

# Jolanta Dziuba

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## Dehumanization of Canadian first nations in the context of indigenous methodologies as reflected in the works of Lee Maracle

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Jolanta Dziuba  
University of Silesia

**DEHUMANIZATION OF CANADIAN FIRST NATIONS  
IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES  
AS REFLECTED IN THE WORKS  
OF LEE MARACLE**

**Dehumanization**

This article is a part of a larger project that examines the phenomenon of dehumanization affecting Indigenous peoples of Canada and their cultural heritage with a specific reference to the Salish people of the West Coast of Canada as explored in the works of Lee Maracle. I focus on different ways of dehumanizing the First Nations by the dominant White culture on the basis of Lee Maracle's writings and, what is more, I inquire into the practices undertaken by Indigenous peoples in order to rehumanize their communities and bring their dignity back while breaking the silence. Above all, taking into consideration Maracle's Salish origin, I emphasize the significance of rehumanization achieved through the rediscovery of Aboriginal women's knowledge which is crucial in the Salish tradition.

Here I concentrate on the phenomenon of dehumanization as one of the many processes of colonization. Presenting the steps of colonization on the basis of the essay "Processes of Decolonization" by Poka Laenui, I examine cruelty and dehumanization as colonial practices carried out to deprive Indigenous peoples of their sovereignty and dignity. This work presents the methodologies either created or adopted by Indigenous authors. I explore not only the creation of new research methods but I also consider closely the modification of Western paradigms both adopted and adapted by Indigenous scholars and writers within the context of Aboriginal communities. Simultaneously, this text analyzes the non-Native methodologies proposed by Renate Eigenbrod in *Travelling Knowledges* as an important contribution to the process of overcoming the Eurocentric approach of a reader and critic. Furthermore, I provide justification of my choice to take Lee Maracle's texts as a focal point. I give all my attention to her works which probe into the

phenomenon of dehumanization, its impact on Indigenous nations and on the methods of resistance introduced from the perspective of a Salish woman.

“Dehumanization is the psychological process of demonizing the enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment. [...] Any harm that befalls such individuals seems warranted, and perhaps even morally justified” (Maiese). To dehumanize means to: “strip of human qualities” (*Webster’s New* 263) or “deprive of personality or emotions” (*Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* 172). All these definitions carry a similar message about these ones who are the victims of dehumanization. They are labeled as non-human beings and are denied basic human characteristics or traits such as feelings, the right to speak on their behalf, the right to take care of their culture or even the right to exist.

Although the Colonial Period is over, Indigenous peoples in Canada still have to struggle against different aspects of dehumanization: they are victims of objectification, physical and mental abuse and their cultural heritage is either reified and denigrated or simply destroyed. Dehumanizing the First Nations has been crucial for the process of colonization carried out by the dominant, White culture. Although it is only an aspect of colonizing “the Other,” it has played a major role in depriving Indigenous nations of their sovereignty and humanity.

The essay “Processes of Decolonization” written by Poka Laenui concerns Hawai’i experience, however, as the author admits, it might be also applied to the Aboriginal nations in general, also in Canada, as similar events “have taken place [...] in the rest of the world” (150). Laenui argues that the first step of colonization is “Denial and Withdrawal” (Laenui 150). Aboriginals are shown as devoid of any human traits and are treated as animals or even as objects. The reification is strengthened by denial of feelings, and abusive treatment seems to be justified as Indigenous people are seen as lacking any emotions or human sensitivity and the dominant culture perceives First Nations as having no cultural heritage which could prove their humanity, moreover, Indigenous religions are treated as mere superstitions. Aboriginal people become adjusted to those views and some even “join in the ridicule and the denial of the existence of culture among the Native people” (Laenui 150–151). That is how the ideas of dominant culture become internalized by the Native people and by the next generations of Aboriginals are perceived as their own cultural heritage. This analysis of the first step of colonization echoes the definitions of dehumanization and proves that the best way to objectify and destroy Aboriginal nations is to depict them as non-human beings spoiling a perfect image of the White society. It leaves no doubt that dehumanization is one of the most important and effective tools and processes embraced by the umbrella-term of colonization.

