

# **FANON AND BEYOND: DECOLONIZING INDIGENOUS SUBJECTS IN JEANNETTE ARMSTRONG'S *SLASH* AND LEE MARACLE'S *SUNDOGS***

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## **Abstract / Résumé**

Looking closely at two testimonial novels, *Sundogs* by Lee Maracle and *Slash* by Jeannette Armstrong, this paper asks whether and how Franz Fanon's influential theory of decolonization pertains to Indigenous literature written in Canada. The plots of both novels appear to affirm Fanon's belief in the necessity of armed resistance as a stage in the decolonizing process. The subject positions constructed by each novel's narrative form, however, contest the oppositional relationship between colonialist Self and colonized Other upon which Fanon predicates his theory. The emergence of an Indigenous, relational subjectivity in both novels provides hope for a bloodless decolonization of the psyche.

Dans le cadre d'une étude de deux romans de témoignage, *Sundogs* de Lee Maracle et *Slash* de Jeannette Armstrong, l'article examine si la théorie de la décolonisation de Franz Fanon a des rapports avec la littérature autochtone produite au Canada. Les intrigues des deux romans semblent réaffirmer la croyance de Fanon dans la nécessité de la résistance armée comme étape du processus de décolonisation. Toutefois, la situation du sujet construite par la forme narrative de chaque roman conteste la relation d'opposition entre le Soi colonialiste et l'Autre colonisé, sur laquelle est fondée la théorie de Fanon. L'émergence d'une subjectivité relationnelle autochtone dans les deux romans offre l'espoir d'une décolonisation de l'âme sans effusion de sang.

Franz Fanon's theories of colonial subjectivity and national revolution continue to inspire studies of power, politics, and globalism, as evinced by a March 2007 Social Theory Forum devoted to his work (Tamdgidi et al, 2007). Nearly forty years earlier, Waubageshig, a former Trent University professor of Native Studies, demonstrated the partial relevance of Fanon's theory of decolonization to the situation of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Waubageshig, 1970). Since colonialism has not yet disappeared, Fanon's ideas (as well as Waubageshig's arguments about their applicability) remain at least potentially useful when approaching Indigenous literature written in Canada. Indeed, Lee Maracle, a writer of Salish and Cree ancestry who belongs to the Sto:lo Nation, cites Fanon as a major influence on her thinking about "Native/settler relations and the connections between colonialism and neo-colonialism" (Maracle, 1990: 194; 219). To date, however, the relationship between Fanon's work and Maracle's, or that of other Indigenous writers in Canada, has received little critical attention.<sup>1</sup> Looking closely at two testimonial novels,<sup>2</sup> *Sundogs* by Maracle and *Slash* by Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong, this paper asks whether and how Fanon's theories of violence and psychological transformation elucidate the decolonizing of Indigenous subjects, and to what degree the novels themselves might expose and transcend the limits of Fanon's vision.

Before turning to Fanon's ideas, I must acknowledge that to approach Indigenous texts with post-colonial theories has provoked considerable controversy. Arnold Krupat objects to the use of the term "post-colonial" in a North American context because Indigenous peoples on this continent "continue to live under an ongoing domestic imperialism" (Krupat, 1994: 169), whereas the temporal connotation of "post" implies that colonialism has ended. According to its proponents, the term denotes simply that colonization took place and not that colonialism is over (Leggatt, 2003: 117); nonetheless, the ambiguity provides reason enough to avoid the term, and it is no accident that I refer above to Fanon's "theory of decolonization" rather than to his "post-colonial theory."

But the controversy does not end there. Although to acknowledge that colonialism still exists addresses one important concern, the centrality given to European colonization and its effects by the term "post-colonial" bothers critics such as Anne McClintock (1992: 86-87), and this centrality remains in a term such as "decolonizing." Particularly distressing to Cherokee writer Thomas King is the assumption "that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic" (King, 1990: 12). To suggest that all "contemporary Native literature" focuses (or should focus) on decolonization would indeed homogenize texts and curtail cre-

ativity. Lee Maracle insists in her essay “The ‘Post-Colonial’ Imagination,” however, that for “the Indigenous people of this land,” “colonialism is our condition” (Maracle, 2004: 205) and that “[i]n order to resolve this colonial condition in literature we need to have Canada recognize that first it is our condition, and second, Canada needs to view this condition as unacceptable” (*Ibid.*: 207).<sup>3</sup> Although some Indigenous writers choose not to foreground “the binary oppositions of colonialism” in their work (Leggatt, 2003: 113), many texts by Indigenous authors perform creative acts of decolonization that deserve critical discussion.

