out, and deconstruct, at least initially, and if ever, during the too-short 13-week semester. The inclusion of *Writing as Witness* early in the course, however, was perhaps one of the most productive aspects of the course. It evoked and provoked a critical process for many of us that continued through the semester, although at that point it was difficult for participants to see this very emotional and rigorous process as positive, as in the comment of one white woman's feeling of being "more confused than ever about what 'Native literature' is supposed to mean" (Prpich).[21]

Two particular but related dynamics of the operation of whiteness in the university classroom emerged in responses to *Writing as Witness*: a profound uneasiness and defensiveness on behalf of white students in being named as part of an oppressive group and an active dismissal of Brant's argument through charges of emotionalism, anger, and reverse racism. These reactions, of course, are part of the script accorded white middle-class Canadians in the ideologies of multiculturalism. Initial responses to *Writing as Witness* included a disproportionate focus on and rejection of what was perceived as Brant's "anger," blatant charges of "reverse racism," stereotyping, and unfair "accusations" of guilt, and appeals to rationalism and liberalism as the right ways to deal with racism and systemic oppression.

White middle-class women in the course struggled from within and through given paradigms of individualism, historical amnesia, and rationalism to at once make sense of the text and to deflect their own implication in the history of colonization away from themselves. Some projected the problems of imperialism and racism as facts of

(completed) history of which they have no part—the familiar "I-am-not-responsible-for-my-ancestors'-actions" argument—or by analysing Brant as has having personal problems that she needs to deal with before she can effectively participate in the "proper" way to deal with racism. In the case of the latter, what is particularly complex is the operation of the reproduction of the subjectivity of the "other" as irrational, emotional, and in a process of teleological development towards the rational and desired state of the (objective) white reader.[22]

In effect, rationalism and multiculturalism as the "appropriate" ways to deal with racism prevailed, revealing again that such responses are part of the pre-written language and subject positions constructed for white students in the national and educational space. Codes of tolerance and niceness and the abhorrence of anger—codes of gender as well as of whiteness—assertions of white feminism in terms of universal sisterhood, and the refusal to accept responsibility for racial privilege through charges of the minority voice unfairly making the innocent white person "feel guilty" are all part of this script. And while participants' responses are of course nuanced and shaped by a multiplicity of discourses, these multicultural codes none the less emerged in their first responses: 1) in terms of the appropriate teleology of the multicultural Other: "The expression of anger is a good way to invoke guilty feelings....Beth Brant would do well by getting past her anger and telling her readers more about the Good Red Road" (Prpich); 2) in terms of the appropriate manner in which the Other should teach us: "I cannot help but feel, though, that I would have been able to understand better where Brant was coming from it I had not felt so personally throttled after reading this book"[23]; 3) in terms of a feeling of a betrayal of (white) feminism and arguments of being "excluded" because of a refusal to homogenize all women's experiences under a white rubric:

> Right away I was feeling very insecure and unworthy, not unworthy that I'm not good enough, but rather that I didn't *know* enough. She outright laughs at white women trying to connect and understand (26). If she doesn't want to let us in, who will read

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[21] Prpich identified herself as a white straight 37-year-old woman of Croatian and German descent in her fourth year of General studies.

[22] A cogent example of this dynamic appeared in one white woman's response to Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (not on the primary reading list): "My intuition tells me that Lee Maracle bases her political views on emotion. This is not necessarily a bad thing since it equips her with the essential passion and strength to move forward" (Kruhlak).

[23] This comment is from the nursing student noted above.

> the book? She says the writing is for her sisters, but she only claims sisterhood in being Aboriginal or being lesbian. I am neither, but isn't sisterhood about being a woman? ....she discludes [sic] anything universal. It is frustrating to see this from a woman trying to increase tolerance and awareness;[24]

4) in charges of reverse racism:

> It seems to me that she is acting in a racist manner towards Whites. I didn't directly impose these things on Native people. It seems she constantly doesn't give people a chance. We are not mind readers. Her attitude frustrates me. I wonder, do Natives know everything about White culture? ....She is stereotyping us. I don't use Native people....I didn't personally take from the Native peoples;[25]

5) here coupled with the appropriate teleology and required "niceness" of the Other:

> The book's focus wandered from her hatred of the white race to her lesbianism. It is a personal and ethnocentric view of whites, religion, and sexuality....Her search for healing and wholeness is apparent, but holding onto her anger, victimization, and hatred will not help her to break free....I believe it is important to look at one's past as to understand one's self, but to remain in the past does not benefit anyone...I can't say that I liked this book because of its anger and attack that was aimed at whites. Brant is hypocritical in her stereotyping of whites....She was making it out to be every white person's fault for her problems as a Native lesbian.....I think that Brant's book is an example of perhaps the first or second stage of recovery that a people or person goes through when victimized. (Leggett)

What these responses revealed is the ongoing construction of the subjectivity of the Aboriginal Other, and therefore of the white national subject, which is in line with the commonsense construction of race and gender circulating in popular and university cultures. (And it should be stressed that these were *initial* responses that participants were required to critique.) White participants' claims to authority and "objectivity" in such contexts "intend to create a division between 'us' and 'them' around the ownership and distribution of emotions and intellect" (Schick 9). This process of dismissal of "anger" as intellectually and politically unacceptable intertwines white defensiveness (as the reassertion of whiteness) with the liberal ideology of multiculturalism that "accepts" difference but only on the terms of the dominant, in terms of politeness, "tolerance," and

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[24] This white woman gave her permission to quote from her journal but did not provide in her permission form information as to how she chose to be named/identified in this study.

[25] This participant identifies herself as a 22-year-old fourth-year English major, born in England and raised there to the age of 18 by her Canadian parents, and holding dual Canadian-British citizenship.

"respect." Typically, this self-legitimization, this reproduction of the white self, is also a process of re-constitution of the "other" as not only "unreasonable" but, in a teleology of desired Aboriginal subjectivity, as needing to "move forward" ("past" anger, militancy) to the desired state of the rational, objective, i.e., "nice [white]" subject.[26]

What I found particularly surprising (at the time) is how deeply personally many of the white women responded to Brant's usage of the pronoun "you," a response not registered by the three white men in the course. Overwhelmingly, the white women in the course interpreted—individualized—Brant's use of the second-person plural pronoun "you" as singular, as addressing them directly, personally. Many white women indicated in a variety a ways a feeling of being "personally attacked" by Brant. Again, they were wrestling with the operations of individualism (produced through the education system and the capitalist marketplace as well), whiteness, which constructs racism as a matter of personal attitude enacted on a level playing field rather than as a historically produced system of inequality, and its concomitant lack of precise language in which to discuss white bodies as racialized and implicated in racial representations. Significantly, several white women participants began the transformative process of anti-racism in recognizing and registering their defensiveness, even if they did not move through it immediately. One woman wrote: "My reaction to this book was anger, defensiveness, and that I was being stereotyped. It was like someone was sitting me down and blaming me for all that was wrong with the native people and I was not allowed to defend myself....I took it fairly personally...Is this a form of racism?" (Lahey).[27] Michelle Kruhlak recorded that she felt "continually under attack....When the word "you" is written I assume it is directed towards me. I am offended because she assumes all people act in this manner. I feel as if I have been wrongly accused."[28]

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[26] This response emerged consistently and persistently throughout the course in relation to the wide range of texts. As one white woman (a fourth year English major) responded: "I like Rita Joe's positive outlook. The pain is evidently there, but I think people are more likely to listen if this is the kind of attitude a person conveys." And as another white woman suggested regarding Brant, "I feel [books like this] are a step back and an excuse made by people" (Lahey).

[27] Lahey identifies herself as follows: a 21-year-old white female Canadian of Greek and French ancestry, and a geography major in the faculty of Social Sciences.

[28] Kruhlak identifies herself as a 22-year-old third-year visual arts major, married, and of Scottish and Irish ancestry.

Many white participants were visibly and vocally uncomfortable as their unconscious reading paradigms were called into question and there was no easy answer for "correcting" all that was wrong with history and dominant imagery and ideologies. Productively, however, many white women recognized their own defensiveness on these questions, and this was a critical gesture in moving towards self-awareness and productive literary and historical analysis, as Haley Wilson suggests:

> My first reaction to reading Brant was "Hey, what are you talking about, you don't know me." I felt defensive, accused, unable to speak up for myself. Like it wasn't fair to categorize me like I am not responsible for all this stuff—it's not *my* fault. Then it occurred to me that this is just a small sample of how it must feel to deal with this every day. To be stereotyped, misjudged, not given a voice. I think this is a brilliant literary technique Brant uses. But it is also more than that. I don't think her accusatory tone is simply meant to give me a brief sense of the racism she has lived with. It is also meant to accuse. And rightfully so. After all, I *am* part of the dominant group, and this has given me advantages. And I also either participate in maintaining a power imbalance (through denial, or outright racism) or I am part of the solution.
>
> Many of my classmates who I spoke to about the book hated it. I believe that this is because it brings about a sense of personal responsibility and most of us don't know what to do with it. It's overwhelming. Pretty shitty to feel helplessly guilty. It is therefore much easier to consider Beth Brant as a bitter, whining woman, who, as one classmate stated, needs to "Get over it."....Everything she states I believe to be true. And being able to accept all of that was a very humbling, saddening, yet also liberating experience....In being able to own this history, I feel empowered to move beyond it.

White participants in particular found this text difficult because in many ways it names and makes visible the political unconscious of multiculturalism, imperialism, Christianity, and individualism. Understandably, because of the normalization of these ideologies, participants didn't always have a language with which to name and critique these dynamics. White participants found it extremely difficult to find a comfortable subject position from which to "safely" read the text, as they/we have been conditioned by educational structures to do. "We are all individuals and we should just treat each other as individuals" was a common refrain in class discussions on Brant's text (which for many was a discussion on Brant *as individual*), an indication of both discomfort and defensiveness in response to being named directly as part of a dominant, oppressive group, and of the forcefulness of liberal multiculturalism's basic tenets.

Several who identified themselves as Christian had particular difficulty reconciling Brant's arguments about the exploitation and oppression in which Christianity has participated historically with their own affiliation with what they saw as a primarily positive and liberatory faith and practice, and their self-constructions as "good" people. This is understandable, given the overtly secular nature of academic institutions, which do not discuss religion except as an "object" of study separate from its actual operation in a predominantly Christian culture and its composition of predominantly Christian individuals. This indicates in particular the need for more critical investigation into Christianity as constitutive of a majority of students' subjectivities, and the recognition that it too is transforming in some contexts (as in the United Church of Canada's relatively progressive policies on women and gay ministers) even as it is being further entrenched in others (such as in the increasing popularity of Christian fundamentalism). Such a critical language would also provide a starting point for an investigation into the role of the ideology of "guilt," not only in terms of multiculturalism as a process of purging national remorse through a promise of collective redemption but in terms of the location of Christianity as both an enabling and limiting (often paralyzing) factor in anti-racist activism and pedagogy.[29]

Yet by registering their defensiveness, anger, and uncertainty about Brant's *Writing as Witness* participants opened up productive avenues of investigation and ways to critique our responses and appreciate the text. It was here in particular that I found my location as a white feminist, also named by Brant as "you" in the text, to be enabling for this process. In naming, deconstructing, and analysing my own similar response to the text and its strategy, I was able, I believe, to provide a point of identification for white women grappling with these issues. To discuss how I had tried to work through the sense of defensiveness and to point out that the categorizing strategy of the text does not, in fact, name us *personally*—as in "you, Jennifer Kelly are evil because you are white"—but reveals in part the very power of categorization itself, I think, was particularly instructive. Brant's text forces white

[29] For a further discussion of the dynamics of white liberal guilt that considers it outside of the Christian framework, see Jeanne Perreault's "White Feminist Guilt, Abject Scripts, and (Other) Transformative Possibilities."

readers to experience being marginal, excluded, while uncomfortably categorized.[30] We do not literally occupy the position of the Other; we do not suddenly become Aboriginal, but we do discover what it is like to be the object of strategies of othering. As one student observed, "[t]rying to put my personal thoughts aside, I now have had a taste of what it is like to read lies about yourself" (Lahey). It was in this context that my location as a white middle-class woman with some experience in surviving the pain of anti-racist work, of discovering my own location as both oppressed (by gender) and oppressor in terms of race privilege, was, I believe, of some benefit. And it was also here that encountered some of my own limits in terms of my processes of anti-racist work, as I remained for some time perplexed as to how to articulate the dyanamics of the responses in a productive way.[31]

There were, finally, participants who were able to "appreciate" the text more fully upon further reflection and consideration (even as others continued to reject it). One woman stated that she "loved it" (Singh) because of Brant's "individual" strength, and others found Brant's exploration of spirituality and sexuality particularly interesting. Many participants returned to the text later in the course and re-visited and critiqued their earlier responses, and in doing so, raised particularly cogent questions, regarding, for example, the limits of the strategy of merely inverting binaristic constructions or categories, the politics of Brant's relationship to, and seeming elision, of her own whiteness as a mixed-race woman, and (from an Aboriginal perspective) Brant's claim that lesbian Aboriginal peoples should hold positions of elders.

However, the unsettling of paradigms and unconscious strategies of resistance to this pedagogy not surprisingly continued to resurface throughout the course as particularly thorny questions arose, as particular issues hit particular nerves, and participants grappled

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[30] It was also here, I believe, that earlier discussions regarding the politics of naming Aboriginal peoples from dominant locations and of Aboriginal peoples' insistence on self-naming also took on more tangible meaning for some.

[31] Following these rather charged discussions about Brant, the class engaged in a target group exercise in which participants move across the room in relation to specific categories of privilege and oppression (sometimes leaving a few people on the side of the oppressed and feeling particularly vulnerable). Several students later commented in their journals that the exercise was highly instructive in that it helped them to recognize, and physically embody, the multiplicity of oppressions and privileges they inhabit, but had not recognized.

My attempts afterwards to engage the class in a productive discussion about racism, however, was clogged by my lack of experience and critical language for the dynamics the discussion took—a litany of

to analyze their individual and our collective histories in a new light (and as I grappled with the class dynamics).

In Search of April Raintree and *Half-breed* and the Question of Truth

A different but related set of dynamics emerged in the responses to Maria Campbell's *Half-breed* (1973) and Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (1984). I chose these texts for the course for a number of reasons: their locations as groundbreaking texts in the history of Aboriginal women's writing in Canada; what they reveal in terms of the internalization of sexism and racism; their revisionist perspectives on Canadian national narratives; their authors' and narrators' locations as Métis women; and the questions they raise regarding assumptions of autobiography, literature and "truth." Campbell's *Half-breed* locates her life and history as a Métis woman within a revisionist history of Canadian nation-building, the Métis people, and the Riel Rebellion. It traces her childhood in poverty, her struggle with sexism, racism, prostitution, and drug addiction, and her recovery through her reliance on her Métis heritage.

Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* recounts the story of two Métis sisters separated and placed in foster care early in life because of their parents' poverty and alcoholism. It is written from the first-person perspective of one sister, April, who can pass as white. She remembers her parents' poverty and alcoholism, and keeps this knowledge from her younger sister Cheryl in an attempt to protect her. April attempts to pass as white for much of her life until she discovers her need to reclaim her heritage; Cheryl, visibly of Aboriginal ancestry, embraces her Métis identity and takes up activism for her people only to become disillusioned to the point of suicide when she discovers the truth about her parents. The text is an intriguing exploration of race, mixed-race identity, and racism, sexism, and dominant nationalism in Canada. Crucially, the final page of *In Search of April Raintree* includes an editor's note stressing that the text is fictional, despite its autobiographical form.

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stories by white individuals as to how they (or close family members) had been the victims of "racism," a discussion in which the students of colour and Aboriginal students were noticeably silent.

There is an indication in the journals that non-Aboriginal participants felt a certain sense of relief upon reading these texts, which, at first at least, they felt they had the analytical tools with which to engage, to "know," the texts (and the authors). Unlike Brant's *Writing as Witness*, these texts, which participants comfortably recognized—and in the case of *In Search of April Raintree*, mis-recognized, as "autobiography"—initially provided a more familiar position for readers, a position in which ideologies of multiculturalism as the nice and proper way to discuss racism, were re-asserted. This more easily recognizable reader's position was one from which dominant assumptions about "autobiography," "truth," "Aboriginality," whiteness, and middle-class ideologies surrounding addiction, recovery, and individualism emerged in particular ways as unconscious reassertions of dominance.

In her article "'Nothing but the Truth': Discursive Transparency in Beatrice Culleton," non-Aboriginal Canadian critic Helen Hoy counters critics' and graduate students' dismissals of *In Search of April Raintree*, which are based on literary and poststructuralist arguments regarding the text's "artlessness" and "simplicity." Initial critical responses, she suggests, reveal both a lack of a critical and aesthetic language that accounts for the text's "emotional power" and the desire for the "unmediated authenticity of the speaking 'Other'" (155). She provides a detailed analysis of *In Search of April Raintree* to insist that in terms of author and character, it "both invites *and* disrupts notions of the real and of the self, of authenticity and of identity, of truth" (179). Hoy argues that the "self constructed in the novel is multiple, provisional, discontinuous, and shared (168), and she self-reflexively concludes with the important recognition that even a "hermeneutics of indeterminacy" (174) may in fact function to neutralize the text's potentially decolonizing effects. *In Search of April Raintree*, as Hoy insists, is "writing that moves and speaks to many, that serves needs that may differ from my own or the academy's" (175).

I would like to examine the potentially decolonizing effects of *In Search of April Raintree* and *Half-breed* as part of a larger pedagogy of anti-racism and decolonization. In the multidisciplinary undergraduate classroom that I am exploring, there were no dismissals (in the journals or in class discussions, at least) of *In Search of April Raintree* or *Half-breed* based on poststructuralist critiques of realism, or of the texts as asserting a false

claim to the reflective nature of language and its unmediated access to "reality" and "truth." Rather, assessments of the texts, and of Culleton's in particular, were overwhelmingly positive, if complexly and problematically so, in their reinforcement of ideologies of the transparent and knowable "Native Other." It was, as I address in more detail, only through my attempt to unsettle ideas about generic boundaries—about autobiography, fiction, "history," and truth—that poststructuralist questions of the provisional nature of "truth" and autobiographical authority emerged. Moreover, the subject-matter of the texts itself was pedagogically important in terms of increasing awareness of the location and struggles of the Métis people in Canada, of their absence or demonization in official national narratives and educational curriculum, of systemically produced historical amnesia, and of issues facing mixed-race people and of the desire to "pass" as white in supposedly tolerant Canada. As a white straight English/management major noted: "Through 20 years of life, 12 years of public school and two years of post-secondary, all in Canada I might add—I have never really heard much about Métis people."

The predominant initial responses of participants to *In Search of April Raintree* and *Half-breed* were emotional, visceral: participants consistently registered surprise, horror, shock, and sadness. Many reported that they hadn't been aware of the historical events and circumstances recounted, and that they had cried while reading Culleton's text. One white man recorded he was "was sick to [his] stomach while reading the rape scene" (Paul). This outpouring of emotional response is instructive. First of all, it is a powerful reminder to those of us whose careers involve the reading of painful narratives of oppression and survival, readings to which we may become rather de-sensitized, that literary texts can have profound intellectual and emotional effects that can be drawn on effectively in a critical pedagogy. As this text deeply moved many participants, we need to ask how such writing may, in a pedagogy and politics of decolonization, serve needs that have not historically been institutionally authorized. That emotional, visceral—embodied—responses are generally not even granted entry into the realm of the objective, disembodied university space of rationality, let alone granted legitimacy as a critical process, and that participants so readily note these responses when given the opportunity to do so, are indications that the

enforced mind/body split is inadequate to a genuine politics of liberation, to genuine learning.

What is also crucial in considering these "emotional" responses of non-Aboriginal participants, however, is the recognition that what might be at work here is the operation of canonical assumptions and ideologies about the "personal," "individual," and therefore acceptable and even *expected* "emotional" nature of autobiographical writing. Here, these are further complicated by ideologies of "Aboriginality," of the racialized Other as "naturally" irrational, emotional, and readily *knowable*, and their lifestories as cultural artefact rather than creative discourse. It is from this location that most non-Aboriginal participants worked to identify with the homogenized narrator/writer such that any specific literary or aesthetic considerations disappeared. What Hoy refers to as the tendency to assign of "uncrafted testimonial to the 'Native informant'" (154) surfaced in a number of ways, but most concisely perhaps in one white woman's initial response to Campbell's *Half-breed*: "It is simply her story, written in her own words, almost like having a conversation with her. Her honesty in conveying the most traumatic and least dignified times of her life immediately makes me trust her." [32] One white woman, for example, quickly recognized and critiqued this process, noting her own discomfort even while writing the following regarding *Half-breed*: "I am left wondering if all Métis people share this closeness and special bond with their siblings. Perhaps this is yet another example of the strong value system and sense of family that can often be found amongst minority people."[33]

The predominant initial response of non-Aboriginal participants was the desire to homogenize narrator and writer as one as an unmediated authentic speaking Other (Hoy 155), and then to work to "identify" with this Other, through particular characteristics of the narrators, similar experiences, and/or shared locations in systemic power relations (i.e., shared gender or class oppression). Dismissals of *Half-breed*, then, indicate frustration at not being able to easily identify emotionally with the narrator/author and the inability to consider the literary contexts and conditions of possibility of the text. As a South Asian

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[32] This participant wishes to be identified as a 21-year old white, straight Canadian graduating in nursing, whose parents were raised in Alberta and who was raised in National Park communities across Canada.
[33] This participant identified herself (above) as a white, straight, English/Management major.

woman suggested, "I'm not saying that my life experiences are or were as rough as hers, but because Campbell has been through so much and experienced so much, I'm sure everybody can find something they can relate to in her story" (Singh). Or as one white woman, a fourth-year English major, suggested regarding *Half-breed*:

> I find her [Campbell's] text extremely moving. I get a sense of universality of emotions—we are all human regardless of race. I agree completely that "we have to set aside our difference and come together as one." Oppressing someone is not an option. I love the book. There are so many circumstances that I relate to—feelings of emptiness, self-disgust. No one should have to feel that way because of the system.[34]

Clearly, non-Aboriginal participants' responses indicate a struggle to articulate their recognition of the processes of internalized dominance in relation to their own assumptions and contexts. In working to find a critical language for systemic oppression and racism, it is not surprising that many turned to familiar tropes, approaches, and lenses, however uneasily. Throughout the participants' initial responses is a collision, or a mutual constitution, of individualist ideologies of autobiography, personal "truth," and imperialist ideologies of the representativeness of the racialized Other.[35] As these texts were read immediately after *Writing as Witness*, responses also indicated relief and comfort in being able to assert multiculturalism's ideology about how issues of race "should" be addressed:

> What I appreciated in the way Campbell told her story was that while she clearly and articulately spoke of both the horrendous treatment she has faced, and her anger towards her oppressors, she did not target me with her anger. As I read, I felt only compassion and understanding for Campbell and her people, and outrage towards a society that would treat and oppress fellow human beings in such a way. This is a contrast from how I felt when I read Beth Brant's "Writing as Witness." Brant's uncontrolled rage, not unjustified however, seemed like it was targeted right at me.[36]

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[34] This woman, previously quoted, was born in England and raised there to the age of 18 by her Canadian parents.

[35] Certainly in this Aboriginal literature class, there were initial attempts to label particular texts within particular paradigms, such as "spiritual", "autobiography," "novel," and so on (and these didn't entirely disappear). And this is why Thomas King's introduction to *All My Relations*, and Jeannette Armstrong's (ed.) *Looking at the Words of Our People* were particularly instructive in deconstructing conventional literary generic boundaries and suspending and critiquing the desire to label, pigeon-hole, and therefore "contain" the self-defining processes of "Aboriginal literature." Indeed, one of the strengths of the multidisciplinary classroom is that concepts of "literature" vary widely and can work productively to deconstruct canonical assumptions.

[36] This participant identifies herself as a 21-year-old white straight Canadian graduating in the nursing, whose parents were raised in Alberta and who was raised in National Park communities in Canada.

Not all participants recorded that they felt emotionally involved in these two texts, particularly *Half-breed.* In registering their *lack* of emotional response, these participants in fact foregrounded the operation of the ideology of identification and of autobiography as personal and emotional disclosure. Haley Wilson writes that she was "rather annoyed" by Campbell's text as it "seemed to be written with a lack of emotion," and the response of another white woman is revealing in this context: "I'm only just starting *Half-breed.* It is *cold.* Written as an autobiography, yes, but shrouded and *distant.*" One woman, who identifies herself as white/Blackfoot, dealt with her uncertainty about the literary quality (which she does not define) of *Half-breed* by asserting the text's historical rather than literary value:

> I was not too pleased with the literary quality of this book. I think that the story could have been written in a way as to incite empathy, not just sympathy. It just seems a bit tiring to keep reading, "And then I did this, and then this happened, I felt this way, and then"....However, the value of the book does not lie in its literary quality, the value lies in providing insight into Canadian History of the Metis people, and to their plight.

I attempted to complicate and problematize assumptions regarding "Aboriginal" "autobiography" by pointing out that Culleton's text defines itself as a "novel" and by asking participants to discuss and describe the relationship between "truth" and "autobiography." From here emerged a complex of inherited assumptions that I found to be politically and pedagogically significant. Many participants struggled to reconcile their inherited assumptions about the "truth" in autobiography—as in Wendy Fehr's words, "an autobiography is supposed to be real not just someone's imagination"—with their awareness of the possible self-interestedness and therefore "less-than-truthful" or inaccurate nature of an autobiography by a person in a dominant location (for example, Alberta premier Ralph Klein or Madonna). This was complicated by their genuine desire to grant the minority voices (in a manner that homogenized narrator and writer) representational authority and access to "truth" and an uncertainty about where to draw the line between the narrator/author as "real person" and as "text" to be read.

This desire emerges from a critical recognition of the deconstructive energies of the texts (if not of their creativity or literariness). But this is certainly complicated by white liberal guilt and an uncertainty (productively so) about how to "critique" works from

minority locations, particularly when the author and text, in the ideology of autobiography, are often merged, and in the absence of non-oppressive critical approaches that do not rely on dominant ideologies of literary aesthetics. A white man in the course (studying molecular biology), for example, intriguingly introduced his commentary on Rita Joe's *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet* and her poetry collection *L'nu and Indians We're Called* in the following way: "****WARNING—I AM NOT A RITA JOE FAN. The views expressed in this entry are mine and mine alone and are not meant to offend or in any way diminish my views of Rita Joe as a person****."

In texts in which lies, official and unofficial, and their effects on individuals are the subject-matter—even when the textual strategies suggest the "impediments to truth-telling," (162), as Hoy suggests—"'honesty' and 'truth' seem to function as talismans" (156) for readers and critics (and perhaps teachers). And it is this context that some participants were (revealingly) disappointed to discover the "fictional" nature of *In Search of April Raintree*. As Tiffany Leggett wrote, "[s]omehow thinking that a book was a real account of someone's life seems to make me embrace it more. I like finding out about peoples' lives, about their history. I want to know about people, about cultures and about history." Haley Wilson commented that she had assumed the text was "all true" and had felt a sense of disappointment, almost betrayal, by the text, as if she had been "tricked." She goes on to comment that

> [w]ith so many of the other texts, I have felt like I was able to share a piece of someone's struggle—like I truly struggled and empathized with them. Like I had been let in on a true piece of history. But then, I need to ask myself whether it really matters. I suppose that autobiography isn't really "true" in the sense that it is selectively remembered, chosen and organized. Maybe even embellished. It also raises the question of whether the concept of true can really be conceived of. Why can't fiction be seen as just as true? It comes from the imagination of someone which is still based on experiences....I should therefore not value this text less or see it as less valid because it is not meant to be autobiographical.

Responses that rely on the "truth" of the texts reveal assumptions about autobiography, reference, and the transparency of "minority" language use in a multilayered process that once again assumes the transparent knowability of the Aboriginal writing subject—as representative and really not very creative after all. Classroom discussions none the less productively revolved around the nature of "autobiographical truth," which Culleton's text

in particularly so effectively problematizes through its inclusion, *at the end*, of an assertion of its fictional nature. Moreover, the texts themselves, in making clear the relationships between the individual and the systemic in terms of internalized dominance, also functioned, as part of their pedagogical processes, to resist, for some non-Aboriginal readers, the easy compartmentalization of the "individual" story as separate from that of the non-Aboriginal reader. However, this did not forestall for many (myself, perhaps, included) the location of the writers and their narrators as mixed-race, placing them rather too conveniently under the category "Métis" in such a way that the implication of whiteness in that location were elided into yet another way.

Such questions around what constitutes "autobiography" and "fiction," therefore, were productively raised, and if the issue of the nature of "truth" was never resolved, it was at least problematized. Significantly, taking our cues from Jeannette Armstrong's and Thomas King's insistence on the fluidity, if not current impossibility, of defining Aboriginal literatures, closure on these questions was not imposed but actively resisted. While these questions were not resolved and resulted in some generic confusion, as in Wendy Fehr's response—"The question of what is truth and according to whom often get in the way of the writing of an autobiography"—the raising of these issues is pedagogically and politically necessary in terms of unsettling dominant expectations and market pressures regarding what constitutes "Aboriginal" "literature" and even "Aboriginality."[37]

Moreover, the strategic negotiation of Aboriginal lifestorytellers with the dominant ideology of autobiographical form may in fact be seen as part of the very pedagogy of their writing practices. The following is part of a response to *Half-breed*, in which I find a reassertion of assumptions about whiteness, Aboriginality, autobiography and the ways in which issues of systemic racism are "supposed" to be raised in tolerant, multicultural Canada (some of which the participant critiques):

> This book was much more easy to look at systemically [than *Writing as Witness*]. I think this may have been easier for me to do because I kept looking at it as if I was

[37] As one white woman (an English/management major) wrote:

> I really don't think that making such classifications is easy to do. April and Cheryl may be fictional characters (they themselves don't really exist) but this does not mean that their story is not very real. Beatrice Culleton would not have been able to write with such authenticity about April's experiences without bringing many of her own experiences and perceptions to the work. Culleton had to *know* the conditions of April's and Cheryl's worlds before she could create characters to live in them.

> reading a story of a person's life, from a long time ago, a long way away. This is probably more comfortable because society continually says we are progressive and learn from our mistakes. I internalized this into meaning the problems in this book are no longer as big an issue.
>
> One interesting part of this book is how non aggressive it is. *You can't get angry with a person's life*. She states very clearly in the beginning how she is going to tell *her* story. She is simply stating what happened to her....I had a hard time imagining the harshness of some of her living conditions. Even when she was explaining all of her responsibilities and worries I did not feel sorry for her. She worded it in such a factual way that feelings were not involved....she is not asking for anything or trying to get our interest through emotional appeal.
>
> As I reread that last statement I asked myself why would I assume in the first place that an autobiographic native writer is trying to get something from me (whether emotional or monetary)? I think that this is due to my limited exposure to Native literature. Most are political or angry and are blaming white society, which as I have explained in previous journals, makes me defensive (something I need to work on). (Lahey, my emphasis)

There is much that is troubling here, but the statement "you can't get angry with a person's life" is particularly intriguing, as it collapses autobiography, writer, reality, and truth so efficiently. On the one hand, Lahey is suggesting, from a position of white defensiveness, that "anger" is not the appropriate mode for addressing racism in polite tolerant Canada. On the other, she might also be suggesting that part of the effectiveness of Aboriginal women's autobiographies is their active negotiation with the form's lingering ideology of truth in popular discourse. As Campbell writes in her introduction: "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in *our* country" (2, my emphasis).

Another cluster of responses that emerged in the readings of this text revealed the ongoing operation of middle-class and white ideologies as they pertain to addiction and addictions recovery. Both *Half-breed* and *In Search of April Raintree* address issues of alcoholism, primarily by detailing how internalized and systemic oppression operate to produce poverty, hopelessness, and substance abuse among Aboriginal peoples. It was here, however, that middle-class and individualist assumptions emerged about Canada as an equal economic and health-care playing field. The awareness of addictions recovery theory that suggests recovery must begin with the addicted person's commitment to change combined with liberal individualism in troubling condemnations of April's and Cheryl's parents (apparently as "real" people) as failures who did not deserve to keep their children.

Here, binaristic thinking regarding addiction prevailed in assumptions that one cannot be addicted *and* desperately love their children, and in the failure to recognize that addiction, by definition, is the loss of choice or control over the substance. Several participants in the course made comments such as the following, but only the following participant granted her permission for quotation in this study:

> This is the first book (*In Search of April Raintree*) that I've read in the course that has held a person accountable for his/her decision to drink. I'm glad to see this ....She [Cheryl] tries to reason that it was because what they "once had has been taken from them" (216). So does that justify one for drinking oneself into oblivion? Because one has faced some kind of adversity one is *made* to drink? That's what she is suggesting, and again is trying to run away from taking responsibility, as if to justify alcoholism. It seems that this excuse has worn itself out; "the white man took away everything, therefore I'm going to drink to take away the pain, to avoid dealing with reality and facing the future." It's not only Natives who feel as though everything has been taken away. What makes their problems harder than someone else's? Everybody faces adversity and everybody deals with it differently. I don't respect anyone, any human being, ie: black, white, beige, etc. that blames their failures on the past or on someone else. I feel very strongly about this because I have lived with an alcoholic and know people who have overcome alcoholism ....Everyone has a will and therefore has choices to make, and are held accountable for those choices. April and Cheryl's father poured the "medicine" down their throats by choice and will. No one forced them....Why weren't they sent to a detox centre? Or at least offered that option?"

Significantly, the issue of alcoholism among Aboriginal peoples did not emerge in larger group discussions. This failure to tackle one of the biggest stereotypes and socio-economic issues facing Aboriginal peoples is certainly a mark of my own uneasiness with the topic. However, it also indicates a larger concern, a general liberal multicultural uncertainty (which I shared) about how to discuss such an immense problem without reducing it to stereotypes and an inability to see the systemic implications of the question. As Aboriginal Australian critic and activist Marcia Langton suggests, the avoidance of discussion among liberal academics of this "major icon of Aboriginality, 'the drunken Abo,'" is part of a refusal to recognize and theorize the location of alcohol in race and economic relations, and her comments are also apt for the Canadian context:

> The iconoclastic image of Aboriginal men and women as "drunks" serves a convenient purpose in the ideology of white Australia. Today it remains the background and popular explanation for the extraordinary arrest rates of Aboriginal people, for the continuing removal of Aboriginal children and the continuing

> exclusion of Aboriginal people from employment, education, health services, rental accommodation, and a range of other services. (83)

As Langton suggests, however, the image and ideological power of "the drunken Aborigine" is both "an icon of European contempt for Aboriginal people" and "an excellent starting point for examining the identity attributed to Aborigines and the inter-subjectivity of the European and Aboriginal identity constructions" (86).

Culleton's text nonetheless was a powerful catalyst to discussions regarding the role of government and social services in terms of foster care and adoption. Participants grappled with their inherited assumptions about the essential "goodness" of government and social services, their good "intentions" in attempting to protect children from abuse, and the actual effects of the foster care system on and in Aboriginal communities, where every child fostered outside of that community is a loss to that community.[38] What emerged in this cluster of responses is the operation of a middle-class assessment of poverty as the personal failure of individuals "to work hard enough" and of middle-class privilege as the product of personal effort rather than imperialist capitalist relations. Again, there was the unconscious though powerful consolidation of the white self through a production of a racialized, classed, and demonized other. The individualism here operates to erase the history of colonization in Canada and to reinforce the liberal multicultural ideology of Canada as an "equal opportunity" nation, where addictions treatment and social services are assumed to be readily and equally accessible to all, and what is available is assumed to be culturally suitable for all.