The second step of colonizing is “Destruction/Eradication” (Laenui 151) which might be understood literally or metaphorically. This step involves the

physical “destroying and attempting to eradicate all physical representations of the symbols of Indigenous cultures” (Laenui 151). The non-literal eradication is pursued through the dehumanizing practices, for instance through teaching methods in residential schools and in modern times by the Canadian curriculum which “marginalizes or excludes Aboriginal cultures, voices, and ways of knowing” (Battiste “Maintaining” 193). As Native people are perceived to be non-human creatures and these notions are internalized by them, they live as if in lethargy and, sharing the dominant ideas, they do not care about their own culture.

That is how dehumanization brings the third step, namely “Denigration/Belittlement/Insult” (Laenui 151). Indigenous people are portrayed as savages, animals or mere items and their achievements and experiences are not worth examining. Some elements of the culture are simply destroyed and those Indigenous practices that have managed to survive are also appropriated by the dominant culture in the process of “Surface Accommodation/Tokenism” (151) and treated as “an exhibition of the colonial regime’s sense of leniency to the continuing ignorance of the Natives” (151). The final step of colonization, called “Transformation/Exploitation” (151), rearranges existing Aboriginal cultural elements and demonstrates them as a part of the dominant ideology or discourse. The dominant culture creates universalized definitions of Indigenous traditions and exploits the ready-made images presenting them as the only legitimate and reliable facts concerning the First Nations. Aboriginals are treated as objects of a study, which strengthens dehumanization and reification. That is why nowadays the creation of Indigenous methodologies or rediscovering community heritage is such an important process as it enables Indigenous scholars and also the whole nations to speak on their own behalf and on their own terms. Reclaiming one’s own right to break the silence is the first step to regain the status of a human being within the dominant culture. Moreover, the creation of Indigenous research methodologies and modification of Western paradigms confirms that Indigenous cultural heritage cannot be oversimplified, denigrated or treated as worthless for a thorough examination. Adopting Indigenous methodologies makes the research dependable as “Indigenous knowledge must be understood from an Indigenous perspective [...]; it cannot be understood from the perspective of Eurocentric knowledge and discourse” (Battiste “Research Ethics” 505).

## Indigenous Methodologies

Native authors and researchers have created a wide range of Indigenous methodologies concerning dehumanization but they also apply Western ones, however, they do it in a way that does not limit their perspectives and, what is

more, in a way that does not strengthen the existing prejudices and stereotypes. They deliberately choose particular Western images and research techniques in order to modify them, and rearrange some elements to create a new vision or approach. Studying both Western and Native responses to Aboriginal cultures and literatures, as Emma LaRocque comments, “moves beyond ethnological typologies and ideological paradigms that plague the study of Native peoples” (1). Ethnology very often emphasizes only the difference between Western civilization and the Native heritage, which, if carried to an extreme, may become another way of colonization. Native scholars struggle to move beyond categories of similarity or difference and to select parts of some available material in order to create techniques of literary criticism that would reflect the multidimensional character of Aboriginal cultures. This enables Indigenous scholars to engage in thorough research of their own cultural material and gives the opportunity to spread their perspectives. Following stereotypical representations and denying Aboriginal writers and critics their right to speak would be another dehumanizing practice used to “undermine their experience [...], therefore, to discredit their voice yet again” (LaRocque 18). Indigenous methodologies focus on decolonization and rehumanization and that is why Native people frequently approach post-colonial techniques with suspicion. After years of silence, only since 1990s have some Indigenous writers “turned to decolonization or modern deconstruction theories” (LaRocque 44). This validates how recent Native resistance publications are and why Aboriginal scholars use modified Western theories. Many of their own theories based, for example, on oral traditions and community heritage have been either destroyed or neglected. They want to create something that will draw scholars’ attention who for half a millennium were not seeing the dehumanizing processes oppressing Aboriginal people (LaRocque 130). Indigenous methodologies are applied because Native people want to avoid generalizations and they need to speak on their own behalf, they do not call for being represented by the West. They also do not demand to be defined through the use of colonizer’s stereotypes and images unless they use them on their own terms and conditions because “[a]s long as Native writing is defined within the colonizer terms, it is neither free nor received” (133). Creating new methodologies and modification of the existing ones confirms the role of a Native intellectual who has to “wrestle with ideas, images and words that dehumanize” (LaRocque 172) Native people. The importance of originating and rediscovering Indigenous methodologies and their application in the research concerning Aboriginals is definitely crucial in the process of regaining their humanity and the freedom of expression when “[p]olished texts obscure Aboriginal history, cultures, and languages while perpetuating the myth of an empty land in the New World that was ripe for discovery by European explorers” (Battiste “Maintaining” 200). Breaking the silence highlights that Natives want to speak for themselves and that their