Decolonizing theories, then, offer important heuristic benefits. Still, critics need to remain vigilant about these theories’ attendant dangers, including their potential to erase differences among colonized cultures (McClintock, 1992: 86). This particular concern may well arise when ideas developed in the West Indies and in Africa during the 1950s and 60s are juxtaposed with Indigenous literature written in Canada in the 1980s and 90s. Further justifying the use of Fanon’s ideas, though, is the theme of interconnectedness among colonized peoples found in Lee Maracle’s *Ravensong* (a novel published a year after *Sundogs* and set in a Salish community on the West Coast during the 1950s). In this novel, Dominic, a village elder and healer who has an “enormous sense of the external world,” speaks of “the coming African revolt” and “how Black people would shed the first blood that would change the world forever,” including the world of the young protagonist, Stacey (Maracle, 1993: 67). Dominic underlines the importance of global awareness when he says, “the world needs a combined wisdom, not just one knowledge or another, but all knowledge should be joined. Human oneness, that’s our way” (*Ibid.*: 67). As a strategy for creating oneness, the Salish trickster, Raven, invents a flu epidemic in order to drive the villagers into the “white town to fix the mess over there” (*Ibid.*: 14); according to Raven, “these others had to be rooted to the soil of this land or all would be lost” (*Ibid.*: 44). In this way, *Ravensong* draws attention to the counter-productiveness of the colonially produced dichotomy between Indigenous people and settlers, even though, in Fanon’s theory, this dichotomy provides both impetus and mechanism for decolonization. This illuminating contrast between Maracle’s and Fanon’s decolonizing strategies underscores that theory need not be applied to fictional texts in a uni-directional, universalizing fashion. Rather, a comparative approach affirms Maracle’s idea that “story and poetry” present their own culturally specific “theory and philosophy” (Lutz, 1991: 171). In short, while not offering a universal key to Indigenous texts, Fanon’s theory of decolonization provides a useful framework within—and against—which to read them.

To describe the subjectivity of colonized peoples, Fanon combines

phenomenological and psychoanalytic models in his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, originally published in French in 1952.<sup>4</sup> He re-reads one of the seminal texts in psychoanalytic theory, Jacques Lacan's essay on the "mirror stage," as installing a binary difference of race, rather than gender, at the core of subject formation:

When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable. (Fanon, 1967: 161)

Being repudiated by the white "Self" creates in the colonized subject a "feeling of inferiority" (*Ibid.*: 93); thus, Fanon argues, the latter will seek validation from the "white man" who "alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level: self-esteem" (*Ibid.*: 154). Fanon emphasizes in this first book that "the subjective realm of colonialism [has] to be the target of strategic transformation along with the socioeconomic structure" (Coulthard, 2006). When he later theorizes decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* (originally published in French in 1961 and based primarily on Algeria, a French African colony undergoing an anti-imperial revolution at the time of writing), Fanon argues that the psychological dependence of colonized people on the oppressors who repudiate them can be overcome only by armed resistance. Although he considers the violence of the colonized a reaction to that of the colonizers and notes that, before the struggle for independence, it is misdirected towards fellow Africans (Fanon, 1963: 52), Fanon embraces anti-imperial violence as a creative force that binds the colonized together, removing their collective "inferiority complex" and restoring "self-respect" (*Ibid.*: 94). In other words, Fanon values violence not so much as a means to regaining political control as for its transformative impact on the colonized psyche.

For Waubageshig, the relevance of Fanon's theories to the Canadian context hinges on "the dichotomy of the settler-Native relationship" described in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Waubageshig argues persuasively that a similar dichotomy exists in Canada, where Indigenous people are forced into an "inferior position" at the "political, educational, religious, economic and legal" levels (Waubageshig, 1970: 81). He demonstrates, correspondingly, that the "colonial dichotomy" results directly from the Indian Act, a fact that, paradoxically, becomes a "redeeming quality [...] in the process of decolonization" because the Act alone is responsible for maintaining "the dichotomous aspect of colonialism in Canada" (*Ibid.*: 92). Waubageshig regrets, however, that a lack of recognition of the "invidious effects" of the Indian Act has led to ineffectual and

non-violent negotiations between Native organizations and the federal government (*Ibid.*: 95). He predicts that “decolonization will not be sought by Canada’s Native people, violent or otherwise” (*Ibid.*: 95).

Writing in 1970, Waubageshig apparently did not foresee the emergence of “contemporary warrior societies” and “Red Power organizations” across Canada and the United States in the 1970s (Alfred and Lowe, 2006: 4-5) that would lead to episodes of armed resistance such as the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota (depicted in *Slash*) and the 1990 crisis in Oka, Québec (featured in *Sundogs*). As Taiaiake Alfred and Lana Lowe point out, during the 1990 Oka crisis, “images of armed, masked men dressed in army fatigues, defending their land and the people from the full force of the Canadian state, shook mainstream Canada and galvanized Indigenous people from coast to coast”; this “watershed event” led to “crucial inspiration and motivation for the militant assertion of Indigenous nationhood,” manifestations of which have recurred in the succeeding decades (*Ibid.*: 6). Fanon’s theory of decolonization thus pertains undeniably to the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Not surprisingly, the plots of Armstrong’s and Maracle’s novels appear to affirm Fanon’s belief in the necessity of armed resistance as a stage in the decolonizing process. Importantly, however, the subject positions constructed by each novel’s narrative form transcend the binary opposition between colonialist Self and colonized Other upon which Fanon predicates his model of decolonization. These texts suggest that it is not by physically fighting the colonial power but by refusing to participate in an “us versus them” relationship that the most enduring transformations occur in the psyches of Indigenous subjects.

