

# Intersections of Diaspora and Indigeneity

## The Standoff at Kahnesatake in Lee Maracle's *Sundogs* and Tessa McWatt's *Out of My Skin*

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. (Maracle, "The 'Postcolonial' Imagination")

The Okanagan word we have for *extended family* is translated as "sharing one skin." The concept refers to blood ties within community and the instinct to protect our individual selves extended to all who share the same skin.

—Jeannette Armstrong, "Sharing One Skin': Okanagan Community"

**Sundogs** (1992) by Salish / Métis writer and activist Lee Maracle and *Out of My Skin* (1998) by Guyanese Canadian writer Tessa McWatt are among a small number of narratives written in Canada set during the standoff at Kahnesatake.<sup>1</sup> The paucity of texts concerned with this national crisis and with five centuries of colonial injustice is surprising. As Kim Anderson notes, in "Canada, many Native people refer to the Oka crisis as a turning point in their lives" (125). Further, many Indigenous communities were afflicted by the "post-Oka blues" as Maracle portrays them in *Daughters are Forever*. The "implosion that follows resistance" (152) might be partly responsible for the reluctance of Aboriginal writers to treat the standoff in fiction. The fact that very few non-Aboriginal Canadian fiction writers have addressed the standoff seems to corroborate assessment of Anishinaabe writer Richard Wagamese that "[t]here is much to learn from the fractured relationship between natives and governments up to now and there will be much more to learn from the era we enter together

now” (75). In his 1996 essay, Wagamese claims that the conflict has not yet been resolved: “the Mohawks did not surrender”; “the rule of law did not prevail”; “the situation [was] not over”; “the standoff did not end peacefully”; “the biggest criminals walked away”; and “the Canada we felt we knew has disappeared forever” (75-76). Miscommunication, misconceptions, and racism continue to fuel confrontations between Aboriginal people, other Canadians, and the Canadian government as Idle No More (established in 2012) has proven.<sup>2</sup> As one of the most significant events in contemporary Canadian history, the Oka standoff seemed to imply that “Aboriginal peoples neither assimilate nor succeed: they are forever a skeleton in the closet of Canadian ambitions” (Barsh 284). As Russel Lawrence Barsh argues, “Canada owes its conscience to the fact that Aboriginal peoples have not disappeared, but remain as witnesses to the efforts of successive waves of immigrants to create a country—witnesses who have grown increasingly outspoken and critical” (284). While the relationship between Canadians and Indigenous peoples and their histories has traditionally been constructed by mainstream Canadian society as a relationship between the descendants of the first settlers from Britain and France and Indigenous peoples, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and racialized minorities in Canada, particularly those from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean remains less clearly defined. Whereas the official political discourse has focused on reconciliation, affiliation and solidarity in the struggle against oppression and colonization have been the objective of racialized minority groups in political and academic debates and in cultural and artistic production.<sup>3</sup>

In recent discussions of contemporary Canadian literature concerned with settler-colonial / Indigenous relations, the focus has shifted from treatments of the appropriation of Indigenous materials by mainstream writers—including the “stealing of Native stories” as Lenore Keeshig Tobias called it in 1990—to the exploration of cross-cultural alliances between Indigenous and racialized diasporic peoples. Rita Wong’s groundbreaking article “DecolonizAsian: Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature,” in which she discusses Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*, Tamai Kobayashi’s *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction*, Hiromi Goto’s *The Kappa Child*, Marie Clements’ *Burning Vision*, and Lee Maracle’s “Yin Chin,” addresses the possibilities of Asian Canadian alliances with Indigenous peoples in the struggle against decolonization (159). Other Canadian critics have also been concerned with the complex intersections of diaspora and indigeneity, in an attempt to challenge conventional notions of the former as associated

with mobility, hybridity, and heterogeneity, and the latter with dwelling in place, relation to land, and kinship communities. Among those critics are the contributors to *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada*, notably Sophie McCall in her analysis of Gregory Scofield's *Singing Home the Bones*, which connects forced Aboriginal relocation and genocide to Jewish diaspora and the Holocaust, and Renate Eigenbrod in her discussion of "spatial and ideological diaspora" (136)—terms she adopts from Cree scholar Neal McLeod—in Richard Wagamese's texts. In their investigation of relations between postcolonialism, diaspora, and indigeneity, the editors are keenly aware of Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua's observation that "critical race and postcolonial scholars have systematically excluded ongoing colonization from the ways in which racism is articulated. This has erased the presence of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing struggles for decolonization, precluding a more sophisticated analysis of migration, diasporic identities, and diasporic countercultures" (130). Such exclusions have also left the issue of the complicity of racialized diasporic groups in the ongoing colonial project unaddressed. Critics today seem to agree that any discussion of intersections between diasporic and Indigenous peoples needs to proceed with an awareness of crucial differences between them, and that more work needs to be done to theorize the relationships between diaspora studies and Indigenous studies.<sup>4</sup> By bringing *Sundogs* and *Out of My Skin* together in conversation, I hope to contribute further to unsettling the binaries on which the construction of Canada's diversity rests and to encourage new ways of looking at relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada.<sup>5</sup> According to Rita Dhamoon and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Canada is characterized by its unique combination of four major internal differences:

that between an indigenous population and a settler population; that between whites and nonwhites; that between European groups (French and British origin or French speakers and English speakers); and that between immigrants and native-born. Combined, these internal differences mean that Canada is not only a 'country of immigration' but also a 'nation-state' which also contains 'stateless nations' in its borders. These stateless nations include Indigenous peoples (some of whom are organized as First Nations) and the Québécois in the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec. (164)