perspectives are legitimate and reliable. They debunk the claims that they have no cultural heritage which could gain equal position to the Western knowledge in the world of academia.

Native methodologies very often attempt to engage into a **dialogue** with the dominant culture. This is proved by the fact that Indigenous writers use English language. However, one has to be aware that Aboriginal authors do use the language of the oppressor because many Indigenous languages did not survive colonization. Nevertheless, many Native scholars use English as they do not want to contribute to further misunderstandings and lack of communication. As the poet Joy Harjo accentuates it, they “re-invent the enemy’s language” (qtd. in LaRocque 43), they adjust it to their conditions and use it to convey their messages, feelings, emotions, or experiences. Frequently, they make a dialogue on a textual level mixing the English language with their Indigenous ones, especially when the translation would not reflect the original thought. As LaRocque puts it, Aboriginal scholars and writers always pay attention to the “colonial workings” of English but they use it to avert “further[ing] the dissonances” (27). Nonetheless, using it might be perceived as a double-edged sword. As Janice Acoose says: “Writing in the colonizer’s language [is] simultaneously painful and liberating.” Painful because it constitutes the only “recourse to convey the reality of Indigenous Peoples” and liberating because “writing encourages re-creation, renaming and empowerment of both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples” (qtd. in LaRocque 42). On the one hand, it guarantees understanding, at least on the literal level, and of course breaking the silence and speaking on one’s own behalf. On the other hand, it might be treated as another way of limiting Native writers to the colonizer’s paradigms. Definitely, it must be explored and understood that “English ironically is now serving to unite [...] to de-colonize” (43).

There is also a large scope of methodologies that might be named **decolonizing techniques**. These are those methods and attitudes that aim at overcoming the disempowerment connected with colonization affecting Natives even nowadays. As LaRocque underlines: “[t]oday, there is of course, a rapidly growing, consciously alert, decolonizing scholarship, much of it inspired through post-colonial and liberation/resistance criticism” (20). However, this is only the beginning and in this case many issues need to be developed and researched. Indigenous nations still have to battle against racism, abusive treatments, stereotypical representations and even mental and physical violence. Decolonization and the pursuit to defeat dehumanizing practices does continue, although the Colonial Period is over, and it might appear as a proof that as long as decolonizing methodologies exist, there are still examples of colonialism against which the Indigenous scholars resist. Decolonizing techniques are aimed at overcoming stereotypical representations and images but also simply at regaining the right to speak. Application of the anti-racist

methodologies seems to be obvious as “the dehumanization of Native peoples is located squarely on White social and racial doctrines” and that is why “it is impossible to deny either the term or the existence of racism in any study concerning power relations between White and non-White peoples” (23). Those techniques enable to fight against the prejudices and injustices concerning Aboriginals in different spheres of life, even the life of academia.