Initially, the psychological benefits that Fanon attributes to armed rebellion for the colonized are affirmed by the representation of Indigenous resistance and its effects both in Jeannette Armstrong’s 1985 *Slash* and in Lee Maracle’s 1992 *Sundogs*, the former a widely-studied “classic” of Indigenous literature (republished in a second edition in 2007), the latter a novel that, apart from several dismissive reviews (Murray, 1994; Hill, 1992; Craig, 1993; Bennett, 1993), has received very little critical attention.<sup>5</sup> The narrator of Armstrong’s novel, an Okanagan boy named Tommy Kelasket, pinpoints the colonial attitude that, when internalized, causes the kind of harm that Fanon has described: “our people seemed to be looked on as if we were less instead of just different” (Armstrong, 1985: 86). Understanding that one of the most damaging legacies of colonization was its theft of Indigenous people’s sense of self-worth, Tommy wonders “what was so complicated that large conferences and long resolutions had to be passed to do something for Indians. Something as simple as to make a man feel good to be Indian didn’t ever seem to be considered as an

answer" (*Ibid.*: 85). The narrative illustrates all too thoroughly, however, that "feeling good to be Indian," though simple to conceive, is anything but simple to achieve because "[e]verything that the colonizers do, tells the Indians they are inferior" (*Ibid.*: 221). As a young adult, Tommy works as a drug-runner, a position he later realizes helps his own "people into the gutter" (*Ibid.*: 77). While making a delivery in a bar, Tommy gets involved in a knife fight that leads first to hospitalization and then to an eighteen-month prison sentence. Tommy is renamed Slash by Mardi, a worker from a Native Friendship Center who visits him and subsequently introduces him to the Red Power movement. That Armstrong titles the novel *Slash* emphasizes the importance the text places on the transformative power of anger, and on the need for rage to be politicized and not to stagnate in random destructiveness, especially self-destructiveness.

In prison, experiences of racist aggression by guards impel Slash to articulate a connection between anger, violence, and self-esteem. After recounting a brutal, racist attack, Slash comments: "Things like that filled you with such a shame because the helpless rage that's part of it can't come out, and the part of you that's a man needed it to come out" (*Ibid.*: 65). Once out of prison, Slash joins the Red Power movement and spends several years travelling around the U.S. and Canada to various conferences and demonstrations, including to the American Indian Movement's occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs buildings at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, an action motivated, ultimately, by the Lakota Nation's (and other tribes') "loss of sovereign rights as guaranteed in their treaties" (*Ibid.*: 116). Although Slash does not get closer than "what was called 'the perimeter'" (*Ibid.*: 114), his experience at Wounded Knee prompts him to remark: "I seen too many things that were done to ever again be hopeful that justice could be done without confrontation" (*Ibid.*: 119). Like Fanon, Slash comes to believe that anger routed through violence metamorphoses into pride: "It's like I'm mad inside all the time. I want blood to be spilled, for people to get hurt. I sometimes think that's the only thing that will unite people. I think that when a people have to fight, then pride returns and with it inner strength" (*Ibid.*: 133). He recognizes the importance of transforming not only material conditions but structures of consciousness, and he believes that, to do so, struggle is key (*Ibid.*: 148-9).

In its stance on the transformative potential of armed resistance, Maracle's novel *Sundogs* resembles *Slash*. Set in the summer of the Oka Crisis and narrated from the first-person, present-tense perspective of Marianne, a twenty-year-old, urban university student who self-identifies as "Native," Maracle's text initially dramatizes the problem of domestic violence in Marianne's family. In doing so, the text instantiates Fanon's claim that "the colonized man will first manifest [the] aggressiveness which

has been deposited in his bones against his own people” (Fanon, 1963: 52).<sup>6</sup> When Marianne’s brother Rudy assaults his wife, Paula, and their children, she and the children seek refuge at the apartment where Marianne lives with her mother. The rest of Marianne’s siblings convene at the home, and the oldest sister, Lacey, frames the incident as an example of systemic oppression: “Lacey marches through the door, assures me ‘we’ll fix it,’ between cursing the world, patriarchy, Rudy, racism, and every other white male conspiracy against Native womanhood and swabbing blood from below the gash Momma is sewing up” (Maracle, 1992: 53). Although Fanon’s interpretation of violence against children resembles that of Maracle (Fanon, 1963: 306), Maracle’s novel complicates Fanon’s androcentric analysis by exposing that violence among colonized adults is gendered as well as racialized. Marianne, who remembers her brother’s kindness towards her as a child (Maracle, 1992: 53-4), believes that “the hoarding of intellect, its monopolization by white men, reduced Rudy to a body without language, love, or thought. [...] ‘Ladykiller’ is what they left him. And the ladies to be killed were limited in number and confined to our own race” (*Ibid.*: 86). Gendered and parental violence thus emerge from a racist, colonial context as corollary forms of domination.