In their discussion of the standoff at Kahnesatake, the two authors claim that "the presence of Mohawks from across Canada and the US was especially seen as a threat to the nation-state because the Mohawks (and other Indigenous peoples) rejected the legitimacy of colonially defined national borders, and

because of fears that alliances would be strengthened among Mohawks” (175).

By reading the texts through a diasporic lens, I argue that *Sundogs* and *Out of My Skin*, written in the direct wake of the “crisis,” portray the standoff to challenge notions of national identity, sovereignty, citizenship, and belonging. The term diaspora is often used to mean dispersal and dislocation and evokes the notion of a homeland with which the dispersed community continues to maintain close relationships or even sustains notions of return. While diaspora criticism needs to examine the temporal and spatial specificities of each of the diasporas under consideration (Jewish diaspora, South Asian diaspora, Palestinian diaspora) in any discussion of intersections between them, reading two very different types of “diaspora” experience on Turtle Island First Nations / Métis and Afro-Caribbean Canadian in dialogue with each other is productive for several reasons. Both texts rewrite notions of “home” and “homeland” and emphasize the importance of cross-cultural alliances in nation building. Rather than discuss Asian / Aboriginal affiliations as most of the novels representing contact between diasporic and Indigenous people do, these two texts use Africa and the Caribbean as reference points to challenge white dominance. Maracle, whose work has been inspired by Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), explains that she is particularly interested in Fanon’s “ideas on Native / settler relations and the connections between colonialism and neo-colonialism” (Bobbi Lee 194). Such ideas are echoed in *Sundogs* and in her second novel *Ravensong* (1993).<sup>6</sup> By showing how an Indigenous family lives a diasporic life in the city (the text is set in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside), Maracle challenges the dichotomies of immigrant and native-born as well as notions of Canada as nation-state. Similarly, in her novel *Out of My Skin*, McWatt explores intersecting histories of black diasporic and Indigenous marginalization, trauma, and (de)colonization, as she shows how alliance-building across cultures can facilitate new and different dialogues about the meaning of “home” and the implications of belonging in Canada. Furthermore, the notion of “diasporic community” is challenged in McWatt’s transracial adoption narrative, reminding the reader of the diversity of diasporic perspectives and the complex issues around the possible expectation that a diasporic writer and / or protagonist might speak for a particular community. In her discussion of mixed race and adoption, McWatt also challenges the dichotomies of white-non-white and native-migrant. In addition, both novels emphasize the importance of language and voice in the process of (de)colonization, as they decentre the white reader by using unsettling narrative strategies and focus on the emotional and

spiritual growth of their young female protagonists as they interact with the urban environment.<sup>7</sup> Both texts can profitably be read allegorically as the standoff initiates the protagonists' political awakenings and changes their notions of Canada. The fact that both books are written by women and focus on the experience of their female protagonists further highlights the intersection of gender and race in considerations of diasporic subject positioning.<sup>8</sup>

Here I am indebted to Anishinaabe scholar Jean-Paul Restoule's argument that "many urban Aboriginal people may be seen to share the characteristics or dimensions of commonly accepted diasporic populations" (21). Restoule further claims that "urbanization of Aboriginal people in the twentieth century, an attempt by settler states to encourage the cultural assimilation of Aboriginal people, has led many Aboriginal people in urban areas to resist assimilation, in the process creating diasporic identities" (21). Drawing on the criteria proposed by William Safran, who reserves the concept of diaspora for groups held together by an identifiable historical trauma, Restoule maintains that urban Aboriginal people satisfy most of his criteria: dispersal of a population "from an original center to two or more peripheral regions"; "retention of collective memory of the homeland"; "partial alienation from the host society"; "aspirations to return to ancestral homeland"; "commitment to the maintenance or restoration of that homeland"; "and derivation of collective consciousness and solidarity from a relationship with the homeland" (25). *Sundogs* in particular demonstrates that ties between land, language, and identity can be fostered in urban spaces. The text also undermines the stereotypical association of the reserve, rural spaces, and the village with tradition, and the city with assimilation. Moreover, a diasporic reading of *Sundogs* highlights Maracle's affiliative politics and her views on Indigenous nation building. The public resistance of the MLA from Red Sucker Creek, Manitoba, Elijah Harper, to the Meech Lake Accord in June 1990 and the Oka standoff itself strengthen the self-esteem of the Aboriginal characters in *Sundogs* as the characters' relationships with each other are transformed.<sup>9</sup> The text suggests that Aboriginal families have suffered because Aboriginal men have been divested of their masculinity through repeated acts of colonization.<sup>10</sup> As Marianne observes: "[o]ur men have been denied work, denied their role as providers, governors of our destiny" (101). The decolonization process Maracle's characters engage in while in the urban environment of Vancouver facilitates a resurgence of "manhood" as well as a revival of Indigenous knowledge. The characters' growing awareness of the possibilities of sovereignty enables them to reappropriate the urban space by

establishing an Aboriginal community in the heart of the city, by reclaiming their voices, and by revitalizing Indigenous languages. The emphasis of the text, however, is on reclaiming female leadership. While *Sundogs* considers both the role of the warrior and the wise Elder, the latter personified by Elijah Harper, it stresses the importance of a new generation of well-educated female knowledge holders.