Another methodology adopted by Native scholars is what LaRocque calls “**engaged research**” (30). The name of the methodology or rather an attitude is not surprising, as many, if not all, Native writers or scholars have experienced dehumanization or are writing about resistance against dehumanizing practices. That is why their standpoint is engaged and they are so involved in the issues concerning their lives and communities. What is more, very often in their research they fuse not only communal issues with personal experiences but also a thorough academic research with their highly personal reflections and confessions. This attitude does not lead to the domination of the subjective point of view, thus making the research appear unreliable. In the case of Native cultures this sort of methodology makes the study truthful and convincing. It helps to create a Native literary theory which challenges “misrepresentations and is at once specific to Indigenous ethos and experience” (LaRocque 32) and should be treated equally with Western theories. Combining the communal with individual by LaRocque called recording “many realities” (36) involves a style that is often “a mixture of keen rhetorical stratagem, sharp sociological perception, moral outrage and dignified poignancy [...]. The argumentation combines Aboriginal and contemporary traditions, including resistance and post-colonial strategies” (36). It shows that Indigenous writers and scholars do not dismiss or belittle the importance of Western knowledge, they rather underline the fact that Western paradigms are not the only legitimate and reliable ones, and that Western theories might be reinterpreted and adjusted to a particular community or experiences of an individual. Due to “**engaged research**” (LaRocque 30) many Indigenous methodologies are pervaded by the specificity of a particular Native culture. That is why authors and researchers such as Lee Maracle, Jeannette Armstrong or Emma LaRocque very often refer to their cultural backgrounds and explain their roots as a crucial element and influence on their writings. Moreover, some of those methodologies could be applied to researches concerning many Aboriginal nations, even outside Canada, or they may seem to be so specific that they might be used only to explore issues of a particular community. Using “tribal epistemologies” “[has] the profound effect of pushing modern knowledge to new questions and ways of thinking about problems and solutions” (Battiste “Maintaining” 201). That is why techniques of writing and researching have to be taken into careful consideration. Application of Western methodologies in the interpretation of Indigenous texts or in the projects concerning Native heritage might be seen as another way of

dehumanization, through which Aboriginals are denied their right to break the silence and their cultures are perceived as primitive and devoid of methodologies enabling a thorough and serious research.

Individual experiences are also the source of “**multifacetedness**” (LaRocque 156) of Indigenous responses. Although the experiences might be similar, each community has been influenced by them in a different way, not to mention the impact on particular individuals. That is why it is “extremely challenging to speak from” the community “or for its members” (156). Native cultures promote “multiplicity of experiences” (LaRocque 239) that are denied as they do not fit stereotypical images and notions. Nevertheless, the denial by the “image making machine is another kind of colonialism” (Dumont qtd. in LaRocque 239). One has to realize the plurality of different Aboriginal nations and uniqueness of each community as it explains the wide range of methodologies or approaches and confirms that “[t]here is no singular author of Indigenous knowledge and no singular method for understanding its totality” (Battiste “Maintaining” 500). “Indigenous knowledge is diverse and must be learned in the similar diverse and meaningful ways” (501). A thorough research must involve exploration of this multitude of experiences and collage of methodologies.

Another strategy of research might be simple **questioning**, or **querying** of stereotypical or common images. This could seem similar to the methodology of an “**inquiring mind**” (13) suggested by LaRocque. This technique guarantees an engaged approach and attitude that does not take any assumptions or theories for granted. This may explain why Indigenous researchers do not reject Western methodologies, paradigms and images. Indigenous writers question and modify them so that these methodologies can bring advantages and enable Aboriginals to reclaim their humanity. Indigenous scholars want to master images that have been labeling them as savages and non-human creatures and use representations of their disempowerment in order to regain their status. Native scholars not only deconstruct images created by the colonizer, they also reconstruct them creating new paradigms of interpretations that provide and emphasize the context of Native cultures and heritage (LaRocque 135). Aboriginals try to debunk the stereotypes and design a dependable and non-biased portrayal of Native cultures. If Native writers do use the post-colonial methodologies they do it to reconstruct them and place “Native writing as resistance within the post-colonial intellectual tradition” (Harlow qtd. in LaRocque 180). They “turn the tables on the colonizer to point out White cruelty and contradictions” (LaRocque 204). It is connected with the fact that the application of Indigenous methodologies is sometimes impossible as Indigenous techniques are perceived as primitive. That is why Native scholars have to use the colonizer’s paradigms as their own weapons. As LaRocque claims, Native peoples “will perhaps always be tempted to turn the tables, this may be the ‘inevitable’ conclusion to experiencing dehumanization for half a millennium” (211–212).

