“COlonization is such a personal process”:
Colonialism, Internalized Abuse, and healing
in lee Maracle’s daughters are forever

by

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, almost everybody is familiar with stereotypes about ‘Native social dysfunction’. Canada’s present-day “Imaginary Indian” (Francis) is indeed associated with substance and welfare dependence as well as family violence and neglect. However, the mainstream tends not to wonder about the actual social suffering behind the image and about the causes of these supposed patterns. In Daughters Are Forever, the Sto:lo / Squamish writer and activist Lee Maracle deconstructs these racist clichés by emphasizing the impact of the colonial process on real-life Native populations. Through a Sto:lo social worker’s attempts to understand how colonial policies have affected Aboriginal motherhood, Maracle demonstrates the roots of Indigenous social ills in collective traumas inflicted over several centuries and transmitted intergenerationally. The conclusion of the protagonist, Marilyn, that “[c]olonization is such a personal process” (216) summarizes the ways in which collective trauma and cultural genocide largely condition individual traumas and grief. Her parallel journeys to help an Anishnaabe woman patient, prevent the abductions of Native Canadian children by mainstream welfare services, and mend her own toxic relationship with her daughters further demonstrate the interrelatedness of Indian policy, patriarchal institutions, and personal and familial spiritual illnesses. They also enable Maracle to show the dangerous ethnocentrism of mainstream psychology and the need to create cross-cultural methodologies and therapies appropriate to the diverse Native North American cultures. By depicting the “unresolved human dilemmas”
(Preface 11) of Aboriginal characters, she strives to create social change by drawing her readers into her stories to shock them into awareness.
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1 INTRODUCTION:
Literature as Social Transformation – Maracle’s Political Story-Telling and the Position of the White Critic

1.1 Challenging Socio-Cultural Boundaries: Lee Maracle’s Political Fiction

Since the beginning of the ‘boom’ of written Native Canadian literatures in English in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Aboriginal authors and poets have had to struggle against the ethnocentric assumptions of the literary establishment and publishing industry (Young-Ing 182-85). To begin with, Native peoples in Canada have traditionally been more written about than they have been able to write from their own point of view. Often published without any consideration for accuracy and cultural sensitivity, the writings of countless white missionaries, anthropologists, and authors have shaped popular Canadian stereotypes of Native people.

1 In his critical study *The Imaginary Indian* (1992), the Euro-Canadian historian Daniel Francis uses the words “Indians” and “the Imaginary Indian” to designate the images of Aboriginal peoples in mainstream Canadian culture (5, 9). He bases his argument on Robert Berkhofer’s idea that “Native Americans were and are real, but the Indian is a White invention” (qtd. in Francis 5). This thesis borrows this distinction, with quotation marks emphasizing a certain irony towards the label “Indian.” To designate the real-life populations, the terms preferred in this work are “Native,” “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous.” In Canada, the terms “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” include the Inuit, but this population group falls beyond the scope of this thesis and the vocabulary applied here focuses on the peoples misnamed as “Indians.” This thesis also resorts to the labels “Amerindian” and “Native North American” as cover terms for the so-called “Indians” of the whole North American continent. The term “Turtle Islanders” covers the same ethnic groups and alludes to a legend shared by several Nations according to which the world is a large piece of land resting on the back of a giant turtle. “Turtle Island” is thus employed as a synonym of “the North American continent.” As for “First Nations,” it specifically designates status Indians in Canada but is used here as a more general category for the sake of avoiding repetitions (Alfred xvi; Cashmore, “American Indians”; Henry et al 403, 405). This thesis further uses the term “Euro-Canadian” and “Euro-American” as synonyms of “white” or “mainstream” in Canadian and American contexts. It also takes over some of the labels that Maracle has coined for the white inhabitants of North America. In *I Am Woman*, she brands them “CanAmericans” and “European-CanAmericans” among others. These terms imply a strong contrast between the real ‘owners’ of Turtle Island and their colonizers by stressing the latter’s actual continent of origin.
(Acoose 30-31). This tendency has constructed them as inarticulate “Others” who need white specialists to research them (Damm 11). These paternalistic representations still shape the reception of Native authors and create supplementary obstacles to their literary careers. Indeed, several Aboriginal Canadian writers and theoreticians point out that mainstream audiences tend to hold rigid expectations of what an “Indian writer” should be (Dumont 47-48). As a result, Indigenous authors often cannot get published by mainstream presses if they do not conform to Hollywood-style clichés, as any diverging experience tends to be dismissed as “not Indian enough” (Dumont 47; emphasis in original). According to this ‘common wisdom’, these writers should above all prove their spirituality and refrain from challenging the status quo, since Natives are supposedly “not a political people [but] […] a spiritual people” (Maracle, I Am Woman (Woman) 39).

The Sto:lo / Squamish author, activist, theoretician, and orator Lee Maracle strongly opposes these colonial constructs and the resulting erasure of Native voices in the mainstream. She cares very little about preserving her readership’s mental comfort or acquiring a fake popularity by playing the part of the ‘white man’s Indian’ (Thom, qtd. in Maracle, “From Discomfort to Enlightenment” 208). On the contrary, she is part of the growing number of Aboriginal authors who expose Canada’s colonial foundations and openly confront its self-serving myth about itself as a multicultural paradise (Lundgren 67-69, 76). Indeed, she views her role as one of truth-telling and is determined not to be silenced by anyone who finds her fictional
works too unsettling (see *Woman* 4, 10; “Some Words on Study” (“Study”) n.pag.). Through her novels and short stories, she plunges her readers into the everyday lives of mainly Coast Salish characters and comments explicitly on the challenges that they meet due to discrimination.

Moreover, Maracle portrays Native characters as three-dimensional and energetic individuals, in striking contrast to common Euro-Canadian representations such as the simple-minded savage (Francis 199) or what Atwood terms “the Indian as victim” (92). Last but not least, she addresses the widespread ignorance and misinformation about Nativeness by documenting little-known facts about the history of several Nations, such as the collective action of a Salish community against a deadly mid-1950s epidemic in *Ravensong*.

This deliberate deconstruction of common beliefs about both Canada and the First Nations places political engagement at the very core of Maracle’s fiction. As an outspoken militant for Indigenous sovereignty, she views Native literatures as inherently political because they articulate realities that have been dissimulated and prove the existence of Native intellect and talent, often with forms, characters, and contents that challenge Eurocentric literary canons (“Radical Writing” n.pag.). Moreover, she creates her fictional and poetic works as forms of activism in themselves. For her, social transformation has to start with culture and values before it can reach the organization of Western society as a whole (“Grassroots Women” (“Grassroots”) 46-47). Indeed, she believes that a long-lasting revolution can only happen through a change in mentalities, as the maintenance of oppressive power structures depends on the widespread
acceptance of imperialistic ideology ("Grassroots"). This "cultural revolution" (Afterword 175; "Grassroots" 46) will theoretically bring forth more egalitarian political structures in the not-so-long term ("Grassroots" 46-47). For Maracle, then, consciousness-raising is the very first step towards the liberation of the exploited peoples of the world (46-47). She argues that minority artists can thus act as "cultural workers" whose artworks transform common racist and patriarchal attitudes (47).

For her, this multifaceted political activism is part of her responsibility as a Native woman, the cultural duty to participate in the struggle for decolonization (see Woman). Therefore, she attacks the stereotype of the ‘Indian’ as spiritual rather than political because “to say that we [Native North Americans] were lawless is to say that, indeed, we were savages” (Woman 39). For her, this misrepresentation excuses the settlers from considering “the traditions, values, and body politic that arise out of our legal system,” such as the fact that the laws of many Nations forbid the organized oppression of a population (Woman 39). Moreover, she views political responsibility and spirituality as inherently linked:

[Politics arises out of law. Politically oppressed people struggle [...] to change the laws of the oppressor so as to free themselves and become unhindered. Spirit is what

2 Maracle defines herself explicitly as a Marxist who constructs a syncretic sociological model of the Western world based on Marxism, feminism of colour, and of course her Sto:lo and Squamish cultures (see Woman). She borrows the concept of “cultural revolution” from Mao (“Radical Writing” n.pag.). Her notion of “cultural work” seems very close to neo-Marxist theories of “subversive” or “counter-hegemonic” cultural work and particularly to one of the sources of neo-Marxism, the Italian Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) (see Cashmore, “Hegemony”; Gramsci 57-59, 390).
moves all living things. Everyone is motivated spiritually to move in a given political
direction. (“Just Get in Front of a Typewriter” (“Typewriter”) 41)

Similarly, she argues that “[t]he value of resistance is the reclaiming of the sacred and significant
self” (“Oratory: Coming to Theory” 11). Her motivation lies in the aspiration to “change the
world” (“The ‘Post-Colonial’ Imagination” (“Post-Colonial”) 205) so as to restore “the peaceful
coaexistence of human beings with all things under creation” (“Oratory” 9). She further argues
that she writes to and from her culture and would “le[ave] [her]sel[f] behind” if she ever forgot
this, with the result that “[her] writing would be useless to all” including white Canadians
(“Typewriter” 40).

1.2 The Reader as Agent of Social Change: Position of the White Literary Critic

Indeed, Maracle’s technique for provoking change in her readers is based directly on Coast
Salish traditions and pedagogy. In the preface to her collection of short stories Sojourner’s Truth
(1990), she explains that her fiction integrates oratory and European literary forms because she
believes that European-style stories do not leave enough room to the imagination of the reader
(12). She adds that while traditional Western novels and short stories usually place “[t]he answer
to the question posed […] within the lines of the story” (12), Native oral narratives “don’t have
orthodox ‘conclusions’ ” but merely pose a dilemma (11). The listener is thus expected to engage
actively with the story and to “draw useful lessons” from it (11), which makes him or her part of
the story-making process and encourages him or her to think independently (11-12). Moreover,
“all conclusions are considered valid” (12). Maracle views this medium of communication and
cognitive transmission as more interactive and instructive than Western literature and teaching techniques (11-12). She agrees that European-style fiction can also transform the reader, but considers her political goals to be better served by the transposition of Coast Salish orature (11-12): by presenting her readers with the “unresolved human dilemmas” (11) of a diversity of Native characters, she hopes to draw them into her stories in order for them to “actively work themselves out of [these dilemmas]” in their own lives (12). In “Oratory,” she further denounces the artificiality of the Western dichotomy between theory and practice and adds that Aboriginal oratory, on the contrary, is predicated on a view of “story [as] the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people” (7). While many Western “[a]cademicians spend a great deal of effort deleting character, plot, and story from theoretical arguments” (8), oratory acknowledges the social and narrative nature of theory and is rooted in spirituality, emotions, and human experience (7-10). In other words: “we [Native storytellers] present thought through story, human beings doing something, real characters working out the process of thought and being” because “[t]heory is useless outside human application” (10). This implies that for her, it is this interaction and implicit emotional, sociocultural, and spiritual bond between reader/listener and writer/storyteller that encourages them to apply the possible messages of the stories in their daily lives; since oratorical theory is primarily concerned with real-life human experiences, the reader/listener is likely to relate strongly to the lives of the characters. For her, this emotional transformation lies at the basis of social change. She even
explicitly attributes to her readership the responsibility of finding personal ways of being socially involved: “[a]s listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose” (13).

In light of these comments, one can ponder the possible position or role of the non-Native critic with regard to Maracle’s prose. What could the possible implications of such a theoretical model be for him or her? Is a white critic even entitled to write about Maracle’s fiction given the risk of misinterpreting it? As mentioned earlier, her literary works are primarily meant for a Native North American readership; moreover, her work attempts to heal and empower in particular “Native people in desperate circumstances, those who need to recover the broken threads of their lives” (Woman 16). While only a traditionalist with an extensive knowledge of several Coast Salish cultures would be able to understand fully Maracle’s network of mythological and historical allusions, her fiction also contains countless didactic passages that seem addressed to Salish individuals who have lost touch with their roots as well as to Aboriginal people from other cultural or linguistic groups. For example, the reader learns in Daughters Are Forever that overt curiosity is socially unacceptable to Salish peoples and that Salish women “make [a] half-bent-torso-tucking-movement” (165) when a foreigner crosses the line (164-65).

One might argue that such explanations are also meant to educate non-Native readers – both white and racialized. Indeed, much of her activism and fiction revolves around the
transformative potential of interracial alliances, especially between Aboriginal peoples and other racialized populations and between women from different minority groups (“Grassroots”).

Although she fiercely criticizes Western societies and their prevailing hatred for difference, she does not reject whites but ultimately seeks to find peace with them. For her, Western imperialism victimizes all inhabitants of the so-called “First” and “Third” Worlds by fostering hatred, inequity, violence, and capitalistic alienation where there could be solidarity and support (“Grassroots”). Similarly, she believes that perpetrators of discrimination violate part of their own being by letting their very humanity and thoughts be imprisoned by destructive ideologies (Bobbi Lee 240-41; “Post-Colonial” 205-08). For this reason, they need to hear voices such as hers in order to become more rounded and freer human beings (Woman 85; “Ramparts Hanging in the Air” (“Ramparts”) 170-72). She adds that white Canadians “need to stop our [Aboriginal Canadians’] continued robbery, to rectify colonialism in order to decolonize their lives and feel at home in this land” (Bobbi Lee 240). If they fail to acknowledge diversity and continue to appropriate all things Native, “the fabric created will be bland, lacking in colour, wanting difference” (“Ramparts” 166). She views the remedy to this inhuman climate as “spirit of community” (“Grassroots” 46), a deep human longing without which she argues that the decolonization of the globalized world cannot be achieved (“Grassroots” 46-47). According to her political and spiritual vision, compassion and forgiveness towards all Euro-Americans and Canadians and a willingness to communicate with them are essential to the task of “plant[ing]
the seeds” of this ideal change (“Grassroots” 46):

Over half of North Americans have a debilitating non-terminal disease and visit one psychotherapist of some sort by the time they are 40. We are so hungry for community. We are hungry for love. We are hungry for humanity.[…] I love every single, dysfunctional, half-crazed and alienated citizen within it, so I write books that will help them change their hearts. (“Grassroots” 47)

In other words, Maracle argues that the toppling of the imperialist order is in everybody’s best interest and that her art and that of other minority “cultural workers” can also contribute to the healing of whites and foster meaningful cultural exchanges, which can result in powerful interracial alliances (“Grassroots” 46-47; “Post-Colonial” 207-08).