Marianne does not contextualize the abuse in order to exonerate her brother; rather, she insists on the complicity of Native men and women in their oppression: “Momma blames them [white people], but I know, we had to give up on ourselves and our families for the [genocidal] plot to work” (*Ibid.*: 70). After Marianne recognizes in Mark, her boss and potential boyfriend, qualities similar to those of her abusive brother, she demonstrates the pay-off of acknowledging complicity in oppression: “I know to hold woman inferior requires help from the victim, so I leave” (*Ibid.*: 80). That domination requires the participation of the dominated renders agency and resistance possible for the latter, a principle that the narrative demonstrates not only at the inter-personal but also at the collective level.

The narrative of *Sundogs* recounts two major public, political events that begin to restore the self-worth of Maracle’s characters and to transform their relationships. In the first of these events, Elijah Harper, the only Native member of the Manitoba Legislature, takes advantage of the requirement for a unanimous vote in order to block the acceptance of the Meech Lake Accord, a proposed constitutional amendment that ignores the interests of First Nations while recognizing Québec as a distinct society (Dickason, 1997: 386-7). In Maracle’s account, Harper, in a striking, counter-hegemonic exertion of verbal dominance, appropriates the power to speak that has been denied to his people:

the murder of our whole people is being documented by a man who sat in the House of Commons in Manitoba, silent for

two years. His frailness disappears in the folds of his steady gaze. He has waited for this moment. He sat in the back benches and waited. [...] He carefully chooses each word so as to sound as unobnoxious as he possibly can, while he articulates, documents and advances the most obnoxious and despicable thing a Nation can do—attempt genocide on a people. (Maracle, 1992: 68)

Throughout the novel, the implications of Elijah's actions for Indigenous people in Canada receive considerable emphasis. In Marianne's view, Elijah's public act of resistance affects her and her people on the deepest intrapsychic levels: "We all become worthy of love" (*Ibid.*: 69). Simultaneously, it dispels the homogeneity of the white oppressors: "I see the weight of their lives etch difference into their faces. Yesterday, they were a mass; today they begin to stand out in clear contrast one to the other" (*Ibid.*: 87-88). That "White people have become individuals" is seen as "the price we have to pay for becoming a people" (*Ibid.*: 113). When Marianne recognizes the individuality—and, implicitly, the humanity—of White people, she inverts the power relation that Fanon delineates in *Black Skin, White Masks* and according to which First Nations people, as colonized subjects, require recognition from the colonizers but do not bestow it. Acknowledging differences within the dominant group also means that the "us verses them" opposition itself begins to break down; the lack of homogeneous terms weakens the polarity between colonialist Self and colonized Other, thus contributing to psychological "disalienation" (Fanon, 1967: 13). Ultimately, however, Marianne finds Elijah's action insufficient: "Elijah may have stopped the process of constitutional betrayal, but Canada has yet to change" (Maracle, 1992: 112). In Fanon's terms, what is missing is the "armed struggle," even if it is "symbolic" (Fanon, 1963: 94).

The narrative, chronicling events later in the summer of 1990, suggests that armed resistance such as that carried out by the Mohawks (who blockaded ancestral burial grounds slated for development into a golf course in Oka, Québec) must indeed accompany constitutional battles in order for Indigenous people to reclaim their personhood. Kept well-informed of events through her summer job at a Native political organization in Vancouver, Marianne reports:

The crisis escalates, the Mohawks arm themselves. [...] The police attack and one of them is killed. The Mohawks maintain the man was killed by one of their own men. Government holds a major tête à tête and the army is called in to replace the Sûreté du Québec. [...] I experience love for ourselves and sorrow I never felt before. (Maracle, 1992: 126)

Marianne's experiences of both self-love and sorrow affirm Fanon's belief



in the transformative effects of armed struggle. This change is both personal, as an inward experience of emotion, and collective, in its orientation towards “ourselves.” As Marianne later declares: “We are no longer victims” (*Ibid.*: 137). The “altered [...] texture” (*Ibid.*: 137) of their interiority also facilitates alliances among First Nations people across the country: “The process Elijah began is rolling out over the land, rooting itself in all of us—solidarity with each other [...]. Individual after individual lines up with the Mohawks” (*Ibid.*: 127). In the novel, the abilities to transcend self-hatred and to love each other result from collective, political resistance. The end of the narrative deliberately emphasizes the rehabilitative effect of the summer’s political events on both the abusive Rudy, who tentatively reconciles with Paula, and the formerly sexist Mark, with whom Marianne once again begins to contemplate a relationship.