A certain comment is also expected concerning the use of the **post-colonial methodologies** because Native writers treat this label with suspicion. As it is emphasized by Ashcroft *et al.* “the idea of ‘post-colonial literary theory’ emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing” (qtd. in LaRocque 242). Very often the term post-colonial is just another dehumanizing generalization neglecting the multiplicity of experiences and their impact on various Aboriginal nations. It is important to be conscious of the fact that post-colonial theories rarely include Native writers of Canada (LaRocque 46) and although the situation is changing “direct representation by Native writers and scholars themselves is as yet minimal” (46). What Native resistance has to do is to find or make “a space and place to be able to enter into the particular discourse of western thought without having to compromise [...] personal and cultural selves” (LaRocque 65). Indigenous authors and scholars are supposed to reclaim their right to speak for themselves and their communities. As J. Edward Chamberlin claims, “[p]ostcolonial theory certainly provides a *useful* way of looking at the lands, the livelihoods, and the languages of Aboriginal peoples. But it is not the only way. Other ways may complement it or even contradict it” (132). However, he also admits that he recognizes “‘postcolonial theory’ a rather intimidating phrase [...] because postcolonial seems to assume that we’re in a state of political grace [...] despite the conditions of dislocation, dispossession, and disease that colonialism creates and postcolonialism chronicles” (131). That is why exploration of Indigenous methodologies seems to be crucial for a research concerning Native peoples. It allows, at least to some extent, to overcome Eurocentric approach which furthers stereotypes and prejudices. “Postcolonialism will not arrive for Indigenous peoples until they are able to make their own decisions” (Yazzie 46).

Finally, one of the most important methodologies applied by the Indigenous writers is the **storytelling**. Story constitutes an essential form of expression as it connects the heritage of the elders and modern techniques of artistic creation; moreover, it “suits the fluidity and interpretative nature of ancestral ways of knowing” (Kovach 94). Storytelling underlines the role of lineage continuity and, furthermore, it underlines the individual responsibility of the storyteller as well as the communal responsibility for upkeeping narratives which are an essential part of the Indigenous oeuvre. The fact that storytelling maintains the bonds between generations as well as between various artistic genres strengthens the link between storytelling and **storyweaving**, another methodology which blends tradition with modernity and is aimed at empowering the Indigenous heritage within the dominant White culture.

Many of the above-mentioned methodologies and theories might be found in resistance literature which is the bedrock “for a re-examination of literary critical methodologies and the definitions whereby a literary corpus is established” (Harlow qtd. in LaRocque 29). It is obvious that if resistance

literature is still created there must be something that causes the resistance. "At the dawn of the twenty-first century Native resistance to dehumanization continues" (29).

### Non-Native Methodologies in Overcoming the Eurocentric Approach

As this project is written from a European perspective, the non-Native methodologies adopted and avoided by Renate Eigenbrod in *Travelling Knowledge* seem to be useful and reliable. She is aware of the "challenges and pitfalls of cross-cultural interpretations from the vantage point of an outsider who may assume familiarity too easily and tends to overlook differentiations" (xii). The study of her book might be necessary in surmounting, at least partly, the Eurocentric point of view. Her research is not overwhelmed by Western terminology and generalizations; she concocts a collage of various perspectives, which guarantees openness and fluidity. She does not "provide a map but contours of a specific intellectual and institutional landscape" (Clifford qtd. in Eigenbrod xiv). Her German background, understanding of German history and the influence of the Holocaust can serve as a point of departure for examination of the colonization and first of all the phenomenon of dehumanization. It lets us suppose that she knows this subject and realizes that it still functions in Canadian society and she very often points to the truth that Aboriginal literature seems to be deeply pervaded by its influence and petrifying effects.