Arguably, this implies that she welcomes whites not only to read her fiction, but also to create their own interpretations and to ponder the implications for their own lives. On the other hand, the preceding arguments should serve as a warning that readers of European ancestry can easily project mainstream bias and stereotypes onto the texts. Maracle particularly cautions the white reader against the temptation to act as the narrow-minded “white […] expert” and to believe that they can easily understand Native peoples by studying them (qtd. in Beech 82). She further expresses concern over the issue of cultural appropriation. However, what she condemns is cognitive imperialism rather than all white writings on Aboriginal cultures.3 She calls for Euro-Canadian authors to “move over” (“Post-Colonial” 207) and let Aboriginal writers express

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3 Marie Battiste, a Mi’kmaq expert on the protection of Indigenous heritages of the world, has coined the term “cognitive imperialism” in order to designate “the hierarchical and patrimonial monologue that has been created by Eurocentrism” (Battiste and Henderson 13).
their own voices:

...It means don’t pick up a pen and imagine you need to write on my behalf or that you should. It means that those who lay claim to a place in the dreamspace of creativity must come to understand the difference between honest stretching into the world of the imagination and pirating someone else’s imagination.

If you conjure a character based on your [...] stereotypes and trash my world, that’s bad writing—racist literature and I will take you on for it. [...] But if you imagine a character who is from my world, attempting to deconstruct the attitudes of yours, while you may not be stealing, you still leave yourself open to criticism unless you do it well. (“Post-Colonial” 207-08)

This line of argument can apply to the position of the white literary critic who writes on Indigenous literatures. In a way similar to her complaint about the Euro-Canadian authors who appropriate Aboriginal writers’ voices, Maracle points to the overall lack of appropriate, culturally sensitive criticism by Euro-Canadian scholars. She finds most existing literary analyses of her works limited to defensiveness regarding her emphasis on less-than-palatable facts about Canada (“Study” n.pag.). Moreover, “[t]here is little effort by critics to connect the images created by the author, the creation of the characters and the assembled image of events with the history of the people, their journey through conflicts and so forth” (n.pag.). Indeed, many tend to assess the quality of Maracle’s fiction from the vantage point of Eurocentric theories instead of trying to understand the influences of her culture and political agenda on her literary forms (n.pag.). In short, Maracle views this normative criticism as a way of maintaining the status quo by invalidating fiction with non-mainstream perspectives and conventions (“Post-Colonial” 205-08; “Study” n.pag.). This suggests that for her, white criticism of Aboriginal
writings should base itself on humility, honesty, and cultural relativism if it is to achieve any insight. Moreover, these scholars should be aware of their own bias and open to (self-)questioning. Genuine knowledge of the culture(s) from which the fictional works originate would further decrease the risks of Eurocentric, stereotyped, or otherwise inappropriate analyses ("Study" n.pag.).

In this respect, Maracle strongly encourages the white critic and Euro-Canadians in general to work hard on learning about Aboriginal cultures and on understanding Aboriginal perspectives ("Post-Colonial"). In several of her essays and talks, she conceptualizes this idea through the metaphor of a bridge or mountain with white Canadians on one side and herself on the other ("Post-Colonial"; "Ramparts" 166). She depicts herself as striving to overcome the obstacles representing the cultural gap and ‘commonsense’ bias that stands between people and calls for white peoples to make a parallel effort, as neither so-called race can reach peace without this mutual understanding:

For me racism was a huge mountain. We come at it from two different sides, White and Coloured. It’s only when we’ve scaled and reached the summit that we have much to talk about. I can tell you how racism is for me and how it is to undo it, how it is to keep going up that mountain and keep falling back and keep going up because I know that at the top, no matter how hard it is to climb, you can see the world. You can see the magnificence of being a small creature in the world. ("An Infinite Number of Pathways" ("Pathways") 168)

This presupposes that different communities need each other’s truths in order to reach a place of deeper insight not only into what it means to be human, but also in the universe itself and in
people’s relationships with every other living being. Thus, she invites her white readers and audiences to use their possible discomfort as an opportunity for learning about the ‘Other’, the world, and ultimately their own selves (“Pathways” 168; “Ramparts” 170-72); far from adopting a one-sided view, she expresses the necessity for Native peoples to reach out to whites and her own need to learn about communities to which she does not belong (“Ramparts” 170). In the case of the white reader, then, Maracle’s portrayal of dilemmas that require the active participation of her audience serves both as a bridge-building strategy and as a way of de-centering him or her.

This thesis is informed by my own journey to unlearning racist stereotypes and to climbing the mountain of racial and cultural difference. Maracle’s writings on efforts to understand the ‘Other’ vs. the risk of cultural appropriation constitute useful tools in negotiating the distance between “honest stretching [of the] imagination” and appropriative readings. As a European woman, I am aware that my research and my efforts to meet Aboriginal North American people can never replace the actual experience of living as a Native person. In other words, I believe that I need to find a balance between interpreting Maracle’s work in a respectful way and crossing the line towards Eurocentric, potentially racist analyses. As a result, it is necessary for me to state that this thesis presents its own cultural limitations and bias. In order to base this work on appropriate, non-alienating material, I will rely as much as possible on Native sources both for literary criticism and for the other disciplines to which I resort. I will only turn to
Western commentators insofar as their perspective seems relevant, informed, and respectful.

Finally, the methodology and ideas of this thesis are influenced by many conversations with Native students and scholars as well as by Peter Cole’s graduate seminar “Aboriginalizing Methodology.”

This thesis will focus on Maracle’s development of a personal theory of trauma in Native communities in her penultimate novel Daughters Are Forever (Daughters) (2002). Its main argument is that Maracle deconstructs racist stereotypes about ‘Native social dysfunction’ by underlining its roots in the colonial process and its assimilationist policies, thus the collective nature of Aboriginal traumas. Chapter one will focus on the parallel personal and political quests of the protagonist Marilyn as she attempts to understand dysfunctional Indigenous motherhood. Not unlike Maracle, she uses her knowledge of sociology and Canadian history to understand how colonization and cultural genocide translate themselves clinically for individuals from different Native cultures. In particular, she sees direct links between the abduction and ‘whitewashing’ of Aboriginal children in the residential schools and the apprehension of many of them by mainstream welfare services. Chapter 2 will focus on Daughters’s development of a

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4 Peter Cole’s course took place in late July and early August 2007 within the framework of the UBC Scholar Institute “What Is Indigeneity Today, and How Can We Make it Matter in Education?”. All the courses involved compulsory attendance to three symposia at the First Nations House of Learning at UBC. This class and the events that surrounded it enabled me to hear the points of view of a diverse group of mainly Native students, to share my thoughts with them, and to experience firsthand Aboriginal pedagogy, methodologies, and ways of relating to the world and other people. I also wish to acknowledge and thank the Musqueam people, on whose traditional – and unceded – territory I did my entire Master’s.
cross-cultural psychological model that takes into account the relations of human beings to culture and non-human entities as well as the ways in which collective traumas passed on from generation to generation condition individual grief to a large extent—a phenomenon that psychologists Duran and Duran call the “soul wound” (24). Finally, chapter 3 will argue that this novel is more optimistic than it might look at first sight, as its identification of the roots of social sufferings is meant to be cathartic and to show the way to Indigenous healing and sovereignty. Similarly, *Daughters* primarily focuses on Marilyn’s journey towards recovery, reconciliation, and self-awareness both as an abused child and as an abusive mother.

The relevance of this analysis lies in the fact that although the harm inflicted by the child welfare system is a topical issue in many Native communities, few Native writers seem to incorporate this concern into their fictional works—with the notable exceptions of works such as Beatrice Culleton Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* (1983). Moreover, very little criticism exists on *Daughters*, although it is a complex, mature, and cleverly written novel that addresses intelligently many contemporary problems created by settler colonialism. More generally, Maracle does not receive the critical attention that she deserves. Although she is probably one of the most prominent Indigenous women authors of Canada as well as a leading activist, few scholars seem to focus on her, which underlines some effects of the colonial legacy.
CHAPTER 2
The Personal Toll of Colonialism: Individual Politics of Canadian Nativeness in Daughters Are Forever

In Canada, many preconceptions exist among the general population about Native social dysfunction. ‘Indians,’ so they say, are maladjusted to ‘modern’ society. Almost everybody is familiar with cultural stereotypes such as the violent drunk or drug-addicted Native; the ‘squaw’ prostitute; the ‘lazy Indian’ on welfare; and the unnatural mother who neglects her children because ‘these people’ do not know how to take care of their own (Fred xi). These clichés tend to fuel resentment against Native communities, often denounced as taking advantage of the welfare state and of their special status within Canada (Francis 217). In Daughters Are Forever, Lee Maracle confronts these preconceptions by ascribing to the colonial process the responsibility for the epidemic rates of mental and social health problems in Native communities. She focuses on Aboriginal family dysfunction and underlines its origins in a long history of disempowerment and cultural destruction. Her protagonist Marilyn, a Sto:lo social worker, attempts to identify the links between personal and social Native traumas on the one hand and patterns of collective victimization by federal institution on the other hand. This leads her to militate against the abduction of Aboriginal children by child welfare institutions, which she views as a way of not addressing the psychological and social toll of Indian policy as a major cause of dysfunctional Aboriginal parenting. Through Marilyn’s parallel personal and political quests, Maracle demonstrates that this struggle against a mainstream institution inscribes itself in
a broader movement for decolonization, as she believes that the First Nations cannot achieve their sovereignty before they reclaim their right to raise their own children with their own cultural standards.

2.1 “[W]hat Happened to […] Indian Motherhood[?]” (40): Tracing the Causes of Native Maternal Dysfunction

When she takes on the case of Elsie Jones, Marilyn is struck by the fact that the welfare agency reduces human tragedies to files, objective evidence, and court decisions. For example, the reasons behind the Anishnaabe (Ojibway) young mother’s alcoholism, recent miscarriage, and inability to mother are only investigated superficially and transformed into a few sentences at her trial (54) while Marilyn believes that “[s]omeone has broken [her]” (50) and later learns from a vision that she was molested as a child (67-68). She further becomes aware of the fact that the welfare institution handles children like objects to control and displace at will. For her, this condescending attitude is epitomized by the double meaning of the word “apprehension” and by the fact that Ms. Madison only followed the rules to the letter when she treated the health of Elsie’s children as one of the lowest priorities:

Apprehension meant, among other things, to frighten, to terrorize; yet the rationale for child apprehension was protection. It made no sense. The worker did not bother to tend to the well-being of the children. The handbook governing the apprehension of children by government social workers clearly states: first take photographs; make copious notes; speak to the parent […]; assess whether or not the child was in danger; collect clean clothes […]; then round up the children. Mindlessly, sightlessly, the worker and her photographer carried out their jobs in accordance with the dictates of their procedural training. (45)
This excerpt focalized from Marilyn’s point of view underlines that while she is aware that Elsie severely neglected little James, Theresa, and Marsha, Marilyn even views government social services as a threat to parenting and to children’s mental health, as they consider kidnappings the only solution to serious family dysfunction.

The resonances with her own personal history further make her all the more aware of the institution’s involvement in dynamics of power and domination within Canadian society. The post-traumatic flash-backs from her own childhood and motherhood (46-50) draw parallels between Marilyn, her mother, and Elsie, all chronically tired Indigenous women unable to care for their children (47-50). The apprehension of Elsie’s neglected children even mirrors that of Marilyn’s daughter Catherine in similar circumstances. The twenty-three-year-old’s alcoholism, lack of self-esteem, and shell-shocked apathy further echo almost perfectly Marilyn’s state in her early motherhood years. Similarly, Elsie’s “hysteri[a]” (47) at her trial is reminiscent of Marilyn’s uncontrollable rage when she lost Catherine (48):

Marilyn was young then. She remembered tearing up her house. She hit her husband. […] “They aren’t going to steal my children,” she screamed. “They won’t beat my baby. […] I will kill them first.”

She engaged a lawyer, then bought a gun in case she didn’t win. (48)

As a result, Marilyn identifies with Elsie to a large extent and can partly understand the powerlessness and guilt that she must be feeling. She further realizes that Elsie’s case sheds light on her own behaviour and patterns of denial, as she finally admits after almost two decades that she so seriously “neglected her children” that “[t]his could have been her file” (58). Elsie thus
becomes a mirror character for her in spite of their differences in age, cultural origins, and personal history. As a result of this implicit bond, Marilyn develops a personal stake in helping Elsie change her lifestyle in such a way that her two living children can be returned to her (54, 65-87). By counselling and questioning her, Marilyn hopes to explain her own unfathomable pain and why she neglected and mistreated her two daughters.

Her journey unfolds at several levels. At a personal level, she investigates her own soul in order to find what went wrong in her life. On the professional side, she tries to refine her methods for counselling Elsie and other mothers in danger of losing their offspring to welfare. Moreover, her efforts include an activist dimension, as she believes that the pattern of dysfunctional parenting that she identifies exists in many Native communities. Since she has been struggling with the ‘epidemic’ of child neglect and abuse by Aboriginal Canadian mothers (55), she understands that her maternal failures and Elsie’s reflect a collective situation rooted in historical, social, and political factors. However,

[The solution to the whole mess was so much more complicated [than just dealing with Elsie]. Marilyn knew it. Elsie’s condition had taken over one hundred years to create. […] It would take time and effort to resolve the historic condition that had birthed massive child neglect among Native families. The blueprint of the effort she outlined […] seemed straightforward and sensible, but the flogging of the theory to make the authorities recognize its viability and its desirability would, it seemed, take forever. (55)

As this excerpt shows, Marilyn encounters obstacles from the board of her agency when she tries to convince them that taking Elsie’s children only addresses the symptoms. As a
government service, this institution clearly has a vested interest in “blam[ing] the victim” (Henry et al 139) rather than acknowledging the fact that Canada has been violating Aboriginal human rights. This convinces her even more that mainstream child welfare is literally a colonial institution (55-56) and that Native peoples need to “explore [their] own solution” (55) to parental neglect. As a result, the novel investigates the personal toll that Canada’s political and institutional structures take, the influence of socio-cultural disruption on Native families, and the links between personal and collective empowerment. For Marilyn, it is vital to replace Aboriginal Canadians’ multiple social problems in their historical context, as disregarding it can only impede understanding and blindly ‘confirm’ stereotypes about the ‘Indian’ as culturally and emotionally flawed.