A collective increase in self-esteem and a calming of internal aggression promise to follow episodes of armed resistance in both novels. Especially since *Sundogs* concludes immediately after the confrontation between Mohawk warriors and the Canadian military at Oka, its narrative trajectory seems to confirm Fanon’s optimistic claims that the fight for national independence produces collective psychological healing and puts an end to internal fighting amongst “Natives” (Fanon, 1963: 306-07). Yet, the embeddedness of both works in ongoing sovereignty struggles—coincidentally, one of Fanon’s criteria for literature in its third and final phase of decolonization (*Ibid.*: 222)—means that these moments of resolution may be unsettled by subsequent events, either within the novel (in the case of *Slash*), or after it ends (in the case of *Sundogs*). Because Fanon died in 1961, the year before Algeria officially gained independence, his work lacks the long-range perspective that Armstrong and Maracle achieve. For example, in Maracle’s 2002 novel, *Daughters Are Forever*, “the post-Oka blues [are] destroying” one of the activist characters (Maracle, 2002: 135) and “post-traumatic stress syndrome” caused by the Oka Crisis is said to proliferate in many communities (*Ibid.*: 135). In fact, Maracle’s protagonist, Marilyn, suggests that these problems symptomatize “the implosion that follows resistance” (*Ibid.*: 152). Even more seriously, Marilyn contends that “[a]fter the Ipperwash crisis, the Oka crisis, any crisis is over, the internecine war between siblings resumes” (*Ibid.*: 204). The resurgence of internal conflict may stem from lack of resolution to the crisis, or it may reflect that, during the crisis, internal difference is suppressed in order to present a unified opposition. Regardless, this later novel reveals that revolutionary euphoria fades quickly. Although “violence attracts the media and creates visibility” for contemporary Indigenous sovereignty struggles (Valaskakis, 1994: 62), it also causes further injury, death, and trauma without ensuring a compen-

satory gain.

In retrospect, the progressive potential of *Sundogs* lies less in the liberatory role its plot attributes to armed resistance than in its painstaking delineation of Marianne's evolution as a self within a community of selves. Indeed, the kinds of subjectivity enacted by both *Sundogs* and *Slash* provide an alternative way to dissipate the "inferiority complex" produced within the colonial situation. When Fanon insists that colonized people can forge community only by uniting against the colonizers, he paradoxically makes a binary relationship to the colonizers central to that new communal identity, thus inhibiting self-determination. Maracle and Armstrong, on the other hand, offer a subjectivity formed amongst the so-called "Others" with little reference to the colonial "Self."<sup>7</sup> The significance of such an alternatively-conceived subject deserves to be underlined.<sup>8</sup> If Indigenous people define themselves without reference to the dominant white culture, then its perceptions lose their power to determine Indigenous peoples' images of themselves and each other. Given the causal link that Fanon observes between the Manichean binary, low self-worth, and the need for decolonizing violence, the emergence of an Indigenous, relational subjectivity provides hope for a bloodless decolonization of the psyche. This relational subjectivity appears perhaps most clearly in *Slash* but, as I will demonstrate subsequently, it also figures in *Sundogs*.

As *Slash* begins to doubt the efficacy of violence, he simultaneously ceases to define himself in binary opposition to white oppressors. After an openly violent confrontation with the police at a Native rights' demonstration on Ottawa's Parliament Hill, *Slash* begins to lose faith in the power of even organized, politically motivated violence to build collective self-esteem. The experience sends him and many of the other demonstrators into a depression during which excessive drinking replaces political activism (Armstrong, 1985: 160). In between binges, *Slash*, although in despair, revels in his exclusion from the mainstream. He disapproves of the materialistic, hierarchical values of the dominant class and does not wish to join their ranks:

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

The limited efficacy of this form of resistance stems from its containment within the colonial binary: assimilate or die. At a detox centre, *Slash* meets an Ojibway man named Joe who convinces him that a third way exists:

“You know we don’t have to cop out and be drunks and losers. We don’t have to join the rats either. There is another way” (*Ibid.*: 198). This “way” turns out to be spirituality, the rediscovery of which allows Slash to develop “beyond the point of [the] sheer anger and frustration” (*Ibid.*: 183) that have fuelled his political activism to this point, and from which he has “always felt there was something missing” (*Ibid.*: 160).

For Slash, spiritual awakening does not involve leaving behind political struggle in favor of personal salvation; rather, embracing Native “medicine ways,” particularly his own cultural tradition of the Okanagan winter dance, teaches Slash that “being an Indian, I could never be a person only to myself. I was part of all the rest of the people” (*Ibid.*: 202-3). Spirituality leads Slash to an understanding both of his identity as communal and of his community as constructed other than oppositionally. As Katja Sarkowsky notes, “the tribal Okanagan identity Slash has developed by the end of the novel [needs] a stage of activist pan-Indian consciousness” (Sarkowsky, 2001: 241). During this stage, he discovers that more than shared oppression links him to other Indigenous tribes across North America. Having recovered at a Native healing camp from an alcohol addiction that nearly killed him, Slash finds out “that there were places like that springing up all across the country”:

At these places there was a sameness in the ways things were done. The use of the pipe and sweats were common to all. All kinds of ceremonies and traditional practices were revived. Some of the things were held open to people of all tribes to participate in. Survival gatherings and survival schools, working with those concepts, started up in almost every part of the country.<sup>9</sup> (Armstrong, 1985: 202)

Understanding their identities as rooted in inherited spiritual traditions frees Slash and others from a merely reactive position to the dominant white culture. In the text, similarity of spiritual practice provides a means of pan-Indigenous coalition that does not replace but enhances alliances formed in the context of counter-hegemonic political activism.