What discussions around the deaths and the incidents recounted in Culleton's text revealed in terms of university structures and the reproduction of whiteness was a desire to re-constitute the ethical white bourgeois subject in relation to the "needy" Aboriginal

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[38] Discussions about the historical role of non-Aboriginal social services in particular took on a heightened and painful significance as, during the semester, an Aboriginal mother and her nine-year old son, Connie and Ty Jacobs, were shot and killed by a white RCMP officer on the T'suu Tina reserve near Calgary, as social services attempted to remove her children from an alcoholic and potentially violent situation. One of the course participants lived on that reserve. Again, however, I did not at the time have an effective language in which to discuss the tragedy, nor the relationships among alcoholism, "Aboriginality," and systemic oppression, even as the media and RCMP justification for the removal of Jacob's children was based in alcohol abuse and a history of physical violence in the home. Rather, while trying to engage in such a discussion (and we were all, I think, troubled by the events), I merely addressed my lack of language in discussing such a loss and the complex of power relations in which the event was embedded.

Other, a desire enacted through the history of the paternalism of government policy and the residential school and foster care systems. (And in retrospect I find myself considering to what extent this is the role I assumed as instructor.) Culleton's text, however, in detailing the systemic process producing a class of dispossessed peoples actively refuses the reconstitution of this white subject as separate from the processes of dispossession. Participants, in critiquing their initial responses, came to recognize that both *In Search of April Raintree* and *Half-breed* detail the internalization of systemic oppression, in which, regardless of personal history and location, we all participate. As a white woman about to graduate in nursing wrote:

> The tragedy that has occurred in these mothers [sic] lives prior to them losing custody of their children is something that I am ashamed to admit that I didn't really consider. I did appreciate their grief when their child was taken into custody but I couldn't understand what had happened that they couldn't see this coming....I guess for me this raises an issue of what should be done.

And as an English/management major asked, "What is it, *exactly*, that is leading to the huge alcoholism problems amongst aboriginal peoples. Once the societal issues that cause the alcoholism are identified, a solution can start to be reached."

This is not to suggest, however, that the desire to "identify with" the narrative subjects did not resurface in responses to these texts. Paul's astute analysis of the class and gender implications of his reading, for example, quickly slips back into the desire to identify with the Other in order to know her (Spivak, *In Other Worlds* 254), an indication of the very normativity of the scripts of liberalism, multiculturalism, and individualism:

> I wanted to help April. My class upbringing probably influences this by tending to want to help others. Our culture loves fairytales. To take April out of the book and give her a better life would be a fairy tale. Our culture believes in helping those who can't help themselves. It's a white middle class ideology. Its also a way for middle-class people to know that there are people below them. I believe it creates a sense of superiority and identity for the middle class.
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> *I like Cheryl because I see a lot of myself in her....Through her knowledge of history Cheryl is developing character. I like people with character.* (my emphasis)

Reading *My Place:* Reasserting (White) National Place

In "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism,'" Anne McClintock suggests that one of the fundamental ideologies informing colonial discourse is the assumption that "space is time" and "the movement forward in space is backwards in time" (292). This is clearly seen in European narratives of contact with Aboriginal peoples, particularly those espousing Darwinian social determinism, in which, in McClintock's words, uncolonized spaces and peoples are constructed as a "regression backwards from (white, male) adulthood to a primordial, black 'degeneracy' usually incarnated in women" (292). This condition, from this imperial perspective, can only be remedied by the colonizing mission and the conquering of space in "the 'progress' forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason" (292).

I note this imperialist construction of space and time not to suggest that participants in English 385 actively or consciously espoused such ideologies but to consider how this inheritance continues to linger, problematically and typically unnoticed, as part of dominant white Canadian nationalism. This has implications for Australian-Canadian comparative studies grounded in nationalist assumptions. In other words, I am concerned with how Canadian nationalism operates in conjunction with imperialism such that Australia is viewed, institutionally and popularly, in spatial terms—"over there," "Down Under," in fact—and therefore as systemically and ideologically "separate." Space, geographical distance, in other words, functions again, as time, not in terms of linear progression/regression but in terms that construct the simultaneous events of systemic relations as diachronic, as distanced in space and therefore in time (away from our immediate present). This produces binarisms of "here versus there", us and them, "their" history as a colonizer of Aboriginal peoples as separate from "ours." In the case of considerations of global oppression, this inheritance reveals itself in what South Asian Canadian critic Aruna Srivastava appropriately calls the "'they-do-terrible-things-over-there' syndrome" ("Cult" 3) and what I would characterize in the Canadian context as the "at-least-we-weren't-as-bad-to-*our*-Aboriginal-peoples" response.

I put Aboriginal Australian material on the course to provide participants with a sense of the global context of imperialism (following our study of the Canadian context) to

explore further the problematic concepts of "Aboriginality," dominant national identities of the "white settler colonies" of British imperialism (through stereotypes of Australia, Crocodile Dundee among them), and the negotiations with the English language and literary traditions that Aboriginal writing engages in. (And, as I have indicated, I had a good deal of personal investment in trying to create a "do-it-all" course.) I scheduled this material[39] for late in the semester hoping that by then participants would have developed some systemic analysis of imperialism that might forestall some of the problems outlined.[40]

My Place (1987) is by a mixed-race Aboriginal woman who recounts growing up in Perth, Western Australia, believing that she is white. Her family perpetuates this impression in order that she escape the racism they suffered. The text details Morgan's dogged attempts to uncover her family's history, which lead her Grandmother and her great Uncle to share some of their painful histories as virtual slave labourers on northern pastoral stations, and of the terrible secret of incest perpetrated by a white station owner who fathered both Morgan's mother and grandmother. Significantly, the text provides revisionist accounts of Australia's "founding" myths of pioneering white pastoralists.

Responses of class participants to *My Place* in some ways were more contradictory and knotted than those to Canadian materials. They are nonetheless highly instructive and reveal a number of critical and intersecting concerns. These include the vast lack of knowledge among Canadian students of the global history of imperialism and of that in Australia in particular (a product of the Canadian education system and of popular/ dominant culture), as well as the amount of time needed (more than a 13-week course) to provide an adequate comparative/systemic examination of Aboriginal cultural production in Canada and Australia. Responses mark the ease with which, under the very real end-of-

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[39] One of either Colin Johnson's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* or Sally Morgan's *My Place* was required reading, but as Johnson's text was expensive, most participants chose the latter. This section of the course included as context a lecture on the history of colonization in Australia and a group presentation on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

[40] This was not always effective; as one white woman speculated (anthropologically) after reading *Doctor Wooreddy*:

> One of the contrasts between the populations was the issue of clothing. The aboriginals did not wear clothing and the issue of sex was not as prevalent as it was with the white people who did wear clothing. ...I think that by covering ourselves it makes us appear as a sex object that is forbidden. Over time this idea has been woven throughout our society. While in other societies where nudity is more excepted [sic] the attacks on women are much less. I'm not saying we should all walk around naked but it is an interesting connection. (Lahey)

semester time and energy constraints, and in conjunction with nationalist ideologies, some participants reverted (often in sketchy and hastily written entries) to the reading paradigms they had until that point challenged. Here, Morgan troublingly became the representative Aborigine, and Australia became ideologically distanced and reified and therefore unrelated to Canadian readers. Finally, responses indicate the manner in which *My Place* satisfied the unconscious expectations of participants regarding autobiographical form and, once again, reproduced the subjectivity of the "other" either as same or as irreducibly other.[41]

My Place, and the brief historical context provided in class, served the primary pedagogical function in English 385 in terms of addressing the vast knowledge gap of participants regarding the history of colonization in Australia (a gap I had greatly underestimated). And it should be recognized that this is part of the pedagogy of the text. Participants consistently remarked on how, in Cyndie Prpich's words, the text served to "enlighten" her "ignorance with regards to Aboriginal people from Australia." For example, Prpich notes that she felt "rather silly that I thought to myself that this book sounded more about 'Black' people than about 'Indian' people and that she had "always associated 'Black' with Africa and never gave much thought to Australia." Tiffany Leggett writes that she found it "so amazing how two worlds, so physically far apart, could be so closely affected by the same source [imperialism]." While in some ways this response is positive, it also functions once again to erase the creativity and particularity of the narrative—text, narrator, and author serve as history, cultural artefact, and Native Informant.

The text and the course structure therefore were successful in foregrounding participants' vast lack of knowledge about Australia, its Aboriginal peoples and global imperialism. Class discussions regarding the relationship between dominant and popular assumptions about Australian identity ("mateship," Crocodile Dundee, and so on) and the history of imperialism, particularly revealed through the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, were intended, like Morgan's text, to disrupt and intervene in dominant national "multicultural" narratives, as we had explored in the Canadian context. This

[41] I had hesitated to set up the course in the traditional comparative framework, for reasons I've previously outlined. However, in its truncated attention in English 385, the Aboriginal Australian material in some ways reinforced the tendency to make single texts "representative" of entire cultures and histories.

pedagogy, however, did not necessarily forestall some participants' reproduction of the text as equal to author and readily knowable, of Morgan as "representative Aborigine," of the virtual erasure of a consideration of the literary aspects and strategies of Morgan's text, and of the reconstitution of the white Canadian national subject in relation to "the Australian national subject." The following, for example, was Wendy Fehr's initial response, which she later critiqued:

> This book was very Australian. The language, the colloquialism and the topic were in many ways unique to Australia. I think the fact that I lived over there for a short while definitely helped me to better understand the book. My experience over there was also a factor in my enjoyment of the book. Morgan would mention something and I would smile in acknowledgement of my own experiences there.[42]

I detect in the responses a genuine uncertainty as to "what to do" with the "difference"–racial, geographic, historical, national–that the text articulates. Haley Wilson records and critiques the questions the text raised for her:

> I must admit that reading Sally Morgan's *My Place* was disturbing to me as it revealed my own ignorance. I was wondering "why are we reading an Australian Aboriginal book?" Actually, I was wondering what an Australian aboriginal is. I was kind of expecting the history to be the same as that of First Nations people in North America. I also thought the term Aboriginal always meant "Indian," that all people called Aboriginal are basically from the same "race." But, obviously, I was forced to challenge all of these notions.

Some participants tried to incorporate the text and its "difference" into comfortable comparative national or nationalist comparative paradigms. More prevalent was the reversion to the desire to identify with the narrator/author as Same, with its elision of difference. Pointedly, if disturbingly funny, is a white man's response in which gender, age, race, class, history, and nation disappear under the sweeping desire for Same, an extreme example of this trend. He wrote: "Nan's [the grandmother's] smoking reminds me of myself. I don't burn everything. Her smoking is an escape and I wonder if it's mine too! Tiger [the Morgans' pet] reminds me of Patches, our first dog. They both tore out the door any good chance they got."

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[42] I would speculate, too, that the manner that multiculturalism makes "cultural difference" seem readily recognized and understood (food and dress as metonymic of entire cultures and histories), also affected participants' responses to the text.

During the course, participants had come to recognize, in the Canadian context at least, that race is a socially produced category and that Aboriginality need not be tied directly to race but is a fluid process of culture and history. Recognition of the diversity of Aboriginal groups, languages, and practices in Canada helped to unsettle imperialist assumptions about race. However, in responding to *My Place*, perhaps because it actively separates cultural identity (Aboriginality) from skin colour, participants grappled anew with "race," reverting, I think, to familiar constructs out of the fear of the unfamiliar and struggling, as my pedagogy was designed to do, to explore the limits of our knowledge:

> I have had to come up with a new definition of what it means to be Aboriginal, without the concept of race being part of it....I had to know, if Australian Aboriginals and North American Aboriginals are not the same, how are they different? The answer is that North American Aboriginals are brown, where Australian Aboriginals are black. So back I come to the whole notion of race, of categorizations based on skin colour. I feel like I have come right back to where I started. And I'm embarrassed by my own ignorance.

I would argue that *My Place*, like *Half-breed* and *In Search of April Raintree*, actively deconstructs concepts of Aboriginality based in skin colour, even as (as I have suggested), the text has been deeply implicated in white Australian nationalism in its reception. (And it is here, I recognize now, that these participants' grapplings did not really address what "whiteness" means; a signal of my inability at the time to adequately raise the question).

As with Campbell's *Half-breed*, participants homogenized Morgan the narrator and the author as one "real" individual, which is not surprising considering the inherited traditional assumptions about autobiography, reference, and authority. It is interesting, further, that, perhaps because of the inflections of race, gender, and the history of autobiography, some participants also easily slipped into referring to the narrator/author in the first-person, as "Sally," again a symptom of the problematic aspects of the process of identification.

Moreover, as with participants' responses to Campbell's *Half-breed*, there is an underlying desire for, through celebration of, a particular teleology of the Other in autobiography in characterizations of narrators/authors as strong, powerful survivors. However, this characterization may not be far removed from the stereotypical wise Native

informant whose role it is to educate whites on our shortcomings nor from the teleology of the "the 'progress' forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason" (McClintock 292). In this scenario, systemic oppression and suffering are viewed almost as necessary preconditions for the teleology of the desired Other's achievement of selfhood (and as Same), as in one white woman's response to *My Place:* "It's all the combinations and situations that make this matriarchal family what it is. Without their struggles and obsessions and obscurities they would not be the powerful people they become."[43]

As I have discussed, the narrative processes of *My Place* have been popularly read n terms of what Stephen Muecke calls the "repressive hypothesis"—that the narrative *reveals* a pre-existing coherent Aboriginal self. Certainly, many of the text's features adhere to the tradition of autobiography (its beginning, if not conclusion, in a linear structure and in a retrospective accounting of the history of the individual), such that participants' unconscious expectations, not suprisingly, were satisfied, as indicated by the complete absence of negative critiques of the text and of commentary on aesthetic or literary concerns.

Certainly the *assumption*, popular and critical, that Aboriginality, as represented in this text and as historical fact is an unchanging essence to be discovered or recovered bears scrutiny in that it risks reinforcing racial constructs. In English 385, participants, likely because of the location of Morgan's text as "representative" in the course materials and because of their assumptions about Australia, Aboriginal Australians, and so on, did not critique the concept of "Aboriginality" in this context but implicitly accepted it as a given. The responses to *My Place* therefore reveal the operation once again of the binarism of racial constructs—of black/white—such that Morgan's history as a mixed-race person is erased and, as the text progresses, she is read as, almost literally, and troublingly so, if not explicitly, as becoming "blacker," "more Aboriginal."

If a critique of Aboriginality as a fluid social construct (with, of course, material effects) which takes on particular meanings in particular locations, was not fully addressed in participants' responses to *My Place*, what did emerge was the recognition of the role of

[43] This student did not fill in the section on the consent form indicating "identification" but does identify

nationalism, specifically white Canadian nationalism, as affecting and limiting responses to the text. Participants also noted in relation to *Half-breed* and *In Search of April Raintree* that a vast gap in historical knowledge regarding imperialism can lead to assumptions that literary texts on such subjects, particularly those that take up the form of autobiography, are accurate historical fact, as one participant came to recognize:

> I think my response to Morgan's book was much more objective because of my lack of experience with these people. I felt more sympathetic towards the search of Morgan than I did for someone such as Richard in *Keeper'n Me*....Unlike Maria [Campbell], Sally has grown up in Australia, a country whose culture I do not really know or understand. I have much more belief in what Sally says because I do not know any different. (Fehr)

By the end of the course, a few participants had developed the critical awareness to be wary of this desire. As one white woman studying nursing recognized, dominant nationalisms participate in the production and reproduction of both historical amnesia and racial and racist constructs, in the "at-least-we-weren't-as-bad-to-our-Aborigines" syndrome of national white guilt:

> In some ways Sally Morgan's story sounded foreign. Language was different, cultural practices, education and laws all different. I immediately noticed my increased comfort level in reading about atrocities that happened far away from me. I could read along, be shocked and saddened, even angry, but feel safe in knowing that these terrible injustices happened far far away from me. I had to forcibly remind myself throughout this book that while many things may have had a foreign twist due to the geographic setting of Morgan's story, the issues, and the force behind the issues are all to [sic] similar to a very local, very Canadian situation....We cannot afford to accept one as a terrible injustice without acknowledging and accepting the other. I think that studying Canadian First Nations people prior to looking at Australia is very important so that we, as Canadian students, don't become too superior feeling toward the abusers described by Morgan.

The responses to *My Place* among this particular group of participants, finally, were in many ways bifurcated between the imperialist reproduction of the Aboriginal autobiographical Other and her text and a productive (if uneasy) awareness of the role that national and geographic location play in processes of reading and interpretation. What at first appears in the case of the former to be a reversion to earlier reading paradigms that had until that point had been generally effectively critiqued is a function in part of how

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herself as a white woman in her journal.

universities and the knowledge they produce are structured to reproduce whiteness and therefore resist anti-racist pedagogies. Undergraduate students in this neo-conservative era in which education is administered as a business, and a job in the corporate marketplace is the baseline for success, are understandably hard-pressed at the end of a full-time semester to maintain the energy required to do anti-racist work. It is understandable, though not to be complacently accepted, that the power of the inherited ideologies of rationalism, imperialism, autobiography, and race would reassert themselves as "natural" as a result.

Moreover, I think it is instructive to consider the more problematic readings of *My Place* in terms of the role that popular nationalist ideologies and comparatist critical models have on the education system as a whole. Clearly, the simplistic notions of here/there, of the separation of similarities and differences as isolated essentialized entities, of the ownership of "our Aborigines" and "their Aborigines" that informs comparatist models (implicitly or explicitly) is inadequate to the task of increasing awareness of systemic relations and of enabling anti-racist activism in the classroom and beyond.

On Not-Concluding the Anti-Racist Classroom

The proof of effective critical anti-racist pedagogy is not solely in the critique of dominant forms of knowledge but in their transformation in and beyond the classroom setting as well. The vast majority of participants (I can think of only two exceptions in a class of 45) in this particular course energetically took up the challenges of anti-racist pedagogy, posing and thoughtfully exploring for themselves the vital question "what can I/we *do* to fight racism?" This is a mark less of my personal success as instructor (though I would like to claim that) than a telling indication of how traditional pedagogy stifles the exhilarating agency of university students. While participants' journals by the end of the semester often reverted to paradigms they had earlier critiqued (a function of the time constraints and end-of-semester pressures of the university), the final projects that participants produced for this course were stunning in their creativity and commitment to

the exploration, from their own locations, histories of the oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and how they might understand and intervene in those processes.[44]

Several white women, for example, took up Paul Kivel's *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Fight for Social Justice* and Anne Bishop's *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression* in writing personal/critical essays of their own histories and privileges as white middle-class women (work which also function to articulate the specificities of the general category of whiteness). Two education majors did a collaborative project that developed anti-racist activities for a primary classroom, and two others developed anti-racist activity centres on Aboriginal and Canadian culture and history. Another white woman conducted a photography tour of Calgary, documenting the pervasiveness of the stereotypes of the "Imaginary Indian"; a white woman interviewed a local Aboriginal artist, invited him to class as a guest speaker, and prepared a thoughtful response on the politics of marketing Aboriginal art; a white man participated in a sweat lodge, and wrote of his responses and critiqued them. An Aboriginal woman raised in white foster care conducted interviews in her family and community to compare the benefits and costs of white foster care versus remaining in impoverished reserve conditions (a project emerging from the readings of *In Search of April Raintree*). Other participants wrote and critiqued creative pieces exploring their own experiences of racism. One Aboriginal man wrote creative, autobiographical pieces, and another, who identified as gay, researched and wrote an essay on gay Aboriginal literature.

Our shared grappling with the immense systemic racism against Aboriginal peoples has foregrounded the need to name racism, and to make multiculturalism a subject of critique, in a location where these operate as "commonsense" practices. As instructor, I gained invaluable knowledge from the students' research for the final projects; from their journals I came to appreciate more fully the complexity of the relationship of the individual to the systemic, in all its permutations, and I continue to appreciate the participants' commitment to the course and pedagogy. By reflecting on this course and its processes, I have learned, and continue to do so, a great deal about my own whiteness, my own

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[44] I am grateful to Aruna Srivastava for providing through her own teaching an example of how these projects and processes can be developed in the "English literature" classroom.

personal and intellectual histories, and my negotiations with institutional authority.[45] And I have come to reconsider the *potential* of the desire for and processes of "identification" of white women students with Aboriginal narrators/characters/authors/individuals in an anti-racist pedagogy.

Certainly, such identification, as I've suggested, is problematic when non-Aboriginal readers attempt to deflect our implication in white privilege and racism by finding points of connection with the text, by "relating to" specific representations through the lens of individual experience. And certainly, this process of identification also often works to elide the specific narrative and generic functions and ideologies and effects of given texts, such that the approach to minority literature as transparent cultural artefact is re-invoked. Having said that, however, I think it is also crucial to consider how an anti-racist feminist pedagogy *might* work in conjunction with this desire for identification (in which, as I discuss in my conclusion, I too unconsciously participate). This desire in many ways indicates a genuine wish to "understand" and "learn" cross-culturally (even when the language for systemic analysis is absent), in support of the politics of decolonization of the texts themselves. It is not surprising that for white middle-class readers a comfortable initial position in discussions or race and class privilege is "me-too-ism"—the defensive desire to identify with the oppressed rather than with the oppressor. But if an anti-racist pedagogy is able to engage participants in the recognition of our locations as multiply constituted, as locating us in both positions of privilege and of oppression, and accepting that our own experience is perhaps an appropriate location from which to *begin* the unlearning of privilege, then the process of identification need not be a political or

[45] It has certainly helped me in my teaching university transfer courses at another postsecondary institution—Red Crow Community College on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta. There, at an institution developing an Aboriginal curriculum, I have been the white instructor of all-Aboriginal classes, and my white authority takes on different nuances; there is no need, for example, to convince participants of the very existence of whiteness as a dominant social category, and yet there I am, holding all the authority in the classroom. That my university-training teaching strategies have proven in some ways inadequate to the specific needs of this community (even as they have been productive in helping students survive the university system), reveals to me not only the need for local practice to inform theory, but the need for critical teachers to move outside of their institutional locations in order to understand the needs—and political agency and aspirations—of their student constituencies. Since I have moved out of the University of Calgary context I have become involved with community anti-racist activism and am seeking instruction in the Blackfoot language. I interpret these personal/professional shifts as signals of both the vitality of postcolonial, feminist, and anti-racist/critical pedagogy theory and their limits, in encouraging me to locate myself and my actions in systemic contexts, and in not preparing me as adequately as I would have liked, to do this work.

theoretical taboo. There is a crucial distinction to be made, then, between students' desires to "relate to" the characters of literary texts, which in fact are expressions of desires to "identify with as Same" or "construct as Same" as defence strategy, and the complex articulation of one's *relationship,* as reader, to the systemic contexts of the production of the text. And it is here that critical race theory and anti-racist materials are crucial in the development of anti-racist awareness and participants' critical language.[46]

In this course, for example, a starting point for many participants (and for white women in particular, who have some experience of gender oppression and a language to articulate it) was to "imagine what it would be like" to suffer the forms of oppression described by the writers on the course. In some white women's attempts to "identify with" Culleton's April, who can pass as white but continues to suffer racism, classism and sexism, for example, whiteness as a social and political category became visible, marked rather than unmarked, and white readers come to recognize their own white bodies as racialized.[47] For one white woman, imagining what it would be like to be constructed as a "Native informant" proved a useful starting point for addressing her white privilege:

> My lack of knowledge about Metis life allows me to accept any information as all encompassing. But I think it is more than just lack of knowledge. I keep thinking back to the article we read with the questions about being a minority/majority. One of the statements that I clearly recall is "I never am asked to speak on behalf of my race." It seems to be true that dominant culture (white) wants to hear a single voice representing a specific group. It is an extreme attempt to oversimplify. Imagine how white society would react if we were told we were allowed one or two speakers to speak on "white life." People would be appalled. And yet we expect this from others, as though they are not complex societies comprised of many individuals.[48]

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[46] Such materials include Anne Bishop's *Becoming an Ally* and Paul Kivel's *Uprooting Racism.*

[47] As Haley Wilson reflected in her journal,

> I am not in a world where essentially everything is against me and I have very few or limited resources. At least not in comparison to the struggles and obstacles which the Native authors in this course have described. As a woman, I have had to deal with the message that I must be thin and beautiful in order to be worthwhile. But at least these messages are being challenged and a feminist movement is alive. Plus, I am provided with the message that simply by the virtue of being white that I am special....Imagine what it would be like to be labelled [as "worthless, inferior, alcoholic, stupid, poor, lazy losers!"] and then have dominant society do its very best to put you in that position.

[48] Here the participant is referring to Peggy McIntosh's article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."

It is imperative that responses of "identification" by Aboriginal students also be considered. This is not to suggest that Aboriginal students' responses to literary texts not be as rigorously assessed or critiqued as those of non-Aboriginal students (which amounts to a renewed process of marginalization), but that these responses be recognized also as culturally and historically located, and specifically so, particularly in terms of the politics of representation.

This course and my experience of it, finally, have foregrounded for me some significant gaps in postcolonial and critical pedagogy theory in particular—the absence of attention to the specifics of Aboriginal histories and the locations of Aboriginal students in the anti-racist classroom, and the absence of Aboriginal pedagogy theory being the most glaring examples.

In a class in which white and Aboriginal men comprise a striking minority, it is difficult to assess my feminist, anti-racist pedagogy without dangerously generalizing from the course work of five men. Yet, that each of the three white men in the course granted me permission to quote from their journals, and that the two Aboriginal men in the course felt safe enough to pursue projects that had a personal component (the writing and critique of autobiographical pieces, in one case, and the exploration, from a gay Aboriginal perspective, of gay Aboriginal writing) suggests to me a certain degree of success in creating an environment of safety for Aboriginal men in a predominantly white classroom, and in engaging white men in the processes of feminist, anti-racism. One of the white men attended a sweat lodge as part of a final project (and powerfully critiqued how his own assumptions and history shaped his perceptions of the experience); another, while not doing "well" in the sense of a high final grade, did a class presentation critiquing how he had unknowingly perpetuated racism in his high school years, and went on the next semester to do a similar course in international literatures with an anti-racist focus. Yet, the very question of how feminist anti-racist pedagogy affects white men raises for me an urgent necessity, that critical race theory engage not only with Aboriginality as produced and reproduced in the classroom, but with gender studies and critiques and transformations of masculinity as well.

My experiences in teaching English 385: Special Topics in Aboriginal Literature, moreover, have made more visible to me the institutional limits circumscribing anti-racist work in the university setting; not only have I come to appreciate how much one can (or cannot) accomplish in a mere 13 weeks but I recognize more clearly the marginal location of this course, and its pedagogy, within the larger academic system. A single course, then, can only accomplish so much within these confines, and must be accompanied by a range of other activities—activism—that transform university structures, pedagogy, and the

knowledges that accompany students with their degrees beyond the university setting (and into elementary and high school classrooms in particular).

The critique and analysis of dominant knowledges, then, is not the end point of anti-racist theory and pedagogy, although this is often assumed to be the case in literary studies, but a necessary starting point of the development of a transformative politics within and outside of the university. Within the university, the advocacy of hiring Aboriginal faculty, as the history and experience of this course reveal, is an urgent necessity in such a politics. Literary, cultural, and even critical pedagogical theories will inevitably fail to match their claims to radicality without the development of a language and a politics of activism, of what to do with this new and transformative knowledge developed in the classroom.

And, I would like to stress, anti-racist pedagogy and activism can powerfully enrich our own reading and critical practices, and help direct those practices towards meeting our stated goals of participation in liberatory politics. The remainder of this study therefore comprises my detailed readings of five texts, readings that have been enhanced and deepened by my experiences of this course.

Chapter Five

Monica Clare's *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* (1978)

Introduction

Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl was marketed as "the first novel by an Australian Aboriginal woman" (Foreward vii), but it is, as its editors point out, based closely on Clare's life. Clare was born in 1924, at Dareel on Mooni River, near Mungindi, Queensland. Like that of her main character Isabelle, Clare's father was an Aboriginal shearer, and her mother an English woman who died in childbirth. The remaining family roamed the Darling region until the children were taken into welfare in 1931. Clare worked as a domestic labourer and then a factory worker, where her labour politics developed (Horner xi-xii). Clare died in 1973, before the narrative was completed. Non-Aboriginal friends Jack Horner, assisted by Mona Brand, edited the text and brought it to publication in 1978.

The opening sentences of *Karobran* begin the text's intervention into the dominant discourses of race in Australia: "The small, blond haired blue-eyed lad of five years walked over and stood beside his brown haired, dark eyed seven years old sister as Mrs Brown came into sight on the verandah above them. She looked enormous" (1). Here, a white woman literally towers over two mixed-race children—Morris, the boy who can pass as white, and Isabelle, his darker-skinned sister (and the "novel's" major character)—foreshadowing how these children's lives are to be controlled by whiteness, by ideologies of race constructed and reproduced through the white Australian nation-state and its "welfare" system. The novel traces the childhood and early adulthood of Isabelle, from this moment, in which Isabelle and her brother Morris are made wards of the state because their white mother has died and their loving full-blood Aboriginal father is unable to provide for them (primarily because of the racism rampant in the Depression outback's struggle over scarce jobs).

Karobran follows Isabelle through her placement in different white foster homes, some racist and brutal, some loving and liberal, her entry into domestic service, and finally,

when she is released from the welfare system, into the wartime working class. It details the lack of control she has over her life, a result of the state-produced lack of education and knowledge, epitomized in her constant search for information about her brother's placement in the welfare system, and in what she later discovers to be her father's relentless but futile fight to get his children back. While written in the third-person voice, the narrative traces the history and processes of Isabelle as she unlearns this state-produced internalized inferiority and develops self-awareness and agency, particularly through the labour movement, and has an empowering relationship with a white labour and Aboriginal rights activist, Bill. The text concludes with Isabelle's heightened awareness of racism and sexism in the labour movement, leading her away from the city and into the communities of those she calls "her father's people," where she hopes to gain insight into the true desires and aspirations of Aboriginal people in order that she fight for their rights.

Karobran powerfully critiques the racism in the labour movement and the ideology of white Australian nationalism as the "working-man's paradise," in terms of race and gender. Here Clare makes a powerful statement regarding how an anti-racist alliance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia might productively develop, in terms of collective organization (as in the labour movement) and in interpersonal terms. This powerful theorizing of class and race alliance dances carefully with liberalism, with an apparent desire to not alienate white readers nor, by extension, those white families whom Clare knew and loved. This signals the text's negotiations with the ideology of form, the politics of audience, and the influence of non-Aboriginal writers, editors, and publishers. Crucially, the narrative marks the difficult location of the mixed-race writer whose autobiographical/fictional narrator is made increasingly aware of and struggles with her in-between identity in a nation built on strict racial definition and opposition.

Agency

Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl traces the effects of discourses of gender, race, class, and nation on processes of mixed-race Aboriginal subjectivity, and suggests how that subjectivity is transformed and transformative as part of a politics of

solidarity and decolonization. It clearly connects this history of the individual to the history of white nation-building, colonization, and its destructive constructions of "Aboriginality."

In *Karobran*, attention to the role of parental agency is focused on Isabelle's Aboriginal father, Dave Herbert, and the limits placed on his agency by racist state policies and Depression economics. That the father is the focus of parental agency, however, is triggered by the absence, the death in childbirth, of Isabelle's white mother, and it is with her death that the narrative begins. The text is suggestive in the way that it constructs this white mother, in her absence, as rebellious and transgressive in her decision to marry an Aboriginal man (a rebelliousness that Isabelle later indicates was latent in her and which begins to emerge when she finds class and racial solidarity). The comments of the white woman, Mrs Brown (who looks after the family after the mother's death) to Isabelle's father indicate the class politics of this decision (and perhaps a white failure/defensiveness regarding the acknowledgement of racism); but Mrs Brown's account of the white mother's actions also suggest the mother's refusal to conform to the race politics of white nation-building:

> Her family disowned her when she first went off with you. They even sold out, an' took themselves back to the big smoke; but I don't suppose you can blame them for that. Bessie was their only one and they made no bones about the fact that they wanted her to settle with someone with a bit of money. (5)

This mixed marriage and the white mother's death become the excuse for the state's intervention, which so powerfully affects Isabelle's life and identity. The death of the white mother and its impact on the family suggest the power of the state's construction of and valuing of white maternal agency (even when transgressive) above Aboriginal paternal agency.[1] Herbert loses his children to the welfare system because of systemic racism rather than the welfare office's stated reasons of his joblessness and his son Morris's weak health. And because Morris passes as white, the implication is that he and Isabelle are placed in the predominantly white welfare system rather than under the Aboriginal "protection" branch of the government, though Isabelle, even in adulthood, is not told this explicitly. When she visits a welfare officer, for example, he tells her only that

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[1] While the narrative is not explicit on this count, it does beg the question as to what state intervention, if any, there would have been if the white mother had lived and the Aboriginal father had died.

> [u]sually there was another Department that handled coloured children, but he himself did not know much about this. Possibly the Officer who took them might have had some doubt as to how much Aboriginal she and Morris had in them.
>
> Smiling at Isabelle, he told her how lucky she and her brother had been under this Department, because they had been well cared for and had been given the chance to learn something at school. (57)

Isabelle's father is drawn as a gentle, loving, affectionate and hardworking man, victim to a cruelly racist and often-overwhelming system. His agency as father, as worker, is perpetually limited by racism—by individuals who deny him work, and by an entire system that functions to take his children from him and ensures that he will never see them again. The narrative poignantly evokes the last moments of family unity at a police station, prior to Isabelle's placement in a girls' home, and it is here, in imagining and representing the intensity of both the father's love and of his powerlessness, that the limits on his agency are clearly drawn:

> He wondered how *could* he tell these two small children of his, what the welfare officer had told him: that they were going to be taken away from him, and that he did not have any say in it anymore....Isabelle looked into her Dad's face. She knew then that she would always remember him as he was at this moment....All three of them knew, each in his own heart, that it would be a long, long time if ever, before they would be all together again like this. (33)

This, then, is the context of the construction of Isabelle's subjectivity, circumscribed, even controlled, at this stage, by dominant discourses of race and Aboriginality. And it is in this context that her awareness of, and her implicit struggle with, her identity as a mixed-race person in a world that literally thinks and acts in "black and white" becomes tangible.

Clare evokes the powerlessness of two children caught in an overwhelming system, particularly in their desperate need for love, affection, and stability, shown in their unconditional love for and trust in their kind white foster parents, the Manburys. But she is also careful to stress the agency of Isabelle, however circumscribed by powers beyond her control that agency is. This is seen particularly in Isabelle's continual efforts to protect her brother in a variety of abusive and dangerous situations, as in the beatings they receive from Tom Wall (23), and in her constant search to locate Morris once they are removed from the Manburys and separated by the welfare system.