2.2 Colonial Policies: The Ideological Legacy of the Indian Act

2.2.1 “Cultural Gynocide” (Allen 30) and the Multiple Oppression of Native Women

As Maracle’s mouthpiece, Marilyn is aware that Elsie’s treatment by the welfare agency and by the court bears the ideological imprint of government policies created from the nineteenth century onwards to control Native peoples’ behaviours and position within Canadian society. The “over one hundred years” that Marilyn views as underlying Elsie’s familial tragedy seems to allude to the Indian Act, first passed in 1876 and which still defines Aboriginal peoples’ social, institutional, and even ethno-racial status (Henry et al 129-32; Native Women’s Association of
Canada (NWAC), “Violations of Indigenous Human Rights” ("Violations") 13). Based on the construction of the Natives as culturally, morally, and socially defective, it contained several policies that imposed European lifestyles and Christian religions on Aboriginal people (Francis 200-01, 203-06, 214-17; Henry et al 129-32, 139-40). In practice, the Act heaped countless regulations and prohibitions on Indigenous populations and justified their displacement, disempowerment, and the attempted destruction of their cultures (Henry et al 129-31; NWAC, “Violations” 13-16). This form of “institutionalized racism” (Henry et al 131) reduced them to a segregated and precarious life on reserves and caused unspeakable social sufferings whose consequences endure to this day (Francis 203-05).

Although this systematic oppression has had a negative impact on all Native people, it has disempowered Aboriginal women in even more total ways. Despite their immense diversity, all pre-conquest Nations viewed women as sacred and celebrated their “power to make life” (Allen 27-28). The Laguna Pueblo theoretician Paula Gunn Allen even underlines the fact that many of these populations were “Mother-Right peoples” (11, 29), which “thought that the primary potency in the universe was female” (26). Furthermore, in most North American Nations, women were the power. The women were the name-givers, as well as law-makers, land-owners, healers, and spiritual leaders. There is also evidence in the oral documents to indicate that there were women warriors. Until the influx of the Europeans to this continent, women held high positions among the original North Americans. (Mingwôn Mingwôn 134)

In short, Native women were generally regarded as the very core of the well-being and
organization of their Nations, as the keepers of language and culture (NWAC, “Alternative Report” 7). For this reason, some argue that dismantling female power was necessary for settler governments to fulfil their agenda of cultural annihilation (Allen 3, 40-42). In other words: if the “gynocratic nature of the tribal system” (Allen 32) was destroyed, the institutions, traditions, and social and spiritual health of the communities would follow (Anderson, A Recognition of Being (Recognition) 69-71, 83).

In Canada, the Indian Act institutionalized the patriarchal devaluation of women through their dissociation from their traditional roles (Anderson, Recognition 57-70). Through the introduction of “European political systems and laws” (68), the Act imposed customs that contradicted local gynocratic practices. For example, “Indian status derived from the male head of the household” while in many Native cultures, “the identity of children derived from the women” (NWAC, “Violations” 13). More insidiously, the restriction of Aboriginal women’s economic and commercial power rendered them “[unable] to provide for their families” and “dependent upon purchased goods,” which made it easy for Canadian officials to blame the rampant on-reserve poverty on them (Anderson, Recognition 103). In one of its typical ‘blame the victim’ moves, the government ascribed the misery and health issues of most reserves on the laziness, slovenliness, and poor housekeeping skills of the so-called “squaw,” thereby diverting public attention from status Indians’ economic oppression, denial of access to their own resources, and confinement in unsanitary shacks (103).
To a large extent, Maracle’s literary works can be said to document the adverse impact of the Indian Act on Native women and children at different periods of the twentieth century and the present-day consequences that generations of patriarchal rule, institutionalized cultural genocide, and government-induced poverty have for them. However, she views the Indian Act and other discriminatory policies as symptoms of a broader socio-cultural problem: for her, racism and sexism are ingrained in European-CanAmerican ideology and as such, pervade and are perpetuated by Western institutions and media behind a veneer of democratic pluralism (“Grassroots” 43-45; Woman), a phenomenon that Henry et al term “democratic racism” (19). In other words, she views racism and sexism as systemic, institutionalized social phenomena before all and individual prejudices as mere reflections of these societal structures. In this respect, her definition of white ideology is close to the Gramscian concept of “common sense” or “hegemonic” thinking (see Gramsci 196, 223, 323). In her political-theoretical works, she thus argues that institutionalized forms of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination work hand in hand to maintain an exploitative hierarchical order dominated by a small elite of mainly middle-class white males (Woman; “Racism, Sexism and Patriarchy”). Thus, she defines the Western (neo-)colonial order as a white patriarchy based on “[t]he emotionality [of] patriarchal racism” (“Grassroots” 43).

5 Also known as “culturecide” or “deculturation,” cultural genocide designates “processes that have been purposely introduced and that result in the decline or demise of a culture, without necessarily resulting in the physical destruction of its bearers” (Cashmore, “Culturecide”).
In this framework, the dynamics of race cannot be dissociated from those of gender and the other way around. For Maracle, racism, sexism, and classism interlock and intersect in dynamic ways in the lives of Aboriginal women (*Woman* 16-22). She demonstrates the fact that as colonized ‘Others,’ as women, and as a generally impoverished segment of the Canadian population, they undergo “multiple marginalization” (Turner 109), a specific, more total form of dehumanization experienced neither by Aboriginal men, nor by white women. For her, the implicit social hierarchies of Canadian society construct white men as prototypical humans, white women as inferior to them, then Native men as even more worthless and Native women as occupying the bottom of the social ladder:

The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female. The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women. (*Woman* 17-18)

As a result, they face endemic abuse and harassment, not to speak of structural phenomena such as their inferior average income compared to Native men (*Woman*; Henry *et al* 138). However, Maracle reaffirms the idea that this more thorough victimization only manifests the larger dehumanization of Native peoples: “[t]he denial of Native womanhood is the reduction of the whole people to a sub-human level. Animals beget animals” (*Woman* 17). In other words, this anti-Indigenous form of “gendered racism” (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women 7) reinforces the racist denigration of Nativeness, both at the ideological level and at the more concrete level of policy.
This implicit influence of gendered racial stereotyping sheds light on Elsie’s treatment by welfare and in court. The two institutions do not treat her as a human being in need of support, but rather as a culprit and problem client. Between the lines, she is judged as a one-dimensional character, as a ‘dirty squaw’ devoid of intelligence and agency and who deserves all the less respect since she is a single mother who struggles with alcoholism (54; see Anderson, Recognition 84, 102-11). The fact that she ‘confirms’ several popular images of Native mothers leaves her little chance to fight back. The widespread view of single mothers and “welfare mothers” as a burden and moral threat to society further overshadows the complete absence of her children’s father(s), leaving her as the sole parent guilty of neglect (Anderson, “Vital Signs” 175). In a similar line of argument, the Doris Marshall Institute schematizes these negative judgements on Native women as follows:

If Native women are constructed as “easy squaws” and are locked into this imagery through the behaviour of individuals, they will continue to be rendered worthless in public institutions such as courtrooms or hospitals. If we treat Native women as easy or drunken squaws in the court system, we feed negative stereotypes that will further enable individuals to abuse Native females, and so on. Negative Native female images are part of a vicious cycle that deeply influences the lives of contemporary Native women. (Anderson, Recognition 112)

In this respect, the court does not even consider that Elsie’s poverty, social isolation within the city, and obvious lack of self-esteem might result from her very status as a Native woman in present-day Canada. Thus, even as it gives her a second chance, the ruling re-stigmatizes and criminalizes Elsie instead of providing her with appropriate resources. For example, she is not
granted psychological therapy outside of Marilyn’s short-term treatment and the judge does not seem worried that she might need suicide prevention counseling. This oppressive dynamics is further reinforced by the fact that Western institutions of justice are largely based on Eurocentric and patriarchal principles often alien to Native populations (Baskin 217-18; NWAC, “Violations” 7-12). In a passage that applies almost perfectly to Elsie, Judge Stuart states that Western justice expects offenders with fragile self images, overwhelmed by personal problems, lacking any significant personal support system, without financial or personal resources to function independently, to miraculously gain control over their life. When they fail, […] the justice system too readily closes the door on further rehabilitation […]. (qtd. in NWAC, “Violations” 12)

In this light, a mainstream court decision concerning custody can only fracture Native families even further and create new cycles of pain, resentment, and crippling guilt, as Marilyn concludes (55, 90, 197). Stripped of her traditional role as a woman and mother, separated from her relatives and from the traditional Anishnaabe territory (217), Elsie needs her personal and cultural grief to be acknowledged. Without this recognition and without the possibility to name the causes of her anomie (86), she cannot overcome her sense of defeat. In other words, her children and she first need to reconnect to each other and to Anishnaabe values. Furthermore, Marilyn comes to the realization that child welfare bears the legacy of assimilationist policies from the Indian Act, more specifically of the mass abduction of Native children to residential schools (55-56). Indeed, she believes that this schooling system fostered a collective trauma that
accounts for a large-scale breakdown in parenting skills among many Native Canadian populations (see NWAC, “Violations” 22). As a result, separating children from their abusive or impoverished parents merely reproduces the same patterns without even addressing the origins of the bulk of Native family dysfunction in this relatively similar policy. For her, this re-traumatization of devastated communities might be much more deliberate than it seems at first sight. However, she believes strongly that “[t]here is power in naming” (65, 199), as identifying the causes of social problems lies at the root of solving them. For her, it is particularly necessary to speak out about the link between the residential schools and child welfare in order to force the government to acknowledge the damage that both institutions have wrought on Aboriginal communities and to “[reclaim] the absolute right of Native people to rear their children” (55).

2.2.2 The Child Welfare System as Legacy of the Residential Schools

The federal residential school system was created as part of “a series of amendments to the Indian Act [meant] to speed up the process of assimilation” (Francis 205). From the mid-1870s onwards, it forced Native parents to send their children to special boarding schools run by Christian churches (NWAC, “Violations” 17-18). Their avowed goal was to “eradicate all that was Indian [sic] in the children” (Fournier and Crey 54) by imposing on them Christianity, English, and Western ‘civilization’ and education. Concretely, they were isolated from their families and “forbidden to speak their language, to practice their traditions and customs, and to learn about their history” (Henry et al 125). Many of the forms of ‘discipline’ in application fell
nothing short of consistent mental, physical, and often sexual torture (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) n.pag.). The low level of instruction further created whole generations of young adults who could not fit in either world (NWAC, “VIHR” 25; RCAP n.pag.). Ill-treated for speaking their language and also deprived of a proper command of English, they often became what Maracle calls “crippled two-tongues” hardly able to codify complex feelings and ideas (“Pathways” 166; “Typewriter” 37-38). In fact, she even argues that the residential schools only “creat[ed] an entire population […] who were unfamiliar with language in general” (“Skyros Bruce” 85).

This policy achieved a debilitating effect on whole generations and cultures. To begin with, the separation of children from their families created a “loss of traditional ways of being on the land [and] of parenting skills” (RCAP n.pag.). After spending their most vulnerable years in an atmosphere of emotional deprivation, cultural oppression, spiritual and bodily violation, and barbaric ill-treatment, many Natives became unable to enjoy life and bond with loved ones (NWAC, “VIHR” 22-26; RCAP n.pag.; Sellars 123-25). Moreover, they returned to their communities as strangers with bottled up feelings of grief, terror, and rage (Fournier and Crey 62-63, 82). As Phil Fontaine testifies, “[they] never heard anything about [their] community or parents except in the most negative way” (54), and being abused by “the very same people that were telling [them] to be pure, free of sin, to love, respect and honor others” often “destroyed [their] sense of morality” (57). This created an “intergenerational chain of abuse and violence”
(NWAC, “VIHR” 22) that affected the survivors’ own descendants. Because “[t]hey were not prepared for the real world” in the schools, many further “became dependent on the government” (NWAC, “Violations” 25). Over a century of this tyrannical regime created a “large-scale cultural catastrophe” (Lane 192) from which many languages and traditions might never recover.

In Daughters, Marilyn sees a direct organic link between the residential schools and new mass kidnappings of Indigenous children by child welfare. For her, Elsie’s lack of self-worth and nurturing abilities must result indirectly from residential schooling (216). Moreover, Marilyn is aware that the beginning of the ‘child welfare era’ coincided with the phasing out of the residential schools in the 1950s and 1960s (Amnesty International n.pag.; NWAC, “Violations” 26-27): as she reflects to herself, “[t]he very moment they shut down the residential schools, the government went on a child-raiding spree” (56). She understands that by a strange twist of logic, the all-pervasive transgenerational trauma and collective demoralization triggered by the residential schools (51, 55) became a new paternalistic excuse to place Aboriginal children into the care of mostly white strangers who attempt to “‘[integrate]’ them into their family” (56). In other words, Marilyn realizes that the child welfare system as applied to Native children serves as a new institution of cultural genocide under the guise of ‘protecting’ them. In their 1997 research on residential schooling and child welfare in Canada, Stolen from Our Embrace, Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey underline this long-standing systemic attempt to ‘whitewash’ First Nations children:
Canada’s Indian policy, from its very inception, has sought to undermine the bond between aboriginal children and their families […] This deliberate policy to separate and forcibly assimilate aboriginal children into the mainstream has pervaded every era of aboriginal history in Canada and profoundly injured […] First Nations people both historically and today. Each era saw a new reason to take aboriginal children away from home, placing them in residential schools, foster care or non-aboriginal adoptive families. (17)

This was particularly the case during the era known as the “Sixties’ Scoop,” during which “the number of First Nations children made legal wards of the state […] ballooned” (Fournier and Crey 83). However, this trend still constitutes an issue today (Amnesty n.pag.; Fournier and Crey 88). For Marilyn, this new attempt to sever the bonds between parents and children from societies recovering from “cultural warfare” (Spears 82) amounts to “terrorism on Native children” (90). She thus grows aware of the threat that the “‘scoop up’ phenomenon” (Maracle, Foreword 7) poses to the sovereignty movement and revitalization of Aboriginal cultures; as she explains during one of her lectures, “without our women raising our children all the work of your generation will be dead by the next” (197). In fact, several observers underline that just as in the residential school era, the Aboriginal community as a whole has already “lost a vital segment of its population” and “suffered from a loss of continuity” as a result of this new attack (Bienvenue 205).