Indeed, the representation of a non-separated self forms one of the most valuable and distinctive formal features of *Slash*. In her 1989 interview with Hartmut Lutz, Armstrong states:

in terms of [...] the character development of Slash [...] in the writing process I couldn’t isolate the character and keep the character in isolation from the development of the events in the community, and the whole of the people. [...] The question of his connectedness to his family, to his friends, to his people, and to the outer world always entered in, all the time! [...] With Native people it can’t be any other way. [...] Because [...] it’s

difficult for us to look at things in a separate way. Everything is a part of something else. Everything is a part of a continuum of other things: a whole. [...] The characters I presented are all parts of that whole. (Lutz, 1991: 16)

As Armstrong's comments imply, the narrative style used in *Slash* embeds the individual within collectivity. Frank Davey adds that "on nearly every page [...the narrator] defers to the voices of others, offering unusually lengthy quotations from people who variously counsel, oppose, endorse, or challenge him on one matter or another" (Davey, 1993: 61). Through this technique, the novel represents diverse voices "without making any single experience or consciousness normative" (Lanser, 1992: 263). For example, though Slash's stance on violence evolves over time, the text resists a teleological narrative of progress and resolution by circularly revisiting Slash's earlier struggles in the lives of other characters. When Slash witnesses his younger compatriots in the Red Power movement espousing his own former "Indian power through confrontation kind of attitude" (Armstrong, 1985: 182-3), he does not try to correct them, but acknowledges the validity of their point of view: "I knew it was necessary for them, in the same way it had been necessary for me, to develop a certain kind of self-awareness and self-confidence" (*Ibid.*: 183). Slash thus accepts the necessity of violence as a repetitive phase—though not the definitive one—in the process of decolonization. That Slash does not impose his own changes in attitude on the others reinforces the structural democracy of the text. By representing diverse points of view that are focalized but not synthesized by Slash's consciousness, by refusing to privilege Slash's later opinions over his earlier ones, and by leaving Slash and his people in process and struggle at the end of the book, the text resists the unitary rhetoric of domination.

Whereas Fanon's oppositional model of subjectivity logically culminates in violent conflict between colonizers and colonized, the alternate paradigm of subjectivity developed in Armstrong's text enables a different kind of social and political agency. In a key example, Slash resists what he sees as the federal government's demand that First Nations speak with one voice: "We are talking about different nations here, not just one large conglomerate group called Indians, the way the government would prefer it and is trying to force on us" (*Ibid.*: 235). Slash envisions a non-homogenizing form of collectivity when he proposes that "[w]e can each deal separately according to each nation's preference" (*Ibid.*: 235). When his friend Jimmy points out that "if we deal with the government like that, we won't have the strength that we would as one body" (*Ibid.*: 235), Slash flatly denies the political necessity of homogeneity:

That's not true, we can all support each other on whatever

position each of us takes. It doesn't mean each has to take the same position. The government weakens us by making us fight each other to take one position, as each one wants their position to win out. Each position is important and each has the right to try for it. We should all back each other up. That's what I think. (*Ibid.*: 235)

Not only does the novel emphasize the importance of listening to differences within the collective, but it also adumbrates the possibility of First Nations' negotiating federally without being moulded or cornered into the position that best suits the government. Contrary both to Waubageshig (1970: 97) and to Fanon, who emphasizes the overcoming of internal divisions by the unifying national conflict (Fanon, 1963: 306-07), Slash develops a political paradigm that embraces difference.<sup>10</sup>

In *Sundogs*, too, decolonization of the subject takes place through a communal embedding that is linked to political action. In some respects, Maracle's novel is more linear than *Slash*: the self-reflexive narration shows Marianne moving from a self-centered position of alienation from her family, to self-consciousness about her role within the family, and eventually to an internalization of communal values in contrast to Slash's circular path "from health" through "falling apart" and "back to health again" (Lutz, 1991: 19). Using less direct quotation and more indirect discourse and editorializing than *Slash*, Maracle's text, like Armstrong's, represents the views of characters other than the protagonist, Marianne, the most influential of whom are her mother and her forty-one-year-old sister, Lacey. Whereas in *Slash*, the views of all recurring characters evolve in response to changing circumstances, in *Sundogs*, the worldviews of Momma and Lacey form stable backgrounds against which Marianne's thinking develops.<sup>11</sup> For example, early in the text, Marianne recounts a trip to the hospital with her mother to visit her sister Rita, who has just given birth:

On the way, I listen to her ramble about doctors, how little they know and how much better the old midwife system was and how the criminalization of midwifery is aimed at us. I want to believe my Momma is sane, but she has a way of leaving out whole paragraphs when she condemns these people and the verdicts she hands out lack evidence. I have no idea what medical school courses look like but they must teach some notions about child birth there.