A pivotal methodology or rather an approach is **migration/nomadism**, constant moving, searching and denying definitiveness and generalizations (Eigenbrod xv). It enables a scholar to grasp a fresh, unbiased perspective and pursue a reliable research. However, one has to be attentive that one always writes or speaks "from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific" (Hall qtd. in Eigenbrod xv); that is why Eigenbrod frequently stresses that Native literatures should not be disdained or even undermined because of absence of universality. She also indicates a significant issue that this negligence of Native literature has its source in lack of appropriate educational background of Western scholars. Critics from the dominant White culture "look for innovations and allusions that they can recognize based on knowledge of their own cultural heritage, but that they cannot go beyond that knowledge is a great shame" (Hulan qtd. in Eigenbrod 7). A thorough research must involve questioning of existing theories and going beyond obvious paradigms. As a scholar one cannot operate only on familiar material, one has to defeat limits of the cultural background, especially when the research explores cultures whose representatives have been silenced by the process of colonization and dehumanization.

Although Eigenbrod's methodologies might be labeled by other scholars as post-colonial, she underlines that "[i]t is only from the perspective of the so-called postcolonial critic that colonialism is over" (42). She rather adopts the attitude that avoids generalizations and universal definitions which reify Indigenous literature. One has to comprehend that colonial ideas are still deeply ingrained in Canadian society and that post-colonial methodologies do not imply or guarantee an immediate self-reclaiming and rehumanization when human values and traits have been so long denied. As Eigenbrod advocates, instead of undermining the humanity of Aboriginals and denigrating the complexity of their literature, instead of reading their works in a superficial way gathering only one-dimensional pieces of information, examining Native literature should be "for those who are serious, [...] a question of cultural initiation, of involvement and commitment, so that the culture [...] becomes more than [...] dusty pages, something lifeless" (Ruffo qtd. in Eigenbrod 43). This confirms her standpoint on dehumanizing practices aimed at interpreting literature and any cultural heritage in a one-dimensional way without discerning a human being behind the pages and written words.

One of the methodologies is **positionality**: "one needs to know where one comes from in order to know at all" (Eigenbrod 46). A Western scholar should put an emphasis on one's position in order to avoid being recognized as another Eurocentric voice of authority that imposes particular interpretation or knowledge. What seems to be more important than scientific "objectivity" is the personal commitment to one's study, which echoes the Native methodology of "engaged criticism." Eigenbrod migrates in her "'ethnocriticism' between Euro-Canadian and Indigenous cultures" (46). That is what guarantees a multidimensional perspective instead of a limiting range of stereotypes.

Another approach suggested by Eigenbrod is **sensitivity**. Instead of using an authoritative voice of a White scholar she advocates "cultural literacy" (58), "search for distinct cultural communities out of which the writing evolves and to which it is accountable" although "[f]or an outsider the search for these links provides a particular challenge" (58). Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that the analysis or rather an "ongoing process of understanding" (Moore qtd. in Eigenbrod 66) of Aboriginal texts might be difficult because one's point of view is in a way limited by one's cultural background, she knows that non-Indigenous scholars "should not abdicate their responsibility" (Eigenbrod 66), they ought to use their position as representatives of a dominant culture but not to dehumanize Native people, deny their emotions or egos by essential and universal definitions of their heritage, but rather to help Indigenous artists to communicate their messages, to help them to rehumanize themselves and their works.