Clare's description of the period Isabelle spends in domestic service is interesting in the way that it evokes both Isabelle's profound internalization of the dominant system's norms and ideologies as well as the beginnings of her recognition and unlearning of those ideologies. The narrative traces how the welfare state has produced Isabelle's ignorance by isolating her so completely from others in her situation. Regarding her wages, for example, she believes the few shillings she receives from her employers are all she earns, while money is also placed in the bank without her knowledge. Only after she discovers that she is to receive a pay increase on her birthday, and is entitled to paid holidays, does she ponder how she is discharged from employer after employer on her birthdays and holidays. Even so, she has internalized the system to the point where she blames herself. When discharged yet again, she becomes "very depressed" and feels that "people did not want her" (54). Her agency and resistance do begin to surface in this period, however, when, on a single occasion, Isabelle rebels against her "employers" by staying out past nine p.m. to watch a movie with a friend: "Isabelle, always feeling the urge to rebel but never before being quite game enough to do it, almost lost this job...for the first time Isabelle was cheeky to her elders" (55).

Isabelle's transformation from being "subjected to" the control of the state to being a subject with agency in the fight for workers' and Aboriginal rights does not occur until her entry into the wartime working class. Discharged from the welfare system at the age of 18, she is, as the state has ensured, unprepared to be entirely self-sufficient and is generally unskilled, if determined. She does not, for example, know how to budget or what an employment reference is (65), and while full of hopes for freedom and independence, she quickly discovers "how empty the word 'Freedom' can be" (58). The narrative traces how the oppressive discourses of race, gender, and nation operate such that they are normalized for Isabelle, to the point where, on her first night of freedom from the control of the state welfare system and from her forced entry into domestic service, she is not entirely equipped to function independently:

> The first night on her own was one that Isabelle could not really describe, but felt intensely. All the time she felt that she was doing something that she should not be doing....Waking out of a dream the next morning, Isabelle wondered where she was; she quickly gathered her wits about her and realised that in all her excitement about obtaining her own room, she had not given a thought to buying any food for herself.

> This was the first time that she did not have anything to eat in the morning, and it was only the beginning of many missed meals. (60)

It is Isabelle's exposure to and involvement in the labour movement (which begins by a chance meeting with the white man, Bill, in a restaurant), and her experiences of sexism and racism in the workplace that catalyze her profound transformation.[2] It is here that Isabelle comes to analyze the specificities of racism and sexism as they operate in the capitalist machinery, and here that her determination grows; she refuses jobs that pay women less than men, "remembering the meetings that she had attended, where women had agreed to certain decisions about not working for less money than the men" (65). In meeting an African-American soldier who shares his history of segregation, she finds that "she too was determined that from now on, she would not let these things happen to her" (69).

Isabelle's recognition of racism in the labour movement energizes her to leave the city and search for her "father's people" in order that she learn of the aspirations of Aboriginal people. She attends a union meeting in which a white man speaks of the plight of Aboriginal peoples and the necessity of solidarity, and her dissatisfaction with the race dynamics of the meeting offers a cogent analysis of white liberalism in operation: "Although she felt this man was sincere about helping the Aboriginal people, she knew instinctively that is was wrong to do it like this. What she really wanted was to see a Dark person standing where this man stood, and telling the white people what his people wanted" (78).

Isabelle's growing awareness of the specific operations of systemic racism, which had of course shaped her life (but for which she had little analysis), marks more clearly her struggle with her mixed-race identity. It is in the final sections of the narrative that Isabelle most consistently makes reference to her "father's people" and "mother's people." She is unable to identify completely with either one, signalling a sense of loss over how she has no clear place in the black-and-white world of postwar Australia. Identification with the white women such as Miss Manbury has proven limited—state intervention and

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[2] This chance encounter is presented in a rather implausible way. It is unclear, however, because of the narrative's production history, whether or not this moment in the text is as Clare wrote it or is an intervention of her editors.

constructions of race and Aboriginality have always left Isabelle an outsider to the world of white women as well as to that of Aboriginal people.

Dissatisfied with the "society of her mother," in its inability to provide her with a complete identity, Isabelle returns to the country of her father in search of answers, to questions of her own identity and to the systemic problems she has come to recognize; she wants to find out, as she puts it, what the Aboriginal peoples want. Here she becomes more rebellious towards exploitative white employers in the fruit growing industry. In one instance, her growing activism and her increasing sense of a split identity emerge: "...sometimes, Isabelle managed to have her last say before being shown off the property. However, she never smiled when she told them, 'If it was not for *their* [Aboriginal workers'] sweat, fella, you wouldn't have any money either" (90, my emphasis). In reflecting on her childhood and adolescence in the welfare system, she comes to the realization that it "had been very wrong of those who had done it" (88), and while the system had made her a "one sided determined person" it had "also deprived her of so much knowledge of her Dad's people, knowledge that she could not fully absorb in the years that would now be left to her" (88).

The state and its racist policies, then, have proven all too effective in severing family ties and the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices; yet, because of the very operations of racism, the state has also failed in its policies of assimilation. Mixed-race Aboriginal peoples like Isabelle, the narrative suggests, are painfully caught in a vacuum of identity, and have only fragments of dispersion and history from which to create solidarity and a new future. Upon returning to her father's unnamed country (the lack of specificity an indication of this dislocation, perhaps), Isabelle is approached by a relative who recognizes her father's features in her, and his few words mark by their understatement the vast damage done to a core of Aboriginal identity, kinship: "My name's Ted, an' we're related somehow, but I forget how it come about now. He sounded a bit sad" (92).

It is, significantly, through Isabelle's return to her father's people, her identification with *place*, their acceptance of her as one of their own despite her mixed-race ancestry, and her joining the fight for Aboriginal rights that she begins to heal: "For the first time ever, she sensed the comforting closeness of her Dad and Mum together as it flowed deeply

inside her body and eased the ache she had carried in her own heart for so many years" (95). It is, finally, through Clare's delineation of the transformation of Isabelle's subjectivity from that of victim of the state to active agent in processes of decolonization and their necessary acts of solidarity, *despite* the lack of a fully coherent sense of self, that *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* makes a powerful statement regarding the transformative potential of representations of agency emerging from the contradictions of history.

Form

Karobran: The Story of An Aboriginal Girl raises a number of intriguing questions regarding the imbrication of race, nation, and the ideology of form. These emerge in terms of the conditions of the production of the text, its non-Aboriginal editing (the processes of which are unclear), and marketing and reception as a novel. It also emerges in terms of Clare's decision to write her lifestory in the third-person voice, to make the geographical and historical specificities vague and generalized and hence "representative." Among the most striking aspects of the text are its form, its compilation history, the ways it traverses the ideology of both novelistic and autobiographical form, its "framing" for a white middle-class "multicultural" Australian readership, and the ways it enters and disrupts dominant discourses on race, gender, history, and class in Australia. It is not coincidental, further, that Clare's representations of whiteness and racism in Australia entered visibility just as Australia's policy of multiculturalism was taking hold of and shaping the national psyche.

Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl is introduced by an excess of publishing conventions: it is preceded by a Publisher's Note, a Foreword, Acknowledgements, a Preface, *and* an Introduction—each written by a separate hand, each emerging from a specific location. While these commentaries certainly function to frame and contain the text in many ways, there are tensions among them that work to disrupt that authority. In particular, these introductory comments (one claiming the text to be a novel, and another tracing its autobiographical detail in relation to Clare's life) actively, if unintentionally, function to blur the generic boundaries of novel and "autobiography."

In considering how this particular narrative is framed, then, it is useful to begin with the title, *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl*. There is a truth claim being made in this title—this is *the* definitive story, the *real* story. This is an intervention into accepted discourses, into another "story" that has made false claims to accuracy. The indefinite article, in turn, and in conjunction with the phrase "the story," suggests at once a vagueness—"an Aboriginal girl"—and a representativeness: this could be "any" Aboriginal girl. The play between the specificity of the definite and indefinite articles here is evocative; the text both enters into dominant expectations of what constitutes an "Aboriginal text" (representativeness, the "untold story of all Aborigines") and disrupts them—this is the story of but one Aboriginal girl. It shifts between, or, perhaps, connects the individual and the systemic. It signals its entry into certain discourses—of Aboriginality, of gender, of the relation between the two. What in fact is the most prominent word of the title, "*Karobran*," finally, participates in this process of engagement with and resistance to dominant discourses. Unglossed, it may mark for the English-speaking, non-Aboriginal reader "difference."

The Publisher's Note provides a translation; "*Karobran*," it states, is "a northern New South Wales Aboriginal word meaning *together*, or, *togetherness*." Again, there is specificity and vagueness here: the publisher fails to provide the tribal name for the "northern New South Wales Aboriginal" group. This perhaps caters to dominant constructions of the nation, of the geographic and ideological spaces of Australia (i.e., Aboriginal self-naming doesn't matter) or, perhaps, signals the loss of specific tribal groups, languages and histories. At the same time, the information helps to frame the disruptions of dominant discourses evident within the title—again, the relations among a specific, Aboriginal collectivity (*Karobran*), dominant constructions of history (the "real" story versus "the" dominant story), a majority population, and an individual named by, contained by, the categories "Aboriginal" and "female."

What strikes me also about these various introductory notes is not only that each emerges from a specific location and enters discourses of race, "Aboriginality," literature, and history from specific points, but also how, taken together, the seemingly simple assertion in the title, the promise, of "the" singular uncontestable story, is productively

disrupted. The Publisher's Note, for example, is situated within the imperial binarism of Self and Other, attempting to reverse the power but not disrupt the hierarchical structure: "increasingly people all over the world, particularly young people," the unnamed writer states, "are coming to recognize that it [an Aboriginal way of life] is the only way human beings will be able to live at all in the world of tomorrow. The final victory may yet be to the Aborigines" (n. pag.). This note makes an appeal to "what Monica Clare believed in," closely linking text and author, and setting up an autobiographical reading.

The Foreword, in turn, again written by an unnamed writer, declares the text "perhaps the first novel by an Australian Aboriginal Woman." This sentence betrays a narrative of progress in literary studies—the notion that writing, and the achievement of the novel form, no less—is a mark of progress, of civilization, of assimilation. (This type of introduction, and the history behind it, of course, is not new.[3]) The Foreword states that the text is "closely based on the author's experience growing up as a part-Aboriginal in the N.S.W. white community"; and, despite Clare's death prior to the narrative's completion, "the novel as presented now *should however prove an important insight into the personal experiences of an Aboriginal girl growing up in a white society*" (vii, my emphasis). Here, then, the text seems to be located in competing frames—individualist, representational, autobiographical, fictional.

The Acknowledgements, in turn, foreground the material processes by which this text has entered visibility, including various forms of "authorization"—Clare's husband's approval of the manuscript, funding by the Aboriginal Arts Board of Australia, and the work/collaboration of many people, several of whom are named.[4] In the preface that follows, moreover, Faith Bandler calls *Karobran* "a Social novel in several ways" (ix), constructing the text and its reception in a different light—this time granting it the authority of the novel. Given the disparagement of social realism within literary studies, however, this authority, or the literary status conferred on the text by its labelling as "novel," is

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[3] Little has been written, however, on this particular phenomenon in terms of the entry of Aboriginal Australian literature in English in Canada, or of Aboriginal Canadian literature in English in Australia.

[4] The editors, without openly declaring their non-Aboriginal status, reinforce a binarism of Self and Other by reinforcing a stereotype of Aboriginal peoples as essentially "wise," by thanking "the very many people of Aboriginal descent who have since 1957 taught us some ancient wisdom and shared their personal insights and friendship" (viii).

diminished or at least reframed by its labelling as "social novel." Nonetheless, Bandler appropriately draws attention to the fact that any labour solidarity that emerged from the Depression excluded Aboriginal Australians, and Aboriginal women in particular, and that this is part of the context of production of the text: "...unsurprisingly, black women plumbed the depths of misery unrelieved by sympathy or understanding from any quarter. Theirs, without doubt, was the worst fate of all" (ix).

Bandler's concluding comment on the narrative—that "because it is written without rancor or bitterness, the poignancy is brought home to the reader with redoubled effect"—strikes me as inaccurate. The narrative's tracing of the horrendous treatment and state-produced powerlessness of the Aboriginal characters speaks volumes in terms of underlying fury at the injustice of an overwhelming system. Bandler's reading to my mind is rather an indication of the operation of the ideology of multiculturalism and its problematic expectations of Aboriginal literature and how it "should" address historical systemic oppression.

The "Introduction," the final framing commentary prior to the text, is written by yet another hand, that of Jack Horner. Here Horner makes several unproblematized claims to authority; he describes Clare's mother, for example, as "English and physically very fair, blonde-haired and blue-eyed, and high-spirited" (xi). Except for stating that he knew Clare, Horner offers no information as to his sources or his authority. There are some interesting historical linkages made in terms of the homes in which Clare was fostered, and in which she served as a domestic worker, but there is also a romanticization of the Woodbury family, which fostered Clare and her brother and appears as the fictional Manburys in Clare's text. As I analyze in more detail, this idealization of the individual white family may function to elide how white liberalism is an effect of privilege and the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples and how such representations are implicated in liberal multiculturalism.

One of the interesting aspects of Horner's introduction is that he quite actively conflates author and text, but, importantly, points out an "omission" in the narrative regarding Clare's marriage:

> In *Karobran*, Monica's first marriage is not mentioned. It was a disaster for Monica: her first husband, a brilliant methods engineer with a bright future, expected her to obey and conform. Independence was like mother's milk to Monica, and she did not

> respond. A divorce took some years, but true to her steady self-help, she paid for court costs through sewing at home for the fashion industry. A tragic part of this story was her loss of a daughter by legal action. *She chose to forget, and none of it appears in "Karobran,"* so that the heroine Isabelle suddenly becomes much older and wiser as she overhears the table talk between trade union workers. (xii, my emphasis)

What is interesting here are Horner's assumptions about the reason for non-disclosure regarding Clare's marriage, divorce, and child: "she chose to forget." I would argue, instead, that the omission of these details from the narrative may be an active choice in the face of the politics of disclosure and possible repercussions for Clare's daughter. Clearly, Horner, as editor, views the text as autobiographical, not creative, in contradiction with Bandler's reading of the narrative as "novel." Further, a close reading of the text indicates Clare's awareness of and strategic intervention into the contexts of reception of Aboriginal literature. On the one hand, we have a lifestory that has been imaginatively reshaped into the novel form. Yet the text's genesis in autobiography is persistently foregrounded by Clare's primary editor such that this fact is not easily overlooked, and the parallels between the characters' lives and that of Clare (as outlined by Horner) can readily be seen.

While there are no explicit details provided about why Clare chose to tell her lifestory in this particular form, Bandler gives an important clue. Clare, she recounts, took her manuscript into the office of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in 1972 and stated: "'It was like this for most of us. That's how it was, and that's how it is, for Aboriginal kids'" (ix). There is, then, a conscious view that her individual story carries pedagogical potential to be "representative" and perhaps more effective in a politics of decolonization than the more typical Aboriginal lifestory (particularly the as-told to narrative), which has historically been read in individualizing, anthropological, and politically neutralizing ways. (There may, of course, be other reasons—issues of personal disclosure raised by the autobiographical form, or a desire to participate in the emergence of "Aboriginal Australian literature" in the 1970s, for example.)

Moreover, the content of *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* supports this strategy of making the individual story representative of an Aboriginal collectivity. Exact details of Clare's life and history have been generalized in its transformation to the novel

form—specific geographic details, names, dates, and in particular tribal histories and specificities of the Isabelle's "father's people" are vague. This could be an indication of the politics of disclosure that attend the lifestory (or its fictionalized form, in this case), and/or of negotiations with dominant nationalism, liberalism, and multiculturalism, particularly in terms of the representations of white people in the narrative. One of the interesting effects of this generalizing tactic in the narrative is that it marks the profound loss to Aboriginal communities of specific knowledges, particularly those connected to place.

Language

Because the history of the writing and editing process of *Karobran: The Story of An Aboriginal Girl* is somewhat vague, Clare's negotiations with language are generally unmarked in the text. Except for the single Aboriginal word, *Karobran*, and the bush/ working-class dialogue of particular characters early in the narrative, the text is presented in Standard English. The Foreword states that "the editing throughout has been carried out with a determination to retain all the atmosphere and flavour of the author's original writing style" and that changes "have been made only in the interests of extra clarity or slightly improved syntax" (vii). The interests of "extra clarity and slightly improved syntax" are certainly a matter of interpretation (clarity for whom? whose syntax?), and an examination of the original manuscript would be immensely useful in exploring the choices of language use in *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl.* None the less, this question raises issues regarding how the perceived context of its reception shaped the production of the narrative.

That *Karobran: The Story of An Aboriginal Girl* has been marketed as the "first novel by an Australian Aboriginal woman" (vii) and is presented in this standardized English implies that the dominant English language and its literary forms are seen (or, at the time were seen) by the majority, non-Aboriginal Australian readership as the "ideal" model for Aboriginal literature. It also implies that Clare's narrative was perhaps perceived (by Clare, her editors, and her publishers) as better able to enter visibility by taking on the form and language of the dominant culture. This is not, of course, to deny Clare agency in

choosing, even desiring, to write a "novel," for whatever reasons, but to signal how the text's language, form, and contexts of reception are intricately linked.

The language of *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* is, however, distinct in one particular aspect, and it shows up all the more clearly because it is embedded within the Standard English third-person narration. This distinction is in the "working-class"/bush dialogue of particular characters early in the narrative, and it informs and produces the text's delineation of the effects of class and race on rural Aboriginal peoples during the Depression. While the working-class language is shared by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters in the bush alike, those who are designated as white assert their superiority through this language, thus reinforcing the narrator's representations of the failure of class politics to address racism.

As the narrative begins, Isabelle and her family are living in the bush, travelling from station to station as the father searches, like so many other men in the Depression, for what little work is available. The people they encounter are among the most harshly hit by the Depression, the generally uneducated labourers on pastoral stations whose skills are rendered redundant or unnecessary in the troubled Depression economy. Their working-class status is marked most clearly by their language. Mrs. Brown, the woman who takes the family in at the time of Isabelle's mother's death, for example, provides the first dialogue of the narrative, and it marks her economic and cultural status; she instructs her children: "Jimmy, come here and take those two down by the shed and play with them. You can take your barrow if you want to, but mind youse all stay there till I call youse" (1).[5]

As Isabelle's father continues, in vain, to look for work, he discovers the preferential treatment given white workers, and it is here that Clare's articulation of the race divisions within an assumed (white) working-class solidarity begins. When a white worker spots Isabelle's mixed-race brother Morris (who appears white) in the "blacks' camp" he rages: "I ain't standin' fer no white kids being in the blacks' camp" (13). When Isabelle and Morris are left by their father with a seemingly kind white man, Tom Wall, and his wife,

[5] As Anglo-Canadian critic Margery Fee suggesting in response to this study, this dialogue marks the speaker as of Irish ancestry, a group that experienced its own ostracization in the history of Australian nation building, even as it benefitted from the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples.

the man is revealed to be profoundly racist, violent, and abusive, to his wife and the children. His language, while marking his working-class status, carries the ideology of racial superiority: "They're only niggers, an' they was made to work fer us whites"; "Yer gotta teach 'em when they're young...otherwise they'll end up runnin' the country" (25).

Interestingly, the dialogue of Clare's characters changes to Standard English—in fact, to urban, middle-class language—at the same time that Isabelle and her brother enter the welfare system in Sydney and, shortly after, foster care with the kind white (and liberal) middle-class pastoralist Manburys (brother and sister) they come to know as Aunt and Uncle. This shift is significant in marking the class permutations of racist language. The language of overt racism of the white characters living in the bush becomes couched in middle-class paternalism (polite racism and sexism) in the welfare system: Isabelle is warned to "be good" in the foster home (35), and, on her single occasion of resistance against her employers in domestic service, she is told by a male welfare office that she "had not been a good girl" and "it would not be nice if she were to be sent back to a girls' home" (55, 55-56).

The language of the Manburys, who own what for Isabelle is an idyllic farm, is also middle-class, and while the Manburys are certainly drawn as sympathetic and supportive of Aboriginal peoples, their language and actions, as I analyze in more detail in the next section, are those of white liberalism insofar as they do not recognize or admit that the ownership of their farm is grounded in Aboriginal peoples' dispossession. This shift in language is crucial, too, in indicating how state welfare structures are embedded in the construction of a white and middle-class nation, despite, as Clare's narrative goes on to explore, its overt claims to be white workingman's paradise.

There is a disjunction, finally, in the remainder of the narrative. The class distinctions that Clare had marked through dialogue earlier in the narrative have all but disappeared, even in the speeches of union workers and leaders and of the urban and rural Aboriginal characters Isabelle encounters. The question as to whether or not this erasure of the working-class language is an effect of editorial intervention or a deliberate choice by Clare to appeal to/negotiate with a dominant middle-class liberal readership (more inclined

to support an argument for Aboriginal rights when couched in its own terms) can only be answered by further research into the production of the manuscript.

Nation

That the narrative has been constructed, as I have suggested, to make Clare's lifestory, through the representation of Isabelle, less individual than representative of mixed-race Aboriginal children and women in Australia, is perhaps a strength in its negotiations with dominant national ideologies. That the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples is the grounding of Australian "settlement" and nation-building is made clear at the outset of the text. Aboriginal Dave Herbert, his white wife dead, looks out on the land of his people, now overtaken by white pastoralists, and at an uncertain future for himself and family: "Ahead of them stretched the vast sunburnt land that Dave had roamed as a boy, land that he had loved, and still did. Looking down at the two small hands he now held in his, he wondered just what it had to offer his son and daughter" (9).

The dominant Australian myths of mateship in the bush are immediately problematized by the narrative's exploration of bush racism—the systemic preferential treatment of white workers over Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry, and, in particular, by the exploitation and violence Isabelle and Morris suffer at the hands of Tom Wall. And it is these conditions of colonization and racism that produce Dave Herbert's inability, despite his best efforts, to provide for his children; the state, in other words, has produced a systemic tautology which seems nearly inescapable—it has constructed Aboriginal peoples as inferior and incapable of taking care of the land or their children, and has produced the conditions where it is almost impossible for them to do so, thus justifying the production of the racist welfare system to further those ends.

Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl does not provide extensive detail regarding Isabelle's experiences in the girls' home, in foster homes (other than the Manburys), nor in domestic service in various homes. It does, however, provide enough detail for a strong commentary on the interconnections among the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples and the ongoing capitalist exploitation of their land, the welfare system, and the production of Aboriginal labour as part of the processes of white, capitalist nation-

building. In Isabelle's case, this labour is clearly classed, gendered, and raced in service of the state, whether it be in domestic service or in wartime factory work.[6]

The role of the Manburys as white, liberal farm-owners who act as supportive foster parents to Isabelle and Morris, and for whom, particularly "Auntie," the children develop an enduring love and respect, in interesting in the context of race, nation, and liberal multiculturalism. In many ways, the Manburys embody the national pastoral myth of transforming the hostile and alien Australian landscape into an English farm, idyllic and peaceful. It is a myth that Isabelle herself internalizes, primarily, I would suggest, because of the emotional support and physical safety the Manburys provide in relation to her previous experiences of abuse and racism in white homes; on her arrival at the farm, for example, "she knew that she and Morris would be all right here, as she could feel the love in it" (37).

The transplantation of this national English pastoral ideology on to Australian soil, however, is critiqued in a fascinating way in *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* by the prominence given to what is likely an Aboriginal grinding stone located on the Manbury property and marking previous Aboriginal occupation of the land:

> All that afternoon was spent showing Isabelle and Morris over the farm. The dairy came first, where the cream was separated from the milk and made into butter, the shed where feed was kept and where pumpkins and gramma and melons were put to ripen, then to the orchard where almost every kind of fruit tree was laden with fruit; then to the cow bails and pig pens, the big patch of peas and beans that were growing from one side of the rise in the hill to the other. Above the vegetable garden Isabelle found a flat rock with a big hole in the middle of it, which still held water from the last rains. As she stood on top of it, she found out that she could see for miles and miles everywhere, almost to the top of the big mountain behind her.
>
> She was reluctant to leave. (38)

The rock is never explicitly identified in the narrative as an Aboriginal grinding stone, and its significance in the narrative is perhaps all the more effective as a result. As indicated in the quote above, Isabelle develops an attachment to the rock that is suggestive of her identification with her Aboriginal ancestry; that the rock, its location, and that of the farm

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[6] Her time at a girls' home, for example, is spent doing domestic chores, and she is told it was "good training for the girls later when they went out to their jobs" (45). Despite how Isabelle excels at school, this had no effect when she reaches the age to work as a domestic: "A domestic job was found for her; it was near where

remain vaguely identified resonates with the loss of ties to place that Aboriginal peoples have suffered. Yet the presence of the rock and Isabelle's affinity with it insist on the ongoing existence of those ties, thus subtly and effectively disrupting dominant myths of white Australian control over and ownership of the land.

It is in this context that Uncle's comment to Isabelle takes on a powerful critical irony—in what he sees as a joke, he confers the rock to her (even though, the narrative suggests, it is already "hers"); yet he clearly has the power to maintain ownership of place, however disrupted, as a function of his race, class, and gender privilege: "'You can have the rock, if you like,' said Uncle, still smiling at her, and he winked at Aunt" (38). None the less, Isabelle takes seriously the ownership of the rock, and it is a marker for her of her sense of home and place, however tenuous, even as the welfare system intervenes again to place her in a home in the city. Before she leaves, she is found "standing on her rock looking over the land that had become so very much a part of her self and her brother" (42).

Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl also theorizes the location of white women in the processes of nation building, and, perhaps because of the location of the narrator/author as daughter of a white woman, is particularly sensitive to how race privilege and gender oppression locate white women in particular ways in the national space. Clare's description of the wife of the abusive Tom Wall, for example, is clearly sympathetic as Mrs. Wall tries, in vain, to protect the children from her husband's violence, and is willing to suffer further violence herself in order to do so. The narrative makes it clear that Mrs. Wall has little agency in this dynamic; with no economic means to leave her husband, all she can do is report her husband to the welfare authorities, and when she does so, it has the unintended and unfortunate effect that her husband's version of events prevails, and the children are taken from their father (25-30).

That Clare depicts Isabelle as identifying so closely with her foster mother, Aunt, and that Aunt is drawn as a kind, liberal supporter of Aboriginal rights, signals a much more complex negotiation with ideologies of gender and of nation, particularly multi-culturalism. It is interesting how, in a single and very subtle and ambiguous moment of the text, Clare indicates that the white woman is also somehow trying to understand, or claim,

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they were living. Of course she could decline to accept it, if she wished, and return to the girls' home until

a place in what was (and is) Aboriginal land. Aunt stands on the Aboriginal grinding stone—Isabelle's rock—and surveys the land, in an ambiguous pose that could indicate a gesture of ownership or of placelessness, or both: "From here Isabelle could see Aunt standing on the rock where that morning she had hidden her apron and shoes on the way to school" (39).

Aunt is consistently depicted as sympathetic, even perhaps radical in her time, in her support of Aboriginal peoples. Isabelle supports the liberalism of her Aunt and Uncle and their individual acts of kindness to Aboriginal peoples. Isabelle is wholly sympathetic to the Manburys' actions of visiting local Aboriginal people in their homes and giving the poorest "fruit to take away for their children (fruit that would otherwise have had to be buried in the ground)" (82), actions for which they are ostracized by the white community. Isabelle, the narrative continues, "was pleased" to hear of such actions. These individual acts, however, are not clearly placed in a systemic context, such that neither the Manburys, nor Isabelle, at least at this point, recognizes that these individual acts mask the actual causes of the perceived need for liberal acts of charity—the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples of their land, the subsequent profits of white landowners, and the resultant systemic inequalities. Liberal acts of charity, in other words, while perhaps addressing immediate needs, do nothing to transform the relations of power that produce poverty and privilege; rather, they tend to assuage the guilt of those in positions of privilege without materially altering those positions, reproduce an ideology of victim-blaming, and strengthen inequality. The individual (and perhaps at the time) unique actions of the Manburys, for example, do not alter their status as property owners.

It is only when Isabelle visits her "father's people" that she comes to a clearer understanding of the relationships of Aboriginal peoples to place, a relationship she has been denied and, until she learns more, can only imagine. In the final pages of *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl*, Isabelle comes to understand more clearly the relationship of Aboriginal peoples, her "father's people," to place, and therefore the imperative of Aboriginal land claims, particularly in the face of increasing multinational encroachment on Aboriginal territory: "Isabelle felt most indignant that land stealing should be done to

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another domestic position could be found for her" (48).

her Dad's people and in their own country too, without their permission" (86). Isabelle had been sympathetic towards the Manburys when she learned that multinational capital (in the form of a highway) invaded the farm, forcing Aunt and Uncle to move. But a subtle critique of the liberalism of whites such as the Manburys emerges, in Isabelle's recognition that the white Australian relationship to place is something quite different from that of Aboriginal peoples. In hearing of the destruction of Aboriginal lands for capitalist development,

> Isabelle knew how they [the elders] felt, because even she had felt very bad when the machines had been brought in to tear up Uncle's old farm to make the road, but then she realised that this was not the same. Sacred Grounds were a part of her Dad's people themselves, and this made it so very much different. (88)

Here, too, the tensions surrounding Isabelle's mixed ancestry emerge—her initial response to the development was akin to that of the Manburys, and even as she comes to recognize that the Aboriginal view of this development is "so much different" from that of non-Aboriginal Australians, she is unable to fully identify with her "Dad's people."

The narrative process of *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl*, finally, is that of an uncovering, layer by layer, of the ideologies of dominant nationalism. It uncovers the repressed heart of the Australian national myth as the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples of their land. And, as I suggest in more detail in the terms of the text's construction of race and Aboriginality, it is certainly supportive of white alliance, and not entirely dismissive of liberal white multiculturalism. Isabelle's suggestions that Aboriginal peoples market Aboriginal crafts to provide "an education to some white people" (91) is an indication of the difficult dance with liberal multiculturalism performed by the text and its narrator. Nonetheless, the final pages of the narrative theorize how effective processes of decolonization must begin with the reclaiming of place.

Aboriginality

Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl does not directly subvert the dominant racial categories of "black" and "white." Rather, it foregrounds how these categories operate, materially and psychologically, systemically and individually, to suppress the

threat that the ambiguity of mixed-race identity poses in the processes of white nation-building.

Born into a world that is literally constructed in "black and white," Isabelle is persistently defined in ways that deny her full acknowledgement of her dual ancestry and cultural heritage. Rather, she is perpetually categorized by others according to the binaristic racial logic of whiteness—most often as wholly "black" by racist individuals and a profoundly racist state system, as her life in the welfare system, domestic labour, and the wartime workforce indicate. The racial definitions imposed on Isabelle and Morris by liberal whites such as the Manburys are also interesting in foregrounding the operations of liberal multiculturalism. While Isabelle finds great comfort in the fact that they do not treat her "differently" because of her skin colour, they are still perpetuating racism by not acknowledging their own race privilege or its history. This claim to "colour-blindness" is a refusal to name whiteness and to acknowledge that racism comprises more than individual attitude but is an effect of systemic structure as well. As the Manburys are individually supportive of Isabelle and Morris, they are either unaware of or unable to deal with the racism Isabelle and her brother experience away from the idyllic farm:

> In all the years that she had lived with her Aunt and Uncle, Isabelle could not remember anyone ever making even the slightest mention that her skin was a different colour to theirs. But now some of these children [in school] were paying attention to it....When she went to collect her own suitcase, she found that it had been put apart from the others—and written on the side of it, in white chalk, was "Your Black." It hurt so much that angry tears appeared in her eyes; she picked up the case and slowly wiped off the words...when the two of them were about to start walking home, several children came hurling themselves around the corner after them, and as they tried to surround Isabelle and her brother one of them shouted: "State kids, black state kids." (47-48)

The power of the black-white binary, its desire to avoid ambiguity, is particularly evident even when Isabelle's mixed-race ancestry is openly acknowledged, particularly by paternalistic welfare (state) workers. She is told that she should not attempt to claim her Aboriginal ancestry but should remain in a white world (that still will not acknowledge her): a white welfare officer advises her "to think very hard before 'gallivanting off to the bush' in search of her Dad and his new family, because as he gently said, 'You are only part Aboriginal and in other words, a half-caste; and that you find that you may not be

acceptable to all of your father's people'" (59). As the narrative suggests, this conflation of race *as* identity undergirds dominant Australian ideology and is shown to be falsely imposed on Aboriginal peoples. Isabelle comes to understand, as she is welcomed and accepted by "her father's people," that Aboriginality and Aboriginal identity are not determined by skin colour but by historical genealogy and by specific relationships to place, such that mixed-race ancestry does not exclude one from identifying as Aboriginal, or being claimed as such by Aboriginal communities. And it is here that the narrative works to transform the categories of race into a representation of Aboriginality as fluid, open to change, and able to accommodate those of mixed-ancestry in a genuinely inclusive paradigm.

That a positive language for mixed-race identity is still lacking, for Isabelle, and by extension, for white Australians more comfortable with the black-white binary, however, is perhaps the most powerful commentary on race politics provided in *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl*. As I have suggested, at the end of the narrative Isabelle's sense of self has still not entirely bridged the division she feels in herself between her "mother's people" and her "father's people." Perhaps because of this split, because of her location of "in-between" the dominant categories of race, and perhaps because of her internalization of the Manburys' liberalism, she is unable, despite her increasing politicization, to address directly the issue of her skin colour—to name it, name herself—in terms of race. While in other contexts I would find this gesture subversive and resistant, the following passage suggests a more troubling hesitancy to speak directly about race politics in front of white people, where liberalism renders the topic of race taboo, as well as Isabelle's lack of language for her identity. Here, a white girl named Irene

> ran her small fingers along Isabelle's dark brown arm and asked her why she could not get her own skin to go as brown as Isabelle's. Jean [her mother] began to scold her, but Isabelle told Jean that she thought Irene should have an answer.
>
> So Isabelle told Irene about the years when she and her brother used to live out in the sun all the time when they were small, like Irene and her brothers. But the small child smiled in disbelief; then she spoke again while both her Mother and Father waited to pounce on her.
>
> "If my skin was lovely and brown like yours Auntie I'd show it to everybody" (81).

While the white child's valorisation of Isabelle's skin is in a sense positive, indicating that racism is learned and hence unlearnable, it is troubling in the expression of desire of white people to "go native" by suntanning, and indicates Isabelle's ongoing struggle, and that of the narrative as a whole, with the ideology of whiteness and liberal multiculturalism. As I have suggested, the history of Isabelle's identity is in part that of a struggle around how to identify, or not, with whiteness, and the only options, the only performances of whiteness that she experiences are either overtly racist and abusive, or troublingly liberal.

Moreover, Clare had to negotiate the politics of reception in a climate and period of the development of official multiculturalism in Australia. Clare's depictions of whiteness, in other words, may have been circumscribed by a doubled desire—to wrestle whiteness into being part of a mixed-race Aboriginal identity, and to avoid alienating white readers (and hence, rejecting part of herself) who, however problematically, might be sympathetic to Aboriginal rights. Hence Clare has to dance among the naming of a history of white racism, charges of "reverse racism" levied against Aboriginal peoples by white people in a period of rising Aboriginal politics, and the recognition that white alliance is going to be required for systemic change to occur: "it could be this younger generation that would reduce some of the justified hatred of white people. This hatred made it very hard for genuine white people to even get close to the Aborigines' way of thinking about things" (90).[7]

Through these complex negotiations, Clare nonetheless manages to delineate a position on the location and role of white people in Aboriginal politics—as supporters and allies but not as central actors: "no matter how sincere white people might be in trying to help the Aboriginal people to 'kind of come out from under' there was nothing that the white people could do for them" (84).[8] *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl*, finally, articulates the painful effects rigid racial categorizations have on the identity of a mixed-race Aboriginal woman: "Isabelle needed no reassurance from her Mum's people like Aunt, Uncle, and Bill, whom she knew would teach their young children to understand that black

[7] And hence, perhaps, Clare's depiction of Isabelle's white boyfriend Bill, a union worker who supports women's rights, Aboriginal rights, and Isabelle's search for knowledge of her father's people, to the point that there "were times when Isabelle herself forgot that Bill was a white man" (86).