Twenty-year-old Marianne, the youngest of five siblings, was three years old when her Métis mother moved her family from “the village” to the city after her Okanagan husband’s premature death: “[m]y mother moved to the city because life in our tiny village not far from Vancouver had been too hard. I realize now that she never intended to integrate herself or any of her progeny into the social fabric of white Canada” (195). Marianne is alienated from her mother and her older siblings Lacey, Rita, Rudy, and Joseph. Repeatedly referring to herself as “the only social idiot in the family,” she is aware of how her university education has affected her social and cultural values and consequently her ability to communicate with her relatives. Toward the end of the narrative, Marianne discovers that her family decided not to share traditional knowledge with her and not to teach her Cree and Okanagan—the languages that they occasionally speak amongst themselves—to help facilitate her integration into the mainstream education system. Through a series of transformative experiences she unlearns acting “white,” assumes responsibility for her family and community, reconnects with the ways of the Elders, and is able to speak her mother’s language: “I could hear my Momma’s language coming through my mouth and it felt damned good” (210). The transformative family events described in the text include the birth of Rita’s twin girls, the death of Lacey’s teenaged daughter Dorry, Marianne’s participation in the Okanagan Peace Run from Oliver in British Columbia to Oka, and Momma’s purchase of a house. The way in which Maracle connects these events is indicative of her interweaving of novelistic discourse and oratory. The narrative concludes by showing Marianne as fully integrated into her family and prefigures her future role as knowledge holder.

The birth of identical twin girls symbolically stands at the beginning of all subsequent events in the text. It is reminiscent of the Haudenosaunee creation story, according to which daughter of Sky Woman gave birth to male twins who were endowed with special creative powers. According to some traditions, one of the twins believed in diplomacy while the other believed in confrontation. Throughout *Sundogs* these two options are weighed cautiously against each other. Maracle also uses character

constellation and imagery to explore notions of “twinning” in this carefully crafted text. *Sundogs* refers to the “mixed” ethnic background of Marianne and her siblings, Métis and Okanagan, as a “twinning of separate nations” (205). The image of the sundogs, from which the text derives its title, is central to the narrative. As Marianne reminisces, “[w]hat was that story that Minnesota boy told us about sundogs? ‘Impossible images reflected under extraordinary circumstances.’ Sundogs. Twin suns; twins image my family, my mountain home backdropped by twin mountains with twin peaks, made of twin sisters” (191). According to Catherine Rainwater, “the lore of tribal pairs emphasizes balance (versus Eurocentric hierarchy) or harmony of opposites (versus western dualism)” (110).

While the birth of her sister Rita’s twin girls, the death of Lacey’s teenaged daughter Dorry, and Momma’s purchase of a house are the transformative family events described in the text, Elijah Harper’s inspiring act of resistance contributes to an even greater degree to Marianne’s social and political awakening. Although the community celebrates Elijah Harper’s victory, the events around the Oka standoff as described in the novel lower aspirations for a stronger brotherhood among Aboriginal peoples and greater understanding between all Canadians. As Marianne comments: “Does it always have to go that way—just at the moment when togetherness is possible, the ghost of white men invades the small space between you and erects an invisible wall dividing you. We can’t love each other and now they are out there bulldozing graves for a golf course” (135). The “extraordinary circumstances,” the military intervention, and the violence and racism launched against Aboriginal people during the standoff represent another in a series of historical breaches of the Kaswentha, the Two-Row Wampum Treaty, which envisioned Aboriginal self-government and a coequal relationship between settlers and Aboriginal peoples. Those who join the Peace Run in the novel emphasize the need for a peaceful solution to the standoff, but there are also calls for sovereignty. Marianne observes: “They talk a lot about sovereignty, and this confuses me. I came here to stop the army from killing Mohawks. . . . I want to promote peace” (181). After the runners are greeted with racial slurs and pelted with stones by an angry crowd in Ontario, Marianne has a vision when arriving at Paise Platte. She sees a dark figure running alongside her and wonders if this figure could be a “young voyageur from Montreal” who found her here “running his journey home” (198-99). The experience of the Run motivates Marianne to reconnect with her heritage. The intention of the runners was to witness the events in person and report to Aboriginal communities on the

way back home, but the organizers stop the Run before the runners reach Oka. They say it is to protect them and those at the barricades. *Sundogs* is particularly concerned with the manipulation of the truth by the mainstream media and their construction of the dangerous and violent “Indian” in the shape of the masked and gun-toting Mohawk warrior. Much of the interaction between family members in the text happens against the backdrop of the events covered on the television screen. As Kiera Ladner observes, “[t]he ‘Oka Crisis’ was different—it was televised. We were all there, watching, emotionally wrought as it happened from the comfort of our living rooms. But like many Americans say of the Vietnam War, for the first time, it was if it were happening in our living rooms. Thus, from coast to coast to coast and to the coasts beyond that, for many the ‘Oka Crisis’ was a personal experience” (310-11).