Not surprisingly, these large-scale abductions by social services have had an extremely destructive impact on the Natives who grew up in adoptive or foster homes, especially in the case of transracial adoptions. While children in the residential schools stayed with Aboriginal
peers and usually knew their origins and that they would eventually return to their families, many
scooped up children still grow up isolated from other Natives and without appropriate
information about their ethnicity and birth family (Fournier and Crey 81, 84-85). Moreover, as
Marilyn notes, Euro-Canadian adopted and foster parents often
d[o] not even bother to try to make the children part of the family. [...] [M]ore often
than she care[s] to know, these foster children bec[o]me exploited playthings in the
homes in which they [a]re sent. (56)

It is indeed well-documented that many Native children placed into white families have been
undergoing psychological abuse, exploitation, battering, and molestation (Fournier and Crey 85-
86; RCAP n.pag.). Transracial adoptions thus often thrust children into family structures whose
dynamics are similar to the residential schools era and function as microcosms of colonization.
Even with caring non-Native adopted or foster parents, the adoptees usually suffer from violent
identity crises because of their displacement in often all-white middle-class environments
(Amnesty n.pag.; Fournier and Crey 85, 97). Consequently, many develop patterns of criminal or
self-destructive behaviours comparable to those of residential school survivors (Fournier and
Crey 90-91). However, Native-run child welfare agencies such as the Sto:lo Nation’s Xolhmi:lh
Child and Family Services were developed recently (Fournier and Crey 230-35; Spears 94).

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6 For more on the history of Native children placed in white foster families, see Beatrice Culleton Mosionier’s In
Search of April Raintree (1983) and In the Shadow of Evil (2000) as well as Drew Hayden Taylor’s Someday (1993)
and Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth (2004). Also see Shandra Spears’s testimony “Strong Spirit, Fractured
Identity: An Ojibway Adoptee's Journey to Wholeness.”
Thanks to her observations and to her knowledge of the history of colonial policies in Canada, Marilyn understands more fully the impact of more than a century of institutionalized violence and cultural genocide on the Aboriginal individual. By analysing Elsie’s symptoms and contrasting them with her own, she starts realizing that even though broad-scale patterns of psychological and social ‘disorders’ can be identified throughout Native country, different persons experience the results of collective traumas in varied ways. In other words, Native individual traumas depend on a complex interplay between colonial policies, specific cultural and geographic origins, personality, and personal and family history. As Maracle’s mouthpiece, Marilyn concludes that the damage to Native societies and group psyches may not form a strict determinism, it influences all individuals in extremely intimate ways, conditioning part of their lives and tainting their experience:

Colonization is such a personal process. Culture is so intensely personal. There must be something about us that never quite gives up [and] that never quite can be completely erased, but at the same time over a hundred years of cultural dismemberment has to surface in some intensely personal way. In the absence of our own cultures we would naturally develop this not quite completely valueless, not quite completely apathetic, not quite completely uncaring self. (216)

Thus, Elsie’s emotional distancing makes Marilyn realize for the first time in her life what the cultural loss caused by the residential schools may mean in clinical terms for an alienated Indigenous individual (216). Her analysis gives a new sense to the motto of second-wave feminism, “the personal is political”: for Indigenous persons, “racism is not an ideology in the abstract but a very real and practical part of [their] lives,” one that informs policy with
“measurable and murderous” results (Woman 4). Arguably, they can never totally escape the influence of this colonial situation, but the extremely politicized aspect of their lives also means that personal decisions to empower themselves are valuable acts of resistance. Through their activism, Maracle and her protagonist make good use of this possibility for the ‘personal’ to influence the ‘political’. By expressing unwanted truths and challenging degrading stereotypes, they underline the guilt of federal and provincial institutions in the creation of ‘Native social dysfunction’ and present Native individuals as complex human beings who face incredible odds.
3 CHAPTER 3
Residual Grief: Understanding the Native Collective Soul Wound

Through Marilyn’s re-contextualization of Elsie’s dysfunctional behaviours, Maracle underlines that the traumas and mental disorders of many Native Canadian individuals cannot be understood through ‘classic’ mainstream psychology. The narration of Daughters repeatedly underlines that standard Western psychotherapies not only fail to explain Native social problems, but also participate in imperialistic practices. Indeed, their tendency to isolate individual psychology from its sociohistorical context disregards Aboriginal belief systems and pathologizes Aboriginal persons who react to cultural loss and systemic oppression. Marilyn’s investigation of Native reactions and solutions to violent social and psychological crises further uncovers not only genetic links between collective and individual traumas, but also the existence of intergenerational traumas caused by cultural genocide among others. The mythological aspects of the narration reinforce this concept of transgenerational transmission through the character of the “still woman” (20), a psychologically scarred ancestor of Marilyn’s who handed down her mental numbing to her female descendants. The novel’s description of overlapping layers of social, familial, individual, and vicarious traumas enables Maracle to develop the basis of a culturally appropriate psychological theory. While several psychological and psychoanalytical principles come under attack in Daughters, Maracle chooses to adapt them to a Native Canadian cultural context –to begin with the notion of “trauma” and equivalent concepts.
3.1 Soul Wound: Collective Trauma and Intergenerational Impact on Individual Sufferings

3.1.1 Methodological Quandaries: ‘Western Ethnopsychology’ in the Colonial Context

As Marilyn learns to question the validity of child welfare practices when applied to Native families, she also grows aware of the fact that her counselling model is as much part of a systemic problem as the welfare agency itself. The power that she wields as a counsellor makes meaningful communication with her client practically impossible. Thus, she notices with bitterness that Elsie “defers to [her] like she would any white woman” (65). The fact that Elsie folds her shoulders forward (66) and uses interrogative intonations “as though she were guessing” (66) further makes her seem like a schoolgirl confronted with a threatening teacher or a battering parent. Marilyn thus realizes how much she has been co-opted by the welfare agency even as she tries to change it from the inside. Just as the institution “terrori[zes] […] Native children” (90), Marilyn disempowers and terrorizes Elsie. She thus realizes that she will be unable to build trust with Elsie as long as she follows her psychological blueprint to the letter. Therefore, she “decide[s] to throw the textbook therapeutic approach out the window and just chat with Elsie” (66) to have a chance to bond with her; indeed, conversations are reciprocal and ideally takes place between equals whereas Marilyn’s relationship with Elsie within the setting of her office is strongly hierarchical.

Marilyn’s frustration suggests that Elsie’s therapy is doomed from the start by the implication of Western psychology in colonial social control. In their 1995 study Native
American Postcolonial Psychology, Eduardo Duran (Pueblo / Apache) and Bonnie Duran decry mainstream diagnostic tools for their personalization and pathologization of the effects of the colonial process on Native clients (6, 26-28). They underline that by focusing on individual symptoms and the micro-social, Western psychology implicitly legitimizes state institutions and invalidates Aboriginal North American patients’ experience of trauma, systemic oppression, and (cultural) genocide (6, 28, 53). Often through ignorance, the mostly white practitioners thus tend to re-traumatize Native clients who are seeking help (42, 87). In this regard, one might argue that in Maracle’s framework, European-style psychotherapy functions with the same dynamics of “blaming the victim” (Duran and Duran 42) as many courts and child welfare agencies. This lack of sensitivity to sociohistorical conditions thus makes conventional mental health services potentially harmful to Indigenous people, who run the risk of being misdiagnosed through the lens of degrading stereotypes (26-27, 52-53).\(^7\) To counteract these hegemonic practices, Duran and Duran call for the creation of diagnostic categories that reflect the impact of historical violence on Native North Americans, such as “acute or chronic reaction to genocide and colonialism” (53). Marilyn’s reflection that “maybe none of us [Native Canadians] are all that disturbed; maybe this is all just a consequence of conditioning” (217) suggests a similar idea that

\(^7\) For example, Duran and Duran cite a 1973 study that diagnosed Alaskan Native populations with “frequent paranoid personality disorders” (97) without considering that the test group was indeed undergoing oppression and therefore displaying “good reality testing” through its so-called paranoia (97). Duran and Duran’s chapter on alcoholism (93-156) further illustrates the way in which non-Native researchers used the widespread Aboriginal alcoholism as confirmation of ‘drunken savage’ stereotypes without considering its real causes.
Native mental illnesses are actually natural reactions to ‘unnatural’, inhuman conditions (IAW 139). An awareness of these historical and systemic factors would be crucial to Elsie’s healing, as it could help her put her situation into perspective and start recovering her self-esteem (see Duran and Duran 90). Without the vocabulary and concepts to codify the pain that she carries as a Native woman, she can only wallow in confusion and helplessness.

The ongoing cognitive imperialism of Western psychology is further compounded by its lack of congruence with Anishnaabe and Sto:lo cultural contexts. Indeed, the novel makes it clear that this discipline not only fails to identify the multiple layers of trauma that ‘Nativityness’ involves, but also follows standards and assumptions that can be extremely alien and irrelevant to non-white individuals (Duran and Duran; Gone, “American Indian Mental Health” (“Mental Health”)). For example, the narration underlines that because Marilyn’s manuals follow a European-CanAmerican construction of the self, they fail to account for Elsie’s symptoms and for their meaning in an Anishnaabe cultural context:

Marilyn watched her during the session. She marked her hand movements. Elsie’s voice tones intrigued her. She noticed for the first time that there was something awry about Elsie’s total being. It puzzled her. Her mind flipped through her reference texts, her file of psychological disorders and their symptoms, but she found nothing to describe the being presented by Elsie. It was as if she were apathetic, but not quite; disconcerted, but not quite; uncaring in the moment, yet deeply caring over the long haul. […] Her shoulders folded in when they weren’t shrugging a vague “I don’t know.” (214-15)

Ironically, Marilyn’s memories of her chronically depressed mother, Anne, help her infinitely more than her therapeutic textbooks, as Elsie shares the same “dead,” “[l]ifeless eyes” (216). On
the other hand, Marilyn perceives a different nuance of “flat[ness]” (214) in Elsie’s gaze (214) and suspects that her expressions of mental disturbance might largely be shaped by Anishnaabe ways of being in the world. In this respect, neither her training nor her experience enable her to tell Elsie’s symptoms apart from normal Anishnaabe body language (218). Based on her double Sto:lo and Western socialization, Marilyn might mistake for pathological hand movements that are ordinary among some Anishnaabe populations (218).

Marilyn’s reflections on Elsie’s corporal and facial expressions entail that ‘orthodox’ psychology tends to universalize Western constructions of the mind, identity, and pathology (Duran and Duran 5-9) and thus ignores “human ‘psychic diversity’ across cultures” (Gone, “Mental Health” 224). Moreover, “our [psychologists’] professional concepts and categories, and tools and techniques are cultural products or artifacts” too (“Mental Health” 226). As a result, Euro-American psychotherapies are discordant with most tribal ethnopsychologies with regard to emotional experience and expression; norms governing kinds and qualities of acceptable communication; the nature of distress, disorder, and its treatment; and the meaning of personhood, social relations, and spirituality. (Gone, “Keeping Culture in Mind” 128)

A natural consequence of these divergences is that what one culture deems ‘normal’ can be ‘strange’, pathological, or socially unacceptable in another (Duran and Duran 33-35). For example, Maracle mentions both in interviews and in Daughters the widespread Native belief in an “unconscious tribal memory” (“Pathways” 175) or “blood memory” (Anderson, Recognition 24), a set of memories of ancestors and of one’s ‘essence’ that is inscribed in one’s physical
being from birth onwards (“Pathways” 175; Anderson, Recognition 24-25). Gone and Alcántara also note that while Western medicine views “therapeutic knowledge and practice [as] essentially dependent on naturalistic understandings and materialist explanations of the human body,”

Native traditional healing “requires a sacred cosmology” (8) in which healing is “essentially dependent on the Powerful activities of other-than-human persons whose motivations and actions remain largely inscrutable to human beings” (9).

In a context where the consecrated forms of knowledge are mainly Western, this lack of cultural relativism often threatens the personal and cultural integrity of the ‘ethnic’ patient. This phenomenon was already noted in by one of the sources of Maracle’s sociology, Frantz Fanon (see Bobbi Lee 219). In Black Skin, White Masks (1952), he argues that the European nuclear family prepares children to follow patriarchal authority in all circumstances:

[In Europe,] [t]here are close connections between the structure of the family and the structure of the nation. Militarization and the centralization of authority in a country automatically entail a resurgence of the authority of the father. […] As the child emerges from the shadow of his [sic] parents, he finds himself once more among the same laws, the same principles, the same values. A normal child that has grown up in a normal family will be a normal man. (141-42)

In his analysis of the Creole mind in the French Caribbean, Fanon further argues that children in these colonies are raised within different core values and family structure (151). As a result, exposure to white cultural products creates a psychic conflict in young Creoles, who learn at school and from Western popular culture ideas that not only contradict local norms but present their African ancestors as savages (146-48). As a result, they may eventually be torn apart
between their family on the one hand and their French nationality and colonial ‘allegiance’ to white society on the other hand (149). In short, “[a] normal Negro [sic] child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world” (143). This implies that mainstream psychoanalysis otherizes Caribbean patients and confronts them with near-insolvable cultural dilemmas (see 149-54).