[8] "When the Aboriginal people eventually made up their minds to do something about these conditions," thinks Isabelle, "there would be sincere white people like Bill who would work with them" (89).

was not a dirty word, and that together with white it would mean strength for equality and human rights" (94). In connecting the binarism of race to both national ideologies and the effects on a mixed-race subjectivity, *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* exposes how the painful ambiguity of mixed-race identity is at once a product of white nationalism at work—and one of its most profound threats.

Chapter Six

Rita Joe's *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet* (1996)

Introduction

Rita Joe is a nationally recognized poet. She has published three poetry collections—*Poems of Rita Joe* (1978), *Song of Eskasoni: More Poems of Rita Joe* (1988), and *Lnu and Indians We're Called* (1991)—and is a recipient of the Order of Canada. Her lifestory, in its form and subject-matter, explicitly addresses the discursive and material processes that have shaped, as the title suggests, the identity of a public figure, "a Mi'kmaq poet."

The narrative immediately marks its retrospective nature—Joe's first sentence is "I am an old woman now" (13)—and is structured chronologically according to what Joe sees as significant periods in her life: childhood, youth, "my talk" (her poetry), and the "spirit path." *Song of Rita Joe* traces Joe's life from her birth as Rita Bernard in Whycocomagh, Cape Breton, in 1932 to the present (1995), chronicling a disturbing childhood through the loss of her mother at the age of five, her placement in a number of abusive situations in foster care, her own request to be placed in residential school, and her series of what she calls "mistakes" upon leaving residential school as a basically untrained and uninformed 16-year old. It details her lifelong marriage to a man who became abusive and alcoholic, the birth of eleven children, the loss of five (two were stillborn), Joe's determination to survive, for her children, and her discovery of writing as a site, in her words, of therapy, of self-worth, and political commitment. The final section explores Aboriginal spirituality and its relationship to the Christian traditions with which Joe was also raised and which continue to influence her and the Mi'kmaq people.

Embedded throughout *Song of Rita Joe* are poems from her collections. These provide a creative response to the specific events chronicled, at once illuminating the event in a particular way and implicitly commenting on the strengths and limits of each of the forms (lifestory and poetry) utilized. The inclusion of the poetry crucially marks the

significance of writing in the lifestoryteller's processes of subjectivity and sense of self and the role of poetry, as she sees it and practises it, in her politics of feminism and decolonization.

Agency

Joe self-reflexively traces the history of her subjectivity, her internalization of sexism and the processes through which she overcomes it, and how, by her example, she has become a role model for her daughters and her community. From the vantage point of "an old woman" (13), she recollects (reconstructs) her childhood, demonstrating in the process the fluidity of memory: "The experiences of my childhood," she writes, "I'm reliving them yet—and I won't stop reliving them until I die" (25). Like many residential and mission school narratives, *Song of Rita Joe* marks the profound effect of maternal absence on the formation of subjectivity: here, however, this maternal absence is not a direct effect of the residential school system and imperialist policies but, perhaps, of the effects of poverty imposed by colonization: "As far back as I can remember, I had a loving family," she writes. "We were very poor, but I try to remember the positive things" (17). Joe's young mother (she was 16 when she married Joe's 67-year-old father) died, along with the child she was carrying, when Joe was five years old. The cause of the mother's death was believed at the time to be the effects of ice fishing while nine months pregnant.

Throughout her life, Joe writes, she has felt this maternal absence, and many of her actions have been based on a search for a loving maternal figure, whether in her various foster homes (25) or in her married life with her stern mother-in-law: "I wanted her to love me," Joe writes, "because, for so long, I had not had a mother" (84). She also notes how for many years she carried a misplaced responsibility for her mother's death, as at the time of the death her grandmother had blamed the young child: "Sixty years later, I still see that pointy finger," Joe writes. "'*Ki'l ktla taqn!* (It is your fault!), she said" (22). Joe's memories of her mother are among the most poignant of the narrative, particularly as they are overwritten by death and loss. Joe writes of idyllic, dreamlike memories of safety, comfort, and unity:

> her loving arms are not easily forgotten. When I try to visualize my times with her, I remember them like hazy motion pictures of years gone by. I can see her laughing with her very white teeth, her bosom my cushion as I lay my head there. I remember her being soft, so I think she might have been fat. (18)

This memory stands in stark contrast to Joe's recollection of her mother's funeral: "...my father took me by the hand and lifted me up to see my mother. She was in a long box. 'She's cold, Dad," I said. He turned his face to the wall" (22). It also contraxts with her memories of grief and unanswered pleas for love afterwards. After a cruel brother-in-law throws away her father's treasured gift of candy, for example, Joe recalls the feelings of rejection she had felt since her mother's death: "I cried for her to return, but she never did come back" (26).[1]

The narrative also theorizes both how the loss of Joe's mother, while producing a profound lack in Joe's sense of self and leading to disempowering behaviours, also functioned, in her own view, as a catalyst in terms of her own agency as mother. Catholic traditions as well as what Joe describes as a Mi'kmaq valorization of the role of motherhood—"There were a lot of good houses in the different Native communities where I lived, and a lot of good mothers; I always remember the mothers," she writes (25)—shaped her desire "to" mother and her identity *as* mother. But it is also Joe's role as a mother as well as the gifts and responsibilities that she believes accompany that role that provide a site of positive identification and agency for her. She writes that when her husband beat her, her children gave her courage to go on (73).

Song of Rita Joe is especially powerful in how it traces the relationship between experiences of the body and language; Joe details how her child's gendered body was "read" and acted upon as available for neglect, sexual abuse, and, as she moved into non-Aboriginal communities, racism. She articulates how these experiences of her body shaped her sense of identity. Subjected as a child to a horrifying series of abuses in a variety of foster homes, including neglect, verbal abuse, threats of physical abuse, attempts to get her drunk, exploitation of her labour, and finally, sexual abuse, the adult Joe describes

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[1] In the case of *Song of Rita Joe*, for example, the agency of Joe's mother is in fact stressed in her very absence: while life had been difficult before her death, as indicated by the mention of poverty and of the placement of two of Joe's brothers in residential school, the family literally breaks apart after her death, leading to the cycle of foster care experienced by Joe.

powerfully how she internalized her own objectification in order to survive, and more poignantly, in order to receive love and attention: "You don't do anything wrong and you don't give anyone an excuse to scold or beat you or whatever. When I was still very little I learned to be a good girl, to always help" (29). Her disclosure of sexual abuse in a foster home is poignant in how the adult survivor recognizes and sympathizes with her child self's desperate desire for approval, and, how she wants to *mother* that motherless, victimized self. This disclosure actually functions through the absence of discussion of the act of abuse:

> I remember suffering abuse at that house, from the man. When the man asked me to do something that was not pleasant and I objected to it, he said, "But you do it so good." That approval meant something to me. When you're in a foster home, you do what you're told. If you're told you're doing something right, you do it again—and again and again, no matter how negative or impossible or bad or ugly it is. And if you get praised for doing it, you want that praise. I always looked for praise and approval when I was little. I hunted for it....I still have dreams about those times. One night, a few nights ago, I dreamt about a little child in bed. I had covered that little child. I don't know who she was. It seemed like she was me, but I was also the mother covering the child." (30, 31)

This silence signals the very unspeakability of sexual abuse, of the difficulty of translating the wordless experiences of the body into language. There is an indication here of the *necessity* of silence, not so much in terms of concerns regarding public response or in resisting a readership's potential demands for full self-exposure, but in terms of actual and ongoing psychological and bodily survival:

> It's hard for me to describe what it was like when I was little. Words sometimes will not come to me; it's as if they're stuck inside. Some of the hurt was too great, so I just bundled it up and put the little bundles away. Those bundles are still on the shelf today and I cannot open some of them. If I open them, I will cry, I will get hurt. So that's why I leave the bundles alone. It's hard enough to survive knowing that they are there. (32)

That Joe does not directly name this abuser, too, is perhaps because her own community is already aware of his identity, and perhaps because of her desire not to "step on live toes" (109) as part of her negotiations with the ideology of the autobiographical form.

There is a sad irony in how Joe records how as a child she wrote to the local Indian Agent to request placement in the Shubenacadie residential school, in order to escape this

abusive situation. (It was a request with which the agent readily complied.) And this event, Joe notes, while at times seen as a source of ridicule among her community has also been recognized as an act of agency, of self-preservation. When she was publicly ridiculed, for example, she recalls the words of an individual in the group: "'Rita had bundles of hurt to carry when she was little, so she put herself in there for safekeeping.' The explanation for what I did," comments Joe, "is all there, in those words" (49).

Joe's assessment of residential schooling as both positive and negative appears to emerge from the protection it provided her from sexual and other abuses. It was at residential school, Joe implies, that her love of language, reading, and books—her identity as a poet—was shaped. She recalls her fascination with "books of knowledge" (whatever in fact was on hand in the library for her to read) and her developing agency in ensuring that she could finish her lessons in time to be rewarded with time in the library (53). When she leaves the residential school at the age of 16 and with only a Grade Eight education, further, she chooses (what turns out to be exploitation in) the workplace over further education and preparation for becoming a nun in British Columbia, as the nuns had suggested for her. This choice, while a powerful commentary on the hegemonic processes of the residential school system, also proves to be sadly ironic, as the internalization of patriarchy is shown to work powerfully against her desires for and claims to that agency: "nobody would ever hurt me again; nobody would ever tell me when to eat, wash, got to bed or go to the bathroom. Most of all, the spiritual part of me would be my own. If I was going to commit a sin, I would commit it with my own free will" (56).

In the section Joe describes as "Song of my Youth" she chronicles a series of events and reflects on her ongoing internalization of patriarchal and imperialist ideologies, which were compounded by her poor education, particularly regarding sexual relationships and knowledge of her own body, and the extreme controls of behaviour that constituted her residential school experience. Joe recounts a period in which she drank heavily (63), and in which she engaged in a series of relationships in which she was exploited (each of which resulted in a child):

> In Halifax, I had contact with boys other than my brothers for the first time. When boys said something to me or looked at me, I would be surprised by their flirting. We hadn't been allowed to go near the boys at school. The most we did was throw notes

> at them that said, "I love you." Real contact with boys went to my head and I had sad experiences and sad realizations. Growing up, I had not received many expressions of love. Now, here were people who seemed to want me. I became a willing partner in what I thought were expressions of love....I was very naïve. (62)

Throughout this section, the influences of patriarchy, imperialism, and poverty on Joe's subjectivity, on how her body is read and physically used, and the processes by which she internalizes and normalizes these, are demonstrated. She recounts how as a single mother of two (her first child is adopted by her sister), she married Frank Joe, and how her life with him became increasingly unbearable because of his alcoholism and physical abuse.

Throughout, Joe articulates—constructs—her emerging agency, as mother, writer, and activist, as both an effect of and constrained by patriarchy and racism, at once internalized by Joe and embodied in her husband and his control over her life. He insists, for example, that she give up her son because he is not his biological child (75). When, several years later, this son dies, Rita's sense of loss—of a son and of the possibility of knowledge of him— and her anger are both doubled and unspeakable: "When he died, I cried all the more for not knowing him all those years: the empty feeling I experienced inside me cannot be described" (75). She loses a three-month-old son (to undisclosed causes), and this loss too, leaves a lasting sense of loss: "I often think of him and wonder what he would look like today" (82). She also loses her daughter Bernadette, aged 32, shortly after her husband's death. (Once again, the causes are undisclosed.)

Joe recognizes and theorizes her own processes of what have come to be known as battered wife syndrome, remarking on how she "jumped" to her husband's demands (75) and, despite public knowledge of the abuse, "made excuses and always, always" expressed her love for her husband (85). She describes how she enabled her husband's abuse and alcoholism and tolerated his unfaithfulness by focusing her life on his needs and by building up his ego (90), and how he forbade her to work outside of the home (87). It was her children, witness to the abuse, she writes, who comforted her bruised body and battered spirit: "*Yi-ya* (Does it hurt), Mom,' they would ask, touching my bruises. I often cried into their hair and wiped my tears on their clothes. When I hugged my children, I tried to find comfort in their love for the pain consuming my soul at that moment" (90-91).

It is in fact the broader feminist movement and its practices of disclosure and consciousness-raising, Joe records, that catalyzed her agency and her recovery from the abuse.[2] She turns to her mother-in-law for support, and it is in her description of her mother-in-law's reaction that the embodiment of Joe's subjectification is powerfully drawn. It is here too that the power of maternal agency, in the person of Joe's mother-in-law, and of feminist solidarity, is accentuated:

> In 1967, I was pregnant with my youngest, Ann. I was still having a hard time, but I did not hide my bruises under long sleeves anymore; I even showed them to my mother-in-law....It was a heel print on my breast that was the last straw for her. It drove her wild. She comforted me, finally expressing her love for me.
>
> Just before Ann was born, my mother-in-law took matters into her own hands. I thought she would kill my husband, she hit him so hard with a block of wood. "Don't ever lay a hand on Rita again as long as you live!" she screamed at him.
>
> I had always called my mother-in-law "*Kiju´* (Mother)"; from this time on, the word truly held us together. (93)

Joe articulates how writing became a process for her through which she could make sense of the pain and her history. While her writing may have begun as what she calls personal "therapy" (96), it also functions as a process, like the lifestory itself, through which she constructs a coherent sense of self that is enabled, a self that she imagines and becomes. The significance of the imbrication of her sense of self and her identity as a writer are clear in the very form of her narrative, interspersed as it is by her poetry. Further, that her writing is never to her an isolated or purely individual experience is marked by her description of her writing as addressing the situation of her children and her people (96).

Joe's identification as a writer becomes more central to her sense of self and is clear through the remainder of the narrative, as she recalls her feelings on winning her first poetry contest: "My heart felt as big as all outdoors. This was my own accomplishment, my personal triumph" (124). Her writing has developed without her husband's assistance (while he comes to be very proud of her, she also refers to him as her "worst critic" [118])

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[2] Frank Joe's insecurities regarding Rita Joe's desires for further education proved to be an enabling condition for the end of his alcoholism and abuse but continued to limit her desires for further education. As Joe notes, her desire to further her education were early on repressed by her husband's apparently sudden desire to go to school himself—a desire to which Joe quickly conceded. It was, however, while obtaining his Bachelor of Education and then a sociology degree that Frank stopped the drinking and violence and became a loving husband once again. And it is at this point that he admitted to Rita that his only desire for education really came from a fear that she would "be better" than him (124).

but with the support in particular of a community of Mi'kmaq women. These women read her newspaper column and shared their responses and own stories in return, and urged her to utilize the Mi'kmaq language as well. That Joe receives community support, she writes, "made me feel like I was accomplishing something" (105). She notes that her community, particularly in its desire to see positive representations of the Mi'kmaq people, created in her a sense of responsibility to that community and to write "in a loving and honourable way about people" (108). Crucially, then, her subjectivity as a writer, and the form and content of her writing, are perhaps not determined primarily by negotiations with a dominant, multiculturalist ideology nor by an internalized assimilationist perspective, although these are strong influences. (She refer, for example, to her struggle with representing "the negative" in her writing at one point in her career because she "did not want to offend leaders and educators" [102].) More influential is the relationship she perceives and participates in with a community of Mi'kmaq women.

It is not surprising, then, that the point in the narrative at which Joe recounts her development of a transformed subjectivity through writing is where she also notes the development of her maternal agency in the politics of decolonization. She writes of how she nurtured in her children a strong sense of pride in their ancestry, a confidence in their own knowledge as Mi'kmaq people, and strategies for opposing—and rewriting—the racist history of Canada and its reproduction in school curricula:

> So then I told my children, "When you're in the classroom and you hear a discussion about Natives and you know that what people are saying isn't right, don't hesitate to put up your hand and say, 'I'm a Native and this is what I know.'" I told all my children that, and they did it. It was the only way to set the record straight. One of the important things I kept telling them is that we are the ones who know about ourselves. "Don't fear declaring anything," I said, "because you are the ones who know. You might not be an expert, but you do know." (96)

Moreover, Joe stresses that it is because of her own ability to survive an abusive marriage that her own daughters have learned to recognize and resist the psychology and cycle of violence: "they would not accept the abuse for themselves or their children. All my daughters who experienced abuse from their husbands ended the marriages afterwards" (126). There is an implication here that Joe's agency was still circumscribed by patriarchy and Christian approaches to marriage, and her choices limited by her poverty, even as she

served as such a powerful role model for her daughters. Joe does not mention ever considering leaving her abusive husband, a lesson perhaps learned by her daughters by negative example.

That Joe views her own survival, and her ability to articulate that survival as a writer respected by (and answerable to) her community, as shaping her sense of identity is clear in the final pages of her narrative. She indicates that Mi'kmaq spirituality is becoming increasingly important to her sense of self, and discloses that since her thirties she has had "prophetic dreams and other experiences" proving to her "that spiritual forces exist," and prompting her husband to teasingly call her a "*buoin*" (witch). She also notes, however, how Aboriginal spirituality is one of the sites of the most intense investment of colonizing energies and of non-Aboriginal appropriation: "More than anything else," she writes, "I have been afraid to write about the spiritual part of things: Native spirituality is not easily understood" (146).

Now a recognized and respected elder of her community, she openly admits that "it feels good to be respected and admired" (167). She sees herself as a role model and as mentor to others in her community: "I know now," she states, "that the basic reason for my writing and speaking is to bring honour to my people" (157). Joe's final words mark her pride in having survived the onslaughts of sexual abuse, sexism, and racism, from being a disempowered object of abuse to an empowered agent, subject, of her own history and participant in a politics of decolonization. The movement, in her own words, is from "being a nobody" to being a national spokesperson for her people and their rights:

> Being a survivor has made me build a brave heart—what we would call a *kinap*. Our tradition tells of the men who are *kinaps*, but I think there must be women *kinaps*, too. I leave behind the memory of an orphan child, picking herself up from the misery of being nobody, moving little grains of sand until she could talk about the first nations of the land. (169)

This entry into agency, too, is marked by a final poem, the last words of which, significantly are "Hello everybody, my name is Rita Joe" (171).

Form

Throughout *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet*, Joe articulates her motivations for writing in general, and, for writing poetry in particular—to combat the historical amnesia and willed indifference her people have experienced through colonization: "I always try to move my audience in poetry and song, making fun of myself at times, but emphasizing that we are a wronged nation by using what I have learned from my cultural background" (159).[3] Her dedication is particularly interesting in that it marks her recognition of her audience as both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, but clearly valorises her descendants and other Aboriginal people. It suggests that her motivation for telling her story is that she/her story serve as a role model in her community: "*I dedicate this book to my children and their children's children, and to all people who read about and identify with my life.* Alasutmay ujit kilow *(I pray for you)*."

Joe does not historicize the conditions of the production of her narrative. While the cover page indicates that the work was published "with the assistance of Lynn Henry," who receives an acknowledgement, there is no further information provided on the processes of writing or editing.[4] Joe's commentary on the autobiographical form emerges in a few references about her perceived audience and in the narrative structure itself, which marks the limits of and transforms the autobiographical form. Throughout the text there are few direct references to, or constructions of, this audience. While the specific references that do appear are directed at an uninformed non-Aboriginal readership, Joe does not construct her audience as exclusively or primarily non-Aboriginal; rather, these are moments in which the Mi'kmaq reader is assumed to already possess the knowledge or information presented, and in which Joe wants to stress a particular point. The following passage, for example, is preceded by a discussion of the historical amnesia, willed-ignorance, of non-Aboriginal people in Canada. In it, Joe refers to non-Aboriginal people in generalized terms: "my country," "the world," "society," but concludes with a direct address to non-Aboriginal

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[3] In her article "The Gentle War," Joe explains why she took up the form of poetry: "in order to get my message across the shortest way possible, poetry became my tool" (27).

[4] The Introduction by non-Aboriginal museum curator and friend Ruth Holmes Whitehead offers no further information on this point. In fact, in my view, the introduction is entirely unnecessary, not only because it is

readers: "What I would like to ask now is that you look at my people without the negative image, and listen to our voices—our wampum, our stone writings, our words. Analyze, if you wish, but listen" (158).

Here, perhaps, is her most direct commentary on her decision to tell her lifestory; it implies a communicative act between reader and writer emerging from a history of storytelling, a form and a process that position the reader as embodied, involved listener, and therefore agent and co-participant in meaning making. This implied reader stands in stark contrast to academic readers and investigating anthropologists who historically have claimed "objectivity" while refusing agency in the production and reproduction of ignorance and systemic oppression. As Joe comments, she reached a point where she "assumed that everyone knew about my culture....I don't know how many people have come onto the reserve and gone to every house asking questions. My people have been 'researched' to death" (116).

The text's combination of poetry, lifestory, and observations on the politics of disclosure (of personal information) offers perhaps the most interesting commentary on the operation of the ideology of generic form, particularly autobiography and poetry, and their respective strengths and limitations. Joe recognizes the processes of the internalization of dominant norms that suppress feminist and anti-racist expression—anger, or what she calls "the negative." She also suggests that her resistance to disclosure is a function, in part, of the operation of ideology of autobiographical form, its assumed relationship to real individuals, particularly her children and husband, and her own valued Mi'kmaq community. She recalls, for example, telling her children of her concerns that perhaps the publication of her lifestory "will hurt you sometimes, because I'm going to talk about the wrong I have done and things that have hurt me, but I will talk about it openly from now on" (138). She describes the effect of writing "negatively" about an individual:

> I learned to write in a loving and honourable way about people. I only wrote one bad story about a person and I got a lot of negative feedback on that. Most of the time I would write about someone who moved me.
>
> I wrote poetry on almost every subject I could think of, but, at that time, one thing I never wrote about was the battering I had experienced. I guess it was just fear

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non-Aboriginal commentary on and framing "explanation" of the text and its author, but because Joe herself provides the same information—in her own words.

> of writing about things like that while my husband was alive. I didn't want to step on live toes; I still don't. (108-09)

One of the enabling conditions of the production of her narrative, then, is the death of her husband (for whom she nonetheless grieves). It is after his death that she is liberated "to write the truth from now on" (137), particularly regarding her survival of his violent abuse and alcoholism.

That Joe includes poetry in her lifestory is perhaps not only an indication of the importance that Joe accords it in her sense of self, and in her history of survival, but a marker of the limitations of the lifestorytelling form for her. The inclusion of her poetry is also the inclusion of a particular form of voice that does not have to negotiate assumptions of referentiality in the way that lifestorytelling does. In the interplay between poetry and lifestory Joe is able to articulate at least dual perspectives on the events and histories of her life; the poetry perhaps serves as a site of self-expression perhaps not allowed (in her view) by the lifestorytelling form.

Language

The negotiations of Rita Joe's narrative with the English language are in some ways made explicit in the form and subject-matter, and at times so subtle as to easily bypass the monolingual Anglocentric reader—thus demonstrating the very problems of language I have outlined. Joe writes in Standard English, providing in parenthesis translations of the few italicized Mi'kmaq words she uses as well as a full glossary at the conclusion of the text. This practice of glossing certainly helps to inform the monolingual English reader of the literal meanings of some of the words. But it also risks rendering invisible both the connotative meanings of the terms, and the other negotiations between the Mi'kmaq language and English that the narrative suggests, reinforcing again the primacy of the English language.

Joe comments that Mi'kmaq was her first language and that her early foster care homes were all Mi'kmaq-speaking households. She does not comment in her lifestory on how she learned the English language, whether through the policies of the residential

school or through entering foster-care later in the non-Aboriginal community of Oxford. But there are some suggestions that over time her fluency in the Mi'kmaq language decreased, as indicated in her mention of asking Mi'kmaq language experts for proper pronunciations and usages as her writing career developed. Significantly, Joe notes briefly that during her first meeting with her husband he asked her to speak in Mi'kmaq and that "Mi'kmaq was our common voice from then on" (72). Yet the remainder of her text records conversations with her husband in English. This is a brief indication of some of the processes of translation that have gone into the production of the text, which can be easily ignored, partly because the presence of the glossary suggests the translation process is visible and complete. Similarly, Joe stresses that the Mi'kmaq language is for her the primary language of expression of "any important issue"; but she does not comment on the difficulties that arise in translating the specificities of that language and meaning into English: "the ultimate expression of any important issue is to voice it in Mi'kmaq—it moves me to hear the words. So, usually, when I hear something voiced in my first language, I listen very carefully then translate it into English" (119).

There are a few subtle but significant indications in *The Song of Rita Joe* of how Joe perceives the inextricable relationship between her language and her "identity" as Mi'kmaq. Not only does she view as positive the fact that her first foster homes were Mi'kmaq speaking, but she notes later how, when in Boston looking for her brother (where she meets her Frank), she finds a community of Mi'kmaq people. She describes this community and her entry into it as formed not through identifications of skin colour but through the Mi'kmaq language (however faulty or regionally different her own use of it may have been): "the camaraderie was instant. I tried to converse with them in Mi'kmaq, to impress them, but they made fun of my pronunciation of certain words. Sometimes my sounds would be too long, sometimes they'd be too short. I just laughed along with them, happy to have found friends" (68).

Joe's most explicit commentary on the power of the English language in affecting and shaping her subjectivity appears in a poem "I Lost my Talk," from her collection *Song of Eskasoni.* It is addressed to the colonizers and those who ran the residential school. Here, the narrative/poetic "I" is angry, resistant, challenging white history and white authority, in

ways that, it would seem. Joe does not allow herself in the narrative of her lifestory; there, she writes of her residential school experience: "I do not like to dwell on the negative if I can help it. The positive outlook that I have worked on for so long now turns me off the negative. I look for the good..." (48). It is this disjunction between poetic and lifestory-telling voices that suggests one advantage of poetry in relation to lifestorytelling, in that it is as form in which to articulate, produce, an alternate subjectivity, which, because of the politics of disclosure, the lifestoryteller may feel constrained to voice:

> I lost my talk
> The talk you took away
> When I was a little girl
> At Shubenacadie school.
>
> You snatched it away;
> I speak like you
> I think like you
> I create like you
> The scrambled ballad, about my word.
>
> Two ways I talk
> Both ways I say,
> Your way is more powerful.
>
> So gently I offer my hand and ask,
> Let me find my talk
> So I can teach you about me. (55)

The agency that Joe articulates regarding her ability, and that of her people, to use the Mi'kmaq language is always located in a context in which the English language and its power, are foregrounded. There are humorous moments in the text in which the Mi'kmaq language is shown as having particular power (but this power is limited to individual interactions), and these function as a critique of the monolingualism of the colonizers and their descendants. In one instance, Joe recounts insulting a non-Aboriginal woman writer in front of her husband (the Mi'kmaq insult is not translated), such that the woman is left uncomprehending while Joe and her husband enjoy the joke.

In another, she recalls consulting Mi'kmaq language expert Sarah Denny on the proper pronunciation of a particular sound before singing a song in Mi'kmaq for a non-

Aboriginal audience: "'They won't know the difference where you are going' [Denny responded]. I laughed very hard at that because it is true that non-Indians know too little about Native expressions to spot the differences" (119). In both cases, however, it is the Mi'kmaq language that is in the small minority, represented, even by Joe herself, to and for a majority and uncomprehending non-Aboriginal, Anglocentric audience.

More pointed is Joe's theory of the language of place names in Canada and their history in the misunderstandings of the colonial encounter. Her discussion offers a revisionist view of colonial history, giving the Mi'kmaq people agency as well as a sense of humour, as if those in the original encounter were playing a linguistic joke on their (once-again-uncomprehending investigators). This joke, suggests Joe, remains on the landscape today:

> The words the non-Natives heard the Natives use have been misinterpreted throughout recorded history. If you are a Native speaking your language to non-Natives, you repeat yourself over and over, trying to be understood. This is how many of the places in our country got their names. To a Native person going through the countryside, Indian place names are a record of our explanations to non-Natives, our jokes and humour. We reason out what the Native person must have been saying, and what the non-Native person must have heard and misunderstood. (131-32)

Joe's comments on her choice of language and the form of her writing, finally, mark once again the primacy of the English language—her children correct their mother's "incorrect" use of English. (Joe makes no mention of her children's knowledge of Mi'kmaq.) And yet she stresses her agency in working to transform the poetic form to suit her needs, calling her poems, as she does "songs": "I would say, 'Never mind, never mind. It's a song!' I wasn't that worried about using correct English; I was worried about the song" (118).

Nation

Rita Joe does not assert a desire for or theory of Mi'kmaq sovereignty or political autonomy *per se* in *Song of Rita Joe*. But in detailing her experiences of residential school and poverty, and her life as a public literary figure and spokesperson for the Mi'kmaq people, she does name the oppressive operations of dominant nationalism as a prime target

of her work. For Joe, life as a Mi'kmaq person in Canada has been an experience of being made to belong to "an alien nation" within her own country, which, she writes, "made a permanent impression on me. Even today, I use the method of peaceful confrontation to fight it" (40). She states that the goals of her work are for the recognition of the specificity and value of Mi'kmaq culture within the dominant national space, which she refers to as her "country." Much of her writing and public speaking, she suggests, is directed at countering official histories and assumptions about the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. She states that for a long time she had assumed that the dominant culture knew "the truth about my people" (102), particularly because of the extent to which the anthropological gaze had been focused on her people (116). She avoided being too critical of the dominant culture and its leaders and educators, she comments, until she recognized the extent of their ignorance. In her concluding pages she notes, too, how dominant ideologies have been internalized by her people, how the burden for change lay with those least privileged because of dominant national apathy, and how the revision of dominant histories, including the construction of "the Indian," is one of the strategies she has chosen in her "gentle war" :

> It is hard for you to see our face, and sometimes it is even hard for us to see ourselves. In the first poem of my book, I wrote:
>
> I am the Indian,
> And the burden
> Lies yet with me.
>
> Twenty years later, I am thinking the same thing. The brave part is in taking on history and leaving your own story. (170)

Joe's story of surviving sexual and other abuses in foster care, of asking the Indian Agent to place her in the Shubenacadie residential school, of her "education" there, and the effects of internalized dominance in her adult life challenges a dominant national mythology of Canada as a "peaceable kingdom" of tolerance and equality. In particular, her account of Mi'kmaq poverty, critiques the myths of middle-class Canada and its internationally recognized high standard of living as masking a class and racial hierarchy in the national space: "Native people are the experts on being poor, we are the experts on recycling, we are even experts on surviving oppression" (157).

That Joe's two elder brothers attended the residential school because of the family's poverty and inability to provide for them, and that Joe sends her own daughter Phyllis to

the school at the age of five because of the family's difficult financial state (78).[5] comprise a particularly sad and critical commentary on the imbrication of the residential school system, its production of a gendered labouring class, and of colonization's enforced poverty on Aboriginal peoples. Joe recalls peeking in on a classroom and then being invited in by the teacher:

> Finally, the teacher told us to come in and sit down, and very soon we were given crochet needles and shown how to crochet a tam. I don't know how long it took me to learn to crochet (and I don't remember learning by ABCs) but I remember this tam. When it was finished, I took the tam home and showed it to my foster mother, and, oh, she was so appreciative. (28)

Joe appears hesitant to critique the residential school system completely for a number of reasons: she chose to attend it as a refuge from even worse abuses than those at the school; her decision to wage a "gentle war" against racism; and her positive experiences with white individuals there. In her article "The Gentle War," Joe comments that the national reception of her works is an indication of "winning the gentle war," which, she suggests, "is more effective than [the] radical" (28). "If one must fight racism we have to do it in compromise in meeting our requirement" (28), she states, indicating a conscious negotiation with national, multicultural ideologies that influence how racism and oppression "should" be raised in order to reach national visibility.

While engaging in her gentle war, Joe does not nullify the suffering and anger of other residential school survivors, nor the aspirations of more "radical" activists. In fact, her "positive" comments regarding the kindness of a particular nun foreground effectively the very absence in Joe's life of loving support and the tragedy of the residential school system, designed to destroy family relationships and Aboriginal cultures, and, in turn, to produce a military-style dependency in its rigid operations:

> Me, I have always had some sympathy for the nuns. Often when I say this, people are surprised because they have heard a lot of stories about the place. Yes, I had some negative experiences. We were not allowed to express our Native language, culture, and spirituality, and these things are very important to us....It is true that bad things happened while I was there. You can't help having a chip on your shoulder if you are

[5] There is no indication in the narrative as to whether or not these children's entry into residential school was part of the enforcement of particular legislation regarding mandatory attendance and poverty; the narrative, rather, only indicates that it was the parent's choice (which may, in turn, be an effect of the perception of the child, Joe, at the time).

> told, military style, when to go to the bathroom, when to eat, when to do this and that, when to pray. We were even told when to yawn and cough....Not all of the nuns were mean, though, and a few were very kind....Every day [the sister who worked in the laundry] would have a candy or a chocolate or a little gift—perhaps a notebook or pencil or box of crayons. They were simple little gifts, but to me there were very important. This nun was like a mother figure to me, and I loved her. I still love her today. (48, 50, 51)

Joe's story of her life after residential school (working as exploited and unskilled labour with only a Grade Eight education) and the difficulties she has faced in terms of raising a large family in poverty, are powerful indictments of the failure of the residential school in even meeting its imperialist goals of assimilation. Again, it is through her poetry that Joe takes on a voice that is more overtly critical of the residential school system, as, significantly, a *system*, in which, for example, there could be resistant or supportive individuals such as particular nuns. The poem concludes:

> I had no wish to enter
> Nor to walk the halls.
> I had no wish to feel the floors
> Where I felt fear
> A beating heart of episodes
> I care not to recall.
> The structure stands as if to say:
> I was just a base for theory
> To bend the will of children
> I remind
> Until I fall. (58)

It is in her roles as poet, public figure, and mother that Joe sees herself as actively resisting dominant nationalism, and its versions of national history. She recalls that it was the negative experiences of her own children in school, experiences that frighteningly reproduced her own, that were her catalyst for writing and for public involvement. "More and more," she writes, "they experienced immersion into an alien nation" (101), and to counter this she values her people's and her children's specific knowledge of history. She suggests, based on linguistic evidence, for example, that some of the Beothuk people survived the slaughter, of colonization (131), and passes a crucial message regarding history, knowledge, and agency to her children: "One of the things I keep saying is that we are the ones who know about ourselves" (131).

She stresses that she "knows" her people and "what they could and could not have done" (36) in relation to what is recorded in dominant historical narratives. She insists on the validity of the Mi'kmaq perspective with an argument that challenges assumptions of dominant "ownership" of the land: "Our beliefs may be unconventional, but they are what have kept us here; we are here as proof" (157). And, as I suggested regarding Joe's negotiations with language, her comments regarding the history of place names indicate that it is, in fact, Mi'kmaq place names and therefore Mi'kmaq custodianship of land that undergird Europeanized claims to place. She directly addresses her non-Aboriginal readers in taking on official histories of Canada and ongoing national representations of Aboriginal peoples, and asserts again the Mi'kmaq's prior ownership of place:

> I wish my country would wake up and look more thoroughly at the Native people of today. We have something to offer, in arts, sciences, philosophy; we are not saying, "Gimme, gimme, gimme." The founding fathers of this land we call *Kante'wa'ki* (Canada) were my people, and when they came here it was to live using the best of their knowledge and the utmost perseverance. We were the first explorers, but had no thought of glory, monetary reward or conquest. We survived. Yet, the world hears the cry of the conquerors as they are immortalized time and time again; society ignores the beauty of our culture. Native people today are still like strangers in our own land.
>
> What I would like to ask now is that you look at my people without the negative image, and listen to our voices—our wampum, our stone writings, our words. Analyze, if you wish, but listen. (158)

Joe negotiates, then, a desire for national, "Canadian," recognition of the Mi'kmaq people as a nation within a nation, as having a claim to their own land which dominant nationalism has overwritten but cannot erase. The presence of the Mi'kmaq people and their ongoing relationship to place as prior owners, as she suggests, is written on the land, in stone writings, and maintained, like dominant nationalism, through the constant performance of that relationship, through symbols (wampum) and words.