Drew Hayden Taylor’s “A Blurry Image on the Six O’Clock News” (2005), one of the few other texts by Native writers, dealing with the standoff, focuses, like *Sundogs*, on the role of the media. In that story, the divorce of an Ojibway man named Richard Spencer and an Irish Canadian woman named Lisa signifies the deepening rift between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Canadians as the events of the standoff unfold. The story is told from the perspective of Lisa who spots Richard on TV “prowling somewhere in the crowds of Oka” (235). Puzzled by the unexpected political activism of her ex-husband, she blames the accidental death of his brother Donnelly for Richard’s transformation and estrangement from her. Unlike Richard, Donnelly did not move off the Otter Lake Reserve and remained connected with his heritage. The story ends with Lisa seeing Richard once again on the TV screen: “He was walking in the distance, toward the general direction of the camera. But somebody was with him, walking beside him. A woman. A Native woman. And he was holding hands with her” (243). Rather than perpetuating the monolithic media image of the militant Mohawk warrior, the news report in Taylor’s story concludes by focusing on a couple holding hands and walking peacefully toward the camera.

In *Sundogs*, Momma smashes the TV with a rock, expressing her frustration with the biased national media coverage as it sensationalizes the violence and criminalizes Indigenous people. Earlier on in the text, Marianne describes her mother as always fighting the good fight although the odds have always been against her (81): “There are their weapons: organized violence, conquest by sword and musket, organized child stealing through the school system and the Child Welfare Act, apprehension, terror, defamation of national character, racism, alcohol poisoning, imprisonment,



hanging, language and cultural prohibition, total racial invalidations. And our weapons? We have but one: dogged insistence on truth” (81). Both texts also emphasize the importance of reconnecting to traditional ways and portray relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as marred by miscommunication.

Taylor’s short story also shares another plot element with *Sundogs*: the tragic accidental death of a close relative, which seems to be a common theme in post-Oka literature and, as such, is perhaps a symptom of the “post-Oka blues.” Ruby Slipperjack’s *Silent Words* and Alexie’s *Porcupines and China Dolls* similarly hinge on a death in the family. This family member is sometimes portrayed as having the gifts of a visionary and healer. The loss of such a person is thus particularly profound for the community, but it often also initiates healing. In *Sundogs*, Marianne’s sixteen-year-old niece is a visionary painter whose trademark technique is superimposition. As Marianne observes, “[s]he has this one particular painting I am curious about. A solitary black woman, sweet and innocent, is silhouetted over an [I]ndigenous woman, also young and innocent, in the foreground. Behind them the illusion of crowds and picket signs, with no writing on them, makes the background” (85). Dorry explains to Marianne that the two women are protesting apartheid. The painting captures a moment of African and Indigenous women’s solidarity in the parallel battles against racism and colonization. Another painting shows “what she imagines Khatsalano’s village to look like, and layered over it is a bunch of apartment buildings. . . . Khatsalano’s village is actually a line drawing, while the new apartments that crowd the old location are superimposed on the village in water colour” (18). Dorry’s graphic technique is reminiscent of Pauline Johnson’s narrative strategy in *Legends of Vancouver*, in which she juxtaposes colonial and Squamish perspectives to undermine assumptions of colonial dominance. Marianne, who looks at the painting through the lens of a sociologist, is puzzled by Dorry’s vision and needs her help to understand it.

Dorry also comes to Marianne’s aid when she commits one of her social blunders when in front of a stranger she asks her brother and her sister-in-law why they are not having children. When “disappointment in [Marianne’s] complete alienation from [her] family hangs thick in the air around [her]” (113), the young woman defiantly declares, “I am going to paint us young people clutching at the edges of the chasm, barely hanging on, and our elders will stand away from the chasm with their backs half-turned. Between our elders and ourselves, I am going to paint cities, red with

war, and between it all, coming magically from the whole centre of the work, I am going to paint Marianne, one hand pushing up on the city and the other hand reaching out to the young and old” (116). This imagined painting envisions Marianne overcoming her lack of purpose and her alienation from her family and community and assuming the role of a spiritual leader who will be able to bridge cultural divides thanks to her European education and her gradual refamiliarization with Indigenous knowledges. Dorry dies in a car accident shortly after sharing her vision. Her death brings the family together for a traditional funeral as it inspires Marianne to join the Peace Run and Momma to buy a house for the family.