In a present-day North American context, the likelihood for mainstream psychology to induce neuroses or inappropriate behaviours in Indigenous clients can be considered comparable. Indeed, most Western therapies insidiously attempt to “resocializ[e]” (Duran and Duran 27) them “into middle-class [white] socially prescribed roles” (103). This falls nothing short of “a nearly invisible (but ongoing) ‘cultural proselytization’ of distressed Native clients in their most vulnerable hour” (Gone, “Mental Health” 220). The Gros Ventre psychologist Joseph Gone further argues that “conventional psychological interventions might be detrimental to American-Indian ‘mental health’ even if they could be proven to reduce symptoms and improve functioning for particular individuals” (“Mental Health” 219), as they potentially undermine cultural preservation (219-20, 226). By supplanting local ethnopsychologies and healing practices, they thus participate in the “epistemic violence” (Duran and Duran 25) and “ongoing ethnocide” (53) inflicted on Native communities.

This defiance towards orthodox Western ethnopsychology in Daughters poses a methodological quandary at at least two levels. At the level of the plot itself, Marilyn struggles to
find healing strategies culturally appropriate to Elsie and to herself. For the readers, especially non-Natives, the novel further creates the challenge not only of understanding the protagonist’s dilemmas and decisions in this respect, but also of situating the plot in its cultural, social, and historical context. However, Maracle’s criticism on mainstream psychotherapies does not mean that she rejects them completely: her ultimate goal lies not in toppling the social sciences but in transforming them from inside. In this regard, Marilyn’s struggle with psychology in *Daughters* lends itself to an analogy with Maracle’s use of sociology in her theoretical and fictional works.

The key to her view of this discipline mainly lies in her first novel, *Sundogs*. Its protagonist and narrator, Marianne, serves as Maracle’s mouthpiece for most of the novel. This Métis / Coast Salish student in sociology decries it as mainly designed by conformistic “white, male scholar[s]” (28) and therefore riddled with racist and patriarchal bias (28, 153-54). In particular, she finds herself dissatisfied with the unwillingness of her sociology classes “to consider emotions as part of the study of human society” (28). For example, she reflects bitterly on the fact that

> second year sociology is full of theoretical grandstanding about the why of divorce, alienation of a social nature and so forth. About the only thing these guys guess right is the problem. They have no idea about the why of things or the solution. They can’t even face a single human emotion when they rattle on about divorce. (27)

This frustrates Marianne’s “deep yearning” (61) to understand her people’s lives and situations: she “understand[s] the colonial process in theory - divorced from living people” (155), but she wants to know “how […] this impacts on us” (155). The plot answers her question indirectly, as
she only develops insights into Salish spirituality when she mixes into a diverse group of Natives for a run for peace during the Oka crisis (168-206). Through her protagonist’s thoughts and actions, Maracle thus implies that genuine knowledge cannot be derived solely from books and abstract theories but has to be related to real-life human beings with all the nuances of their social relations and personal feelings.

Maracle seems to address a similar criticism to mainstream psychology: while it does consider human emotions, it arguably reifies them by considering them in a rationalistic way. As a result, it labels individual feelings and behaviours in ways that may blind people to their inner truths. In *Daughters*, Marilyn is too terrified to delve into the meaning of her visions, as the only instrument that “[h]er Western education” (206) has provided her to understand her experience is the vocabulary of hallucinations and psychosis. In other words, “[s]he dare[s] not look at those moments pre-defined by white Western intellectuals as insanity, delusional, ‘schizo’…” (206). In *Woman*, Maracle explicitly addresses sociology and psychology’s pathologization of non-Cartesian worldviews in a chapter about Marxist sociology:

> Science has not yet unraveled the mystery of the spirit […]. This does not negate spirit’s existence, it only shrouds it in mystery.
> “I hear my grandmothers speak” is one remark which brings either howls of laughter or nervous looks of skepticism […]. Psychiatry is predicated on dispelling the illusions of patients who hear voices. The victims of voices are influenced by the notion that hearing voices is connected to insanity or religious fervour. (*Woman* 113-14)

Thus, Maracle underlines that the tenets of both disciplines can alienate Native women from their culture, their families, and their own selves. On the other hand, she adopts a
sociological framework in most of her theoretical and fictional works including *Daughters*:

indeed, she regards sociology as useful to understand the dynamics of racism, patriarchy, and colonialism in Western society (see *Woman*; “Racism, Sexism, Patriarchy”). However, she strives to create a sociological model rid of the (supposed) patriarchal racist bias and dehumanized tone of ‘classic’ sociology (see *Woman* 39, 108-13). She mainly achieves this by integrating Sto:lo beliefs into her model and by emphasizing the lived emotional impact of systemic violence on diverse Native characters. This allows her to turn Elsie from a statistic into a fully-fledged human being. In *Daughters*, psychology further serves both as a theme and as a literary device in the same way as sociology does in *Sundogs*, as it comes under scrutiny as harmful to First Nations people when used uncritically, but also contributes to Maracle’s unveiling of the chronic colonial mistreatment of these populations. In order to shed light on the psychic damage done to Native Canadians, Maracle employs a cross-cultural model that incorporates Aboriginal cosmologies and constructions of the mind, an effort that parallels Duran and Duran and Gone’s recommendations. The narrator further uses terms congruent with the insights of psychoanalysis and psychiatry, such as “shell-shocked” (120) and “post-traumatic stress syndrome” (135), but also describes Native traumas in terms of “chronic grief” (21) and “chronic spiritual hunger” (27), a vocabulary that evokes an ancient spiritual wound. At the level of the plot, the need for cross-cultural therapies is further expressed by Marilyn’s decision to seek treatment at a centre that treats Native patients “from a cultural perspective” (245).
3.1.2 Unsolved Historical Grief: The “Soul Wound” and Intergenerational Trauma

Maracle’s investigation of the psychosocial roots of Native social ills makes it clear that the traumas of colonized individuals are largely by-products of collective traumas. Indeed, the large-scale kidnappings of Native children and the colonial process as a whole may be viewed as repeated collective traumas that have affected ‘Canadian Nativeness’ in general. Sociologist Kai Erikson defines individual and collective traumas as follows:

> By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively. […] By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (qtd. in Alexander 4)

In this light, organized attempts to destroy community bonds and prevent cultural transmission

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As Smelser underlines, the term “trauma” suffers from “conceptual muddiness” (31). While Charcot and Freud’s definitions involved relatively straightforward causal connections, subsequent studies resulted in an explosion of research on trauma, with both “an enormous gain in recognition of comprehension and complexity” and “a loss of formal scientific precision” (58) (41, 55-58). However, it is possible to pinpoint several characteristics of the concept. According to Freud, trauma is caused by a negative affect (often fright) that is repressed along with the memories of the event and later “returns, is defended against, and ultimately is converted into an organic symptom” (Smelser 32). Moreover, it can also be defined by its “embeddedness or indelibility in the structure of the personality” (41). Although “[t]he degree of indelibility varies according to [factors such as] the severity of trauma,” most experts agree that traumas are long-lasting (41). The French neuropsychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik further contends that “[i]n order to be able to talk about trauma, you have to “have been dead” […] Whereas in an ordeal we suffer, fight, we are depressed, angry, but we feel very much alive and we manage to overcome things, in the case of trauma, people remain prisoners of their past and very often relive the images of the horror they have experienced for years” (n.pag.).
among colonized peoples arguably create collective traumas, and so do deadly pandemics such as smallpox. Similarly, one can conceive that the invasions of Turtle Island, the imposition of a foreign regime, and the disruption and even ban of many traditions could inflict a massive tear to the very social fabric and sense of community of many Native societies. Arguably, a cross-cultural psychological model that integrates Native psychic structures has to take into account the specific effects of collective trauma on diverse Aboriginal cultures and individuals.

However, Maracle’s Coast Salish/‘Western’ theory of collective trauma differs from more ‘orthodox’, Western models in some fundamental respects. For theorists of “cultural trauma” such as Jeffrey C. Alexander and Neil J. Smelser, sociocultural traumatization is an inherently mediated process. For them, there is no such thing as a ‘traumatic event’ because trauma is a socially constructed category rather than an objective quality of particular events (Alexander 2-4, 8-11; Smelser 35-38). In other words, no real-life phenomenon automatically creates collective trauma; instead, the latter derives from a complex system of socio-cultural representation (Alexander 8-27; Smelser 43-44). Thus, cultures (especially national ones) can only be traumatized if specific social agents convince the public that certain events have negatively affected its collective identity (Alexander 9-24). The success of this undertaking depends on

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9 For more on the specific elements, mechanisms, and actors of the “social process of cultural trauma” (Alexander 10), see Alexander 10-24 and Smelser 35-38, 43-44 and 48-50. Also note that Smelser formulates a slightly different definition of cultural trauma from Alexander. While Alexander largely uses the term “cultural trauma” as a synonym for “collective trauma,” Smelser views it more specifically as “an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed
factors such as historical context, the interests of specific social groups and institutions, and the relation of the victimized group to the larger society (Alexander 11-24). Alexander calls “trauma process” this “gap between event and representation” (11). In this framework, cultural trauma can be defined, in Alexander’s words, as “occur[ring] when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1; emphasis added).

In the line of this constructivist argument, Alexander denounces what he calls the “naturalistic fallacy” (8), the notion that trauma can be identified with “events that shatter an individual or collective actor’s sense of well-being” (2). If (both personal and collective) trauma is “not something naturally existing” (2), it cannot be a natural response to overwhelming occurrences (2-10). Therefore, he criticizes the “realistic” (5) approach not only of accounts such as Kai Erikson’s, but also of psychoanalytical theories that posit that “the truth can be recovered, to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole” (38). Smelser’s other sub-category of collective trauma, “social trauma,” designates “social dislocations and catastrophes” that “massively disrupt organized social life” (37). Although both forms of large-scale traumatization can overlap, a socially traumatic experience does not automatically qualify as culturally traumatic and the other way around (38). In this light, the invasions of Turtle Island and Canada’s assimilationist ‘Indian’ policies can be viewed as both social and cultural trauma because the settlers damaged the social structures and institutions of most if not all First Nations and altered their norms, values, and cosmologies (see 37). There is further little doubt that most Native communities in Canada are aware –or ‘convinced’– of the harm that the colonists inflicted on their cultures and societies thanks to political events such as the birth of the modern pan-Indian movement in the 1960s (see Coates 34-36); the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord, the Oka crisis (see Anderson, Recognition 125), and the lawsuits for abuse in the residential schools (see Fournier and Crey 71-78; RCAP n.pag.).
and psychological equanimity restored, [...] ‘when memory comes’ ” (5) and that traumatic reactions derive from “the unwitting reenactment of an event that one simply cannot leave behind” (Caruth, qtd. in 6). Indeed, these arguments are still “root[ed] […] in the power and objectivity of the originating traumatic event” (6). While he remains aware that the “claim to verisimilitude” (9) lies at the core of “the very sense that a trauma has occurred” (9), he immediately adds that “as cultural sociologists we are not primarily concerned with the accuracy of social actors’ claims, much less with evaluating their moral justification. We are concerned only with how and under what conditions the claims are made, and with what results” (9). While Alexander evidences some concern for the political and moral need to acknowledge and memorialize past genocides, this statement exemplifies what Maracle views as mainstream sociology’s lack of responsibility towards real people.

Although Daughters does not deny the mediation of trauma by language, social categories, and cognitive processes, it develops the notion that some brutal happenings are automatically traumatic not only for the victims, but also for human and non-human witnesses. In the semi-mythological first part of the novel, the slaughter of (presumably) Coast Salish women immediately affects every single human and non-human person present:

The birds stopped singing and the very air above the women began to die. [...] Sweetgrass was stilled. The women’s blood stopped the grass from moving. Sweetgrass whispered to the ground below, “Be still,” then lay quietly under the women’s bodies. She prayed softly for a new tomorrow. The earth did not move. The small beings inside her black soil stilled. Westwind fell onto the bodies of the women
and lay there helpless. Eastwind, horrified, returned to the sea. [...] Exhausted and unable to fathom what was happening, she [Raven] too retreated, voiceless, to the base of an old elm tree. (18-19)

In accordance with holistic belief systems, Maracle describes how the unbalance of one part of the “circle of interdependency” (Alfred 42-43) between humans and all things destroy the whole circle (43-44). By describing sweetgrass, the winds, and the ground itself as entities endowed with agency and empathy, she broadens the collectivity affected by a traumatic event. All creatures and natural forces present develop symptoms of collective PTSD: overwhelmed by the absurdity of the murders and aggrieved by their own powerlessness, several entities react through “suppression of affect” (Smelser 45). From this moment onwards, speechlessness, stillness, and “emotional paralysis” (36) become leitmotifs.

Interestingly, the human witnesses’ reaction mirrors that of the stilled creatures rather than the other way around. Marilyn’s nameless female ancestor even acquires her chronic stillness not only from her physical and sexual abuse by the hateful men, but also from the instructions of animals and grass who attempt to protect her. As she lies on the ground, “[h]er body offer[ing] itself up to death,” Eagle and the “grass people” tell her to “[b]e still” (18). It is by staying motionless and slowing her breath that she is left for dead (18-19). The men of the neighbouring Nation that takes her in further develop the same kind of spiritual numbing tainted with the guilt of failing “to protect their relatives” (20) as the winds, Raven, and the ground. Thus, all the living beings who witness the genocide of the “still woman” ’s (22) Nation directly or indirectly
undergo instant traumatization. On the other hand, this passage also suggests that Maracle views traumas as mediated by culture at a basic level: indeed, the neighbouring tribesmen’s shock derives partly from their social role as protectors (Duran and Duran 35-37). Moreover, the non-human creatures also participate in the local cultures.

The “[h]orrific decisions” (21) that the epidemics force entire Nations to take disrupt social organization and the transmission of knowledge and further foster mutual distrust.