Aboriginality

Questions of biological and "racial" ancestry do emerge for Joe, primarily in terms of gaps in her family history. She writes early in *Song of Rita Joe* that she is of mixed ancestry. "Sometimes I wonder about that; in my heart, I care about where I come from.

The Native part of me I am sure of: I honour it whole, and respect all other cultures" (18). This suggests perhaps a sense of a self divided along "racial" categories, with a valorisation of her Mi'kmaq ancestry indicated subtly in references to a desire to be "purely" Mi'kmaq.[6] Later, Joe recalls, for example, how her mother-in-law referred to Joe's son Junior as "a stranger" because of his blond hair. Joe's reflections on this incident suggest that she has mixed feelings about her white ancestry and its transmission to her children:

> I never said anything, but I knew in my heart that my ancestry was showing itself. Later, Junior became darker and today that particular son is the spitting image of his father. Our other little fellow, Basil, was as dark as Frank from the day he was born and always getting into some mischief. I called Basil and Junior "night and day." Once, when Basil was sitting by the side of the road playing with his little cars in the mud, my mother-in-law told me to dress him in brighter colours. "Nobody can see Basil in dark clothes," she said. "He's the same colour as the mud." Basil laughs at this story today. (88)

If Joe indicates some sense of incompleteness or uncertainty regarding her mixed-ancestry, as suggested in these rare moments in her text, they do function as a deconstructive reversal of the racial hierarchy of "white"/"Aboriginal"—her desire is for a full-blooded Mi'kmaq ancestry, and for her son to be "visibly" Mi'kmaq rather than be able to pass as white.

More typically in her narrative Joe constructs Mi'kmaq identity not in exclusive terms of skin colour or biological categories (though the imposed category of "Native" is her initial marker of difference) but in terms of practices. Her discussions of racism against the Mi'kmaq people and indeed all Aboriginal people in Canada, while using the dichotomy of Native/non-Native, focus not on skin colour as the determining factor, but on cultural difference, ignorance, and historical amnesia. In addressing the racism she encountered in the white-dominated writing community, for example, she comments: "Many times there would be interest, and sometimes I would feel shut out. If I was shut out, I always knew why: it was because the people did not know much about my culture, and whose fault was that?" (128).

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[6] She regrets her lack of knowledge regarding her great-great grandfather's identity (17), and suggests that her father's choice to change his name from that of his light-skinned grandmother (Gould) to Bernard is an effect of his sexism. In a poem on this very point she writes:

> The reason he gave was: not from a woman
> He wanted to be known, his name,
> But from a man's man his ego travelled.
> I am his daughter, humility is my fame. (18)

Again, Joe's strategy of not directly naming racism as a foundational problem of the oppression of her people could be part of her strategy of fighting a "gentle war," but it also functions to shift focus away from the dichotomies of race and racism towards a more fluid and rich assertion of Mi'kmaq identity. (Moreover, that her life has been so circumscribed by racist and sexist systemic processes of colonization renders that racism obvious.) Her comments on life on the reserve at Eskasoni not only reveal her views of some of the defining practices of Mi'kmaq communities, particularly sharing, but in contrast provides a critique of mainstream Canadian culture generally, including its individualism and lack of respect for the elderly:

> Living on the reservation was different from living in Halifax. As in all Native communities, the people helped each other. There are some people in Eskasoni who have helped me in more ways than I can say. There is a friendly atmosphere among my people that I have always known and felt—we share stories, problems, caring for our babies, recipes for Native herbal medicines—and hardship sometimes seems less hard because we can talk about it with each other. The soupbone making the rounds is our favourite joke. I have been sharing problems and jokes with my friends, especially other women on the reservation, since I arrived in Eskasoni in 1956. The friends I made then are still my friends. That is why I like living on a reservation, even today. It is like living with an extended family....I think the elders in a community are the best social intermediaries in any situation. In Native communities, we have total respect for the elders; we listen to their common sense more than we listen to professionals. (80, 94)

In the final section of her lifestory, *Ntapekiaqn*: My Song (The Spirit Path, 1990-), Joe explores how Mi'kmaq spirituality has shaped her sense of self, and in doing so asserts again that Mi'kmaq identity is based on practice, which may include aspects of the dominant culture.[7] In doing so, she makes a clear distinction between "religion," as the institution and ideology of Christianity imposed on her people, and Mi'kmaq spiritual traditions. In recalling the Christian components of her residential school education, Joe critiques the manner in which Christianity was imposed through fear:

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[7] Early in the text, for example, she refers to the annual St. Ann's Day Celebration, indicating that the Mi'kmaq have in many ways taken a Catholic tradition and made it their own:

> St. Ann is the grandmother saint of the Mi'kmaq, and her feast is held each year on July 26. On the Sunday following that date, there is the *'Tewa'lud* ("Taken Out")—the ceremony where a statue of St. Ann is taken to the rock where Abbe Maillard, the Apostle of the Mi'kmaq, used to teach. Our people have kept this feast alive since the 1600s. (33)

> Then, when I went to residential school as a little girl, I was afraid of the priests and nuns who were our teachers. I remember that when I made my first communion, I was petrified; and I didn't know how to confess. I had poor communication skills in English to begin with, and I didn't know what I was supposed to say. I wondered if I should invent things. When you are just a little child, you don't have sins, and here I was expected to confess every week. We children would invent our sins and share them. Oh, it was so ridiculous. (149-50)

Joe, while certainly valorizing Mi'kmaq spirituality, does not entirely dismiss Christian tradition as an avenue for identity. She notes that she and her husband "tried to teach our children about religion but also about our Creator," and that eventually after leaving residential school she did return to the Christian church—"on my own time and for my own reasons—myself" (150). Nor does she suggest, as dominant stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as a purely and "naturally" spiritual people assert, that spirituality is entirely constitutive of Mi'kmaq identity, or of her own. Rather, it is a knowledge and practice to be learned and developed: "I had to learn the hard way about the spiritual side of things. *Kisulkw* (our Creator) is very important to Native people; I learned this from my dad and other people when I was very young" (149). Moreover, she makes a clear distinction between Mi'kmaq spirituality and Christian "religion," and indicates (again, subverting stereotypes of Aboriginal spirituality), that neither practice can completely provide a site of agency:

> The spiritual part of things—I have always kept it alive for myself, deep within my own core. Whatever happened to me, whatever problems I had, I would talk to my Creator in Mi'kmaq. I would converse with *Kiskam* (God) when I was alone, just as if I was talking to an individual....And, of course, the religious part of things and the spiritual part of things don't always solve your problems, either. There were times, when I was a little girl, when I prayed to be delivered from whatever misery I was encountering, and it didn't happen. The misery went on and on and on. And then you have the unhappy realization that religion doesn't always come across for you. But prayer does help. (151)

Rita Joe constructs her sense of agency as informed but not exclusively determined by Mi'kmaq spirituality as a cultural practice. In turn, she is producing through her narrative an assertion that Mi'kmaq identity is not predetermined by external or imperial categories of race and "traditional" spirituality. Rather, it is a fluid process that does, of course,

involve negotiations with those dominant categories, but more importantly, transforms and incorporates a variety of discourses that exceed constraining and monolithic constructions.

Chapter Seven

Elsie Roughsey's (Labumore's)
An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New (1984)

Introduction

Elsie Roughsey's (Labumore's) lifestory is a fascinating and long-neglected narrative. Written by Labumore in 1972, and loosely edited (with Labumore's final approval) by white researchers Paul Memmott and Robyn Horsman, it details Labumore's life on Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland, Australia. Labumore was born in 1923, and from the age of eight she was raised in a mission dormitory. During the Second World War missionaries were evacuated from the island and Labumore rejoined her father's family to live in the bush, where she learned first-hand of Lardil traditions, some of which she records in detail. The missionaries returned in 1946, and Labumore, by then married to writer-artist Dick Roughsey and the mother of six children, worked as a nursing assistant/midwife, teaching assistant, and community volunteer prior to writing her lifestory.

This text is unique in this study in the lifestoryteller's recollections of traditional tribal life and the transitions of her community from the tribal life to contemporary economies and politics. It provides details into traditional healing practices, ceremonies, kinship ties and taboos, childbirth, the powers of spiritual figures in the Lardil world view (such as the Sea Serpent), food gathering and preparation, traditional economics, and philosophy on Aboriginality as defined in specific terms of place, history, cultural practice, and, significantly, relationship.

Labumore provides a perspective on the history of imperialism on the island in the twentieth century (from 1923), detailing the mission system and its imposition of Christianity, and the capitalist economic system and their particular gendering of labour. Moreover, the text provides a unique perspective on the operations of white Australian nationalism in relation to the Second World War. As Labumore recalls, the arrival of army

troops and the evacuation of missionaries from the island left the Lardil people without the economic resources on which they had come to depend, but also forced/enabled a return to bush life for many of those, including Labumore, who had lived in the mission dormitory for so long that it had become "home." In detailing precontact traditions and practices of land custodianship that survived into her childhood and which she experienced, further, Labumore effectively challenges dominant constructions of nationhood.

The text's structure, language, and subject-matter perform a historicization of a subjectivity located at the intersections of Aboriginal and dominant Australian cultures, and in negotiation with the contexts of the production, dissemination, and reception of Aboriginal lifestorytelling. What fascinates, however, is how the text does not smooth over the contradictions and tensions produced by competing discourses and material systems, but demonstrates them. Christian doctrine and Aboriginal tradition, Aboriginal English, Lardil, and Standard English, the influence of traditional tribal life and of dormitory education, of Lardil conceptions of place and origin and dominant Australian nationalism are at once uneasily juxtaposed and yet constitutive of the writing subject. The operations of imperialist hegemony are made visible as these conflict with Lardil perspectives, and are subverted and transformed by the Labumore's processes of sense making, of construct-ing a coherent sense of self through these tensions. Embedded in this rich and complex text is a historicizing of a subject position and of a subjectivity that works to provide an imaginary solution to the very real contradictions of its own history and contexts. Labumore's narrative therefore reverberates to provide a commentary on colonization, nation, race, Aboriginality, agency, and identity.

Agency

Labumore writes of the lifestorytelling process as based in memory, as an introspect-ive and retrospective process that works towards producing coherence from seemingly incoherent conditions:

> Thinking back those many years, from eight years old, when I was a child, now a full grown up woman with human sense of grown up person, I can see way, way back of my childhood days[....]Only now am I able to understand it all. When I was a child, I

> hardly knew anyone. *I cannot ever explain really of my life.* To me, I just got along the way things went[....]You can bring forth so much from the past[...]how it was all worked out, to what it is now. (1, 3, 24, my emphasis)

An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New is explicitly pedagogical, providing both a record of Labumore's people and traditions before they are lost completely and a counterstory to the dominant nationalist narrative of colonization and race. Her hope, she writes, is that children of the contemporary generation "can compare my time of learning and understanding" (25) to their own and develop a sense of Aboriginal identity at once appropriate to their time and yet which adheres to traditional Lardil views.

That Labumore's varied childhood experiences living in a mission dormitory and then traditionally in the bush with her family have greatly influenced her sense of identity is clear throughout, both in the contradictions in many of her statements, in her own stated sense of self, and in her reflections on gender, women's roles, and Aboriginality in a contemporary context. That Labumore refers to the mission dormitory as "home"—while at once celebrating bush life and admitting how much she hated it because of its arduousness, physical discomforts, frequent lack of food and adequate shelter—is an indication of a subjectivity working to reconcile conflicting responses within her pedagogical framework of educating a white readership on the value of Lardil culture.

Labumore's reflections on Aboriginal women's roles, and on motherhood in particular, evince a struggle to reconcile her stated desire to value Lardil tribal customs for a non-Aboriginal audience with her contemporary reflections on the devalued role of women, and of mothers in particular, in her community. Labumore's self-representation is in many ways shaped by concepts of the maternal, either through its absence, as in her early childhood, or through her own performance of that role later in life. Her self-construction as gendered, as motherless girl, and as maternal agent is enmeshed in the internalization of patriarchy imposed by the mission school system, its structure of gendered labour, and a patriarchal Christian tradition. That the narrative does not resolve such tensions, moreover, is a mark of its particular interest—its performance of the effects of competing discourses on the writing subject. For example, in her insistence that in her childhood the government "really cared for us in those times. Their visits came with

love....we had real good people who cared to come along and see all the black people" (22). the operations of imperialist hegemony are starkly presented.

An Aboriginal Mothers Tells of the Old and the New begins in the recognition of and struggle with absence—of memory and of parental influence. particularly that of Labumore's mother. Labumore's first memory foregrounds the *absence* of memories of her first eight years—"Oh. how I'd love to know it all." she states (6)—and takes on an intriguingly split voice in the adult recognition and *reconstruction* of her child self:

> I shall never. never tell any stories of all those times. only the day *I noticed myself* with my sister May William. other two friends Vera Barney and Gertie Gammon...how we walked along the shores of our island. going to the mission. singing. talking. laughing and playing as we went along. (6-7. my emphasis)

Labumore foregrounds the absence of maternal influence in her early childhood (as her mother was for an undisclosed reason living with relatives elsewhere) and in doing so marks the importance of the role of mothers: "Living in the dormitory. I thought I only had father. but I have no idea of having mother. Mother was nothing I have known or understood" (8).

Labumore stresses her ability to mother. a role that she extends beyond biological ties. and her disappointment at how this labour is devalued in contemporary times. In many ways. the self Labumore constructs emerges from the importance she places on this role and how she has fulfilled it so effectively (as signalled by the title of her narrative). She notes how she cared for many children before the birth of her own six. because their parents were unable to do so at the time: "I mothered them as they were my own children because I like to help to take part in love and caring for children. As times went by. as these children grew. they soon forgot about me and fled back to their parents. with no thanks as they left me" (81).

As a child. Labumore had contact with her family even while in the dormitory. particularly in times of food shortages. and then. for a number of years during the Second World War. when the missions were evacuated (of white people). forcing the Lardil to return to a traditional. if disappearing. lifestyle. Her continuing struggle to reconcile the differences between dormitory life and tribal life (where she became close with her "foster mothers" as she calls her father's second-wife and her mother-in-law), and the profound

effects they have had on her, are marked early in the text: "My mother was my best friend, also my mother-in-law, Dick's mother. I spent most of my bush life with them, ran into the real life to roam and hunt with the tribe" (178). The struggle to reconcile the pain of childhood is indicated in how she suggests that such pain and confusion in part produced her current strong sense of identity:

> But the toughness of my time made me to be what I am today...nice, kind, helpfulness, forgiving, to be honest, and not to be dishonest with anyone, to be happy. Well, all what I learnt made much different in life I'm living now. So those hard life I once had was to help me to understand so much...how to get prepared for when I was able to stand for myself, when I was old enough to keep control of myself. What I never knew in my girlhood days, is those awful days I thought was not nice for me to live with tough missionaries, but I was wrong to announce it. But that was so. I must speak true of that life, or perhaps I was not really wrong. It was the way I looked back upon it, was my way of looking at things. But that made me now free to really understand it all.
>
> I'm thankful I was firstly put in dormitory. Now, when I see it all, it made me how to do everything right [....] I am thankful I had old parents, because in the year 1942, I learnt extra more from them. (24)

In particular, Labumore stresses that she had always had a particularly strong sense of identity, even in moments acute oppression ("The best way I always fought it out...to speak up for myself," she writes [86]), especially in her development as a lifestoryteller: "I am proud of myself [....]I am able to write and bring it to the life, that some other people may understand and realize what the life of an Aboriginal people had to go through" (236-37). Labumore's suggestion that her personal strength is an *effect* of a history of oppression and resistance is not the same assertion (assumption) as claiming oppression as a necessary precondition for a coherent and strong identity. Even near the conclusion of her narrative, Labumore's struggle to reconcile these competing discourses and the material and ideological effects on her sense of self remains visible:

> Why I feel different from others...it's the background which I am proud of, also European life is a view of my point to press on to. I have sought...is good to live with. So I should feel I am in two world, which I have found both world of life is so real and wonderful to me to live each day. (224)

Labumore's text is unique in Aboriginal Australian women's published lifestories in its elaboration of the agency and power accorded Aboriginal women in traditional cultural practices (Longley 380). The narrative "provides amazing insights for white readers into

tribal laws, customs, and beliefs" of the Lardil people (379). It records how Labumore came to be included in corroborrees and initiation and healing practices (as a result of her intense and persistent curiosity [Labumore 81]), how traditional Lardil practice viewed and celebrated pregnancy, with its range of taboos (100-01), and how some geographic sites "represent women's legends" and are "very, very sacred life of the early days' people" (139). Labumore states that speech taboos are grounded in a philosophy of respect: "I'm even not allowed to speak to my sister-in-law. That too is how we show our love and respect to her, because she got married to him. And I am not allowed to go or even speak to her because that woman is now one with my brother. Therefore it is the way I cannot speak to my brother or his wife" (91). She notes that traditional Lardil custom abhorred child abuse and neglect, as well as wife abuse, and that a woman was speared for leaving her children. "That even applied with a man too" (187).

However, *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* also articulates tensions among the desire to validate Lardil culture generally, to critique of aspects of traditional and contemporary Lardil culture as patriarchal, and to assert Christian perspectives on gender roles and marriage. Labumore writes that in traditional Lardil tribal life "[w]oman always needed a man to care for the families" (193), and her comments on the ideals of marriage seem to advocate a relationship in which men hold more power and authority:

> We have a man to be our husband, to take all the responsibility to love, help guide us. We are no more unhappy children, but pride with love and comfort, to know we have someone as a husband to share the world's life. We are happy and there is not much worry to be unhappy. (194)

Elsewhere, however, Labumore critiques the traditional practice of infanticide of twins (104-05) and comments on how in current times the division of labour is not equal between genders: "Some people are very useless when storm or rain is approaching, especially men and boys. They just sit there without moving to get ready for the rain. Poor women must do everything...on her own" (149). While Labumore's stated intention is to affirm Lardil law, she also recognizes that change has occurred to the extent that a return to precontact Lardil practices and economics is an impossibility, and would not be effective in contemporary Mornington Island.

Form and Language

As with the other Aboriginal women's lifestories I analyze in this study, *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* grapples with the ideology of the autobiographical form as it negotiates assumptions about race, Aboriginality, nationality, language, and truth. This text is singular, however, in how it makes these negotiations so very visible in terms of form and content, such that the conventions of the genre and of Standard English are immediately thrown into question; it "works against white ignorance and misconception about tribal life without bowing to white conventions of genre and representation" (Longley 380). There are moments in which the grammatical sense and literal meaning are rendered opaque, and intriguingly so. The non-Aboriginal editors have supplied a glossary, and, in many cases, ellipses, when, in their words, "sudden changes in the thought process occurred in mid-sentence, or when vital linking phrases or words were missing in the original" (Memmott and Horsman, "A note" 241). They suggest, moreover, that apparent contradictions in Labumore's content or stated views "reflect the complex array of dilemmas that the people of Mornington have faced over the past seventy-five years (Preface, n. pag.).

In many ways the text is structured in the format of the "as-told-to" (white anthropologist) tradition of Aboriginal autobiographical narrative. There is an editors' introduction, and photographs of Lardil people prior to Labumore's birth, of Labumore as a child, and, later, engaged in a traditional activity ("I am making a doll out of cotton tree," reads the caption) are included, such that the text suggests more than a hint of the anthropological. The production, content and the structure of the text, however, work to counter the assumptions that what will be presented will be anthropological rather than creative. It must be stressed, as the editors do, that Labumore wrote *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* on her own, and that she was consulted during the editing process, approved the final manuscript, and that the editors did much to avoid standardizing Labumore's idiosyncratic and often-opaque Lardil/Aboriginal English idiom.

The narrative is linear in general structure—beginning with Labumore's earliest memories and concluding in the contemporary present of 1984—but within this structure

the chronology is often non-linear; Labumore circles back to and shifts between different time periods and events with little concern about linearity, producing instead a sense of the flow of the operation of memory. As she states, "[o]nly remembrances are now" (212).

The editors' insistence that "Elsie's work is a valid and powerful literary work in its own right" (Memmott and Horsman, Preface n. pag.), while seeming at first to be an assertion of white authority on/over the narrative, is also a resistant negotiation with the expectations of truth and with the hold of the anthropological gaze, of the intended and constructed "European" (white Australian) audience. Labumore's first words, further, in one aspect mark this anthropological inheritance; at the same time, they can be read as a framing assertion regarding Aboriginality, its definition as an effect of relationship to place, and thus a powerful claim to origin and land ownership: "I'm a full-blood Aboriginal, born 1923, on Goonana mission, Mornington Island. Goonana is the name of my native home, far up in the North, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland" (1).

Labumore draws persistently on dominant assumptions about the veracity of autobiographical narratives in order to make more forceful her argument about the existence of precontact Lardil custom, tradition, law, and spirituality and their validity and equality with European culture. Her narrative, then, is bifurcated by her desire to both preserve Lardil culture (with its imperfections) and to assert its validity, and therefore to idealize it, perhaps, to an audience perceived as skeptical, unbelieving, and racist. Labumore's stated intention is to record Lardil traditions, to preserve them for her people and a much wider audience, such that the Lardil people provide a role model for future communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal:

> In the outer parts of the world, people of other states and continents do not know of my people really. Lardil customs, laws, culture and its legends will never be known to the people who never saw the tribes of Goonana people, the Lardil. They have so many things that are interesting...are still now known so far. Only very few have been told, or given to a white man.
>
> I'm sure the world should know what was not mentioned, because other people can live by us if they only know the good laws of one time we had. (4)

Labumore represents herself as verifiable witness to the Lardil tribal traditions, particularly of spiritual occurrences and healing practices, and persistently insists on the veracity of her experiences and eyewitness observations, using the word "true" and the phrase "true life"

throughout her narrative (120, 133, 139, 237). Spiritual figures and events, she insists, "are true life in our history" (110). "All our legends are not false. They are true" (123), she argues.[1]

Yet Labumore places limits on the access to truth she is willing to grant the part of her audience that she clearly constructs as white/European: "...if any of you don't believe of what I'm writing about, you could live in these areas for a month or more to learn and hear and see things for yourselves" (139) and "[y]our ways can steal, wreck...and lose all our humble culture, customs and laws" (230). She does reflect late in the narrative that despite the amount of detail she has provided on spiritual and ceremonial matters—for example, beliefs about the power of dreams and of the armpit perspiration of a healer, as well as the manner in which geographic locations have spiritual power—there are limits to her disclosure: "You can get half but not all," she remarks of "Europeans who are interestd in the black people's way of living from the past" (98). Later, she states, "I cannot show and give a white person too much of my tribal life" (232). Moreover, the information she does provide, while certainly providing a fascinating record of particular practices, be they spiritual, ceremonial, or practical in terms of food and shelter preparation, is not adequate to provide a re-creation of the materials or events, as might be expected from the anthropological perspective. One would be hard pressed, for example, to build a fish trap net or a hair belt from the instructions Labumore provides (151, 152). This, however, does not detract from the value of the text, but marks its tracing of a subjectivity and what it deems significant, what elements and discourses and material realities have shaped it, and therefore, shaped and limited agency. The strength in the text, in other words, is not necessarily grounded in its historical accuracy but in its negotiations with history.

That the text foregrounds the tensions among historical accuracy, the limits of disclosure, and the creativity and fluidity of the operation of memory in the production/ construction of a lifestory is particularly intriguing, and particularly disruptive of

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[1] Throughout *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* negotiations with the repertoire of assumptions and representations of Aboriginal peoples held by a non-Aboriginal (white Australian) readership are clear. There is the desire to convince a white audience of Lardil culture's validity through such persistent references to tribal Lardil people as having "happy smiling faces." This phrase, while attempting to counter the images of brutish savagery attributed to Aboriginality, can also function to reproduce another stereotype, that of the innocent and simple "noble savage."

anthropological and autobiographical conventions. Early in the text Labumore notes the limits of her self-understanding—"I cannot ever explain really of my life" (3)—and at the conclusion she notes that while the people she writes of are gone, "[o]nly memories last forever" (239). Mudrooroo Narogin insightfully argues that Labumore's narrative style is one that "slides from objectively describing an incident to participating in it" (*Writing* 161). This shift may in part be an effect of the infusion of the Lardil language structure with the English language, as well as of the infusion of oral traditions and speaking patterns in the written text. In Lardil, the editors note, there is no linguistic distinction between past and present, with such differences indicated by other language markers (241); in addition, however, Labumore comments on her own processes of self-reflection and writing as a process and function of memory. She notes that she "enters" memory as she writes: "[t]ruly, as I write, I just can only see the life as a picture...never would appear to try and carry on again" (213).

Labumore's assertion that Lardil spiritual traditions both equal and pre-date Christianity can be read not only as an effect on the writing subject of competing epistemologies but as a conscious negotiation with the ideologies of form, nation, and Aboriginality in a process of asserting and claiming agency and ownership (custodianship) of place. In many instances, Labumore turns the logic and theology of Christianity to her advantage in critiquing the hypocrisies of Christianity as it has related to colonization and ongoing racism. She uses, in other words, "the master's tools" to deconstruct the very non-Christian attitudes of intolerance towards Lardil spirituality and law, which in fact are inextricable:

> So now you can read with the most interest and learn from it, so we many closely contact with love, relation and friendship and all unite as one in God's big vast of land. That's why God has sent His Son...to teach us all to live the same as my people of Lardil, with happy smiling faces, and a most gifted people of my country. So there it is for the year 1982. (236)

In one instance, she uses the Christian doctrine of faith to ask, "if anyone wants us to believe that the bible says, and has and can teach us today, why doesn't any one or some one believe we tribes...of all we lived with and what has been done, and how we look and believe how things happened and were done in the past" (205-06). In critiquing non-

Aboriginal disbelief and denigration of Aboriginal healing practices and powers. moreover. she asks: "You think that the same way of our Lord Jesus Christ? When He was on earth. all His works were just by speech and touch. and everyone is healed" (76). Her suggestion for resolving the unequal power relations of imperialism. so the "world could have much happy. decent. honest. friendly loveable people." finally. appears to be based on the basic Christian tenet of "do unto others as you would have done unto you" (the "Golden Rule"): "One thing they [Europeans] often forget before going into action...feeling if it should be done to them by someone..." (197).

Labumore's record of Lardil spiritual tradition and of her own relationship to both Lardil and Christian spirituality in *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* is a fascinating example of the desire of the narrating subject to resolve the contradictions posed by competing ideological systems (and to negotiate the expectations of a white readership). Labumore not only attempts to validate a Lardil spirituality without explicitly denigrating Christianity (which she has also accepted) but attempts to produce a coherent narrative of spirituality and healing that can encompass both perspectives. In articulating and attempting to reconcile both traditional and Christian views she is also theorizing Aboriginality. Lardil identity. in a particular way—as dependent not on skin colour but spiritual relationship to place and to others. Labumore's construction of her self as a spiritual person. and her more general reflections on spirituality draw on dominant terms of race and Christianity and western medicine but do so to offer a transformative alternative. one inextricably linked to Lardil law. and therefore "place." as well as to reveal the psychological and philosophical tensions in doing so.

Assessing the extent to which Labumore has in fact internalized Christian ideologies as an effect of the mission system also involves a consideration of the politics of reception that her text must negotiate with a white readership. Clearly. Labumore's intent is to establish the validity of Lardil spiritual traditions prior to colonization. coupled with her desire to avoid alienating her predominantly Christian readership. Moreover. as a woman who has experienced both systems. who identifies as Lardil and Christian. who sees value in both Lardil and western healing practices. she clearly is working to find commonalities and equivalences between the competing systems. This dynamic is not just a question of a

negotiation with a Christian audience but an issue of the operation of competing discourses of spirituality in the construction and processes of subjectivity.

There is a clear distinction between Labumore's statements directed at a Christian readership and her recording of and reflections on specific Lardil traditions. In the case of the former, Labumore is clearly attempting to "translate" Lardil traditions, and their validity, into and through the terms of the dominant:

> But God has given us such interesting life...its laws, customs, culture and legends. Dark man had his ten commandments long before a white man came with his gospel and bible. They believed of one Spirit, but they knew not of His name as God. But still in all, they knew that same person was there, above their life. He was their. He was the One whom my people knew of, for all their life, help and protection....[ellipses mine]. So the tribes knew Him a mighty long time before the gospel came to them. (203-04)

Labumore's assertion of Christian values—as equal to and pre-dating Aboriginal spiritual traditions—is also an indication of a strong claim to prior ownership of place: "It's all right a white man and woman brought love and care, things from the bible to teach people, but these things came too late to my people. They already lived with their own life, their own laws and customs" (201).

Nation

An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New reveals and critiques the operations of nationalist and imperialist hegemony, particularly in Labumore's analysis of her experiences of her life in the mission dormitory, where, she writes of "[a]ll the orders we got from the white man and his wife" (7). While early in the text Labumore states that she is still struggling with the legacy of cruelty at the mission school—"today, I still just can't understand why it all meant...to be so tough with us" (13), she writes—the remainder of the text provides a concrete analysis of the ideologies and material practices of imperialism, as they affected Labumore personally and as they affected her people.

The narrative reveals the very powerful operation of imperialist hegemony in terms of Labumore's growing attachment to the dormitory as "home," her expressions of Christianity, and her struggle to reconcile her validation of traditional bush life with a

recognition of its extreme hardships. "As I grew older I liked being in the dormitory," she writes early in the text (22), and on several occasions she comments on how she "hated to go bush. The travel in the hot sun was too hot to carry on travelling" (57). That she continued as a child to refer to the dormitory as "home" is particularly revealing of the "effectiveness" of the mission school system as an agent of assimilation: "Me and my sister pestered Dad to take us back to the mission. We did not like being out in the bush too long. We rather be home with the other girls, but Dad said 'No, we'll go home, when I think of going home'" (58).

Her fond recollections of Christmas celebrations in the dormitory further articulate the operation of Christian imperial hegemony and its active separation of Aboriginal children from their spiritual heritage. However, that in this case, the man who plays Father Christmas is Aboriginal, puts an interesting, humorous, and potentially subversive twist to this process: "We really thought it was Father Christmas himself, and soon we found out it was my uncle Gully Peters. But that never minded us at all" (19-20). At the same time, however, Labumore recalls the beatings of children she witnessed: "I saw lots of girls, older ones, also boys being flogged with flagellan piece of motor car tyre, saw blood streaming from their bottoms and legs where they'd been cut as they were flogged" (16). Early in the text she wonders why kinship ties were abolished in the dormitory system such that her older sister and brother "were only ordinary to one another" (7), and the text proceeds to provide answers. She names the gendering and racialization of labour and the inadequate education given Aboriginal children as part of the process of the production of a domestic labouring class:

> You'll never get anywhere to understand to learn any other good things, no matter how talented you are. To do a thing...they never let you have a try to give it a go, but expect you to go along the way of life without helping you. They rather we black fellows stay where we are. Don't make a move, or you will go above a white man, or should I say equal with them. (86-87)

Later she returns to the same issue, articulating the specific methods of this inadequate education: "There was only a small limit to know and learn, especially to read and write and other small jobs like cutting and carrying wood for cooking, working and watering in

the garden, cleaning around the house, and tidying up, washing and drying up the dishes" (228).

It is in this context that Labumore's ambivalence about the hardships of bush life can be understood, as can her final validation of bush life over dormitory life. She and her husband chose this lifestyle after their marriage, despite its many hardships and Dick Roughsey's persistent absences (because of limited employment opportunities) .While constantly reiterating the hardships of bush life, they chose it because it is a life of freedom from European/imperial control: "I really liked living out bush. You know for why? Well, there are no rules or laws of an European out there in the bush, no policeman or Councillor to order you around, to force you to do anything, but live and hunt, rest in peace and quietness, where there is no worry of all sorts" (175).

Labumore's experiences of shifting between dormitory and bush life, then, offer an intriguing perspective from which to explore the history of colonization and the operations of white nationalism at the local and at the personal or psychological levels. It is, in fact, white nationalism that enabled/forced the Lardil people to return to the bush life during World War Two—white missionaries were evacuated in 1942 because of the threat of Japanese invasion along Australia's northern coast (following the bombing at Darwin) and they took with them the supply of food on which the Lardil people, through the very mission system, had come to depend. (In the 1950s, it was water shortages at the mission that forced the Lardil people back to the bush, rendering them once again powerless in relation to the vagaries of the capitalist mission system.) This in itself is an indication, and implicit critique of, the operation of a racial hierarchy and of the non-citizenship status of Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia. At the same time, what Labumore indicates as the Lardil people's fascination with the army plane wreckage on the coast, and what she refers to as relief at the arrival of the army also indicates to what extent, at least in her formative years, she had internalized white wartime nationalism as norm.

Labumore's record of the instability of the mission economy supplies provides a history of the encroachment of capitalism on the traditional economy of the island as it is imbricated in the development of the white nation of Australia. Her experiences of bush life, further, enable her to develop and posit her own theory of "nationalism" in an

Aboriginal context—in terms of custodianship of land, of relationship to place as enacted and reproduced through both ceremony and everyday material practices, and in terms of the economy. She notes the economic transitions and their devastating effects on the Lardil people:

> My people had no idea of any value belongs to a white man, but just lived on the land, where they were much contented of the food they lived on.
>
> Times went by when some of the hard life was passing away, when we were gradually getting supplies from the Mainland. More and more good things came to our island. People were looking for something belongs to white man now, so they were forgetting about our customs, laws and legends. They were looking beyond for the white man's everything, its laws, rules and all its powers of Governments. But what was the use of forsaking their own tribal laws and customs?...When new things came in too fast, with new kind of people, all kinds of race...well, you could say they ruined every precious life of the Lardil people and all it had on the land with so much happiness. (62-63)

When Labumore details the laws and taboos surrounding the collection of particular food items (for example, the taboo against the counting of mudshells, and of the practices regarding Sea Serpent), she also provides details of a precapitalist island economy. Her discussion of her married life as one in which her husband took a variety of jobs and "has never been much at home" (173) while he worked at whatever employment was available (deckhand, stationhand, carpenter, councillor, policeman, writer, painter, and horse-breaker) is also a reflection on the changing economy of the island: it marks the development of the shipping and pastoral industries, and the further gendering of labour according to European norms: "Most time, when husbands went out working on Cattle Stations, or crew on different Cargo boats, wives would be left without a decent house. So the men had to find a job on the Mainland, to earn enough money to come home and make a small shack enough to live in" (161).