The fact that Marianne’s mother buys a house in the city is not a sign of assimilation, but of the consolidation of family and community. Having left her village to provide an economically better life for her five children, “[s]he wants to take Canada on. She wants to be a citizen, a citizen who adds her own cultural stamp to the garden of flowers that blooms in the urban centres of the country” (115). Like her oldest daughter Lacey, Momma creates diasporic community within the heart of Vancouver. Pondering the differences between Lacey and her own continuous negotiations between the non-Aboriginal world and that of the Indigenous community, Marianne observes, “[y]ou re-created a village in the middle of Vancouver, a village full of Natives from all kinds of nations, all sorts of occupations . . . all of them bronze, with cornhusk and violins in their voices” (168-69). Although the family does not plan to return to the village and remains removed from its land base, it maintains links to “homeland” by reconnecting to ancestral heritage in the city. According to Restoule, “[t]his lost connection to land is what urban Aboriginal people face and is a key difference in the makeup of their diasporic identity. While in the city, they form identities based on traditional values, but they are in many ways as disconnected from the (home)land, as all diasporas are” (31). Moreover, as Dorry’s painting of Khatsalano’s village shows, urban Aboriginal people often find themselves minorities in what was once the traditional territory of another community, as Marianne’s family lives on the unceded traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples. Restoule contends that “when Aboriginal people are pushed and pulled into cities, it leaves the reserve community with fewer people, fewer potential leaders, and fewer contributors to the strength of the community” (26). In Maracle’s novel, Marianne is fully aware of these colonizing forces:

Land. Land. We are landless. The land dribbled through our hands in moments when disease and hunger rendered us impotent. Royal Commission laws. There are

so few Indians left in this village that this commission recommends appropriation of the land and the transfer of the remaining stragglers to another reserve. They became few in numbers because disease, induced artificially, killed them. (163)

Elijah Harper's "no" and the standoff at Kahnésatake have had profound repercussions not only for the Aboriginal characters in the text, but also for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. The narrative concludes with Marianne's proud recognition of her mother's participation in a demonstration and the fact that she raised her voice publicly for the first time: "[t]his is my Momma's country and she can do just exactly what she wants to in it" (218).

Like *Sundogs*, *Out of My Skin*, concludes with an affirmation of voice and identity. In her novel, McWatt remaps the urban landscape of Montreal and juxtaposes this crucial moment in Canadian colonial history with (de)colonization in another part of the Commonwealth. The novel "compares" in a "non-competitive" (Rothberg 3) way the individual and collective traumatic experience of Afro-Caribbean Canadians with that of Indigenous peoples and suggests a way out of situating diaspora and indigeneity at opposite ends. McWatt's awareness of the limitations of the "comparability" of racialized minority and Indigenous trauma, oppression, and forced assimilation is apparent in the construction of her protagonist's biological, racial, and cultural background. Daphne, who as a small child was adopted by a white Canadian couple named Jennifer and Bill Baird, receives no parental guidance of how to be non-white in a predominantly white society and initially has no knowledge of her biological and racial background. She gradually learns that "comparing" her own "dislocation" with that of the Aboriginal activist Surefoot's ignores the differences between their experiences. At the beginning of *Out of My Skin*, Daphne is literally "out of her skin" as she engages in self-mutilation and attempts suicide after finding out that she is the offspring of an incestuous relationship. She is also metaphorically "out of her skin" in not knowing her kin and her own racial background. As a thirty-year-old, Daphne leaves Toronto to extricate herself from a dysfunctional relationship, hoping "to be absorbed into a foreign, cosmopolitan city, but she felt more and more as if she had marooned herself in an island village" (65). To her disappointment she discovers that "the languages of two empires [are] still fighting a colonial war" while recent immigrants live in their own cultural niches. From a Torontonians' perspective, Montreal seems to be just as "foreign" to Daphne as "the Mohawk crisis" (65). Daphne learns from Sheila Eyre, the Guyanese

Canadian sister of her birth mother, that Muriel Eyre committed suicide shortly after giving birth to her. Not surprisingly, these revelations unsettle the protagonist who is already confused about her identity. The character reminisces about how when she was in second grade, the teacher asked the class if anyone knew what a “Negro” was. When one of Daphne’s classmates responds with “yeah, Daphne,” the teacher observes: “No that’s different. Quite different. . . . What are you, anyway, Daphne?” (16). Her adoptive father’s response is irritated and evasive: “You’re a Canadian, and don’t you let anyone tell you otherwise” (16).

Questions of her racial identity become even more vexing when she receives information about her birth mother. Revealing the name of her biological mother, the agent at the Adoption Registry comments, “[g]ood name she had . . . Eyre . . . very good name” (10). He adds, “‘British Guiana, now Guyana’ . . . a country of many cultures, Chinese, African, Indian, Portuguese, British, as though explaining Daphne to herself” (10). Daphne’s multiracial ancestry makes it more difficult to fit in because being of mixed race is not a notion easily accommodated by Canadian multiculturalism, which acknowledges Canadians’ right to identify with the cultural traditions of their or their ancestors’ country of origin while being a Canadian citizen. The hyphen, a by-product of the implementation of multiculturalism, thus links ethnic and national identity as in German-Canadian, Haitian-Canadian, and Japanese-Canadian. This kind of hyphenation is based on notions of racial and cultural homogeneity. For example, it does not easily accommodate a person of Aboriginal and Chinese Canadian identity. When Daphne and her aunt Sheila first meet, her aunt asks her what “hyphenation” she used before discovering her racial background: “‘I mean, what was your hyphenation? I have a friend, a lady from home—she makes me laugh. She says, ‘In dis country it’s important to have de propa’ hyphenation. . . . Now you know your hyphenation. West Indian-Canadian. What did you used to say?’” (81). Daphne’s mixed-race background also raises questions about the investment of racialized settlers, and more complicated, of mixed-race settlers in Canada’s colonial project. As a result of her confusion, Daphne passes through various stages of ethnic impersonation during her childhood and adolescence. Mistaking West Indian for “Indian,” that is, South Asian, she “fashioned saris out of bed sheets and wore them around the house, saying words like *curry* and *tandoori* over and over like a mantra” in recognition of a homeless West Indian man who accompanied her home after she got lost in the park (20). This phase was followed by a fascination