“ ‘We cannot take care of the aged’, and whole hosts of knowledge-keepers [die]. ‘We cannot take care of the men’, and young men [cease] trusting the women” (21). As a result, the air is “sour” with “chronic grief” (21). Each new human tragedy creates a ripple effect, contaminating the survivors, those who come into contact with them, and the extended families through mechanisms that mirror the spread of diseases: “[t]he women [pick] up the stillness of the survivors of each new holocaust. The men [pick] up the tension of failing to protect. Women t[each] babies stillness” (21). This phenomenon is reflected by the parallel structure of these three sentences as well as by their brevity and sharpness, which reinforce the sense of brutality and irremediability that this passage conveys. This “[e]conomy of movement” (22) and sound is a survival mechanism to escape bounty hunters, but it also kills expressions of fundamental emotions (21-28). Because death is so commonplace, people further stop caring about each other and about themselves (22-28); even the grasses “[s]top weeping for the women” (22). Thus, each link in the chain is repeatedly re-traumatized before anybody or anything has the time and ability
to mourn properly.

Through this process, the Native populations turn their backs on everything that they held sacred; as they abandon many of their most fundamental traditions (22-28), they “g[î]ve up their original being” (22). This reflects Maracle’s argument that “[g]eneration to generation the hurt of defeat accumulates in the consciousness of the colonized, until defeat itself becomes the norm” (*Woman* xi-x). All in all, the ‘pandemonium scene’ makes it seem as though whole cultures were going through a nervous breakdown. This scene paints an unnuanced picture both in its ‘European evil incarnates vs. innocent Natives’ binary and in its radical depiction of cultural loss, the latter verging on the “Vanishing Indian” stereotype (Francis 57). On the other hand, its semi-legendary status gives it the value of a general schema for the steps of Aboriginal collective trauma in North America.

Maracle’s narration and terms indicate that a more useful tool to understand her view of Native collective traumas is Duran and Duran’s theory of the “soul wound” (24). In their efforts to find a cross-cultural psychological model appropriate to each specific Amerindian worldview, they coin this term as a category that encompasses the specific colonial sufferings of the Natives and their sociohistorical context. As the cause of Aboriginal PTSD and depression symptoms, the soul wound can be viewed as a multi-layered trauma that permeates the “Native American collective psyche” (32). Within an American context that is largely relevant to Canada, they further argue that the Natives’ initial loss of relationships with their peers and “their daily world”
was compounded by the lack of “proper bereavement and grief process” (32), which the narrator of Daughters also stresses in the aftermath of the first carnage. “The grasses and stones and maybe even the humans could have grieved and recovered, *but it didn’t end there*” (21; emphasis added). The “collective soul wound” (45) thus takes an all-encompassing quality due to Indigenous holistic worldviews, which arguably demarcates it from other forms of collective trauma:

The core of Native American awareness was the place where the soul wound occurred. This core essence is the fabric of soul and it is from this essence that mythology, dreams, and culture emerge. [...] The manifestations of such a wound are then embodied by the tremendous suffering that the people have undergone since the collective soul wound was inflicted half a millennium ago. (45)

Furthermore, this concept cannot be fully understood without Duran and Duran’s notion of “intergenerational PTSD” (30, 43), which they largely derive from research on Holocaust survivors. Indeed, “[m]any of the dynamics in effect in the Jewish experience are similar to those of the Native American experience, with the crucial exception that the world has not acknowledged the Holocaust of native people in this hemisphere” (30). In the families of Holocaust survivors, “[u]ncompleted mourning and the depression and somber states of mind it created were absorbed by their children from birth on” (Shoshan, qtd. in 30-31). What is more, their children “experienced more PTSD than those involved in war whose parents were not Holocaust survivors” (31). Indeed, if a highly traumatized person does not finish healing, he or she will develop dysfunctional behaviours and his or her children will “grow up with fear, rage,
danger, and grief as the norm” (31).

*Daughters*’s view of the dynamics of perpetuation of trauma follows the same direction.

Since “threat” fills “the voice in motherhood” across the continent, the babies eventually get used to emotional and spiritual starvation and relate to the world accordingly (27). In this regard, the history of the still woman’s female lineage can be viewed as a synecdoche for this process. Her children are born “branded” with her emotional unresponsiveness (23); in particular, it becomes “her female descendants’ response to life’s critical events” (23). In Marilyn’s case, her father’s death works as a catalyst for her development of these intergenerational post-traumatic symptoms. When Anne shuts down in her bitterness and grief, the child “practices Anne’s stillness” (34) to such an extent that shell-shocked silence eventually becomes normal for the two of them. This spiritual numbing inscribes itself in their very bodies, thereby “blind[ing]” their skin’s “ability to feel its way through life” (35). This results in all-pervasive psychosomatic ailments and ‘bodily blocks’: “‘Don’t move’ bec[o]me[s] the command of Anne and Marilyn. […] Even the internal cellular movement of their bodies [i]s too thrifty” (35). This disconnection from the body further manifests itself in Marilyn’s chronic inability to breathe properly, worsened by her obsessive denial:

She knew about breath […] Breath should plunge itself into every nook and cranny of her lungs. Sometimes, though, […] it simply refused. She had long ago convinced herself that perhaps it was the air-conditioned room, the lack of natural air. When outside, she persuaded herself that her breathlessness was related to air pollution. […] Rationale after rationale helped her to avoid wondering why her lungs did not work.
This apparent e/motionlessness actually covers her constant inner panic (110, 120). Although Marilyn is one of the only genuinely socially engaged characters in the novel, her own apathetic state ironically mirrors that of the residential school survivors whose resignation she attempts to challenge. This syndrome of acute collective demoralization, which Marilyn calls “[r]esidential school hangover” (51), is another form of intergenerational collective trauma caused by endless strings of prohibitions and the welfare system as ‘spiritual legacy’ of residential schooling (55-56). As a result of generations of the “[e]verybody run away!” mentality in the residential schools (Woman 37), Marilyn thus encounters “[passive] opposition [from] her own people” (55) when she tries to raise consciousness about the protection of Native children. It is as if people were terrified of retaliation against all of them whenever “some courageous man [sic] utters words of encouragements or self-assurance in the face of colonial authority” (51). In fact, Marilyn herself is affected by the collective impact of the residential schools even though she went to public schools: she remembers being the only child in her village and feeling chronically lonely “from childhood right through her marriage” (185). Moreover, the absence of the younger generation clouded the whole village in a supplementary layer of all-pervasive silence and emptiness (183-85), which mirrors Fournier and Crey’s argument that the residential schools also brought a sense of guilt and uselessness to whole communities that were unable to defend their children and to teach to them (62). Although the
novel never states explicitly whether her parents went to the residential schools, it is further very likely that at least one of them did and that their inability to take care of a child and take ownership over their lives derives from this. In other words, Marilyn herself might be a ‘child survivor’ of the residential schools in a way similar to Jewish children whose parents went to the concentration camps.

The manifestations of collective, intergenerational, and individual traumas in Marilyn also affect her children. According to Duran and Duran, colonized individuals and populations react to hopelessness by internalizing the oppressor to reclaim power, which “is merely a caricature of the power actually taken from Native American people. At this point, the self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level tantamount to self-hatred” (29). This lack of self-worth can then be “internalized or externalized,” turned against the individual him- or herself or against an external object (29). Marilyn translates her “internalized hatred” (29) into alcoholism and suicidal thoughts when her husband Mat leaves her (60-62, 99-101). Her painfully detailed outbursts against her daughters illustrate the idea that Native domestic violence “can be interpreted as a venting of anger towards someone that is helpless and as a reminding of the perpetrator of himself [sic]” (Duran and Duran 29). Thus, her shame when she hits them paradoxically drives her to more brutality:

Marilyn loomed over Catherine, a wooden spoon in her hand.

“Bend over, bend over, or I’ll hit you wherever I can.” Marilyn’s voice was a horrific shriek. She hated herself while she was shrieking and determined to follow through
with the licking. “I promise to be good, Mommy, *Please don’t hit me, I’ll be good.*”

[...] Her hands shook with the coldness of the rage that seemed to be shooting into
them from the ball inside her belly. [...] She heard [Lindy] make grunting, fearful soft
sounds. [...] Marilyn swung, caught Lindy on the backside as she crawled. Lindy’s
back arced under the blow. (102)

The uncontrollable nature of her rage at Cat’s begging and Lindy’s fear emphasizes that
she cannot stand seeing her own terror and loneliness reflected in the girls (148). Indeed, she
dearly misses Mat but also bears a grudge against him because he deserted her and is frustrated
by her emotional dependency on an irresponsible, abusive man (104, 147-48, 161). In other
words, she attempts to obliterate the part of herself that she perceives as defenseless.

Furthermore, she resents her children for “challeng[ing] her paralysis” (109). Through their
energy and innocence, they make her feel worthless and all too aware of her inner death:

> Children are so alive. Some piece of Marilyn hated their aliveness, their very optimism.
> She hated hearing her children’s unconditional love for their father, who was out
> sleeping with who knows whom, drinking who knows what, spending the little money
> they had. She had too little love too share, and the little she had was twisted and hidden
> underneath this terrible hate, which froze every morsel of affection she had for herself
> and her life. (106)

Moreover, she “ha[s] no other picture of her aliveness but her violence” (109). Her ‘berserk
mode’ expresses in a distorted way her struggle to feel functional. As testimony to this, she often
“succumb[s] to a strange catatonic state” after she “decide[s] that she would rather die than hit
[her daughters] anymore” (113). This can be explained by one of the dynamics of internalized
abuse: according to Duran and Duran, colonized peoples undergo

> a splitting of the personality that is consistent with the level of trauma. The feelings of
helplessness and hopelessness are compounded to such a degree as to make the choice complete psychosis or splitting of the ego into at least two fragments. The split ego, then, will keep one aspect of the person in touch with the pain and one aspect identifying with the aggressor. (36)

In other words, the educational violence and emotional shutdowns show how dangerously close to the disintegration of her personality Marilyn is. In fact, her alcoholism and Elsie’s may be viewed as attempts at self-medication, as they may be using the “nonprescription drug alcohol” (Duran and Duran 39) to “anesthetize” anger and PTSD symptoms (152).

That Marilyn expresses self-hatred through the maltreatment of her ‘flesh and blood’ is also evidenced by echoes with her childhood. First, the ‘beating scene’ is juxtaposed with a memory of her stepfather Earl throwing her eldest brother Bobbie against the walls. The now-adult Marilyn even hears the boy plead in Lindy’s voice, “I promise to be good, Daddy. I promise to be good, Mommy. Don’t hit me, I’ll be good” (101). Second, her resentment towards Cat and Lindy who wait for their father day after day mirrors almost perfectly Anne’s impatience with her as a child waiting for Eddy (34). Furthermore, the image of a child struggling to “be good” so as to stop a parent’s abuse or neglect links many generations and places, as the first part of the novel shows two centuries of Turtle Island babies trying to plead with their threatening parents some sanity and care (27). Just after her father’s death, Marilyn herself attempts to catch Anne’s attention by showing her a picture that she drew (34). She is also haunted by the guilt of not saving Eddy because she believes that he “would […] have stayed” had she told him “how much [she] loved [him]” (193). When Mat disappears, he reopens this wound and leaves her
“promis[ing] to be good” if he only comes home (147). These scenes shed a sinister ironic light on Marilyn’s parenting style, as she reproduces the destructive patterns of Anne’s motherhood even as she can hear her five-year-old voice “screaming for her mother to come up with some mature feeling for her” (108). This network of familial influences illustrates the complex dynamics at work in the formation of intergenerational PTSD, and each outburst can thus be viewed as a microcosm of the pandemonium scene.

Her inability to stop abusing Cat and Lindy demonstrates the logic of scapegoating of internalized violence. Because Native individuals are hardly in a position to confront their oppressor, many project their frustrations on ‘weaker’ relatives (Alfred 34-35; Duran and Duran 29-30). However, the unconscious goal of this “identification with the aggressor” is “destroying the aggressor and restoring the community to a pre-colonial lifeworld” (Duran and Duran 37). For this reason, Maracle argues that this “lateral violence” is “about […] anti-colonial rage working itself out in an expression of hate for one another” (Woman 11). Marilyn herself comes to the realization that she “made war on her daughters” because “[s]he needed someone to punish” (235), a target less elusive than a whole system of oppression. Thus, the settler system works as a mechanism of self-perpetuation through the psychological damage that it inflicts. This illustrates the complexity of the colonial predicament and the ways in which it affects every element of the Natives’ daily life. Colonization, indeed, never stops being “such a personal process” as long as its legacy is alive.
To conclude, Maracle develops a cross-cultural psychological and sociological model to account for the dynamics of internal colonization that mainstream models tend to ignore. This enables her to investigate the ways in which Native collective trauma affects individuals because it permeates whole communities and can be handed down for several centuries. She further both adapts and subverts Western psychology to reflect a holistic worldview in which traumatic events impact systems in their entirety, whether it be the environment and beings that surround an act of brutality or the human self struck in all its bodily, spiritual, and emotional manifestations. In this respect, the depiction of a Sto:lo social worker’s dilemma when she realizes that her mainstream counselling tools may do more harm than good to non-Western clients can be viewed as metafictional in that it reflects Maracle’s effort to develop a culturally appropriate theory. Her resituating of psychology in a sociohistorical context and reinsertion of the human and spiritual in an overly technical, dispassionate discipline further shows similarities with Gone and Duran’s recommendations. However, one might wonder to what extent her unveiling of the collective psychic wound is productive, as Daughters describes a universe where everything has suffered massive traumas.
As it does not gloss over any of the colonial cruelties and internalized abuse that haunt many communities, *Daughters* tells a daunting saga of destruction, pain, and murder. Yet, this is only one facet of the novel, which is primarily recovery writing. Indeed, Marilyn’s healing journey stresses the possibility for victims-turned-perpetrators to reclaim their agency and integrity. Although she abuses her daughters, she is also a generous woman with a genuine social commitment. Her physical and psychological survival in spite of a past of stark poverty, racist incidents, and severe traumas further testify to her courage and inner strength. In this respect, the novel does not categorize abusers according to categories of neuroses and psychoses, but presents them in a nuanced way as ordinary people with a spiritual sickness, which entails the possibility of healing. Thus, *Daughters* examines the interconnected notions of personal and cultural resilience. The theme of healing also emphasizes the need for Native individuals and communities to confront their traumas and “mov[e] beyond the psychology of grievance” (Mercredi, qtd. in Fournier and Crey 208). Maracle views this acceptance of past catastrophes as integral to personal and collective recovery, as it enables one to build the future by learning from the horrible actions that cannot be undone.