While lamenting the loss of her traditional culture and economy—"I feel today's life has ruined everything of the good old days" (176)—however, Labumore does not advocate a return to that economy as a viable option in contemporary times. Rather, she reflects on the difficulties of developing a sustainable island economy aligned with Lardil goals and practices amidst the capitalist system: "The only thing we must understand...take great interest and aim to force ourselves...how we should live in this island of our own with all

sorts of good life. These things are not in our ways here" (194). In particularly she comments on the difficulties of developing such an economy when the island geography works against full involvement in state, national, and international business, trade, and industry: It would be ideal, she suggests, to

> be able to begin certain jobs, say to make motorcars, motor bikes, tanks for water, to make push bikes, to be plumbers, to build a boat, to make all kinds of articles. But where are the materials? On an island...is so very hard to equal as European, to work and live to their standard. (228)

She advocates in particular the development of the Lardil handicraft industry, which capitalizes on non-Aboriginal Australians' and tourists' desire (however troubling) for traditional Aboriginal art and crafts: "what we have done with our own culture, by making to sell[....]The people only just cannot eat bush food or sea food today. They have found a way to be happy by going bush to search out and cut handcraft and sell. Now they are getting money from handcraft" (180, 181).

Labumore's persistent reference to Lardil law reverberates on a number of levels—explicitly she is providing a record of information that may soon be irretrievable: she is educating a white readership on the validity of Aboriginal law as the most appropriate form of governance and relationship for her people and her place; and she is countering a European conception of law with a Lardil perspective that merges spirituality, place, cultural practice and "law" to make a powerful claim to custodianship of the land. In arguing that the Lardil traditions and laws predated European colonization, Labumore offers a persuasive articulation of a Lardil claim to place and therefore a critique of non-Aboriginal claims to land ownership (as through the doctrine of *terra nullius*) and the "laws" on which this false claim was based. Labumore's extensive discussions on the effectiveness of Lardil law, which are inextricably connected to place, to spirituality, to everyday material practices of survival, child-rearing, courtship, etc., also work to effectively disrupt dominant assumptions of the "lawlessness" of Aboriginal peoples. As the complexity of Labumore's narrative indicates, spirituality, place, and cultural identity are not easily separated out but comprise a complex of practices that produce collective identity. Labumore's claims to origins merge with Dreamtime stories to effectively disrupt European linearity and claims to ownership of place through the "settlement" of

unoccupied territory, as in her commentary on why the oral history of the Lardil occupation of the island only extends back two generations and how it merges with Dreamtime stories:

> Then out of these two kinds of people, from Marnbill and Gin Gin, and the Bulletgearmanda [unseen people], could we come from? Because no one on this island ever was told, or heard, of our third grandparents. Even the old folks themselves don't know any more from their two grand parents....No one can recall any such history of the third and fourth generation. So you can see, that's the limit to our race of people...it goes that far. (128)

Kinship, ancestry, practice and place here merge in part to define Aboriginality outside of imperialist racial constructs. Here, Lardil relationships to land are asserted as determined by borders of practice and kinship:

> Most time the one who was born near the place, he claims everything that is round about the country side. No one is allowed to do anything wrong on that part of the area that is owned by that one. If he disobeys the customs and law of the tribe, about the time when all eating thing of that season are on, with the owner of the land not there, they have a big fight and most time he is killed by the relation or the person who owns the place[....] I can remember, in the heart of the bush, the boundary between North and South countries of the people, that cuts off the two sides of our people's land, the limit...tells where the end of the line is. Well I saw the place, and Dad showed me...this is the place that belongs to his side of the people, and the other side on the South belongs to my grandfather Barney and my mother's side of people. (56, 58)

Crucially, what Labumore's narrative suggests is that the complexity and effectiveness of Lardil law emerge *from* place, from the longstanding relationship to place established and affirmed through Lardil law and therefore the only appropriate relationship, "law," for that location. As she insists, the Lardil law is "dreadful" for those who disobey it. This applies not only to Lardil people but is instead a function of *place* such that anyone in that location must obey: "It doesn't concern only for Aboriginals," she insists, "it's also for white people too...that's if you come to live, and visit our country, and you try it out for yourself" (114).

While she supports the protection and maintenance of Lardil tradition, Labumore does not advocate a return to pre-contact tradition as a viable option for Lardil sovereignty and self-sufficiency. While insisting that the recognition by the colonizers of the validity and effectiveness of Lardil law would encourage the maintenance of that law, she also recognizes the extensive influence of colonization, such that "people of mine were different to what they are today" (97). At one point, in fact, she notes an instance in which

at an unsuccessful ceremony. "[t]hese laws of the tribes have failed" (190). She recognizes that the current and future generations will have to forge a renewed relationship to place, to tradition, and to dominant Australian legal systems and culture: "So I think these children will face two world, old and new, because they are taking up corroborees, and other back ground and also they are learning the European life which we understand it's good for them" (186). Moreover, she theorizes some of the difficulties involved in forging and imagining an independent Lardil and Aboriginal community in relation to the colonizers, including that of breaking free of internalized dominance and of the co-optation of Aboriginal activists into dominant structures (215): "We just don't know when to put our feet to stand on the right way of life. How can we do it? When will be the day or time? What shall we do to start ourselves? How to get away from the old ways? There are so many questions to answer" (213).

In addition to the development of culturally specific economic pursuits, such as the crafts industry, Labumore theorizes from her own experience and observations about how Aboriginal self-government should operate if it is to effectively meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples. She critiques the overt force and control of non-Aboriginal police and the justice system and argues that conflicts within Aboriginal communities must be "understood through Aboriginal tribal laws, and feeling against the law of Government" (210). She suggests that perhaps the most effective mode of developing a renewed relationship to place in the "sovereignty" movement is in fact to organize outside of established dominant structures: "Our customs and laws do not belong to school...but get together in families groups down the village each day at certain times and speak, explain to parents and families. Have a chat perhaps round camp fires at night, or anytime where there is a thought for it" (97). Her reflections on the difference between "independence" and "dependence," moreover, interestingly invert and subvert dominant nationalist assumptions regarding the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples:

> So now the Government expects us to take over to be independent, but my people never heard of being independent before, because they never heard or knew the word or what it all means. It's just lucky few of us understand, and had to explain the word "independent." Means...help yourself to all living in life. "Depend" is the word we knew of, because I cannot depend on you or you don't depend on me, but not this other one. That "independent" was a European's act and life. He only knew.

> Aboriginal could never in the past years be equal as European. It was never meant to give to all my people here and in all parts of Australia. (228)

Finally, Labumore's reflections on Lardil law, on relationships to place, and the difficulties of forging self-determination from within a colonized space do not provide specific answers or a blueprint for political change. They do, however, provide a mediation of history, a transformation of some of the dominant terms of nation and law into an Aboriginal perspective that is persuasive in its claiming of a prior relationship and "ownership" of place. Her recollections, too, reveal cultural practice as transformative and fluid: while Lardil law and tradition have been profoundly damaged by colonization, they have also survived, however partially, and can be, in fact, *must* be transformed into a renewed and powerful relationship to place and legal and cultural framework, as her own life story and agency attest: "All our males and females and children will have to learn two kinds of laws and customs, abiding in both. Make one" (206).

Aboriginality

Labumore's engagement with discourses of race and Aboriginality, like her engagement with nationalism, is doubled. At times she adopts the terms of the dominant in order to both reach her non-Aboriginal audience and to utilize the logic of the dominant in order to challenge it. Most of the time, however, she presents her own transformative construction of Aboriginality as not reducible to skin colour but as a fluid process based on relationship to place and others, as dynamic and expansive enough to incorporate non-Aboriginal practices and perspectives within its paradigms, even as that incorporation is an effect of the devastating violences of imperialism. One of the central aspects of Aboriginality as Labumore constructs and transforms it is spirituality—traditional spirituality being a prime definer of her Lardil identity in her youth, and its maintenance, transformation, and affinities with Christianity marking contemporary Lardil identity.

While in some ways, for example, her constructions of pre-contact Lardil life appear to be romanticised and seem to merely reinforce stereotypes of noble savagery, they

also function as a critique of the destruction wrought by colonization when weighed against the problems her community now faces as a result:

> How wonderful their character was, full of happiness. Many laughs were often heard. They lived as one individual race. Although they had two tribes of people, Winded and Lewit, but they were all as one big family, and the true relationship was real in their whole community as one full blood people. (106-07)

More often, Labumore's use of the dominant categories of "black" and "white" appear only as a beginning reference point for non-Aboriginal readers and in contexts that immediately disrupt any reduction of Aboriginality to skin colour. Labumore at once stresses that "differences" that have been constructed in racial terms are actually differences in cultural practices, with Aboriginal practices being "normal" and European ways foreign and unnecessary: "It's not because a black wants to be white, but we Aboriginals feel different to the liking of where a European stands. We like to live normal and do the things in life in our own liking[....]I can say I wish I never become civilized of the fact of science, methods, of Government morales" (233).

Labumore's narrative also disrupts dominant racial categories by asserting that Aboriginality is not reducible to skin colour but is based in relationships to others (exemplified by a variety of speech taboos) and in spirituality. She suggests that the actual differences between Aboriginal and white Australians are in terms of perspectives on relationships, and that it is an artificial construct—race—and the fear it produces, that blocks mutual understanding and recognition: "my people want to love you as their own[...] whites are afraid to claim us back because of their colour. Colour makes no difference. The feeling of mankind is within a black person feeling. It's too much of it really to explain to you all...heart and the stomach" (196-97). She insists, for example, that white Australians already have a specific type of kinship with Aboriginal peoples, one that they should recognize through their own paradigms of racial biologism (even as historically miscegenation was repressed in national narratives): "I must explain to both races...one's white and one is black. They are brothers. They are true brothers because now the white man has joined in that real relationship in blood line" (224).

Labumore addresses the issue of mixed-race Aboriginal identity, then, by insisting that it is not genealogy but practice, even hybridized practices, that will constitute

Aboriginality in the future. Very early in the narrative she writes: "Today, race has been mixed. The life has changed and there is sadness and happiness here. So our choice is mixed background and forward step together and make it one, and live as one real people for the days that are to come" (2). That this has come at a cost, however, to both Aboriginal traditions and to her personal relationships, is also a thread throughout *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New*. Labumore attributes the difficulties facing the younger generations of Lardil as a failure to attend to traditional practices and relationships: "Soon the young generation came forward and wanted their own way, and spoilt every customs, culture and laws. They thought these were just foolishness, and would not grasp them. Relationship was cut out of their life" (182). Labumore's choice to get married in Christian rather than Aboriginal tradition, for example, is a point of pride and an assertion of autonomy, as well as a painful point of separation from her father (whose absence in this case appears intentional) and her Lardil traditions. This moment exemplifies the "happiness and sadness" that accompany her life not as a mixed-*race* Aboriginal woman, but as an Aboriginal woman shaped by two cultural traditions:

> To my surprise, on my wedding day [in 1946], my father was away in the bush. Therefore my uncle Gully Peters gave me away to Dick. That was the first wedding ever took that custom belongs to a white man, of fathers giving their girls away. Also, I had a bride's maid, flower girls, and Dick had a best man. Since then all marriages followed in this way. (158-59)

Labumore's recollections of Lardil healing practices, moreover, are overlain with this desire to produce and affirm the equivalence of western and Aboriginal practices. Again, this could be as much an effect of a negotiation with her readership as a reflection on the subjectivity of one shaped by competing discourses of spirituality, health, healing, and the body; she suggests that "God" provided each people with the means to heal their illnesses:

> So the Lord looks down in mercy and pity, also to a tribal man, because He placed us on earth to take care of ourselves. He gave power to whiteman, too, to become famous healers with all their skills and talent today.
>
> So you may wonder how we can live also, with all our unknown powers. But there you see, white and black are equal to gain all that belongs to them and what was meant for either of the race, to help all men of the worlds who are sick and those who look forward to be healed [....] Everyone has something belongs to himself that was given by training or from dreamtime. (76-77, 77)

In her specific recollections of traditional healing practices, as in her detailing of specific taboos and laws relating to kinship and place, Labumore takes risks in disclosing this information to her non-Aboriginal audience, which may incorporate her views into its own predetermined stereotypical constructs of primitiveness, superstitiousness, and so on. This is perhaps in part why she works so hard to establish equivalencies of systems and to affirm their veracity as an eyewiteness: "You might say it's superstitions, but it's not. It truly has been done and still is done today" (72). Nonetheless, *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* is remarkable in the information it provides, and in the construction of Aboriginality it subsequently suggests, particularly in Labumore's persistent references to the relationship of healing and Aboriginality:

> the only way to cure is a smell from the under arms. Give a blow of wind to the hands that already were held at the [healer's] under arms. Then he had touch....slightly rub over the painful part of the body. Then that good Spirit touch already has helped to cure the sick one (66-67)

She persistently affirms that such practices are a result of specialized knowledge, access to which she does not have, and of which she is in awe,[2] but which is equivalent to the medical training of western doctors: [3]

> We just cannot really explain how these things were done and how clever these people were. It was something belongs to them. The talent was theirs, and all we can see, the only thing of a man, is his skill. How you call this? Is it then Aboriginal dramatists to a physician man for his healing? It's something that you see but you really cannot explain. (73)

An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New, therefore, is an example of the operations of discourses of spirituality on the formation of subjectivity, and of the contradictions—and desire for resolution of those contradictions—that are an effect of the processes of colonization. Labumore's lifestory then offers some important theoretical and political insights into how Aboriginality has been constructed by the dominant as

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[2] "Fancy," she writes, "just a smell from under arm, then a blow of wind to the hand, then on to the body of the sick person[....] I've seen many people who have survived from sickness and death, and are now strong and well" (72)

[3] Further, she writes,

> So you see an Aboriginal man has his talent of healing by chanting, whereas a European has Doctors to heal in a different way again. But they both do the same good deeds. One gets no pay for the prize of human life saving...that is a black man. He does it because he feels sorry to see anyone in agony. But a European, he gets pay to save life of a human. (161)

inextricably tied to and equivalent to a fixed spirituality. As Labumore's narrative suggests, Aboriginality is a fluid enough construct to encompass the transformations wrought by Christianity, and, crucially, that these changes need not be deemed as entirely negative if they provide a (self-defined) site of agency. As Labumore stresses, "we do not only do things of our tribal ways. Also we do what the Europeans have given us and showed us to do, and also have taught us" (207). That dominant racial categories not only are inappropriate for "defining" the identities of mixed-race Aboriginal peoples but unnecessary in a definition of Aboriginality that encompasses multiple perspectives is foregrounded by Labumore: "[T]he same life can be both at once," she insists (231).

Chapter Eight

Emma Minde's *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik: Their Example Showed Me the Way, A Cree Woman's Life Shaped by Two Cultures* (1997), as told to Freda Ahenakew

Introduction

While Cree elder Emma Minde's lifestory in many ways takes the form of the "as-told-to" narrative, it provides an interesting variation on, and challenge to, that form. In this case, interviewer (and, with H.C. Wolfart, editor and translator) Freda Ahenakew is a Cree linguist, and Minde's lifestory was originally told and recorded in Cree. The generally brief text (73 pages in English and 73 in Cree) is presented in direct transcription of the Cree-language reminiscences (appearing in Roman orthography on the even-numbered pages) alongside a translation of Minde's words in English (on odd-numbered pages). These are framed by extensive introductory notes on the form, language and content of Minde's narrative, which, in turn, is followed by 135 pages of translation notes and glossaries.

Minde's narrative provides an account of major events of her life and her reflections on them: born in 1907 at *onihcikiskwapiwinihk* (Saddle Lake, Alberta) and educated at the Catholic residential school there, she left her family in 1927 and moved to *maskwacîsihk* (Hobbema) as a result of an arranged marriage to a man she had never met (Joseph Minde). Minde's narrative provides a fascinating history of a woman whose life, as the title suggests, is profoundly shaped by two cultures, by the influence of the Catholic church, by a Cree culture and economy in transition, by the impact of an arranged marriage, and by the powerful influence of family, and particularly the women, in her childhood and married life. *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik* provides insights into the changing roles of Cree women in the processes of imperialism, capitalism (particularly the encroachment of multinational oil companies into the Cree land base), cultural survival and adaptability.

In its form and subject-matter, *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik* is a text that challenges. Minde's seeming internalization of patriarchal and Catholic ideologies, and her

acceptance and even validation of the residential school system, in particular, pose a challenge to critics in balancing a critique of these ideologies while honouring Minde's own claims to agency. Early in the narrative, for example, she states:

> I know that they have been leading better lives, they have been living right and they have been working, these who used to be in boarding-school; the schools that used to exist long ago, where the students were boarded. Many times I have heard it, in the past, that they live right today, having been married in church, that they look after their children properly, I myself have been hearing these accounts. (9)

Moreover, the text provides a particular challenge in terms of considering Christianity as a site of agency for those in colonized locations. As the editors suggest, Cree and Catholic theologies may at times be complementary rather than contradictory, and the "interplay between the Cree virtue of hard work with the Catholic doctrine of good works is a fundamental part of Emma Minde's story" (xxiii).

Agency

"I am Emma Minde, from *maskwacîsihk*, and I am one of those Elders, as they are called, I am eighty-one years old; I reached that age in April, not long ago" (3). So begins the lifestory of Emma Minde as recorded in 1988 by Freda Ahenakew. It is from this location and perspective of elder, and with an awareness of the expectations and responsibilities of that role, of her larger audience, and of the politics of autobiographical and literary form (Cree and Western) that Minde constructs, *performs*, what I would call a particular form of her subjectivity. By suggesting that she performs a "particular form of her subjectivity" (and that it is co-constructed with Freda Ahenakew in the interview process), I am referring to the ways in which Minde overtly presents and re-presents herself, less as an individual with particular gifts and attributes (though these too emerge) than as one of many strong Cree women. As the title of her narrative suggests, Minde's lifestory delineates the influence of other women in her life in shaping her own identity. Rather than give herself credit as an individual with immense capacities of perseverance and forbearance, she presents herself as a woman carrying on—honouring—the practices of women before her—her mother, her mother-in-law, and her husband's uncle's wife (whom she also refers to as mother-in-law). The maternal history that Minde creates is at

once a testament to and theorizing of a transformed and transformative maternal agency, and an account of the limitations on Cree women's agency imposed by patriarchal norms, imperialist practices, and Catholicism. In turn, she honours this tradition by preserving it as historical record and by acting as a role model for her community, especially the younger generation. Her recollections are "permeated by the paramount importance of teaching the young, expressed in a profusion of terms for advice and counsel, for teaching and parental control" (Ahenakew and Wolfart, "The Education" xv).

Minde recalls, for example, how in her childhood women maintained many of their roles in the traditional Cree economy, though this is not to suggest that patriarchal assumptions did not operate in her community—her arranged marriage being a case in point. Rather, through her experiences and remembrances, she provides some insight into Cree gender relations, and a stark illustration, and critique, of the influence of ideologies of gendered labour imposed by imperialism and capitalism. As Minde recalls, "the women used to work so much, that they used to do everything for themselves" (81), and in her view, "as time went on young people became weaker and weaker" (87). Minde's constant emphasis on the necessity of maintaining the work ethics of her elders as an example of "proper conduct" functions to historicize her own subjectivity and perceived role as elder, and is a critique of multinational capitalism and of the long-term effects of oil royalties and mineral rights on reserve life.

There is little personal or emotional disclosure here (the rare moments of personal disclosure are all the more powerful as a result), and any critique of patriarchal or imperialist practices are carefully couched in attempts to balance the critique with understanding of the underlying motivations for such practices, however destructive or painful they may be. What at first may seem to be the performance of an overtly conciliatory or colonized subjectivity may in fact be in part the result of a number of active negotiations—with the ideology of generic form (Cree and Western), with Cree and Catholic codes of self-presentation, with the role of elder as instructor and role model, with patriarchal practices (Cree and Western), and with ideologies of motherhood—signalling at once a remarkable, particular, subjectivity circumscribed none the less by the external forces of economic, cultural, and ideological change.

Minde's praise for her residential school education, and for residential schools in general, and her assertions of the positive influence of this schooling in the shaping of her identity, provide another challenge for critics. That the conditions of the narrative's production and its perceived audience must be accounted for in this regard is only part of the challenge raised by *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik* and in theorizing the agency claimed by the lifestoryteller—on her own terms and those of her community and history. What appears to be the internalization of Catholicism's patriarchal norms (especially in terms of Minde's praise for the residential school system) perhaps actually functions more radically in the text—as part of a theorizing of maternal agency through and against multinational capitalism and the devastating effects of its exploitation of the *maskwacîsihk* (Hobbema) community. The agency Minde theorizes and represents as ideal, in other words, while certainly conventional and even patriarchal (in white middle-class feminist terms) is strategically posed in contrast and as remedy to the conditions facing the younger generation of Cree people in her community, as she views them. As Minde suggests early in her narrative:

> [a]s many of us as are old, we should not be afraid to counsel our children; we also should not be afraid to counsel our grandchildren. Sometimes they are really happy to hear something, for us to tell them something, for they themselves do not know but we, we know, and we should pass on to them the good things we know, and in this way these things will live on forever. (51, 53)

The first section of the narrative, comprising four pages of text, is in fact Minde's synopsis of her life and particularly her philosophy on it. Here, she concisely summarizes major aspects of her life: her education at residential school, her arranged marriage to a man she did not know and resulting move to a new community away from her family; her experience as mother of three daughters (one of whom died at the age of 17); her current life as elder and counsellor. The content of the remainder of the narrative appears to a certain extent to have been determined by the particular interests of Ahenakew. The transcription makes it clear that Ahenakew has asked Minde for specific information regarding particular aspects of her life—for example, her recollections of women's labour, of her grandparents, her in-laws and the Minde family, and not, or so it appears, of her memories of residential school. (While there are very few interventions by Ahenakew in

the interviewing process once the lifestorytelling sessions begin. Minde makes it clear at the beginning of several sections that she is responding directly to the interviewer's queries.)

In this introductory section, Minde constructs herself primarily as an active and respected member of the Catholic Church, and recognized source of counsel in the community. Throughout this section Minde provides indications of her own philosophy on the imposition of Catholicism, on proper conduct and the necessary role of counsel to the young: "The priest, let it be said, is trying to do us good, he is trying to guide us to heaven, we should not hate the priest and the nuns. Nor should we hate religion either. God gave it to us because he loved us, that is why he gave us the faith with which to live right" (7). The importance of her role as counsellor in her sense of identity is foregrounded, both directly and indirectly: "I counsel good things, as I know them through my life. I know I have made many people grateful, telling them something of what my parents had told me, too, what they had told me would help me" (9). Later, however, she speculates as to why devout Christians are shunned; and there is a hint here of personal experiences of being criticized or rejected by more traditional Cree members of her community because of her devout Catholicism: "And now one other thing: it always happens on the face of this earth, when a person is seen a being religious and tries to do right, people stay away from that person; they walk away, they do not want to talk to that person, they are afraid, I will say" (53).

Minde suggests how her generation was caught in an era of imperialist imposition (particularly in her later discussions of gender and labour) and how her own parents may have made difficult choices in raising their children in order that they would be secured a place in an uncertain future. In addition to being raised to treat others with respect, particularly elders, she says,

> We were also raised in the faith, we were taken to Mass every Sunday. And we were also sent to school (we were sent to the kind where the students used to be boarded); that is the reason, I guess, why we have been doing the decent things to this day, *because we had been told all along what we would come up against in the future*, that is how we had been counselled. (5, 7, my emphasis)

Taken in this context of choices made for survival of and preparation for the changes wrought by colonization, the operation of (limited) parental agency can perhaps be

discerned here. Minde's later comment that her parents "were never afraid to take us to church" (77) is telling of the difficult choices facing Cree parents at the time. Minde's overt praise for the residential schooling she received may in fact be an implicit comment on (or more accurately perhaps, an example of counselling, regarding) those who were less equipped to deal with the changes they faced. It is perhaps also set up as an example to a younger generation that in her view has gone astray, spiritually and in terms of adherence to Cree work ethics, as a result of capitalism and the welfare system:

> And the nuns really used to take proper care of us and they also counselled us properly.
>
> And because of that, in those days, when they would later go out from the school, when they got formally married, men and women or young men and young women, these people used to behave properly. They used to give their children a home, and they were also able to provide for their children by means of their work. No one used to give them anything, there was no welfare for them from the government with which to provide for their children; it was with their own work that they used to provide for their children. And the women also stayed at home with their children and looked after them for themselves. And they also breast-fed their children, they loved them so much, and they did not leave their children to be kept somewhere else. (45, 47)

Minde's recollections of her mother and her construction of maternal agency are inseparable from the history of gendered labour that she recalls. All of Minde's memories of her mother, in fact, are stated in terms of labour and skills she was taught by her mother: "I remember that our mother used to teach us everything about work, from childhood on, for instance, she used to teach me to wash the dishes and to put them away, and to do the sweeping" (23). And it is here, too, that the history and operation of maternal agency, circumscribed as it is by patriarchal and imperialist paradigms, is traced, in what labour Minde's mother performed, and what labour she taught her daughter to perform.

Interestingly, Minde does not specify at what age she entered and for how long she at the residential school, but she credits her mother in particular for preparing her for the duties of domestic labour in married life. And if there is any suggestion of conflict with her mother in the following passage, it is left unsaid, seemingly by the vagaries of technology, as the tape recorder shuts off just as she raises this point:

> That is the reason why today and earlier on, at the time I came to marry my husband, I was able to do these things, to wash the dishes and to do the sweeping; for my

> mother had taught me to try and keep the house clean. And my mother never made me angry at her, at the way she raised me. All along I have been grateful to my mother that she raised me well, even when she whipped me sometimes when I deserved it. I never stayed angry at my mother and I still loved her; but we are all different. We should love our mothers for they have suffered greatly in raising us. We do not know —— (23, 25)

There is, however, an *absence* of any mention of her mother in Minde's powerful description of the difficulties she faced in entering a marriage arranged, it would seem, primarily by her father and her future father-in-law, and in being forced to move to a community where she knew no-one, not even her husband. (Here, too, I would speculate as to whether or not the arranged marriage was an effect of residential school policy that young Cree women could not leave until marriage was secured [45, 102]). Minde's recollection of her arranged marriage is unique in the text in its indication of her struggle to resist and defy her father's wishes: here the manner in which patriarchal assumptions about the sexuality of women that must be controlled emerges. In this narrative, both mother and daughter are powerless over the events, and are left to mourn their separation:

> Joe Minde, he did not know me and I did not know him. But it was for the parents, it was they who decided this, and he was a good worker, my husband did the right thing, he worked and he listened to his father. My father-in-law must have tried to find a wife for him, one who would love him, he must have thought, for he had made the choice for his son, for me to marry hime—I wonder why he did that, for I was not very good natured [*laughter*]....But it was difficult then, when my father asked me, "Are you going to marry this young man?" was said to me; I did not speak for a long time, because I had not yet even seen his face, it was difficult for me to respond, to marry this Joe Minde as he was called. Finally I was scolded because I would not respond. I will say the scolding words which were said to me: "On top of it all, you girls make no effort to get married, and then later you go crazy and run around," those were the scolding words said to me. Finally I responded, "Since you urge me, I guess I will say yes," is what I said. For me, my life was difficult; a man had been found for me to marry and I did not know him, and so I was brought over here to *maskwacîsihk*.
>
> We did cry, my mother and I, before I left home. It was difficult indeed for me to come and live over here, for I did not know the people. (57, 59)

It appears however that it is in the very absence of maternal agency and in facing the forcefulness of male, fatherly control over her, that the young Minde, by both Cree and Catholic codes, felt pressured to find ways to justify, honour, and respect the men's actions in determining her fate so directly. She suggests, for example, that her parents may have

arranged her marriage because of her shyness (13-14), or that, even while she did not love, let alone know, her future husband, "he, too, must have loved me, since he had been willing to get married to me; that is what I usually think" (61).

While Minde continues to mourn the separation from her mother—"I still think of her whenever I feel lonesome, I thank her, I still love her," she says (77)—she also stresses how her mother-in-law immediately took on the role of "counselling" the young wife in her new home (61-63), and how she was "able to love this man once I had become his wedded wife" (61). As the editors point out, Minde and her new husband followed Cree tradition by living at her in-laws' home, and they speculate that the maternal role of counselling the young wife included not only instruction in domestic duties but "instruction about the basic facts of human biology" (Ahenakew and Wolfart, "The Education" xi). The editors suggest that the bond between Minde, her mother-in-law Mary-Jane Minde, and the other woman she calls "mother-in-law" (her husband's uncle's wife, Mary), "stand as a lasting monument to female solidarity" (xi). This solidarity, however, is certainly circumscribed by the norms of patriarchy and gendered domestic labour, difficult economic times, and Joe Minde's alcoholism, which Minde discloses, in a qualifying or conciliatory way. As Minde notes, her mother-in-law Mary-Jane "taught me right away, as soon as I came to live with them, how to do these things, how to clean house and that kind of thing, although I had already been taught at boarding school, she urged me to clean house, to scrub floors and to wash dishes" (75).

That her mother-in-law's marriage was also arranged, and that she had lived in abject poverty (the reasons for which are not disclosed but one may speculate on the effects of colonization on the traditional Cree economy and food sources), are further indications that this agency and solidarity are indeed remarkable: "...they were so poor," Minde recalls, "she used to have nothing to eat, as I told you before [off-tape], she would pull up roots, cleaning strawberry-roots, and these she used to eat....And sometimes she used to end up crying when telling us about this, down the hill there at my daughter's house" (111).

Minde's commentary on her married life discloses little personal or emotional information, but is telling of the constraints of patriarchy that she negotiates. She briefly reveals her disappointment at having no sons, for example: ""For we only had three girls,

we never had boys, that is what I was given, I guess." (37), she says. More telling (particularly in terms of her negotiations with the politics of form), is her disclosure of her husband's alcoholism, her reasons for sharing this information, and her attempts to avoid dishonouring her dead husband's memory by emphasizing his commitment to work:

> And so, now that he has departed this world, I will tell about my husband, for now he will not know about it; he, too, used to have a few real weaknesses here and there, just like other people, all of us who are human have good traits and bad traits. What used to give my husband trouble was that he used to drink; today I am going to speak about that, but something good will come of it, of what I will tell about my husband. Although he used to drink, my husband still used to be able to work....And so I definitely want these young people and men to hear this, for them, too, to love their fathers and to listen to their mothers, to obey them in the good things in which they encourage them, in work, it is not right that they should dislike work. (35, 39)

Minde theorizes maternal agency in terms of the history and transformation of gendered labour under imperialism and capitalism, and does so within a framework of counselling (both Cree and Catholic); but she does not provide personal details of her own experiences of motherhood, even in terms of childbirth or the domestic labour involved in parenting. An exception is in her introductory comments in which she refers to the death of her daughter Clara, and to how she "always counselled my children and I was not afraid to counsel them for I think I counselled them because I loved them" (7). She notes disappointment that one of her daughters (she "cannot mention them by name"[7]) has not followed in her faith, but that she is asked by her daughters to counsel her grandchildren. This absence of discussion of her experiences as mother signals at once that this is an area not directly investigated by Ahenakew and not stressed by Minde herself. It could be that the very role of counsel includes and extends the role of motherhood as constructed in Western culture, as Minde's final comment in her introductory "summary" of her life suggests:

> For all along, throughout our life, we tell one another about what is happening, about this life we are in the midst of living. In the past, people had been happier (I have heard many say that), they had been happier even when they were poor, because they used to love one another, they used to help one another in various ways, and they also visited one another when they were settled down; that is what they say; and they used to take time to tell stories to one another and talk about good things. (11)

Form and Language

The text's origin in the performance of the interview, its presentation in Cree and its translation into English, the editors' commentary on both the difficulties of translation of Cree concepts into English and on the specificities of Cree oral literary form, and the narrative's subject-matter foreground the complex history of the production, and its effects, of *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik*. Throughout, Minde is aware of the contexts and ramifications of the production of her lifestory, particularly its unrepeatable (and un-revisable) performance as a story for an audience that exceeds her immediate audience of one, and an audience that may view her story as historical fact rather than a creative reconstruction (through memory) of historical fact and personal and community experience.

The text also marks the limits of the knowledge of the non-Cree reader (while also providing fascinating information to expand that knowledge). What is significant is how necessary the editors' introductory comments are. They point out how what might *seem* to the non-Cree reader a typical example of the Catholic/imperialist influence in fact is the operation of a traditional Cree practice, whether it be in terms of literary form or, most intriguingly, constructions and assertions of spirituality and morality (what Minde refers to as "proper conduct"). The significance of the editors' information, in other words, fore-grounds how *easily* theoretical paradigms that focus on the racialized colonial subject as primarily victim and object of colonialist ideology, without her own agency or repertoires of knowledge on which to draw, can be applied to Aboriginal women's lifestories.

Minde's self-presentation, her performance of her subjectivity, is in many ways a conscious negotiation with the ideology of the form of the as-told-to lifestory as well as a process of co-construction with her interviewer. Throughout the narrative (because it is in fact a transcription of interviews), Minde makes it clear that she is speaking of particular topics at the urging of Ahenakew and with an awareness that her eventual audience will be larger than one: "Now I will tell about my childhood, as much as I am able to remember, it is this woman [Freda Ahenakew] who is making me tell about it, that is what she wants me to tell about..." (19). She makes it clear that she is discussing Cree women's traditional labour and roles because of Ahenakew's questioning: "Another thing this woman wants

from me when she is recording these stories," she states later, "she wants to know what women did long ago, how they themselves made a living and how they made a living for their children" (75).

While Minde's story in many ways can be seen as a response to Ahenakew's questioning, Minde is also clearly aware of the politics of reception of her story. She is aware that her narrative will be read not as a re-creation of historical events through the processes of memory, imagination, and desire but as historical document: her comment that she will tell of her husband's alcoholism "now that he has departed this world" (35) is a clear indication of her concerns about the assumed referentiality of the lifestory and its effects on individuals named in such narratives. She none the less consciously utilizes this ideology of form for specific purposes, including the preservation of her knowledge for historical record and for the counsel or education of the younger generation:

> Some of the young people, I guess, will like to hear about these things, how the old people used to be such hard workers back then—and they should also tell about that sometimes among the people, that the old people were such hard workers, that they were so good at fending for themselves, how to live well and how to keep clean and also how to feed themselves, how to make a living. People sometimes should tell about these things, as many as have lived to see them. (131)

The conclusion of Minde's recollections in *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik* is also notable. The narrative ends abruptly in a section entitled "Daily Life," which details the labour of women of Minde's parents' generation, foregrounding once again the nature of Minde's lifestory as a contextualized performance for/with her interviewer (who was also conducting similar interviews in the community): "And with that we will finish now; because you must also be told stories over there....I know that there are two of us at work telling stories. / [FA] Well, thank you, I thank you very much" (147).

Significantly, the editors of *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik*, in transcribing all of the interviewing process, including the interviewer's questions, joint comments on the presence of the tape recorder and the interruptions in conversation it produced when the tapes ran out, foreground the conditions of the narrative's production. And in doing so, they foreground what historically has been masked in the history of the as-told-to (white anthropologist) lifestory of Aboriginal peoples, and elders in particular: the operations of

the ideology of form, and more importantly, perhaps, the agency of the lifestoryteller in actively negotiating these ideologies for her own purposes.

Language

The politics of language constitute the structure of Emma Minde's lifestory, presented as it is in both its original Cree and its English translation, and with its extensive editorial commentary on the processes and problems of translation. The diligence with which the editors have explicated the translation process is perhaps double-edged. Rather than seeing the text and its constitutive processes as posing a challenge to the limits of knowledge of the non-Cree monolingual English-language reader, such a reader *could* make the assumption that through the translation process the narrative in English is somehow been made "transparent" and available for consumption. It is disturbingly easy, for example, to ignore the left-hand pages of the text which are presented in Cree, because of their seeming opacity, rather than consider the interplay and tensions between the Cree and English texts (or, more importantly, do the hard work required of learning basic Cree).