with things stereotypically Native in response to reading and absorbing Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. She and her friend dress up as "Indians" and speak in a secret language to each other. After she grows up and returns to an old copy of *Hiawatha* in her Montreal apartment, Daphne defiantly observes that Longfellow's "noble savage" has little to do with the images of the "militant Mohawk warriors" (69). She continues, "these were the quiet people she knew, not those defiantly boisterous others on the television behind her" (McWatt 70).

Both textual and television images of Indigenous people rely on the performance of ethnicity not unlike Daphne's own. According to Amelia Kalant, it was the warriors' masks that were particularly upsetting to settler society and the government because they "hid' the true purpose and intention of the warriors" (242). Further, Kalant maintains that "only in hiding themselves and refusing to look the part, could the protesters move beyond the fantasies of Indianness that had been projected onto them by Canadianness" (242). However, when the masks were removed, Canadians "could back away from" the related question "about who was Indian" and what was "nativeness" (242). The novel also plays with notions of "masking" of identity and portrays stereotypical perceptions that members of the dominant society have about those who look different. One of Daphne's white colleagues attempts to talk her into joining the protesters by emphasizing the importance of the visibly "ethnic" (143) support at the barricades. Moreover, Daphne remains unaware of the fact that, as the text seems to imply, the Indigenous people of Guyana might well be among her ancestors. When they first meet, Surefoot observes that Daphne's features remind her of those of Indigenous people in the Mississippi Delta: "A Delta gal, you look like to me. There're some Indians there look like you" (14). Ironically, her adoptive father, oblivious of this potential connection, refers to her as "his own little Hiawatha" (70), both exoticizing his adopted daughter and making her "more familiar" by projecting the romanticized notion of the "Indian" onto her. McWatt shows here how members of white Canadian society in their discomfort with racial and cultural otherness employ strategies to "familiarize" the unknown in a process that blurs differences between Indigenous and diasporic identities rather than making appropriate and constructive connections between them.

In addition to representing different responses from non-Aboriginal locals to the standoff—ranging from active support of the Mohawk blockades to setting "Indian effigies" on fire (181)—the novel gives voice to an Indigenous

perspective through the character of Surefoot. Daphne meets Surefoot at the Adoption Registry where she, as a residential school survivor, hopes to locate her parents. However, unlike Daphne, she remains unsuccessful in her search. As Surefoot observes, “too many different tribes . . . they didn’t keep the same records” (11). The Registry’s response indicates that Indigenous children were either not considered important enough for proper record keeping or that records have not been made available in an attempt to cover up acts of abuse and violence committed at the schools. Surefoot herself is the survivor of severe physical abuse. Large parts of her body remain scarred from burns inflicted by one of the nuns at the school. Yet the question of biological origin does not seem to bear much weight for her. She explains to Daphne: “A Mohawk friend told me it didn’t matter what tribe I belonged to” (99). Daphne repeatedly turns to Surefoot for guidance and eventually joins the protesters at the Mercier bridge blockade only to witness four soldiers lifting her into a truck: “Surefoot wasn’t struggling, but from her face Daphne could see she was channeling all the weight of her ancestry into every cell of her body” (181). At the end of the novel Daphne demythologizes her own identity by no longer thinking of the Greek gods as her “real family” and by no longer attempting to find clues to her own existence in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Similarly she decolonizes her image of “Indians,” acknowledging that the reality of the Mohawks protecting their ancestors’ land has little in common with the images of Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*. Daphne’s emotional growth and political awakening enable her to enter into a relationship with *her* (my emphasis) Rochester, a Québécois produce vendor of Italian descent.

What makes Michel a welcome suitor is his question “Where’ve you been?” (90) rather than “where are you from?” when they first meet, challenging notions of migration and autochthony. Walking toward Michel at the conclusion of the novel, she announces “I’m here” (208). She achieves this new sense of belonging by having received information about her biological parents as well as about Guyanese history, underlining the importance of the past in understanding the present. By discussing similarities between Indigenous people’s stolen lives and history and those deprived by history through slavery, *Out of my Skin* points at two of the pillars of white supremacy. Early on in her quest, Daphne explores her roots by seeking out a Caribbean grocery store. Intrigued by an unknown vegetable, okra, she asks the store owner how to cook it. Amused by this unexpected question, the woman responds: “you could boil it, fry it, mek a coocoo wid it” (6). Daphne quickly leaves the store, but the woman’s