### 4.1 Writing as Trauma Mastery: Maracle’s Cultural Work

In their development of treatments for Native clients who struggle with a history of trauma and
self-destruction, Duran and Duran quote Nietzsche as saying, “there is nothing worse than suffering without meaning” (qtd. in 148). As a result, deriving meaning from catastrophic events is already to come to terms with them at a basic level. In *Daughters*, Marilyn similarly believes that “there is power in naming”; this sentence practically becomes her mantra and underlies most of the novel. In a context where the Natives were denied knowledge in the residential schools and through the internalization of degrading stereotypes, unveiling the root causes and ramifications of their collective sufferings can be a powerful subversive weapon. This implies that even Marilyn’s fragmentary knowledge is a fundamental part of the solution: it would be in the colonizer’s interest to keep Aboriginal people dysfunctional and unable to understand the historic and systemic nature of their wounds. Without this ability, they are as it were condemned to leap into the trap of lateral violence; as Maracle argues in her poem “Hatred”: “Blinded by niceties and polite liberality / we can’t see our enemy / so, we’ll just have to kill each other” (*Woman* 12, l. 10-12).

In this respect, politicized arts such as Maracle’s can help not only make sense of the cultural harm done by the residential schools and welfare services, but also channel the rage, shame, and fear that many Indigenous readers must be experiencing. For theoreticians such as Ron Eyerman and Taiaiake Alfred, this is where the power of artistic creation lies for colonized populations. In the context of African American identity politics, Eyerman argues that “movement intellectuals” (63) play a crucial role in the “meaning struggle” (62) that collective
trauma entails. For him, “movement intellectuals” (63) “mediate between the cultural and political spheres that characterize modern society, representing and giving voice not so much to their own ideas and interests, but rather articulating ideas to and for others” (63). Indeed, “a traumatic tear evokes the need to ‘narrate new foundations’ ” (63). Thus, minority artists and scholars contribute to “memory work” (66) and create a “metanarrative” about self, ethnicity, and history that gives cohesion to the community (66).

This view of artists as social mediators is congruent with Maracle’s description of “cultural work” as codification of forcefully silenced historical traumas and as attempt to achieve ideological changes. In this regard, the Kanien’kehaka (Mohawk) political scientist Alfred contends that the idea of an “indigenous intelligentsia” of “writers, philosophers, teachers, and artists” is “actually very traditional” and empowering (142). For him, Indigenous societies traditionally had strict qualifications and rituals for “teachers and wisdom-keepers”; moreover, the individuals who fulfil these roles should by no means supplant “the traditional elders and healers” (142). He further explains that these intellectuals have a very practical function within the movement for self-government, as they enable “[s]tructural and psychological decolonization,” which “is an intellectual process as well as a political, social, and spiritual one” (142). Indeed, he argues that colonialism has resulted in the broad-scale “loss of [Native Canadians’] ability to think for [them]selves” (142), with the result that many leaders and communities have to “rely on others to think for them” (142).
In this framework, the work of Native authors, musicians, painters, and filmmakers is a political task of reaffirmation, re-creation, and revitalization and thus, of collective healing (“Grassroots” 45-47; Eyerman 63). For many Native artists and critics, art is not secondary to land claims but constitutes another facet of the same anti-colonial fight: since cultural expressions were forced underground through the residential schools and potlatch bans among others, the creative process is central to reclaiming a voice (Anderson, *Recognition* 142) and rekindling Native pride and courage, without which sovereignty cannot exist:

> How can we have self-government without joy, without arts? You can’t have a building spring up one day – a government house with a whole bunch of politicians running around – without pride. You have got to have arts. You have got to reclaim your identity. You have got to have song. And that is something I would love to see more of. (Arnatsiaq, qtd. in Anderson, *Recognition* 144)

In this regard, Maracle explicitly underlines the cathartic potential of her works in “Oratory”: “[b]y using story and poetry I move from the empowerment of my self to the empowerment of every person who reads the book” (14). The expected healing, then, is located at at least three levels: she writes to recover from the perpetual violence of racism, her characters grow through challenges and self-questioning, and an ideal reader should heal vicariously or at least, have learnt something vital by the time s/he closes the book. In this regard, characters such as Marilyn can be viewed as models: she may have a less-than-palatable past, but she perseveres despite the tremendous pain that recovery first brings.
4.2 Marilyn’s Self-Rediscovery Quest

4.2.1 “Indian Sick” (Fournier and Crey 44): Marilyn’s Need to Heal

However, she first “never seem[s] to get past th[e] first question” concerning “what [...] happened” (57) because she constantly sabotages her own efforts, as naming the root causes of her own issues would mean confronting her past mistakes and challenging herself. For a woman like her whose childhood seems to have been a nightmare, it would also involve awakening painful memories. This pattern of avoidance and repression reflects Maracle’s idea that what is the most painful is not the trauma itself but the recovery and ‘working through’. In “Pathways,” she explains this through the metaphor of a fresh cut that only starts hurting when the flesh mends (169). She goes on to say to the white interviewer that

[s]ocial pain and social healing is not any different. For you to become a racist was painless. For you to un-become and become something new is going to be excruciating. Just like me to become self-racist is painless. The shame part was easy to learn, easy to internalize. The un-becoming is very, very difficult and very painful. But it’s healing and there’s no other way to heal. (169-70)

For Marilyn, escaping from herself and most of the memories constitutive of her personality would indeed bring less anguish, yet she knows that she cannot run away forever and that this attitude will not improve her relationship with her daughters. On the other hand, the hurtful nature of recovery also entails that Marilyn’s violent personal crisis has a deeper, more empowering meaning. Her disquieting visions and posttraumatic flashbacks are “the chaotic images that, when examined, w[ill] point her to the road of transformation” (39). Her
‘symptoms’ even coincide with what Crey, himself a Sto:lo, calls being “Indian sick”:

In our [Sto:lo] society, when you are ill or feeling discomfort, you are described as being “Indian sick,” which means that spiritual forces are at work in your life. In order to understand these forces, you must return to spiritual teachers. The elders believe the voices and spirits that non-medical experts might diagnose as a profound mental illness are in fact an expression of the cultural estrangement so many of us have suffered.

(Fournier and Crey 44)

This reinforces the inadequacy of Western psychopathological categories: Marilyn is neither schizophrenic nor insane, but actually in the process of recovering from the sedimented impact of colonialism on her own life. Similarly, her so-called ‘hallucinations’ derive from the help of non-human entities and familial spirits. However, she first needs to listen to the content of her visions to derive meaning from her past. Only by transcending the pain can she surpass herself to reach a higher state of being, or rather her deeper, genuine self.

4.2.2 Starting Again: Marilyn’s Holistic Reconnection

In A Recognition of Being, Anderson argues that for “[w]omen who are working in the Aboriginal healing movement [...] rediscovering a sense of purpose is critical for the well-being of our individuals as well as our nations” (202). She adds that each person on the earth “has a purpose or a reason for being” (201); however, hardships can disconnect them from it:

When we were born, we knew the reason for why we came. But, for many of us, remembering is difficult because our true selves are covered over by the memories and feelings associated with the painful experiences in our lives. The spiritual task before us requires us to work our way back through all of those experiences to uncover our true selves by remembering who we are and what our gifts are. (Hill, qtd. in Recognition 202)
Anderson further argues that uncovering this fundamental self “is an act of recognition, a physical, spiritual and emotional remembering that can link us back to our ancestors and to a time when Native women were uniformly honoured” (9). She views the decolonization of Aboriginal womanhood as the key to collective recovery (115) and divides it into four steps: resisting negative definitions of Native womanhood, which “is, at the same time, resistance to colonization itself” (115); reclaiming one’s traditions and origins (157); “reconstructing Native womanhood” (193), which involves “mak[ing] sense of how ancestral traditions can fit into our modern lives” (193); and acting based on knowing one’s responsibilities (229). This self-(re)definition can further be summarized by the four questions “Who am I?”, “Where have I come from?”, “Where am I going?” and “What is my responsibility?” (16).

In Marilyn’s case, she is acting to decolonize institutional structures and the Native Canadian family, yet she tackles the problem from the wrong end as long as she does not start by knowing herself. Anderson argues that for Turtle Islanders, “[y]ou have to know where you come from to know where you are going” (15). Like her breath, the protagonist’s knowledge of her origins and ancestry is shallow and lacks personal involvement. While “What is my responsibility?” is probably the only question that she would be able to answer, she mainly feels accountable towards the First Nations in relatively abstract terms. This does not invalidate her efforts, but rather means that she needs to start again on a healthier basis.

In order to reclaim her agency, she first needs to overcome her patterns of denial and
rationalization. This struggle forms most of the plot, as she oscillates between fooling herself and glimpses of acceptance. She eventually realizes that the-Devil-made-me-do-it excuses hurt her the most because they disempower her and leave her children with sterile answers:

“‘I’m doing the best I can’ is a response from a mother to a child, not a mature response to anything. Our responses to the calls of children have not grown in the direction of victory.” The words from her presentation dried in Marilyn's mouth. “Dumb catchphrases of defeat,” she whispered. (108)

Marilyn’s inner conflict is reinforced in a darkly ironic way by the fact that she uttered these wise words at a presentation that she gave and is aware of her failure to apply them to her own life. Although she is on friendly terms with her daughters, she knows that they are still suffering. Since she wants to “mend all the bridges [...] between them” (245), she eventually decides to become fully accountable for her misbehaviour and to overcome her tremendous shame and guilt, unconstructive feelings that constantly bring her back to the path of denial:

Since she had authored this condition, she was responsible for altering it. [...] What the hell does responsible mean, anyway? she asked herself. [...] Responsible: ability to respond appropriately. Defensiveness and guilt would help no one. They were inappropriate responses. She felt lighter, energized, and even hopeful. Everything is fixable. (141)

As Northwind thinks to himself earlier in the novel, “there c[an] be redemption if she actively accept[s] what she ha[s] done” (115). She cannot change the past, but what matters is her present relationship with her daughters and how they are going to prepare the future. In other words, a more honest exchange with her daughters might bring a form of reconciliation. But before all, Marilyn needs to forgive herself and to accept herself with her flaws.
Her fundamental problem can be understood as her being out of touch with her own sacredness or holistic self. According to Anderson, “[a] key place to begin reconstructing self is with the understanding that we are all sacred beings” (194). Counsellors Alannah Young (Cree / Anishnaabe) and Denise Nadeau express this through the notion of “sacred vitality,”

the feeling of energetic connection with one’s own sacredness, with the earth and with others in community, a feeling of being fully alive. This aliveness allows one to “stand one’s ground” in experiencing one’s rootedness in a web of relations. Sacred vitality supports transformation, affirms collective strength and sacredness in the face of oppression, and creates new forms of power and non-violent embodied ways of being in this world. (3)

Like Duran and Duran’s model, this worldview considers the body and spirit as inseparable (3). When violence and cultural destruction interrupt the “flowing of energy between sacred beings and the Creator” (4), a Native woman experiences these losses “in her body” (4): “her body-spirit has lost touch with its connections to its relations” (4). As a result, healing “involves restoring these connections in the body and repairing the network of relations” (4-5). The “restoration of sacred vitality” can thus be viewed as “a form of decolonization” (3).

In this light, it should not come across as a surprise that Marilyn experiences her major existential crisis at several levels, from the spiritual to the social to the familial to the bodily. These aspects of her person are all interconnected and influence each other dynamically. Her sexual awakening is of particular significance, as it partly stems from her political convictions, growing self-acceptance, and new awareness of her loneliness. When she meets the Mohawk activist T.J., her whole being awakens instantly (151). As Westwind, the warm wind of passion,
tickles her skin, she becomes aware of her whole body and longing for “[l]aughter [...] with a man” (174):

His [Westwind’s] breath caressed, wandered, stopped and searched for some fissure in Marilyn’s stillness. [...] Her skin wanted to free itself of its own version of Westwind’s breath coming up from somewhere inside her womb [...]. [...] Her body sought liberation from the layers of old caution her mind seemed to hold tight to. The moment her mind disconnected, her skin took the opportunity to push through the cracks in the armour, opening up to Westwind’s breathy presence. Once inside, her desire slipped gracefully from its drumhead prison, floated in and out her cells at will. (156-57)

This spectacular falling in love thus changes Marilyn’s body image and relationship with Westwind, whose benevolent presence she denies for most of the plot. Although she resists his attempts to “[father] [her] in the direction of free being” (157), she eventually manages to breathe as well as feel beautiful and fully alive when she thinks about T.J.:

T.J. is Marilyn’s Westwind. He is a moment of awesome aliveness. He inspires oneness. His presence tugged at her every cell, lined them up, opened her musculature. Light shot between each cell, blood rushed in, cleaned up old, toxic places, and restored breath inside every part of her being. [...] She rose – stood up soft, supple and tensile, and for the first time she saw herself. Marilyn saw sinew and blood, muscle and bone. [...] For the first time she felt strength: its powerful surge filled her up. [...] She felt her lips swell and looked right at them, loving the image of their fullness [...]. (211-12)

This marks the beginning of the restoration of her sacred vitality; this new use of the ‘cellular leitmotif’ suggests that she is being regenerated at the microscopic level and lit with “internal light” (212). To neutralize the trauma, she is creating a “counter-memory of non-violence” and of feeling good in her body (Young and Nadeau 7). As Cherokee writer Marilou Awiatka argues, sex is “part of the generative power of the universe” (qtd. in Anderson, Recognition 199). Marilyn’s positive sense of her sexuality also counteracts the residential
schools’ negative teachings about sex and womanhood (*Recognition* 75-78, 199-200) as well as the stereotyping of Native women as debased (195); her awakened sexuality enables her to start caring about herself and to break free from her cycle of self-destruction.