"Genocide. Pure and simple.... They knew." I want relief. Relief from always considering every law, custom and practice of these people as some sort of anti-Native genocidal plot. My mother, I muse, thrives on the plottiness of these people. (Maracle, 1992: 8)

Entrenching an “us versus them” opposition from which Marianne wishes to escape, Marianne’s mother reiterates her ideas about cultural genocide at every opportunity—not unlike the mother of Stacey in Maracle’s *Ravensong*, who becomes “steely in her unforgiveness” of the white townspeople after they “[watch] the villagers die” during the flu epidemic (Maracle, 1993: 193). Marianne, in contrast to her mother’s relentless consistency and spurred by the armed stand-off between Mohawk warriors and the Canadian military, changes her stance on the issue: “There is no longer a question in my mind about genocide. I still don’t buy the plot part of Momma’s formulation, but the genocide is clear” (Maracle, 1992: 126). In her contrastive development, the character of Marianne is more individuated than that of Slash. In addition to its focus on Marianne’s personal development, the use of interior monologue (as opposed to the quality of eye-witness journalism that characterizes much of Slash’s narration) renders Maracle’s narrative structurally more individualistic than Armstrong’s.

Marianne’s efforts to assert her autonomy, however, meet with cultural injunctions to defer to the collective. To support the warriors at Oka, Marianne participates in a cross-country Peace Run with other Native youth. When Marianne objects to the organizers’ decision to halt the run in Ottawa because of escalating violence in Québec, her sister Lacey insists that she has “obligations,” not “rights” (*Ibid.*: 201). Marianne responds, “Sounds fascist to me” (*Ibid.*: 201). Another participant explains, “The people as a whole have a right to be free. The individual has an obligation to cooperate” (*Ibid.*: 202). Marianne struggles to reconcile herself to this perspective:

I know Lacey is not a fascist. I said that to protect my faltering self. I don’t want to be persuaded of this collective point of view. This new way of being puts me squarely in charge of myself, but at the same time it is a self that stands in the center of a community of selves all tough and resilient with each one owning their own view. (*Ibid.*: 202)

Although, in its structure, *Sundogs* does not intertwine individual and collective to the same extent as does *Slash*, the celebratory tone in the above passage endorses the “new way of being” even as Marianne purports to resist it. The concept of a “community of selves” with “each one owning their own view” strongly resembles Slash’s coalitional idea that First Nations “can all support each other on whatever position each of us takes. It doesn’t mean each has to take the same position” (Armstrong, 1985: 235). By decentering the racialized opposition between colonialist Self and colonized Other and by modelling Indigenous, relational subjectivity, these texts stage an alternative to armed resistance as a means for decolonizing the psyche.

In a recent speech, Jeannette Armstrong celebrates writers who are moving “the aesthetic of Aboriginal literatures from the common text of the settler into a new place in our communities” (Armstrong, 2006: 30). “Not being placed in their literature” gives Armstrong “great joy and solace” (*Ibid.*: 30). Just as Armstrong delights in the emergence of an autonomous Aboriginal aesthetic that does not make reference to “settler” literature, so a subjectivity that does not define itself in opposition to the settler facilitates the self-determination of Indigenous people. The text of *Slash*, while acknowledging the importance of armed resistance, questions its ability to decolonize the psyche in a lasting way, precisely because of its violent, oppositional emphasis. In Armstrong’s novel, spirituality provides a more reliable ground for healing the psyche, enabling pan-Indigenous identifications and coalitions that, in turn, empower (but do not conflate) First Nations as they negotiate with the federal government. In *Sundogs*, Maracle overcomes the oppositional binary between colonized and colonizer by disrupting the homogeneity of whites and by invoking the complicity of oppressed people. She emphasizes the latter’s consent in order to disrupt the “purity” of the victim position and to make way for a type of agency that puts an individual “squarely in charge of [her]self” at the same time as it situates that self “in the center of a community of selves” (Maracle, 1992: 202). To the extent that Armstrong’s and Maracle’s texts, both thematically and formally, push for a renewed understanding of Indigenous subjectivities, the violence required for nationalist revolution as theorized by Fanon cedes its place to the imagination needed to envision sovereign subjects outside of the colonial framework.