accented voice stays with her. She later associates the voice with that of her birth mother, and it eventually becomes her inner voice. Daphne's journey of "coming home" through voice and story begins when a West Indian homeless man finds the eight-year-old girl, having wandered off, one night in High Park. He accompanies her back to her parents' house telling her a Jamaican trickster story on the way. It is this chance encounter that awakens Daphne's curiosity about her own racial background and arouses her interest in mythology, albeit ancient mythology. As in *Sundogs*, storytelling is a vehicle for cultural transmission. It links successive generations with each other and creates "home" in a cultural sense. According to Michael Rothberg, "our relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the present, but never straightforwardly and directly, and never without unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other. When the productive, intercultural dynamic of multidirectional memory is explicitly claimed . . . it has the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice" (5). In this sense, *Out of My Skin* suggests that "multidirectional memory," that is, the memory of trauma—however distinct—suffered by people in various places of the globe inflicted by colonization, relocation, violence, and racism facilitates the coming together of diasporic and Indigenous groups. The settler-native dichotomy on which the discussion of decolonization in Canada and in other settler societies is sometimes based is portrayed here as being unhinged by the racialized, mixed race, diasporic subject who was adopted by white Euro-Canadian parents.

Although *Out of My Skin* encourages readers to think critically about how racialized minorities are complicit in the colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada and how issues of racial discrimination and exclusion experienced by African and Afro-Caribbean Canadians cannot be separated from colonial legacies that continue to affect Indigenous peoples, it hesitates to fully imagine the implications of such complicity. After having been carried away by the soldiers, Surefoot disappears from the text. Daphne goes on a canoe journey and gets lost in the Canadian wilderness where for the first time she identifies with Bertha Mason rather than with Jane Eyre, and where she buries her father's diaries, which record the physical and emotional abuse that he suffered in a mental asylum in pre-independence Guyana and which disclose her parentage. Her experience of being reborn in the bush is reminiscent of the experience of other protagonists of Canadian novels, which, as Labrador Métis scholar Kristina Fagan has argued, represent their protagonists as "going native" in an attempt to feel at home on the North American continent (251).

Yet the plot of *Out of My Skin* deviates from the formula of the typical “Indian novel” in that Daphne goes on her journey without an Aboriginal guide and thus somewhat complicates the stereotype of the “Indian” as feeling at home in the wilderness. The fairy tale ending of *Jane Eyre*, where the governess marries and transforms the cold-hearted master, has left many critics dissatisfied, particularly those who read the novel from a feminist perspective. Perhaps the equally puzzling ending of *Out of My Skin* is meant to remind us of the Victorian novel’s conundrum of reconciling tensions reflective of the tumultuous time in which it is set and in which it was written—not unlike McWatt’s.

The fact that only a small number of Aboriginal texts portray the standoff at Kahnésatake and that, to my knowledge, *Out of My Skin* is the only text by a non-Aboriginal writer to do so surprises in light of the significance of the event for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. As Kalant observes “[n]ational crises are those instances in which an entire web of myths threatens to be pulled apart: a tearing of a strand in which the skeins of other stories are so closely interwoven that the major presuppositions of nation are cast into doubt. Oka was not about a simple binary relationship of Native-Canadian, but involved the myths about Canada and the United States, Canada as a Northern nation, Canada and Quebec” (4-5). Both texts by Maracle and McWatt subvert notions of the status quo by unsettling the binaries on which the construction of Canada’s diversity has rested in their representations of the standoff at Kahnésatake. *Sundogs* “marginalizes” white society while Aboriginal identity is affirmed by “reclaiming” Vancouver and by reviving traditional knowledges in the city. *Out of My Skin* disrupts the notion of the “two solitudes” by acknowledging the role of both Aboriginal and racialized diasporic peoples in nation building. Although *Sundogs* was published twenty-two years ago and *Out of My Skin* came out sixteen years ago, the conflicts that the two novels portray are still with us. Their promotion of Indigenous and diasporic alliances resonates with recent critical and cultural production.

#### NOTES

- 1 The resistance carried out by people from Kahnésatake, Kahnawake, and Akwesasne began in the spring of 1990 with the intent of peacefully blocking the expansion of the Oka golf course into the Pines, a small piece of land that the people of Kahnésatake had been fighting to have recognized as theirs for at least three centuries. The conflict escalated in the summer of 1990 in a seventy-eight-day armed standoff in Kahnésatake, Kahnawake, and the non-native town of Oka between the Mohawks and other bands, and the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP, and the Canadian army. Jordan Wheeler’s “Red Waves,” Richard



Wagamese's *A Quality of Light*, and Drew Hayden Taylor's "A Blurry Image on the Six O'Clock News" are among the few texts that discuss the conflict.