Added to her self-questioning, this emotional and physical renewal also allows her to reconsider her past. As she admires her “Salish pout” (212) in the mirror, she remembers her aunt and sisters “marveling at [her] ability to pout” while “Momma picked her up, nuzzled her, pride texturing her laugh” (212). Similarly, her realization that she is “afraid to love” (191) T.J. because she has been abused by many men (189) makes one of her early memories of Eddie resurface: “follow[ing] Daddy around the house,” she watches him “buil[d] things for the house” and “engag[e] in touch [with her mother] when they th[ink] she [i]sn’t looking” (192). The fact that his spirit appears to her in her living room and picks up young Marilyn to “introduc[e] her to each room of her [former] home” suggests that she has always had a home and a family who cares about her (192). Because she was so focused on her feelings of abandonment, she had remembered her parents one-sidedly as unfeeling and abusive, but she seems to come to terms with their mistakes. By extension, she is beginning to accept her image of herself as a parent and her daughters must have good memories of her. This reclamation of agency also influences her political activism because it leads her to decide that “the key to sorting this [the problem of maternal dysfunction] l[ies] inside the women themselves” (199) and that she is “going to let [her]self care” about Elsie (199).
4.2.3 “Daughters Are Forever”: Confrontation and Renewal

The restaurant scene shows Marilyn’s daughters as challenging her child-rearing techniques for the first time, but also as very loving and open to dialogue. While Marilyn thinks that her erratic behaviour has “demolished the arc of the bridge their relationship had been standing on” (227), the confrontation soon turns out to be a very cathartic episode:

> The can of baby snakes opened up. The snakes crawled in every direction, wriggling, hurrying away from Marilyn, threatening to escape before she could name them. […]
> “Momma, are you trying to say we are all adults here and we should […] respect whatever choices we make independent of all the rules you set up for us for the past two-and-a-quarter decades? Snake one. Lindy was going after them all […].
> […]
> “Yeah,” Cat said, “Unless you have some giant with a wooden spoon stashed under the table, […] we’d best work on the basis of an agreement. […] And of course, we are more willing to discuss this than you imagine.” Cat – quiet, well-behaved Cat – had found her tongue. Worm six. (227-29)

The snake metaphor evokes toxicity and abuse at a superficial level but acquires more positive meanings throughout the novel. While it is explicitly associated with lateral violence (23) and crippling doubt (26), it also “creates genius within our minds” and “reveals […] helpful doubt” (207). In this light, the baby snakes that escape from Marilyn may stand for her traumas and fears that resurface then are alleviated when her daughters criticize her. Although Marilyn views the crawling reptiles as representing a disaster that spreads in her family, Lindy and Cat are actually helping her by naming out loud each of the shameful memories that she cannot identify.
and deciding to talk them out with her. 10

As a result, the two young women subvert Marilyn and the readers’ expectations by not attempting to punish Marilyn: they are clearly worried about her and want to have a conversation that will liberate the three of them from “two-and-a-quarter decades” of communication breakdown and missed opportunities. Furthermore, this small-scale crisis serves as the necessary trigger for their reconciliation, since Marilyn wanted to apologize to her daughters but could not muster the courage to bring up the issue. When she breaks the spoon in front of her daughters then “whisper[s] words of comfort” (233) as they weep, she thus symbolically admits her past wrongs and shows her intent to have a healthier relationship with them. This performative episode further enables her to understand that she is not so much looking for a strong reconnection with her daughters as for one with herself: she realizes that she “ha[s] always felt the love” for her daughters (234) but that she expressed it inappropriately. Through the comparison of affection and food, she understands that her “spiritual cannibalism” of her daughters (232) stems from her “hung[er] [...] for herself” and “to express love to them in the way she felt it” (234). This analogy further makes her aware that if she can love herself, she will not need to vampirize her children and will develop a more balanced relationship with them.

Both Marilyn’s personal growth and her daughters’ ability to understand and potentially

10 The culturally specific meanings of the snake metaphor in a Sto:lo context would deserve further research. I also wish to thank Alannah for ‘brainstorming’ with me the possible interpretations of this image in Daughters.
forgive her point to their formidable resilience, “that ability to overcome the most serious
psychic trauma and emotional wounds” (Cyrulnik n.pag.). For Cyrulnik, this skill derives both
from “inner resources” and from “outer resources” or “resilience support mechanisms” (n.pag.).
The former emerges as follows:

[W]hen a child is raised in an emotionally stable environment, he [sic] acquires this
early preverbal confidence [...] which means that if problems arise, he will receive the
“first blow,” he will suffer, he will be unhappy, he could even be depressed, but he will
have deep within him the feeling that he has been loved, and therefore that he is
lovable, and this will enable him to keep hoping and to bounce back. (n.pag.)

In Marily’s case, her ability to ‘bounce back’ probably originates from her positive early
memories of her parents and siblings. Moreover, she had Ta’ah, the great-grandmother who
constantly challenged her but whose “[e]verlasting love” was always a given (183). The
narration further suggests that all Native children are born with “the body memory of origin”
(27), the cultural and ancestral memory that knows about love and about the “original promise”
that pushes people to build families (26-27). As these inner vessels of cultural resilience,
Marilyn’s cells are repeatedly described as longing to regenerate and express her inner truth (49,
127, 140, 212, 242). After destroying the spoon, she can even feel her cells and blood “cry out”
for family, for renewal, and “for the restoration of the magic breath between herself and her
children” (242). As Plains Cree artist and former adoptee George Littlechild argues, “the soul
cannot be robbed unless we allow it. There is always innate genetic material that couldn’t be
damaged; it’s passed down and remains deep within us. That’s why as a group of people we’ve
survived” (qtd. in Fournier and Crey 114). This is another way in which personal and collective resilience are interdependent in *Daughters*.

Catherine and Lindy further prove to be largely unaffected by Marilyn’s symptoms of abnormal stillness. They do suffer from PTSD and present a certain “voiceless[ness]” (230), but they are described as impish, dynamic, and assertive (220-21, 246-47), which suggests that they did not inherit the still woman’s disorders thanks to their habit of relying on each other.

Moreover, their substitute mother, the seer and healer Dolly, acted as a resilience support mechanism when she “helped [them] to find [them]selves when [they] were teenagers” (248). Although the novel only reveals little about her, she is very likely Salish herself and probably passed some of her own culture down to them. She further “helped [them] to carry on loving [Marilyn], despite the memories” (248). The readers can speculate that she contextualized Marilyn’s behaviour and told them not to judge her.

Dolly works as the most powerful healing and unifying factor between Marilyn and her daughters at the very end of the novel. The fact that Lindy and Cat decide to disclose Dolly’s existence to their mother and to introduce them indicates how deeply they now trust her. The ‘open ending’ weaves together the different threads of Marilyn’s initiation: she is shown walking towards Dolly’s house arm in arm with her daughters, vaguely aware of Southwind’s “chortling with joy” (247) and ready to learn the elderly woman’s understanding of culture and politics (250). The river that they are following is further significant, as it is very likely the
Fraser, from whose original name, “Sto:lo” (“river”), the name of her Nation derives (Carlson 24). One could hardly think of a more appropriate return to the roots, especially since Dolly’s house reminds Marilyn of Ta’ah’s. Marilyn even remembers a traditional story that Ta’ah once told her and that concludes with the line “[s]ometimes to go forward you have to go back to the beginning” (250). This reinforces the idea that Dolly’s house “w[ill] be a kind of beginning” for the three women (250) and that Marilyn is growing attuned to her original self. The baby that Catherine is bearing (246) will therefore probably be the first generation since the silent woman not to be born with accumulated intergenerational traumas. This new beginning will also repair ancient wounds, as “[s]ome medicine people have equated the treatment process as one in which we not only treat the client but are also treating our ancestors” (Duran and Duran 154). Cat and Lindy’s resilience and vivaciousness seem to influence Marilyn’s recovery; similarly, the three of them may be healing the silent woman, to whom they are unconsciously connected. This connection between all parts of a female lineage is one of the possible interpretations of the title. Finally, “Daughters Are Forever” suggests that Marilyn can always count on Cat and Lindy’s unconditional support and that she has achieved reconciliation both as a mother and as a daughter.
5 CONCLUSION

To conclude, *Daughters* is a journey for the reader whatever his or her background and ethnicity. This densely written novel tackles a large number of interrelated issues, from colonialism to institutional practices to family life to one’s connection to the earth’s life processes. As a result, it invites or rather forces reflection, provoking the reader to face the brutality of Canadian history and Western history as a whole. The “unresolved human dilemmas” on which it closes leave many unanswered questions at the levels of self, community, politics, and relationships between all parts of ‘reality’. The fact that the ending leaves Marilyn’s healing journey incomplete suggests that recovery and self-redefinition are always an ongoing, incomplete process and that before the ‘finish’, it is this very evolution that matters the most. As such, it invites the readers to continue Marilyn’s personal and social struggles in their own lives. “If you’re frustrated with this ending, then do something about it in the concrete world!” could be its message to the reader who is used to Western conventions. While one can infer that Marilyn and her daughters will find peace with themselves and each other even if the path to recovery hurts, much remains to be done to heal Native Canadian communities and make their sovereignty effective. As a result, one can call the ending realistic, since it shows all the loose ends that exist in the real world and the fact that it will take time, probably generations, to solve the deep-seated social problems created by colonization and racism. It also demonstrates the fact that collective empowerment is impossible without individual maturation and that decolonization starts with the self.
This also entails that *Daughters* asks its readership to what extent it has decolonized itself. Reader, what have you learnt from this narrative? How are you going to heal? What is your personal involvement in social issues? How does policy influence your life? What do you want to repair in your life? What past or present violence haunts you? Is there anything you want to make amends for? What is your responsibility to the ones around you and to the future? In particular, this last question stands at the core of the novel. In a world affected by a lack of accountability and a “pattern of unconcern” (*Daughters* 91) towards the earth and other human beings, Maracle shows that someone’s problem is everyone’s problem. In other words, Canada cannot liberate itself from its own destructive ideology as long as it exploits Aboriginal people; similarly, acts of dehumanization and violence against a particular group insult humanity as a whole (see *Bobbi Lee* 240-41; *Grassroots*). While many minorities and colonized countries have acquired rights in the last fifty years, Fanon’s words about “the explicit reality of feeling oneself responsible for one’s fellow man [sic]” (89) remain topical:

[I am] [r]esponsible in the sense that the least of my actions involves all mankind. Every action is an answer or a question. Perhaps both. When I express a specific manner in which my being can rise above itself, I am affirming the worth of my action for others. Conversely, the passivity that is to be seen in troubled periods of history is to be interpreted as a default on that obligation. (89)

Arguably, the idea that we as humans are all responsible for our words and actions and need mutual care in our relationships is a meaningful lesson to be derived from traditional Native knowledge and the ‘cultural workers’ who express it (see Alfred xiv, 63, 91-95). This suggests
that we need to stop the hatred and polarizing debates, try not to pass judgements on others, and that the Western world needs to find ways of negotiating diversity and international relations that avoid “‘threat of other’ psychology” (“Ramparts” 162).

Finally, *Daughters* also raises the question of how collective and familial traumas can be perpetuated in unseen ways for several centuries. This pattern probably exists in numerous places and cultures, and one might wonder to what extent “chronic grief” defines everybody without their knowledge. In particular, Europe has a long and complex history of wars, invasions, and massacres from which its diverse populations may or may not have healed properly.\(^\text{11}\) This might

\(^{11}\) For example, my own involvement in *Daughters* as a Heinz 57/‘white’ Belgian female reader led me to think about the fact that World War II and possibly World War I have had a very concrete impact on my life even though I was born almost forty years after 1945. For example, my late maternal grandfather was a war veteran and resistance fighter (apparently widely considered as a hero, but we only learnt this after his death in 2000!) and his invisible wounds were just an ill-understood fact of life when I was growing up. He often met with friends from his regiment in a veterans club, but they never disclosed much about the war itself. They were practically a part of my extended family, but there was always this missing part of the puzzle, as they mainly focused on humorous anecdotes in front of the younger generations. Also, one of my maternal great-great-grand-uncles was executed by the Nazis for being in the resistance; I only got to know him through fragmented accounts, and he had no children either. They say that his brother was present when he was arrested and that he made him a sign to pretend they did not know each other so that the brother would not be killed with him. The prevalence of such stories in my family and in my home neighbourhood indicates how much they haunt the present. After at least two generations sacrificed in the World Wars and the survivors living with little or no therapy, it should not come across as surprising that my generation and my parents’ inherited massive traumas that must have influenced the whole social organization and family life of Belgium. Given than in a span of a little more than two thousand years, Belgium was invaded by the Romans, the Spanish, the French, and the Dutch among others, the amounts of trauma that must have been passed down unconsciously over the centuries are truly terrifying. I also realize that I know very little about the aboriginal populations of Belgium, some of whom must have been my ancestors. Although I do not think that these cultures left no traces, the social structures and cosmologies of these Gaulish and Germanic peoples seem to have been dissolved by centuries of cultural genocide. In the future, I want to learn more about my own history to continue my
partly explain the insane barbarity that has characterized the treatment of Indigenous and minority populations of the world by diverse European nations—in fact, it might even explain colonial ideology itself. On the bright side, Maracle strongly believes that one can come to terms with traumas by confronting them and mourning them properly. Maybe the Western world as a whole needs to grow up and find peace with its own violent history. For Maracle, “oneness with humanity” is not only possible but a fundamental human desire than often gets obscured by violence, pain, and fear. Thus, maybe our greatest responsibility as readers is to come to terms with ourselves and to restore the lost or broken connections with our fellow human beings.

research and life with this awareness. Working with Aboriginal Canadians has also taught me to ask for permission, and I applied this principle by showing this footnote to my mother to ask for her approval concerning the contents.
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