That colonial violence continues to be perpetrated on Indigenous people in Canada remains, of course, the underlying problem. It happens bureaucratically, as in the delays to processing land claims, including the one that sparked the Oka Crisis (CBC, 2007); directly, as in the police killing of unarmed Anishnabe land claims protester Dudley George at Ipperwash in 1995; and indirectly, as in the nation-wide crisis of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the public’s apathetic response to it (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2007). Referring to “Oka Peace Camp—September 9, 1990,” Maracle’s preface to the 1990 version of her autobiography *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, Sophie McCall notes that “Maracle draws stark contrasts between Euro-Canadian and First Nations worldviews and values. She repeatedly returns to the persistence of these groups’ dichotomous relations that preclude reciprocity or understanding” (McCall, 2002: 76). Although these dichotomous relations are unsettled within the novels discussed in this article, they are reinscribed in critical responses to the novels as aesthetic “Others” that lack, for example, sufficient liter-

ary merit to be taught in university English courses (Hodne and Hoy, 1992: 73). Extending the logic of the current argument, Indigenous texts do not need the validation of white literary critics such as myself, nor has it been my intention to render these texts palatable for the consumption of non-Native readers. The crucial point is that the dominant culture must cease to perpetrate violence on Indigenous peoples by ceasing to dominate altogether. It is my hope that, by drawing attention to the particular aesthetic and political values of Armstrong's and Maracle's texts, I am helping to change the "habits of thought" (Härting, 2004: 261) that permit colonial hierarchies to establish themselves and violence to occur.

### Notes

1. In her essay "The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers," Barbara Godard briefly mentions Fanon's ideas about the colonial distortion of the historical record and the appropriate response of the decolonizing writer (1990: 199).
2. I borrow the term "testimonial novel" from John Beverley to reflect the basis of these novels in collective political events (1992: 105).
3. Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel go as far as to say that "Indigenism is an identity constructed, shaped, and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism" (2005: 597).
4. Although he grounds his analysis in the Antilles, Fanon argues that "the same behavior patterns obtain in every race that has been subjected to colonization" (1967: 25). Such transhistorical claims provoke much resistance from contemporary scholars; nonetheless, Max Silverman maintains of *Black Skin, White Masks* that "the power of the text resides in its ability to travel across the frontiers of place, history and politics" (2005: 2).
5. In an interview given when she was planning the novel that became *Sundogs*, Maracle declares, "it's not going to be in an even voice" (Lutz, 1991: 170). She relates the changes in voice to a Big House tradition in which speakers "try to let the voice reflect the subject" (*Ibid.*: 170), offering "a presentation of theory and philosophy [...] that is best done through story and poetry" (*Ibid.*: 171). Predictably, this generic hybridity displeases the majority of critics, who object to the "inconsistent" "control" of voice (Hill, 1992: 52) and complain that "long passages are really essay" (Murray, 1994: 135) in which "Lee Maracle [...] starts to preach—or her characters do" (Bennett, 1993: 43). The poetic style of her polemic is termed "turbid density" (Craig, 1993: 3) and "purple prose" (Murray, 1994: 135). Normative assump-



tions of what a novel is and does shape and determine these critical assessments—and they are assumptions by which Maracle’s text refuses to be disciplined.

6. Maracle laments in *I Am Woman* that internalized oppression often results in “lateral violence” across divisions of gender and age within Native communities (1996: ix). Her 2002 novel *Daughters Are Forever* further explores the harrowing topic of the abuse and neglect of Native children by their parents.
7. Emphasizing the mutual alienation within Fanon’s theory of colonial identity, Homi Bhabha suggests that because of disavowed identification and desire, “it is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness” (1994: 45). Although Bhabha’s vision of mutual interdependence helps to dismantle the Manichean binary between colonizer and colonized, it also risks eliding the material inequities and power differentials produced by colonization. In an Indigenous, relational subjectivity, material conditions remain visible but do not determine the contours of a subject’s interiority.
8. A number of critics have noted the communally-embedded dimension of Slash’s character (Green, 1999: 53, 63-4; Morton, 1999: 21) without connecting it specifically to psychological decolonization in Fanon’s terms. Manina Jones points out that Slash’s name itself “signifies a textual mark, an alternative to the hyphen” that opens up a space within “either/or” dichotomies (2000: 52). This transcendence of binary oppositions, likewise, possesses decolonizing implications.
9. Ken Coates comments that these practices emerged in the context of “declining cultural knowledge and a growing determination to celebrate being Indigenous” (1999: 35). That these practices were sometimes “revived” outside areas where they were originally practiced, and that individuals such as Slash rediscovered their spiritual “roots” outside their own areas of tribal origin does not, Coates argues, demonstrate the “failure of Indigenous cultures to survive in the contemporary world.” Rather, “the expansion of pan-Indian attributes... more properly demonstrates the flexibility and persistence of Indigenous cultural determination” (*Ibid.*: 35). That Indigenous cultures adapt and change attests to their vitality.
10. That decolonization moves outward from the personal to the political is affirmed by Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, who note that “decolonization and regeneration are not at root collective and institutional processes. They are shifts in thinking and action that emanate from recommitments and reorientations at the level of the self that, over time and through proper organization, manifest as broad social

and political movements to challenge state agendas and authorities” (2005: 611).

11. Of course, the narrative of *Slash* spans more than twenty years, whereas *Sundogs* takes place over the course of a few months and, as compared to Lacey and Momma, Marianne’s youth renders her thinking susceptible to rapid change. The fact remains that Marianne’s personal development, in response to or in conjunction with domestic and political events, organizes the trajectory of the novel; the most fully developed of the other young characters, Marianne’s younger cousin Dorry, is, like her elders, depicted as possessing a stable, intact Native worldview.

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