The text, in traversing academic disciplinary boundaries of linguistics, literary studies in English, and Native Studies, foregrounds a limitation of English departments and literary studies as they are now structured. English departments (in Canada) have shifted their focus from English language and literary studies to primarily literary studies. As a result, literary studies, particularly postcolonial studies, do not stress the history and grammar of the English language. This has the pronounced effect, in this case, of making the grammatical information provided by Wolfart and Ahenakew regarding the grammar of the Cree language seem almost as opaque as the Cree text itself . This is a tangible mark, in other words, of the failure of postcolonial studies to productively address its ongoing Anglocentrism and to make meaningful interventions into the politics of language and language instruction at the postsecondary level. And yet, as the editors' comments make clear, knowledge of the specific structure of the Cree language is fundamental to any critical understanding of traditional Cree literary form, and how contemporary lifestory-tellers such as Minde transform both form and language:

> Throughout her text, Emma Minde relies on subtle variations in the formation of verb stems to create the dense texture typical of literary texts in Cree. The stem *wîkim—*, for instance, together with other stems derived from it, constitutes a simple etymological set....In establishing such a set and then varying the elements and adding to them (the preverb *kihci*, for instance, with its overtones of ritual sanction), storytellers employ one of the most common figures of Cree rhetoric. (Ahenakew and Wolfart, "The Education" xx)

The editors note that there are some examples of the overt use in Cree of a Christian term that is easily detectable for the bilingual reader ("the use of the preverb particle *kihci* 'grand, formal: holy'"), while in others, the influence of English-language patterns, both linguistic and cultural, "may be less obvious"... ("*otinito-* VAI take one another; marry each other'" [xxi]). Moreover, they note that it often takes several English words or phrases to indicate the meaning of a single Cree stem (i.e., *itakiso—* a verb denoting an inanimate actor, and which is usually intransitive), and that one single Cree stem may have multiple connotative meanings (191).

In her narrative, Minde makes few comments regarding the difficulties of translation. She does remark on the problem of finding an appropriate Cree term to indicate the English philosophy and practice of education, and this may indicate some of the philosophical differences between Cree and English language and culture: "I must not use English to speak about education, it is hard to speak properly in rendering these various terms having to do with when the young people go to school; I have never come across that [a Cree term for 'homework']" (45). Her commentary on the paucity of what she considers to be good parents in her contemporary community, however, poses a more complex and subtle problem regarding the limits of the Anglocentric reader. The following passage, for example, appears to be a stark indication of the internalization of Catholic ideology. But as the editors point out, such terms that translate into English as "counsel" and "proper" are traditionally Cree in origin, and even what translates as "temptation" is based on a Cree stem (xxii), such that the following passage, for example, actually indicates the active integration of Cree and Catholic perspectives: "And some, I guess, still have the blessing of God, because they try to raise their children well and counsel them. One should not give up, there are still some people left by divine grace, I always say, who are trying to live properly in their homes, who are able to resist temptation" (47).

It is relatively easy to recognize the conversational nature of the following passage: "And in the fall, when they found berries, when they found berries out there on the trapline, they also used to pick berries..." (19). It is not at all easy, however, to recognize how the narrative is structured according to Cree literary conventions and bears, in the editors' words, "the hallmarks of classical style and form" (xxvi). According to editors Ahenakew and Wolfart, the narrative integrates Roman Catholic theology into this classical form of Cree literary form (xxiv). Again, this marks a limit of postcolonial theory's analysis in terms of how the transplantation of the English language and literary forms operates specifically in local conditions. Critical awareness of these distinctions, then, is clearly fundamental to understanding how an Aboriginal lifestoryteller may be utilizing and transforming both languages and their attendant philosophies in both their Aboriginal language and in English translations of their narratives.

Nation and Aboriginality

Emma Minde's lifestory is also, in part, a historicizing of a community through and against imperialism, dominant Canadian nationalism, and multinational capitalism. Minde's commentary on the transformations of Cree women's labour through several generations as effects of the residential school system, Catholic ideology, and multinational capital provides a significant record of the Cree economy in transition. It also offers a powerful critique of the devastating effects of the imposition of these systems on the Cree economy and culture. This is not to suggest, however, that Minde and her Cree community are merely helpless pawns in these global systems but that Cree women especially are shown to be remarkably resilient and creative in their responses to these systems. Minde demonstrates, for example, how these precapitalist economic relations can remain useful and even necessary in the survival of Cree culture, particularly in resisting the homogenizing effects of multinational capital, seen most explicitly in the effects in her community of oil and gas royalties:

> I have been telling you all over and over that we will not be getting this money [oil royalties] forever, in any case the large sums of money we get. People will have to go back and work to try and make a living when this money, when the oil wells run out.

> Some do not believe this, but we will not be able forever to get this money that we are getting; already the sums of money we are getting are becoming less and less; so we will have to go back and work to try and make a living; the way men and women used to make a living long ago. (73)

Moreover, that members of the Minde family have been deeply involved with Aboriginal politics, serving as band chiefs and as founders of the Indian Association of Alberta, is an indication, as the editors suggest, that such activism was "heavily dependent on the active support of their strong-willed wives" (ix). It also indicates the transformative agency of the Cree people in negotiating dominant white nationalism, in part, on their own terms. While Minde rarely addresses band or provincial and Canadian politics specifically, her comments on how Dan Minde was instructed by the preceding chief (Ermineskin) on how to conduct himself as chief is a clear negotiation of Cree traditions with an imposed justice system:—"For you to care for your people; for you to take up for your people where they run into trouble" (69):

> It is true. I saw that my father-in-law loved the people. When they went to court, they would call on him to go and speak for them so they would not be dealt with so harshly when they were in court for drinking or some other thing, when they were arrested on some charge. I used to see my father-in-law do that; he used to go there to go and speak for his people. (69, 71)[1]

Minde's discussions of the transformations of Cree women's labour (initiated by Ahenakew's questions) provides a particular critique of the gendered nature of imperialist and Catholic ideologies. (Much of Minde's commentary on Cree women's labour is also a record of the introduction of technology, as her discussion of her mother's transition from hand-sewing to machine-sewing and her comments on the introduction of washing machines indicate.) She recalls her early childhood in which the Cree lifestyle and economy revolved around hunting and trapping (19). Women's roles, she stresses, included tanning hides, food collection and preparation, and the making of clothing, many aspects of which have since disappeared with the further encroachment of colonization and its

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[1] According to Ahenakew and Wolfart, the Canadian legal system here is seen

> from a perspective not of right or wrong, guilt or innocence, but of the need for intercession and grace. This fundamental lack of agreement between the adversary system of Anglo-Saxon justice and the Cree system, where the accused begs for mercy (and which shows remarkable similarities to the theology of the New Testament), results in a monumental lack of understanding—and rarely has the

imposition of European forms of gendered, domestic labour. This is not to suggest, however, that precontact Cree culture did not include gendered labour; in fact, much of what Minde refers to as women's work in the residential school context, she indicates, was also traditionally Cree women's work—sewing, cleaning, food preparation. It is significant, however, that the residential school system in particular worked to erase the culturally-specific economic contributions of Cree women (the preparation of hides, for example), and transformed others into European-style labour, particularly in terms of agricultural labour. In addition to recalling learning how to knit socks and garters at residential school (127), an activity designed to replace traditional sewing and beadwork, Minde refers to the process by which the government introduced gardening (as specifically women's work):

> And nearly all the women used to have gardens....Of the garden seeds, they never had very much of anything (it was called the "ration house" here, where they looked after it—where they looked after people on behalf of the government, the ones who looked after people [Indian agents]; there we were given that kind, garden seeds for us to plant. (83-84)

The overall effect of these changes on Cree women, Minde suggests, is the development of dependency on men for economic survival, a process she explicitly critiques in relation to the encroachment of multinational capital, and which over time, in her view, has made young people "weaker and weaker" (87): "But because the women worked so hard, I guess, they used to be strong; they made themselves strong so that they could do things for themselves" (129), and "women did not feel sorry for themselves when their husbands left them behind [to hunt]" (79).

She stresses how traditional Cree culture was based on the sharing of resources, labour, and goods, and on the effective use of all supplies, and how this contrasts with the excesses of capitalism: "When they had a surplus of something, they used to give it to one another. This also is not well understood, I guess, as money is the general obsession now and you only try to make money from everything" (89). Minde stresses that the loss of economic independence is a fundamental problem facing Cree communities. She is not, of course, suggesting that the Cree return to a precontact economy. When she suggests that the Cree will eventually "have to go back and work to try and make a living; the way men

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Cree system of suing for leniency been put more clearly and more eloquently than in Emma Minde's

and women used to make a living long ago" (73), she is suggesting that it is the Cree work ethic of community self-sufficiency that must be recovered. She recognizes the impossibility of returning to a traditional economy, given the widespread environmental and ideological effects of capitalism. In the following passage, she negotiates (perhaps as an effect of her perceived audience as well as her Christian faith) a critique of colonization, white nationalism, and multinational capitalism with an attempt to understand or at least locate positively the intentions of white people in this process:

> The life of long ago certainly was good, but you probably could not really live like that today, for there is too much damage to the earth, there is so much cultivation all over....We have lost that way of making a living, for in everything there is now a different way of making a living, the Whites have come to teach us a different way of life and they have destroyed many of these things. They have also poisoned the water; some fish are poisoned, too, it is said, they must be dumping lots of things from what they do in their factories....Surely we could not go back to that life which used to be so good, but should follow as best we can what they teach us (the Crees often call them "our brothers," the "Whites" as we call them), for they are trying to help us, I guess, for us, too, to live in a different way, to follow a different lifestyle. But we should not fight that, if we are going to be helped with a different lifestyle, we should cooperate with that, we should be educated in how to live in that lifestyle. (29)

And while she considers the possibilities of adopting non-Cree lifestyles, Minde is not recommending the rejection of Cree tradition. Rather, she is suggesting that Cree traditions are fluid and flexible enough to be maintained in the current context, and that some can be used to develop a Cree-based economy that negotiates, rather than succumbs entirely to, multinational capitalism. "Everybody really likes beaded things," she considers, "and people could make a living with that, a lot of people up North must be living on that, on beadwork, and they also make moccasins, mittens, and coats" (31). Emma Minde's lifestory, then, is not explicitly "nationalist" in the sense of arguing for political autonomy or sovereignty for the Cree people. But her narrative clearly critiques the dominant operations of nation and multinational capital as she traces their effects on her own life.

Minde's negotiations with dominant discourses of race, further, are at once subtle and effective. Very rarely in her lifestory does she use the term "white" to refer to the dominant peoples and culture of Canada. An exception is her previously quoted comment

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account. ("The Education" xx)

on the destruction of the environment at the hands of "Whites" (29), a term she proceeds to qualify with the parenthetical statement: "the Crees often call them 'our brothers,' the 'Whites' as we call them'" (29). More typically, Minde's references to "white" people, either as a category or as individuals, appear in terms of the specific roles they perform—Indian agent, nun, priest, and so on. Similarly, Minde makes no reference to Aboriginal peoples in general terms (such as "Aboriginal," "indigenous," etc.) nor in the dominant discourses of skin colour, and refers only and very specifically to the Cree people. Her particular use of these terms could be the result of a number of factors: her interviewer is also Cree and therefore their shared cultural and historical knowledge may make such markers unnecessary; and Minde has lived in predominantly Cree communities for her entire life—her immediate experiences of the dominant culture have come through meeting individual white people, and her experience and views of Aboriginality are specific to Cree culture.

The absence of reference to racial categories, for whatever reason, acts as a powerful commentary on the uselessness of these categories for Minde. The content of her narrative instead asserts a very specific perspective on what constitutes Cree (not "Aboriginal") culture—the performance and maintenance of a matrix of specific practices, particularly economic and ethical, in terms of parental and elder counsel—that is fluid enough to incorporate elements from a dominating culture, such as Catholicism and capitalism, and yet maintain its integrity. Her references to the younger generations do not address questions of "race" or mixed ancestry, but again, it is suggested that there is a cultural, rather than racial, inheritance that determines Cree identity.

In focusing on Cree culture only, further, Minde's narrative provides an implicit commentary on the necessity of attentiveness to the local and specific in any discussion of "Aboriginality" and "nation." The culturally specific history she provides, for example, stands as an important reminder of the problematic nature of the imposed category "Aboriginality" (even when it is deployed effectively and subversively). Moreover, it provides a critique on the very structure of English and postcolonial studies as they continue to construct "nations" as objects and areas of study. Specialists of British literature, for example, are expected to focus on a specific time period of a single "nation"; postcolonial specialists are expected to have knowledge of the colonized world,

encompassing numerous nations and colonies over extended periods of time: the value of the specialized analysis of the literature of the Cree nation as a recognized area of study in these fields has not entered institutional consciousness.

Chapter Nine

Rita Huggins's and Jackie Huggins's *Auntie Rita* (1994)

Introduction

Auntie Rita is the intriguing result of a mother-daughter collaboration. The published text largely comprises the narrative of Rita Huggins. It is interspersed with the italicized responses of her daughter, Jackie, who provides her "biography" of her mother, information the mother is reticent to supply, her own autobiographical perspectives, and commentary directed primarily at a non-Aboriginal audience, providing historical background to her mother's life. *Auntie Rita* recounts the abduction of Rita's family from her "born country," the "land of the Bidjara-Pitjara people" in Queensland, their forced relocation to the Cherbourg mission, Rita's mission-school education, her forced entry into domestic service, her experiences as a single parent, as wife and mother, then as widow and single parent once again. Rita tells how, poor and grieving, she moved to Brisbane with her children, got involved with alcohol, at the expense of her children's care. At the age of fifty-five and after the death of her daughter Gloria, she became a mother to her grandchildren and increasingly involved as a spokesperson for Aboriginal rights in the One People of Australia League (OPAL). The final pages of her text recount her more recent experiences as an activist and proud mother and grandmother. *Auntie Rita*, in providing a collaborative maternal history and an alternative national history, is a fascinating transformation of the autobiographical form and intervention in dominant constructions of race, place, gender, and nation.

Agency

The interplay between the mother's and daughter's perspectives in *Auntie Rita* is particularly intriguing, as it indicates the operation of maternal agency as it has positively affected and shaped the daughter, as well as illustrating the material and ideological

constraints within which that agency operates. *Auntie Rita* demonstrates how, in particular, the daughter, politicized and university educated (as a result of her mother's example and efforts) "reads" her mother (often with a troubling authority), and struggles with her desire to reshape her mother's story into her own words, her own narrative, as these converge with the politics of race, Aboriginality, language and literature. The original intention of the project was for the younger Huggins to transcribe and edit her mother's lifestory as tape-recorded, but it turned into a much different project and process, as Jackie writes:

> *After getting many of Rita's memories on tape, I began, through naivity, to translate my mother's voice, trying to do it justice while knowing that this book would have a predominantly white audience. This was my first cardinal sin. (The second was losing the disk!) Although Rita speaks a standard English, her voice often got lost amid my own as I attempted to "protect" her from non-Aboriginal critics. Black writers grapple with this all the time. But Aboriginal ways of speaking need to be maintained and protected, for they are authentic, precious and irreplaceable.*
>
> *The separation of voices here will I hope prove to be one of the book's strengths. Now I am not speaking for my mother but to her, with her, and about her.* (3, italics in original)

Auntie Rita indicates how the daughter's adult perceptions of her mother influence her mother's own self-perceptions. Rita states, for example, "I hate politics and don't consider myself a political person, but my daughter says I am—was born political and always have been. Maybe I am" (86).

Rita Huggins's narrative begins with her earliest memory of place, with what she calls "my born country," "the land of the Bidjar-Pitjara people" and "also the land of the Kairi, Nuri, Karingbal, Longabulla, Jiman and Wadja people" (7), now known as Carnarvon Gorge, 600 kilometres northwest of Brisbane. Despite her forced removal from her "born country," Rita states that "it will always be home, the place I belong to" (7), and it is through her claiming of this place as part of her identity that she also begins her maternal history, a history Jackie also claims as her own: "As Rita's daughter," she writes, "I not only share the celebration and the pain of her experience but also the land from which we were created" (13).

Rita's recollections of her own mother link the pre-mission life of one generation, the mission-raised generation of Rita, the urban, university-educated generation of the daughter Jackie, and that of Rita's own grandchildren. Rita's recollections of her own

mother indicates her mother's strength and agency as well as the limits of that agency within a patriarchal family structure and oppressive system of colonization on the mission[1]:

> My mother was such a fine woman....She never had an argument with my father, at least not in our presence. Her work around the house was spotless. She would sweep the timber floors and then scald them with hot water and caustic soda once a week. Mama would even sweep the bare ground outside. It was as though she was in control of everything, her domain and her huge family....It was as if hygiene was a safeguard to this strange, new world we had just entered....My mother never interfered when my father disciplined any of us. When the belting was over, Mum bathed my wounds in salt water after which she wrapped them in calico. (17-18, 23-24)[2]

Jackie's interventions also function to foreground and deconstruct moments in her mother's story that reveal her mother's unconscious internalization of dominant norms. The mother's seeming ready acceptance of the mission school's construction of female sexuality as negative, aberrant, uncontrollable and of its disciplinary structures, including relegation to dormitories, as "norm" is reframed by Jackie:

> I didn't like the dormitories but we deserved what we got because we didn't do what we were told. Sneaking around and talking to boys and all that business.
>
> *No, Mum, none of youse deserved it. They brainwashed you into believing you were responsible and it was your fault. It was about white paternalistic control and surveillance. Would you have sent us to a home? Even though you continually threatened us as small children, "I'll put you all in a home if you play up" I used to be terrified you would, so tried not to play up often—even though this never worked. No one deserves to be forcibly removed from their families.* (28)[3]

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[1] Jackie Huggins, in her 1991 article, "Towards a Biography of Rita Huggins," comments on the erasure of Aboriginal women's identity through the colonization process. Not only were tribal names banned through the mission system, but government records discounted the roles of Aboriginal women again by leaving them unnamed: "Rita was able to trace her maternal grandmother in the Tindale documents—she was a nameless woman referred to as 'a "full-blood"' from the Maranoa" (147).

In this article as well, Jackie recounts Rita's memory of her own grandmother's reaction to the abduction of the children. Rita, she writes,

> vividly recalls her grandmother wailing as the "mob" were rounded up. "Don't take my gunduburris! Don't take my gunduburris!" she screamed repeatedly. Much later Rita was told that her aged grandmother wandered off aimlessly into the bush that day and was never seen alive again. It is presumed she died alone somewhere out there with a broken heart. When her body was found it was taken to Wooribinda where her "full-blood" relations lived. (148)

[2] Rita recounts later how she knew her mother had died without being told, and the effect the death had on her: "When you lose your mother, you lose part of yourself," she states.

[3] While the published text *Auntie Rita* does not explicitly provide this detail, in her 1991 article "Towards a Biography of Rita Huggins," Jackie Huggins states that her mother was sent to the mission dormitory "at the relatively late age of 13 as punishment for dating boys" (149). The mother's published comments indicate that she may have internalized this punishment as acceptable and appropriate, and indicative of the patriarchal operations of imperialist hegemony.

The narrative addresses how Rita internalized shame and silence regarding the abuse she has suffered, particularly as a domestic labourer in a white home. The abuse is disclosed by Jackie, not by her mother. Of the circumstances of the conception and birth of Rita's first daughter while a single, domestic worker, Rita states only "[d]uring my domestic service my first-born Marion (our name for her is Mutoo) was born in Cherbourg on 18 May 1942" (42), and that her parents raised this daughter as their own. Rita theorizes her own silence, and reveals that it is the influence of her daughter, as collaborator, that has motivated her to disclose *some* aspects of her history:

> There are some parts of my life that I probably didn't want to have in the book because to me they are shame jobs. But they are part of the story and Jackie tells me, in her loving way, that I don't need to feel ashamed. Look who's talking! My story is not rare among Aboriginal women.
>
> There are, though, other things that I just cannot speak about because they are too painful to remember. These things I must keep to myself. Much has been done to me and my people that we find hard to talk about. (2)

These are the limits that Jackie, as the daughter who has not directly experienced such oppression, at once recognizes, respects, and exposes: silence as personal limiting condition here is transformed into a historicization of that silence, a tangible revisionist history:

> *Rita is reticent to talk about the regular beatings she received from one white mistress. I stumbled upon this fact accidentally when a family friend told me of my grandparents' attempts to get Rita out of the way of that mistress before she killed Rita....My mother does not want to talk even to me about the kinds of bitter treatment she experienced. I respect that, but I will not forget nor forgive the people who inflicted that pain. These events should be exposed so that we might have another view of Aboriginal labour history than the gross distortions that present those years as a golden age. However, I cannot speak of those years for my mother. What stops Rita speaking about them herself is not unusual—it's the same thing that stops other people speaking about profound sufferings they have experienced. The oppression and pain can be so fierce as to make people mute. They close this experience inside themselves and don't want anyone to touch it. I will not force an entry but I have done my damnedest to get inside her pain, short of breaking down the door.* (34, 36)

Intriguing here, too, is Jackie's expression of her own desires to enter her mother's subjectivity, "to get inside her pain." In many ways, the text may be as much Rita's narrative of her life as Jackie's attempt to locate herself within that narrative and the

historical processes that were its conditions and its limits. Jackie's attempts to "enter her mother's pain" appears in part as a process of identification, of exploring and transforming her own subjectivity, her own history. In drawing out her mother's story, the daughter re-creates her own personal and collective history, of both Aboriginal women, and men, as shown in her response to her mother's telling of her childhood on the mission: "I understand so much more now" (48).

Jackie's voice at times troublingly takes on that of authority or commentator on her mother's narrative: "*Growing up in Cherbourg for my mother was a struggle and a privilege*" (31).[4] This sense of daughterly "authority" on the mother's narrative may initially seem troubling in its assumption that Rita's voice and perspective need clarification, explanation, by the university-educated daughter, that the mother's voice is somehow inadequate and does not stand on its own authority. This tone, however, emerges in part from the writers' conscious negotiations with their white, middle-class, book-buying audience and its expectations, assumptions, and vast lack of historical knowledge, which in many ways are the conditions of production of the text. While Jackie states early in the text that her interventions are not speaking "for" her mother but "to her, with her, and about her" (3), it is clear that she is providing information "about" her mother, often as representative of Aboriginal women generally, in order to educate her perceived audience: "*My mother blames herself for those years, but they are not problems that were peculiar to her, but one common among Black urban communities*" (73). As the writers state in their introduction: "We want the book to be a record for my [Rita's] children and their children and other members of my family. Hopefully it will speak to other people too, including those white people who want to know what the story looks like from the Aboriginal side" (1).

As an adult, Jackie writes that she came to identify with her mother as a single, poor, Aboriginal mother and yet she recognizes their vast generational and historical differences. The responses of Jackie to the details of her mother's life reveal her process of trying to come terms with some of the pain she experienced as the daughter of a member of an

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[4] Elsewhere Jackie comments: "*All I want to say to you is that it's okay. All your children and grandchildren love you, understand you and forgive you because being a single, Black and penniless pregnant woman in your time was your greatest test and punishment*" (48).

oppressed group, of a poor single mother who, in Brisbane, sought solace in alcohol while her children were left at home:

> My children told me much later in their lives how they were hurt by my not being there. How my priorities were solely about me and my life. I was so busy having a good time that I'd spend most of our money on drinking and socialising. My children paid the price, but I couldn't see it. As long as I was having fun, who cared?
>
> *Yes, Mum, I hurt a lot about the bad old days but they are gone now. Writing about them has proved an extraordinary healing process for me... We can laugh about that now.* (70-71)

The writers' discussion regarding Rita's participation in OPAL (One People of Australia League) in Brisbane is particularly interesting in that it foregrounds how maternal agency operates in the public sphere and in terms of Aboriginal politics, and how Aboriginal politics are shaped by particular historical circumstances. OPAL, as Jackie explains, in contemporary terms is considered to have been assimilationist, liberal, limited in its effectiveness as a result. Rita discusses with pride, for example, the "debutante balls" held for members' daughters, including Rita's daughter Gloria and her daughter Sherrin (98), and of the visit of Sir Henry Abel Smith, Governor of Queensland, and his wife, to an OPAL-organized children's camp, with which they were "deeply impressed" (94). OPAL clearly is a site of Rita's politicization and of the development of a sense of collectivity, solidarity, with other Aboriginal women. She speaks with pride and humour of her role as a spokesperson for Aboriginal peoples, and the effect it had on her sense of identity: "I felt wanted and needed—and an Aboriginal diplomat. Gamon! [joking])....It gave me a sense of freedom, responsibility, strength, and most importantly, helping other people" (90).

Rita's political work is clearly gendered, maternal even, as Rita recalls her work with the youth of OPAL, describing her home as an extended OPAL office where young people congregated: "I would welcome them with a hearty hug and kiss, and refreshments" (91). Yet OPAL appears to have functioned for her as a site of maternal agency and to have shaped her daughter's sense of self as connected to this group, to Aboriginality, and Aboriginal politics:

> *Ah, OPAL, where would we kids have been without such a positive force in our lives? A force that kept the public self of Rita most respectable and exceptional for an Aboriginal woman of her time. It gave us another extended family on top of our own and provided a sanctuary for us. We were made to feel wanted and loved there.*

> *almost as if we were on public display....OPAL was a large and sometimes annoying part of our lives. We recall being constantly dragged around to dances, socials and talks on Aboriginal culture with our mother. Always displaying her very deep sense of pride in her Aboriginality, Mum was able to instill this in her children by speaking freely for hours in the halls of OPAL to other people about Aboriginals. She not only educated others but also educated us to respect our people and recognise we all had worthy contributions to make....Not only did the OPAL experience equip us with social skills, but it provided a political framework from which to operate....as Rita's children we are determined that our children will be encouraged to explore and deal with the historical, political, social and cultural aspects of their Aboriginality through an activity or community involvement such as OPAL....To be proud to say who we are and what we are without any feeling of inferiority is one of the greatest gifts of life we can give to our children.* (99, 100, 101)

The narrative concludes with Rita's reflections on her life with her grandchildren, and one anecdote in particular indicates Rita's influence on her children, and the operation of this politicized maternal agency as it reverberates through generations. She recalls her seven-year-old grandson watching a western movie on television: "he said proudly that he was on the Indian's side because the cowboys stole the land from the Indians in the first place. I thought how very smart that was" (112).

Form

That negotiating the complex of dominant ideologies of autobiographical form and Aboriginality comprised part of the conditions of production of *Auntie Rita* is made explicit in the text's publication history and the writers' introductory comments. The text was published by the Aboriginal Studies Press and marketed clearly as an "Aboriginal" text for a primarily non-Aboriginal readership, and this marketing can serve to reinforce dominant ideologies of race and Aboriginality—of Aboriginality *as* race—and the ongoing marginalization of Aboriginal cultural production (as exotic, Other, and so on). The text of *Auntie Rita*, however, actively works against dominant assumptions of race and Aboriginality, particularly assumptions that equate the two.

The form of *Auntie Rita* mixes traditional genres, including at once lifestorytelling in the "as-told-to" tradition of Aboriginal autobiography, biography, and conversation (if only one-way, as Rita does not respond to her daughter's commentaries). In her 1991 article,

"Towards a Biography of Rita Huggins," Jackie predicted that her mother's story would become "typical of the new phenomenon of contemporary Aboriginal writing where a task lies ahead in not only addressing personal histories and life stories but indeed a more equitable representation of Aboriginal women's history" (163). Rita Huggins introduces her narrative with a questioning of the popularity of autobiography and her grappling with the traditional chronological form of the lifestory—"People's lives aren't like that [ordered]. Lives jump here, there and everywhere and then return to the beginning and start again" (10). She comments on the popular ideology that an autobiography is an accurate reflection of a person's life and of those individuals named in it:

> I have often wondered why we like to read books about the lives of other people. Perhaps we are interested in what shapes people, or maybe we're just plain busy-bodies.
>
> This book tells the story of my life. These are my own recollections. I speak only for myself and not how others would expect me to speak. The book exposes me and my family. But I can only be myself and hope people can judge me on that, whether it be good or bad. I'm not perfect, just Auntie Rita. (1)

The Hugginses, however, also explicitly recognize that lifestories by Aboriginal women will be read primarily by white, middle-class Australians through particular filters of race, ethnocentrism, and collective amnesia about the history of colonization in Australia. Jackie's comments regarding her desire to "protect" her mother from "non-Aboriginal critics" are an indication of how the awareness of the reception of Aboriginal lifestories in turn shapes their production. The use of Wakka-Wakka and Pitjara terms as well as Aboriginal English, for example, is an integral part of everyday language use for Rita Huggins. In preparing her text for wider consumption, however, she had to negotiate the Anglocentrism of non-Aboriginal readers and her desire to not reinforce the marginality of Aboriginal language through italicization or extended parenthetical explanation. To avoid glossing altogether, however, as the Hugginses recognize, also risks reinforcing the misunderstanding of non-Aboriginal readers, their primary audience: "We made a decision not to differentiate these words in the text because they are part of our natural way of speech. This may cause some unsettling and confusing moments for a white reader. However, there is a glossary for those unfamiliar with our languages" (3).

Often throughout the text, the Hugginses stress how Rita's experiences are not unique, but similar to the stories of countless other Aboriginal women in Australia. And while awareness of the ignorance of a white reading audience shapes the structure and process of the narrative, Rita concludes with additional commentary on the popularity of lifestorytelling, and on the significance of Aboriginal lifestorytelling for Aboriginal people:

> People tell stories about their lives and what's happened to them, the things they've seen. Everybody likes listening to stories. Some stories are very strong and exciting; there are sad and happy stories. I like the sad stories coming out because it helps people. It gives Aboriginal people confidence to speak about our lives and to be listened to. I think it's good that Aboriginal people are writing down these stories. We've got a lot of things to say to the migaloos. They don't understand it all, of course. (149)

Jackie's interventions, as I have suggested, are bifurcated in intention and effect; they shift between direct address to her mother and to their non-Aboriginal audience. In addressing their perceived audience Jackie details the reserve pass system, discrimination against Aboriginal war veterans, the 1930s and 1940s Queensland Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders Preservation and Protection Act (which effectively indentured Aboriginal people in employment contracts, often with pay withheld), the 1963 Yirrkala bark petition, the 1967 federal referendum which granted Aboriginal peoples citizenship—"How nice it was for the British to grant my people that," comments Rita wryly (90)—and OPAL.[5]

While Rita stresses in her introduction that the narrative comprises only her "recollections," the concluding pages of the text reveal her acute awareness that an uninformed dominant culture reads Aboriginal lifestories as representative of Aboriginal culture. She notes how public disclosure of certain types of information, in this case, of problems of violence against women within Aboriginal communities, can be used to justify ongoing oppression: "... sadly, if we talk about it, it can be used against us, too" (133). That the white readers of *Auntie Rita* identified and even informed and educated by the Hugginses still "don't understand it all," finally, can perhaps be taken as an intriguing mark of the vitality of the form of lifestorytelling as it is being taken up by Aboriginal writers

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[5] This is not to suggest that Aboriginal readers "automatically" know these details of the history of colonization in Australia, particularly those dealing with a specific geographic and historical location, but that the writers explicitly provide these details for a non-Aboriginal readership.

and transformed to meet the aspirations of an Aboriginal constituency rather than catering singularly to a non-Aboriginal audience.

Nation and Aboriginality

From the outset, *Auntie Rita* constructs Aboriginal subjectivity as an effect, in part, of connections to specific geographic and cultural history. The displacements of colonization—Rita recounts being transported to the Cherbourg mission in a cattle truck, and Jackie was raised on the mission and largely in Brisbane—are foregrounded, but there is also a refusal to allow that history to completely erase original ties to place. There is a refusal here to accept dominant nationalism's writing over of place with European culture and history:

> *Like most Aboriginal people, it is my deeply held belief that we came from this land, hence the term "the land is my mother."...There are no stories of migration in our dreamtime stories. Our creation stories link us intrinsically to the earth. We are born of the earth and when we die our body and spirit go back there. This is why land is so important to us, no matter where and when we were born.* (13)

The details of Rita's education in the mission school delineate the discourses and power relations circumscribing and shaping her life and her identity. They simultaneously offer a revisionist account of dominant national narratives of "settlement" and "civilization," revealing the patriarchal and imperialist assumptions and hegemonic processes embedded in the mission school system: "We were taught basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, and a lot about European history, Captain Cook, and sewing" (27). She notes how the mission school's production of Aboriginal women as a class of domestic labourers has led to her near-obsession with household cleanliness: "It is my background as a domestic that has in many ways shaped my whole life. Even today I do not feel comfortable and a whole person unless the day has been spent in some kind of domestic activity, whether it be cooking, cleaning or washing" (37). And, as she states later, Rita's entire employment life has involved domestic labour, with the exception of part-time employment on an educational project for the University of Queensland (103).

Because her formative years were spent there, the Cherbourg mission became "home" for Rita. She recalls friendships that became lifelong as well as the pain of the community as it was torn apart by a colonizing ideology that led to the separation of parents and children as they were shunted off to domestic service. The "place" of the mission thus forms part of Rita's identity: "I love going to Cherbourg for happy times, not sad. I have a different feeling, so free. When it's sad, it's like I'm trapped there still in my heart. I think about my parents a lot, the times we had, and always visit their graves" (137). She therefore continues to connect her sense of self with place (and with displacement) and with her maternal history.

Jackie's reflections on the life of the father she never knew (he died when the children were very young, of what the children, according to the details of *Auntie Rita*, believe to be effects of his service in World War Two)[6] not only articulate her own sense of loss but provide a critique once again of dominant nationalism and its celebration of participation in war as signalling a national coming of age. She describes her father in such a way as to mark his individuality as a proud veteran and his systemic location as an Aboriginal man discriminated against by a government that denied him citizenship and veterans' benefits; her words, too, delineate her own subjectivity as a process of struggling to come to terms with this individual's absence and with the systemic pressures she addresses:

> *My dearest father had died needlessly due to a war which he had no control over. More than this he was not yet a citizen of his own country but was considered good enough to go to war. While his people were being denied the basic human rights, for example education, he wore the patriotic uniform of the Australian army proudly. I had often wondered why he loved the army when the hypocritical society in which he and my mother lived in that time was brainwashing our men into believing they were equals, when they did not even have the right to vote or to be counted as Australians. Maybe if Dad was alive today he'd be able to tell his children, who hold uncertainty about his motivations and anger at never knowing their father.* (63)

There is in *Auntie Rita* a deconstructive energy directed at dominant constructions of race and Aboriginality, and their painful material manifestations, as well as an assertion of

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[6] In "Towards a Biography of Rita Huggins," Jackie Huggins states more explicitly that "[n]ever fully recovering from injuries as a prisoner-of-war on the Burma/Thailand railway, Jack's life with his young family was brief—he died from a heart attack at the age of 38" (151).

agency, a reconstruction and theorizing of what constitutes "Aboriginality" against and outside of those dominant assumptions. This is not to diminish, however, the powerful and painful influence of racist government policies of forced displacement, dispossession, and violence—these continue as a determining factor in Rita's narrative and her sense of identity.