- 2 According to Kiera L. Ladner, "[r]egardless as to whether the message was ever really heard, at the time, it was impossible for Canadians and Indigenous people alike not to think about the cost of action and inaction" (302).
- 3 The contributions to *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* focus on shared experiences of relocation, colonization, and genocide. As Georges Erasmus, a Dene man from Yellowknife and President of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, explains: "the subjects of historical wrongdoings and redress, healing, and reconciliation have many localized variants, among them the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War and the demolition of Africville in the 1960s" (vii).
- 4 Yet Indigenous scholars seem to have been reluctant to explore intersections between diaspora and indigeneity with the same enthusiasm as their non-Aboriginal counterparts in light of growing interest in Indigenous literary nationalisms. See "Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism? Critical Approaches in Canadian Indigenous Contexts—A Collaborative Interlogue" in *Cultural Grammars*. Lee Maracle seems to be reluctant to subsume Indigenous literatures under a transnational CanLit project. This is clear in her contribution to *Trans. Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, "Oratory on Oratory," in which she, as the only Indigenous scholar included in the volume, expresses concerns about the institutionalization of diaspora.
- 5 My position as a white German-born academic inadvertently shapes my reading of these texts and limits my perspective. I would like to acknowledge Renate Eigenbrod's complex and thoughtful deliberations about her own positioning vis-à-vis Indigenous texts.
- 6 The title of Maracle's *Sojourner's Truth* pays homage to Sojourner Truth, the African-American abolitionist and women's rights activist.
- 7 *Sundogs* is not strictly speaking a "novel" in the conventional sense of the word. Maracle points out that in her writing she tries "to integrate two mediums: oratory and European story, our sense of metaphor, our use of it, with traditional European metaphor and story form" (*Sojourners* 11).
- 8 As Lily Cho reminds us, diaspora "is not about membership, but about a raced and gendered condition of melancholia and loss which is intimately related to the traumas of dislocation and the perpetual intrusion of the past of this trauma into the present" (174).
- 9 The Premier of Manitoba needed unanimous approval for ratifying the Accord. Harper refused to give his consent on the grounds that Aboriginal people had not been consulted or recognized in the constitutional discussions around the Accord, and so initiated procedural delays in the legislature. When the Legislative Assembly adjourned, it had not voted on the Accord.
- 10 In referring to "Aboriginal," I do not mean to imply that there is only one Aboriginal culture or people.

#### WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Kim. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Toronto: Sumach, 2000. Print.
- Armstrong, Jeannette. "Sharing One Skin': The Okanagan Community." *The Case Against the Global Economy*. Ed. Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1996. 460-70. Print.
- Barsh, Russel Lawrence. "Aboriginal Peoples and Canada's Conscience." *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture*.

- Ed. David Newhouse and Cora J. Voyageur. Vol. 1. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005. 270-91. Print.
- Cho, Lily. "Dislocations and Diaspora: Reading Evelyn Lau's *Choose Me*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 32.1 (2007): 173-91. Print.
- Dhamoon, Rita and Yasmeeen Abu-Laban. "Dangerous (Internal) Foreigners and Nation-Building: The Case of Canada." *International Political Science Review* 30.2 (2009): 163-83. Print.
- Eigenbrod, Renate. *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*. Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2005. Print.
- Erasmus, Georges. "Introduction." *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*. Ed. Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011. vii-x. Print.
- Fagan, Kristina. "Adoption as National Fantasy in Barbara Kingsolver's *Pigs in Heaven* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*." *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture*. Ed. Marianne Novy. Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 2004. 251-66. Print.
- Johnson, E. Pauline. *Legends of Vancouver*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1920. Print.
- Kalant, Amelia. *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka: Native Belonging and Myths of Postcolonial Nationhood in Canada*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Kim, Christine and Sophie McCall. "Introduction." *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada*. Ed. Christine Kim, Sophie McCall, and Melina Baum Singer. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2012. 1-18. Print.
- Ladner, Kiera L. "From Little Things." *This is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades*. Ed. Leanne Simpson and Kiera L. Ladner. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2010. 299-314. Print.
- Lawrence Bonita and Enakshi Dua. "Decolonizing Antiracism." *Social Justice* 32.4 (2005): 120-43. Print.
- Maracle, Lee. *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*. Toronto: Women's, 1990. Print.
- . *Daughters are Forever*. Vancouver: Polestar, 2002. Print.
- . "The 'Post-Colonial' Imagination." *Fuse Magazine* 16.1 (1992): 12-15. Print.
- . *Sojourners and Sundogs: First Nations Fiction*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1999. Print.
- . *Sojourner's Truth & Other Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1990. Print.
- . *Sundogs*. Penticton: Theytus Books, 1992. Print.
- McWatt, Tessa. *Out of My Skin*. Toronto: Riverbank, 1998. Print.
- Rainwater, Catherine. "Intertextual Twins and Their Relations: Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* and *Solar Storms*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.1 (1999): 93-113. Print.
- Restoule, Jean-Paul. "Urban Aboriginal Migration in North America: A Diasporic Identity?" *Transforming Diaspora: Communities Beyond National Boundaries*. Ed. Parmita Kapadia and Robin E. Field. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2011. 21-36. Print.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009. Print.
- Taylor, Drew Hayden. "A Blurry Image on the Six O'Clock News." *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past*. Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2005. 225-43. Print.
- Wagamese, Richard. *The Terrible Summer: The National Newspaper Award-winning Writings of Richard Wagamese*. Toronto: Warwick Publishing, 1996. Print.
- Wong, Rita. "DecolonizAsian: Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature." *Canadian Literature* 199 (2008): 158-80. Print.