This negotiation is outlined at the outset, as Rita notes that the Cherbourg mission was designated for "half-castes" by government officials, while "full-bloods" were sent to Woorabinda (10). Rita states that her own mother and father had white fathers, and proceeds to disrupt categories of race with an assertion of a "Aboriginality" defined outside of dominant constructs. None the less, the power of the dominant categories remains to be struggled against. Her words, therefore, negotiate the tension between a dominant and resistant process of naming: "But skin never mattered to us. It was how we felt about being Aboriginal that counted. It was when I was in my twenties, too, that I was given a certificate, which specified my 'breed'" (11).

Rita's account of life on an Aboriginal mission, as a domestic labourer, and as a spokesperson for Aboriginal peoples in OPAL provides ample evidence of the operation of race and racism in Australian history. Intriguingly, the mother's and daughter's narratives further disrupt dominant categories of Aboriginality through the writers' exploration of their mixed Maori and Aboriginal ancestry. Jackie recalls that her paternal grandfather married a woman believed to be of Maori ancestry and that while growing up some of her relatives would "remind us that we weren't Aboriginal" (54). Jackie's disclosure of her part-Maori heritage further supports her assertion that Aboriginality is a process of self-definition that can function outside of dominant categories. Jackie's response, moreover, reveals not only the immediate effects of this "difference"—the paternal side of the family was not confined to the missions but was allowed "freedom"—but the profound generational and historical differences between mother and daughter. For Rita, survivor of the mission system, the question of purity of race and the desire to "pass" as non-Aboriginal (preferably white) is not prioritized but seemingly a normal fact of life at the time. Jackie, from a contemporary location of more overt anti-racist movements, struggles to accept that the paternal side of the family would deny its Aboriginal ancestry:

> *It has often puzzled me why my father's family stayed in Ayr and remained "free" people while other Aboriginals were being herded off in droves to the missions. Did they claim another identity in order to stay? I deny this emphatically and it depresses me even more to think this was true. My own uncompromising identity politics couldn't stomach it, but I can understand my grandparent's generation trying to survive and keep a certain amount of dignity intact. There would be no excuse for it today.* (55)

Taking their narratives as histories of their subjectivities, and of their subject positions, it becomes evident why Rita's approach to questions of racism are couched in terms acceptance, forgiveness, and in many ways the language of dominant multiculturalism. Rita's description of her daughter Mutoo, she acknowledges, is also a description of herself: she "like me I guess, loves all people of every race, colour, creed or class" (43). And although racism is painful, she states,

> I have always risen above it because to dwell on it only hurts you in the end. I certainly remember these things but never let them get to me like I've seen them get to other people. Some people will go on about it for days, weeks, months and years but it is only being painful to them. I try to do positive things to help me get over that pain. The lack of bitterness in Aboriginal people can be put down to the great humanness of our society. After what we've all been through, it's no wonder we are strong. I forgive sometimes and find it hard to forgive at other times. (107)

Jackie, in turn, suggests that her mother's approach of forgiveness—an effect of history, of the influence of Christianity (113), and of an era of enforced silences and a political climate less amenable to anti-racist and Aboriginal sovereignty movements—is neither ultimately practicable or desirable: "*Because our beginnings as Black and white Australians were steeped in bloodshed and murder, and Black survival depended on such flimsy pieces of fate, it makes it almost impossible for us to pick up the pieces, forget about it and make up*" (15).

This is not to suggest, however, that Rita's sense of race politics is somehow less effective than that of her daughter. Rather, I am gesturing towards how the operations of racism and how anti-racism have historical specificities. The mother's tactics and strategies are delineated in the text as radical and effective, within the conditions of possibility of the time, just as the daughter's are an *effect* of, a possibility emerging from, both her mother's agency and the change she enacted, at the personal (mother-daughter) and systemic levels. This is one of the strengths of the mother-daughter collaboration in *Auntie Rita*—the

historicization not only of individual "lives", subjectivities and subject positions, but of the conditions of possibility of each generation. Interestingly, while Jackie clearly constructs herself as a contemporary anti-racist Aboriginal rights activist, and at times assumes a tone of authority in relation to her mother's narrative and politics, there is a moment in the text where the mother's experience and political insight into race politics in Australia takes precedence. It occurs when Rita recalls Jackie's experiences as a novice teacher in Ti-Tree (north of Alice Springs), where Rita joined her daughter. It reveals, this time, the mother "reading" and theorizing her daughter, and it reveals once again Rita's assertion of the failure of dominant, homogenizing assumptions of Aboriginality to adequately encompass the diversity—geographic, linguistic, historical—of the indigenous peoples of Australia:

> It was then that I realised how different we were, not only to the whites in town, but to the Aboriginal people. I am sure they saw Jackie as a white person because she was a teacher and couldn't speak her own language apart from the Aboriginal English we use between ourselves. For the first time in Jackie's life she suffered from an identity crisis—she was too black to be white and too white to be Black.
>
> *...I have always been strong about my Blackness. From my earliest days my mother, family and friends helped me to feel pride in being Black, and I've been reminded of my difference by whites ever since. Without that early reinforcement I'd be a confused person now. Until Ti Tree I never questioned where I stood in the world. I was a person within a white world. But in Ti Tree I was a Black person within a Black world that was different from my own and I experienced something of a culture shock.*
>
> *But all the same, here the white world still wielded the power.* (124, 125)

How the "white world" wields power, how the dynamics of race are historically located, as is resistance, are traced in the text through the lifestory of Rita Huggins and through the relationship between the mother's and daughter's texts and perspectives on anti-racism. By the end of the text Rita recounts her own individual acts of resistance (in contrast to Jackie's more vocal challenge to systemic racism throughout); in combination, the mother's and daughter's perspectives on racism reveal at once the "sameness" of racism through time, its particular manifestations, and the range of strategies required to combat these specificities. Rita recalls taking a trip to New Zealand with Jackie, where a "big, tall, Yankie tourist" insisted that they weren't Aboriginal: "Fancy saying that! I was very angry and told him that we knew who we were. I knew I had jarred him by the look on his face" (127). Jackie, in turn, analyzes this incident and extends the discussion of racism to the systemic level:

> *The ultimate insult is "You're not a real Aboriginal." Non-Aboriginal people are not expected to comply to one particular model and neither should we. We come in all shapes and sizes, and from different places. We have always had to conform to white Australian society, but imagine what a different country Australia would be now if non-Aboriginals had had to adopt Aboriginal ways.* (128)

The mother-daughter collaboration here works to locate racism in its particular and its systemic manifestations. It undercuts dominant assumptions of Australian nationalism and its use, through tourism, of stereotypical representations of Aboriginal Australians, as well as providing a construction of Aboriginality as fluid, transformative, and dynamic. That Jackie's sense of Aboriginality is different from that of her mother, though also intimately connected to it, is an indication of this transformative Aboriginality. The text concludes with Rita's proud assertion of her Aboriginality, which, she suggests (through her borrowing of a joke from Aboriginal entertainer Ernie Dingo), remains constantly in tension with the race and class dynamics of urban Australia: "When I think of my life now, although the lives of Aboriginal people have always been hard, I wouldn't change being Aboriginal for the world—except, as Ernie Dingo says, at four o'clock in the morning trying to hail a taxi in Brisbane" (157).

Not a Conclusion:

Reflections on the Processes of Transformation

I shudder a little as I re-read my "readings" of these texts (editing as I go), noting the tone of my words, my authority on these texts, as I play armchair psychologist about the pain, the survival, the psychologies of these women. I did not intend to, but yes, I am judging them (myself?) through this process of "literary criticism." I find myself saying things like "Rita Joe's survival techniques as a victim of sexual abuse become part of her later politics"; I said that Emma Minde "rationalizes" her parents' decision to arrange her marriage for her; I critique the authoritative tone of Jackie Huggins as she analyzes her mother's words. But I wonder, what am I doing differently? Am I trying to reserve the voice of critical authority for myself? I don't want to believe this is all my work is, but these desires are there as well.

There is such fuzziness here that I have been trained to not admit—do I <u>really</u> know how to come to terms with the question of authorial referentiality in autobiography and lifestorytelling? I do come to think of these lifestorytellers as individuals who can be affected by my words and criticism in a way that doesn't happen with "fiction" writers. This is compounded by the power relations of white reader on "Aboriginal" text. I have the power to impose meanings on their work. And yes, it does somehow matter more that I am white and the writers are Aboriginal, even as I rally against those definitions.

I am less critical than I would be if these texts were written by those in locations of privilege. I wouldn't hesitate to say that I don't like the implausibility of the chance meeting of Isabelle and the Aboriginal rights activist if this weren't an "Aboriginal" text; I would criticize Ruby Langford Ginbi's <u>My Bundjalung People</u> as not ready for publication and in need of a "good editor" (rather, I chose to quietly ignore it in my thesis); I would say that something troubling happens at the end of <u>Auntie Rita</u> that makes it, too, seem like it was rushed, as it suddenly shifts into the present tense and addresses the (seemingly mundane) activities of daily life. Am I, in the troubling spirit of liberalism, trying just a bit too hard to

valorize these texts? Why? How much of this is just my self-construction as "good" white person? (How much of my reflections are just white-liberal-guilty—literary-self-flagellation?)

It is so easy to critique the operations of liberal multiculturalism from afar—the around the globe gaze at Australia is particularly comfortable. It's not so easy to see it in yourself.

Why am I fascinated by these narratives? Is it their remarkable "difference"? Yes. I am attracted by Labumore's refusal to smooth over contradictions, to cater to dominant/ my expectations. So this "difference" is about me after all. To what extent am I just celebrating difference (ie reproducing My Sameness) once again? In retrospect, I have begun to wonder if I am not, after all, privileging, desiring, the fragmented subjectivity of poststructuralism over, say, the tidier coherent teleology of subjectivity suggested in Clare's text. Is this, after all, why I like autobiographical writing—to get a sense of the "real" I don't get in fiction, and to observe a spectacle of punishment, of fragmentation, and, happily and comfortably, survival of the onslaughts of oppression? Why did I choose these texts, after all, and where did my passion for them come from—a sense of identification? a desire to be mothered? to be told how to conduct my anti-racism? Did I learn what the narrators wanted me to—and why does this matter?

Am I delighting here in a spectacle of contradiction, of exotic, "remote" (Aussie/Aboriginal) Otherness, weary as I am of seeming white male certitude, coherent self-hood, and its power over me? Aboriginal woman as resolution to white patriarchy—what a burden.

> I am sitting in the home of a Peigan elder. It is a summer-warm fall afternoon overlooking the Oldman River. We are discussing the possibility of recording her life story along with those of other Peigan elders as part of a postdoctoral research project, and how it might be done according to the elders' wishes. I was nervous when I arrived, not only because I was late for our meeting (I got lost trying to find her home on the reserve) but because I am anxious about following Peigan protocol for visiting an elder in her home. And I know I won't know if I make a mistake, nor is she likely to say anything to me directly.
>
> She takes some time to tell me what she told a recent meeting of Peigan people and the RCMP about traditional Peigan gender roles. She shares a funny story

that is from at least the early 1900s and is about a pretentious white woman who falls out of a wagon and ends up covered in mud.

As she speaks I find that my mind wanders. I notice those familiar feelings—of being lulled by the voice of an Aboriginal elder, of impatience about not getting to the point (whatever that is) fast enough for me, yet of letting myself drift into the sound of her voice. I have stopped paying full attention to what she is saying but somehow feel comfortable, soothed. Her braids probably have something to do with it, with some expectation, wish, some operation of my white desire, even as I recognize how her contemporary style of eyeglasses, her home, with a Christian mural on the wall, its cleanliness despite its wornness, play also with my expectations. Then I wonder if I'm just reading this as poststructuralist jouissance. In any case, I keep putting myself at the centre.

While she is speaking I ask myself Why I am here? What do I want? What answers am I looking for? (to what questions?) What desire is at work here?

This woman is a bit younger than my own mother. Why have I never thought about recording my own mother's life story? What's the *difference*?

This binarism of similarity/difference, self/other seems to persistently threaten my stated project, reasserting itself when I do not want it to, expect it to. I want to be the "one" who brings these "neglected texts" (women?) to critical visibility, but this is also a process of my desire for institutional affirmation, for the acknowledgement of my "discovery."

White critical saviourhood wrapped in theoretical clothing?

Is literary criticism after all, nothing more than the autobiography of the critic? Am I making these texts still about me, my agenda, my history? Am I imposing meanings on these texts that aren't there? Do I read for a purpose (personal salvation? "Look at me, I know my history of colonization, aren't I <u>good</u>?")? Am I just reconstituting Aboriginality and my whiteness yet again?

I wanted to escape the similarity/difference binarism of comparative studies, but I still have set up categories or lenses for reading the texts; the binarism is still there, even if only slightly more cloaked than the more obvious compare-and-contrast approach.

Labumore writes: "the toughness of my time made me what I am today...nice, kind, helpfulness, forgiving, to be honest, and not to be dishonest with anyone, to be happy. Well, all what I learnt made much different in life I'm living now. So those hard life I once had was to help me to understand so much..." And who am I to say, 'no, I'm sorry," but really you should not make it sound like all you went through was a good thing because if it didn't

kill you it made you stronger"? I chastise students for believing Aboriginal lifestorytellers, for taking them at their word. Are they honouring the writer's integrity, and right to self-definition more than I am, me, who says, no, 'that's not it at all. Let me tell you about you..." (And why am I suddenly thinking of the lifestorytellers as "you"?)

I get very frustrated reading Labumore. Her lifestory is not a quick read. A lot of times it simply "does not make sense" to me. But can I say that, an almost-Ph.D. in English? Aren't I supposed to "get" it? I want to take my editor's pen and change her words. I struggle with how I have internalized patriarchy and want to assert authority, with how academic structures call for such authority, with the fundamental necessity of self-critique that anti-racism demands. I am tired. I am lonely in this struggle, even as it is a struggle of privilege that I can abandon anytime. It is exhausting inside this head. Sometimes, I think it will explode.

> I am teaching at Red Crow Community College for the first time. It is a 70-km commute one-way between the small Alberta town of Pincher Creek to the Blood Reserve. I am told that I can claim mileage for $60 per round trip.
>
> I feel uncomfortable claiming this money. I feel like I don't "deserve" it. I was not provided mileage for the sessional work I did at the University of Calgary, 200 km away. (Somehow, somewhere, I've been a "good" student, and learned the lession well: be grateful to have a job at all). We are financially secure at home. It takes me about a year to recognize that *not* claiming it devalues the job, my work and that of the college. White liberal guilt works in such insidious ways.

If I am truthful, part of the reason I chose this area of study was, indeed, its "newness," the opportunity for me to make some sort of mark (ie gain some sort of prestige), the thought that I wouldn't have to compete with reams of texts already written on the subject (as per Shakespeare). (What foolish and unfounded laziness.)

How much of the cultural homework I call for did I actually engage in during the preparation of this thesis? I did not explore Cree literary traditions. I did not research Lardil history, or Mik'maq culture. I even assumed that "Karobran" was going to be the autobiographer's name.

I am teaching an introductory university English transfer course at Red Crow Community College. It is early in the fall semester but very warm still. The classroom is stuffy so I open some windows, including one without a screen.

I am still getting over my early-semester nervousness (though this is the third semester I've taught here), compounded as it is by my vague and unarticulated anxieties about my whiteness, about the appropriateness of my teaching here, (and how) in this place, this former residential school which several of these adult students were forced to attend as children.

Suddenly the class is disrupted by a small bird that has flown in through the screenless open window and is swooping around, panicked, from wall to wall. Some women in the room squeal and cover their heads. A man says "Uh Oh." I stand there looking, wondering how to get the poor bird back outside, wishing the women would relax. It's just a bird, I think.

The bird has landed on the blinds covering another window and a man in the class gets up, telling me he has to kill the bird because it's a "bad sign." Another man rushes to shut the open window, and, rather dumbfounded, I help by removing the tin can I used to hold the window open.

The man kills the bird with an astoundingly efficient *fwap* of his baseball cap. He picks the dead bird up off the floor and plunks it in the metal garbage can. It *pliiinngs*. He puts his baseball cap back on and sits down quietly and waits for class to resume.

I say something inane, trying to acknowledge that I don't have a clue what just happened. "Thank you—I think," I stupidly say, before returning to the safety of my course outline.

Oh my God. What *am* I doing here?

It is weeks before I mention the incident again, privately asking a student what the bird in the classroom *meant*. She tells me, and adds, kindly, "You should have seen the look on your face."

What I wanted to hear more about is so telling—I wanted Rita Joe and Emma Minde to say more about the loss of their children (why? isn't their unspeakable grief enough?); I wanted to hear more about the mother-daughter conflict in Auntie Rita (why, so they could heal me?); I wanted Emma Minde to condemn outright her residential school experiences rather than say the residential school was a positive influence in her life. I found myself feeling superior when I could say, "look, see how she has internalized oppression," tut-tutting knowingly.

Even as I don't really believe that armpit sweat can heal the sick (though for some reason I feel I'm not supposed to say this), I delight in reading about it—my anthropological gaze fixes on the exotic. And I do have trouble seeing speech taboos among women

(Labumore) as anything but patriarchal; yet I also want to valorize (unthinkingly?) Aboriginal traditions (reconstituting the binary again).

I wanted to read about experiences of the body, of sexuality; an effect, perhaps, of the politics of disclosure of mainstream feminism, writing and celebrating the body and all that. But it's probably more than that too—curiosity (the question as to how Emma Minde slept with a man she had never met before) tells more about my sexual history than anything particularly literarily significant; and let's not forget the element of the exotic Other here.

I feel a renewed appreciation about the politics of disclosure in lifestorytelling. Did these texts teach me? And is that really their "job"? Am I performing whiteness, Canadianness, middle-classness, any differently as a result? I want to believe so. But how, exactly? How much of such change is from the text, and how much from what I bring to it, what I "do" (argh) with it?

I do want highly politicized, "angry," even militant "Aboriginal subjects" when I read, but in my daily life, I want that gentle spiritual grandmother to tell me that yes, after all, I am a good person, not one of those "nasty whites" at all.

> I attend a session of the cross-cultural days conference held in Pincher Creek and designed to improve cross-cultural communication between the Peigan and non-Aboriginal communities here. At a break, a white woman approaches the Peigan elder I had visited, and gushes her white angst all over her, lamenting how she wants her "children to know the grandmothers of this land (blah blah blah)."
>
> I stand nearby, listen for a bit, and interrupt to say hello. I am thinking somehow that I am 'rescuing' this elder from the deluge of white guilt. Soon after, I think about how I had just reconstituted my whiteness, her Aboriginality, my agency (saviour status), her supposed victimization.
>
> Different individuals, same damn dynamic.
>
> I should have approached the white woman. But I'm not sure how. (It's easier in the classroom.)

I am at the supposed, provisional "end" of a project in which I argue for critical self-reflexiveness, for a transformation of whiteness and I wonder, to what extent I have merely reproduced it? Has my subjectivity been transformed by my practice? Does my white body signify differently? How can I occupy and perform whiteness resistantly?

I have been teaching part-time at Red Crow Community College for almost two years now. Every once in a while some white person says something inane and offensive to me about needing a shotgun "just in case." In my head, I blow these people off with a few choice words, as I try to more calmly challenge their stereotypes.

Yet.....almost every time I make the 70-km commute, I notice how Imaginary Indians (to use Daniel Francis's apt description) dance in my head and how I still have to fight them. Disturbing thoughts and images of male Aboriginal violence, threats to my white female sexuality (are these actually fantasies? o god), assumptions about universal Aboriginal poverty, relief at owning a cell-phone and a reliable vehicle all stir in my unconscious becoming conscious as I cross that spot on the road that says "Blood Indian Reserve." I feel sick. Sick at heart and disheartened. How can these fears and desires *not* translate into racist acts, even as I try to recognize them and fight them? What about what I don't even recognize?

If, as I have argued "objectively" and "intellectually" that the reading of Aboriginal women's lifestories can be a process of transformation of the reader and therefore of "the world," the intriguing question arises for me as to what extent my own writing style, my own voice, my own subjectivity, have been transformed by my engagement with this material, and, with the various forms of writing/communication that went into this project. It is clear to me now that in the more (traditionally) "theoretical" sections of this study the absence of my personal voice is an effect of the distancing and disembodiment of the reader in this form of discourse. My voice is more embodied when I discuss my own experiences of anti-racist pedagogy, experiences in which I was all-too and constantly aware of how my post-partum white body was being read in that space and in which I actively tried to embody all of us in that room in the systemic processes of privilege and oppression.

And, it has been suggested to me,[1] *that my readings of the individual texts in this study take on a particularly oral, conversational tone that doesn't appear elsewhere in the study. The astute observation (I didn't notice this shift in my voice) also raises terror and excitement: terror that I am unconsciously mimicking the Other. If I take on the tone and voice of Aboriginal women lifestorytellers, how is that yet another enactment of my desire,*

[1] I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Aruna Srivastava, for pointing out this aspect of my study, for asking the right (tough) questions in her typically supportive and incredibly insightful way. I regret that approaching deadlines do not permit me the necessary time to explore this issue as fully as I would like.

my privilege, my authority "over" these texts? To what extent has this study after all really been about my desire—critical, ethical, spiritual, and personal? Have I merely sought personal redemption for my own race and class privilege by engaging in work that I claim to be liberatory but is really about me after all? And yet there is also excitement regarding the transformative potential of literature—if it can change my writing, it is changing my subjectivity, and therefore, can I/it/we change the world?

These are frightening and crucial questions indeed. And in a form (and a conclusion to it) that historically has depended on certainty, the acknowledgement that I do not have the answers to such questions feels risky, yet necessary. I never intended to produce a tension in my own voice, to demonstrate my own conflicted and split subjectivity as I engaged with the material, grappled with (and danced, unintentionally, around) my whiteness, my location as a white reader of these materials.

Part of the immense challenge of transforming whiteness and "Aboriginality" in liberatory ways through literary criticism is the nature of literary criticism as a process and form of "representation." Criticism in and of itself has always been a process of representing others—writers, their contexts, their ideologies—and doing so with an institutionally sanctioned authority. It is also a practice and reproduction of individualism such that it doesn't allow for the multiplicity of meanings of a text to emerge through dialogue, debate, among readings and interpretations. The individualism of academic structures and practices, of Canadian (and Western) culture generally rails against the recognition of whiteness as a collective category, and the necessity of white anti-racist alliance in its transformation.

My personal reflections, again, are not *intended* to be read as separate from the processes and politics of this project, as merely personal and extraneous eruptions into the "real" text (though institutional conventions and the culture of individualism and "privacy" invite such a reading); nor are they *intended* to function as the deconstructive thread that can be pulled to undermine the content as *all* personal justification and critical autobiography. Rather, they are intended to perform some of the self-reflexivity I call for, to illustrate some of the processes of the transformation of subjectivity I theorize as necessary for a liberatory practice, to mark the inseparability of my critical voice from the institutions

that have so powerfully shaped it (hence the placement of the shift in fonts), and to serve as a critique of the academic institution and of postcolonial theory in particular, in how it prepared me (or not) for teaching in the Kainiawa community, and, by extension, how it addresses (in fact, does not address) cross-cultural and anti-racist pedagogies and activism in relation to its stated goals of decolonization.

In a provisional "conclusion" (that in many ways is another beginning), I am certain that reflecting on my own processes has created in me a renewed sympathy, empathy, for the white women in my English 385 course, whom I so comfortably admonished for wanting to "identify with" the text, and their narrators, and for not being vigilant enough about where their responses were coming from.

And I have also grown increasingly uneasy with the conventional forms of literary criticism and their imbrication in imperialist power relations, in the reconstruction of binarisms, in the reconstitution of Aboriginality and (my) whiteness. The transformation of social categories, the entry into the politics of representation as constitutive of decolonization will also, after all, involve the transformation of the forms, styles, and ideologies of literary criticism. The strength of this study, therefore, is in demonstrating that critical analysis is neither political nor transformative in and of itself unless it involves anti-racist, self-reflexive pedagogy, that not only links community activism to university practices, but sees the classroom as a site of activism as well.

To take seriously, ethically, the argument of this study is to argue for a transformed critical practice that will genuinely accommodate and be attentive to Aboriginal interpretive paradigms, epistemologies, and literary theories rather than point out the limits to achieving that goal. And while we may wish to suspend definitions of Aboriginality, and with good reason, we must recognize that whiteness and Aboriginality continue to circulate, in fact are produced and reproduced, in university structures and classrooms. Non-Aboriginal anti-racist pedagogy certainly goes some way to creating a transformative educational site, but we must also ask, continually, what is being excluded and why, in the spaces and practices we inhabit.

This study, I believe, is valuable in that it does articulate many aspects of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling previously not considered in the field of postcolonial

literary studies, and my aim has in part been to enact a transformation of that field, beginning by pointing out its limitations and making interrogative interventions. Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling is not, after all, well-served by its current institutional location as a subsection of postcolonial theory or Canadian-Australian national and comparative studies. Nor is its inclusion as a separate area of study the only or ideal goal; appended to the British or national canons, this location functions to reinforce the dominant ideologies of nation, multiculturalism, and Aboriginality. Rather, as I hope to have demonstrated, the richness of Aboriginal women's lifestorytelling in Canada and Australia means that, particularly when accompanied by anti-racist reading and teaching practices, as a body of work it enhances other areas of study: world literature, women's literature, the tradition of autobiography, and, in the case of residential and mission school narratives, perhaps slave and prison narratives as well.[2]

That critical race theory, nation theory, and postcolonial theory (as well as official multiculturalism) have yet to find an adequate language for the location of mixed-race Aboriginal peoples, particularly in terms of the national space, is not only an indication that at some level this location poses a threat to current distributions of national, economic, and institutional power, but that we continue to inhabit these discourses of nation and race in ways that are not readily visible to those of us who benefit most directly from their maintenance. Significantly, we must be particularly wary of how seemingly progressive and liberatory discourses, particularly in terms of nationalism, manage to reconstitute hegemonic categories (such as that of "race") in service of the state, its academic institutions, and our own locations in it.

The production of an ethical subject of transformation, as critic, teacher, and actor in the world, as ally of Aboriginal peoples, must take seriously, by embodying, the challenges of taking the necessary (and necessarily) risky steps of advocating for systemic change when that system works so powerfully to maintain its power. Yet there are places to begin: in the university—the advocacy of the inclusion of Aboriginal languages on

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[2] More research (such as Jon Stratton's *Australia in Identity Crisis* and in the anthology *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and "Our" Society*, edited by Gillian Cowlishaw and Barry Morris) that shows how ideologies of multiculturalism and of culture—in law and in popular discourse—are in fact problematically imbricated in former categories of race, is required in order to fully understand the dynamics of race and culture in the performance of the nation, in theory, and in the "multicultural" classroom in particular.

university curricula; the institutional recognition of the literatures of specific Aboriginal nations as national literatures in their own right; the advocacy of the hiring of Aboriginal faculty (even as the weight of poststructuralist arguments about "essentialism" and the backlash against equity policies hiring conspire against it), and of reconsidering what "qualifications," what forms of knowledge are deemed acceptable for faculty, and why; the naming of and resistance to the micro acts of racism that construct the university; interventions into faculties of education and graduate literary studies that insist on the inclusion of anti-racist pedagogy (not "multicultural pedagogy") as fundamental to teacher education, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal faculty alike.

But the university, certainly, is not the only place where such transformation can, or does, occur. Anti-racist pedagogy is not aimed, after all, only at the few students who will go on to graduate study and become university faculty. Rather, the very challenge of liberatory intellectual work is that it must inevitably, and productively, leave the university, enter communities, and participate in local practices of resistance and agency.

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APPENDIX A: COURSE OUTLINE

English 385.03: Topic in Aboriginal Literatures
Tues., 2:00-5:00 p.m., ST 133, Winter 1998

Instructor: Jennifer Kelly
Office Hours: Tues., 11:00-12:00,
or by appointment
e-mail: jgkelly@canuck.com

This course will examine Aboriginal writing in Canada and its historical, contemporary, and critical contexts. We will consider the course materials in terms of the histories of European imperialism and English literary traditions (ideologies and representations of Aboriginal peoples, race, gender, class, genre, and form). We will emphasize Aboriginal critical perspectives and the relationships among readers/critics and texts and their political/social locations. The course will include consideration of some Aboriginal Australian writing, again, placed in its historical and social contexts, and in relation to Aboriginal writing in Canada, to global imperialism, and to comparative and postcolonial critical approaches. The course will be supplemented by films and critical articles.

Reading list: You are required to read the first three texts (Francis, Armstrong, Brant) *and* six of the other texts on the list (including at least one of the Australian texts), for a total of nine texts:
Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*
Jeannette Armstrong, ed. *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature* (selections)
Beth Brant, *Writing as Witness*

Maria Campbell, *Half-breed*
Beatrice Culleton, *In Search of April Raintree*
Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie, eds. *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*
Rita Joe, *Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaw Poet*
Thomas King, *Green Grass, Running Water*
Richard Wagamese, *Keeper 'n Me*
Australian texts:
Colin Johnson, *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*
Sally Morgan, *My Place*

Assignments/Grades:
Group research presentation: 15%
Journal: 30%
Final project: 35%
Class/group participation: 20%
Note: while a passing grade in each component is not required in order to pass the course, submission of all components of the assignments is required for you to pass the course

Please read the policy on plagiarism

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION FORM

March 24, 1998

Dear Member of English 385.03 (Winter 1998)

As you know, I am in the process of writing my Ph.D. dissertation on Aboriginal women's writing in Canada and Australia, with particular emphasis on the criticism and teaching of these materials from a cross-cultural (non-Aboriginal) location and in predominantly non-Aboriginal university classrooms.

Part of my dissertation will examine and critique the effectiveness of journal-writing as a critical process and teaching strategy. As such, it is important that the voices and perspectives of those undertaking such a journalling process be included in this research. My aim is not to critique individual students' perspectives, but to address the question of how teachers may effectively teach cross-culturally-- what systemic and/or institutional obstacles she/he and students may encounter; what strategies can be developed to address these difficulties; what opportunities are there for productive work; positives and negatives of the journalling process, etc.

I am requesting that you consider granting permission for me to use your journal (all or in part) as part of this research.

As you know, the journal process is designed for the exploration and interrogation of how personal and collective histories affect our reading and critical practices. It is therefore important that the location(s) from which the journal is written (ie ancestry, gender, academic discipline, year, age, sexuality, ability, etc.) be included and identified in the research. I respectfully request that you consider including as many of these as possible. Your name will not be used unless you wish it to be included. You will be identified in the dissertation by the terms you choose (see below).

If you agree to grant your permission for me to use your journal as part of my research, *and* if you supply me with a permanent contact address, I, in turn, will
i) return your journal to you
ii) provide you with a draft of the section of my dissertation which includes reference to your journal (planned completion is September 1998). At that time, you may choose to withdraw the use of your name, if you have given previous permission for its inclusion
iii) inform you of further uses of the research (for example, future publication)

The completed dissertation will be available in the Department of English, The University of Calgary.

Please consider this request during the remainder of the semester and if you grant permission, please complete this form and return it to me with your journal. If you are granting permission for only parts of the journal, please indicate which parts may be included in the research.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer Kelly, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English, The University of Calgary

APPENDIX III (CONT'D): CONSENT FORM

I, _____ .

give Jennifer Gail Kelly, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English, The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, my permission to use all / specified parts (please circle one) of my journal from English 385 (Winter 1998), for research purposes.

I request that I be identified in the research as follows:

_____

_____

_____

I understand that, by providing Jennifer Kelly with a *permanent* mailing address, I will receive a draft of the section of the dissertation containing reference to my work, and that the completed dissertation will be available in the Department of English, The University of Calgary, upon its completion.

I request that my journal be returned to me at the following address:

_____

_____

Signature:_____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INSTRUCTIONS ON JOURNALLING

English 385.03. Winter 1998
Aboriginal Writing and Critical Contexts
Assignments/Grades

1) Group Research Assignment/Presentation: 15%
2) Journal: 30%
3) Final Project: 35%
4) Class and group participation: 20 %

3) Journal (30%)

In your journal you are required to respond to 7 texts on the course. **This number includes *The Imaginary Indian, Looking at the Words of Our People,* and *Writing as Witness,* one Australian text, and three others.** In the case of *Looking at the Words of Our People* you must respond to at least two articles and in the case of *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* you must journal on at least five entries.

On Journalling: Journal writing is one of the fundamental critical processes of this course. It is a place for you to explore your own critical contexts as these pertain to the course readings. Journal-writing in this course is a process of self-critique and cultural critique. It works to connect your individual responses to texts with larger cultural systems (like education, religion, class, gender, etc.). You should be asking yourself not only what your responses reveal about you as an individual but also about the culture or cultures you inhabit.The journal is a place for you to work through and reflect on your place in history and society; your relationship to your own culture and other cultures, to certain ideas, to "literature."

Your journal grade will comprise three components, equally weighted:
1) your response to the texts: this component must indicate your careful reading
2) self-critique: analysis and critique of your response
3) cultural critique: analysis and critique of your response in broader cultural and historical contexts

Response to the texts: In responding to a text, indicate what you "like" and "dislike" about it, what you find powerful, unsettling, interesting, pleasurable, boring, etc. Try to indicate not only what you believe that you understand about the text, but also moments that you don't get, such as culturally specific references unfamiliar to you.

Self- and cultural critique:

In writing your responses that you constantly try to answer questions such as the following: where did that response come from? Why do I think/respond this way? What assumptions did I bring to my reading of this text (or idea) and how does this text (and/or idea) challenge them? What challenges me the most about this text or idea? Makes me resist it? Where and how was I taught these beliefs that are being challenged? Am I discovering that there are gaps in my knowledge that I wasn't aware of? Why are those gaps there and what can I do about it? If there are culturally specific references you don't understand, try to find out what they mean.

APPENDIX C (CONT'D): INSTRUCTIONS ON JOURNALLING

The concept of **"unpacking"** is a fundamental part of journalling -- by this I mean making a record of your initial response, even on what seems like very basic things. and then breaking down your response into its many layers -- ie where did my personal reaction come from? Who/what taught me that? In whose interest was it me to teach me that? Is that the only way to see it? What are some other possibilities?...and so on. You will, of course, find your own way to work through self-critique and cultural critique. But if you get stuck, ask yourself "where did that response come from?" Often, and especially at first, we will overlook in our self-critique things that seem "obvious" or "natural" to us. Taking a look at why we believe certain concepts or ideas to be "obvious" or "natural" or "universal" is an important part of self- and cultural critique. It helps us understand the politics of our own reading -- and what we've been taught about reading, about others, about history, culture, society, etc.

The Journal "form": There is no given or required style for your journal: its requirements are only that it be a record of your reading, your responses, and your critique of those responses. It can be fairly informal but must be clearly written. Check for obvious grammar and spelling errors and avoid point form. There is no specific length requirement (you know how much you need to write to accurately reflect your reading and responses), and I will collect the journals early in order to give you an indication of length. Keep in mind that the journal is worth 30% of your final grade, and judge your time and work accordingly.

The "unpacking" and "self-critique" part is challenging, so you may wish to write your initial response more spontaneously—making notes as you are reading, for example, or writing a response as soon as you've finished the last page--and then go back and re-read and critically reflect on your initial response later.

Give yourself plenty of time for this process. You will be asked to hand in your journal periodically, for comment. It would be useful for you to leave time at the end of the course to reflect on your entire journal and your critical process of journalling.

Final due date for journals: April 7