Moreover, Eigenbrod discerns that dehumanization does not only have a physical, literal dimension when, for instance, Indigenous nations are treated

not as human beings but rather objects without susceptibilities or communal dignity, she also notices the significance and dangerousness of “dehumanizing, dehistoricizing power of stereotypes” (99). Studying Aboriginal literatures is expected to involve openness to details and specificity, as each author is a member of a particular nation, with a particular cultural heritage which determines his/her point of view, style of writing and feelings that are conveyed in one’s writings. Simply saying, there is always a human being behind the text. “Labeling, objectifying and categorizing a people according to selected ‘essential’ characteristic dehumanizes a people and hence disempowers them” (Eigenbrod 117).

Repeating once more, Eigenbrod recommends the rejection of the limiting perspective of Western dominance: “the methodological framework for this study cannot be seen within the linear thinking of postcolonial studies that espouse ‘the departure from essentialism and dichotomic thinking [...]’ ‘a process *from* Authenticity *to* Mix, syncretism, hybridity’ [...]. [A] culturally literate reading must understand both” (Pieterse and Parekh qtd. in Eigenbrod 117). “To see only one or the other denies Indigenous peoples the right to be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the West has that privilege” (Smith qtd. in Eigenbrod 117). Eigenbrod does not want to adopt post-colonial methodologies which are so popular among Western scholars, because they may be seen as another way of dehumanizing generalizations. As she highlights, for Indigenous peoples colonialism has not finished yet and to put it in more drastic way quoting once more Robert Yazzie: decolonization “has not begun for Indigenous peoples” (39). Methodology should not limit the critic’s perspective or impose stereotypical interpretations, hence Eigenbrod adheres to hybridic strategies (189) that form a collage of different points of view, voices and visions. Indigenous heritage is not stable but still in process, still flourishing, not an uninteresting mass. “A critic has to move in the right direction, making the Aboriginal context (in all its complexity) the centre out of which other critical movements evolve – rather than the other way around” (Eigenbrod 189). One should hesitate to “‘fix’ the **fluidity** of [one’s] theoretical migrations and of the texts investigated, to dehumanize through summative statements” (201) as Native Literature “may be one of the most effective ways to shed light on Native humanity” (LaRocque qtd. in Eigenbrod 201).

**Ethics of reading**, another methodology suggested for the research undertaken by non-Indigenous scholars, focuses on gathering a multitude of outlooks and information rather than formation of imposed definitions and universal images. “Coming to conclusions may lead to creating monologue that singles out one’s own voice (of authority) at the end of a multi-voiced study” (LaRocque 202). The best methodology is supposed to guarantee that one “will not travel to the fixed place of the other but to a plurality [...] neither essentializing [oneself] not ‘the other’” (LaRocque 24).

## Dehumanization and Resistance: Lee Maracle's Writings

Lee Maracle's writings have been explored by many researchers and scholars, for instance by Sylvia Vranckx, Helen Hoy or Kevin Kardynal. However, they focus mainly on Lee Maracle as a representative of Indigenous female writers and they rarely take into account her attitude toward writing as a healing method grounded in matriarchal character of the Salish culture. In my opinion, her works are worth further analysis and exploration as they are deeply pervaded by different aspects of dehumanization, for instance, the impact of residential schools, objectification, sexual, physical and mental abuses. She also shows how serious the effects of these practices are, leading to personal and communal lethargy and lack of active participation in personal and communal life. Maracle considers closely the internalization of anger and prejudices seriously affecting Aboriginal families and communities which, instead of struggling against the oppressor, internalize their anger and then release it within community "abus[ing] their own culture" (Laenui 153). Furthermore, she examines the community and personal crises which are another source of the destruction of Native communities and heritage. Nevertheless, she not only explores dehumanizing practices, but also gives special attention to rehumanizing practices suggesting that "the phase of recovery has not ended" (Laenui 153). She illustrates individual and collective rebellions connected with the pursuit of self-reclaiming and overcoming objectification. Reestablishing the status of the whole community, possible only when the individual crisis is overcome, is identified by Poka Laenui as a part of the process of decolonization when "a people are able to lament their victimization" (154). Moreover, Maracle shows clearly the significance of Native women's knowledge in the process of resistance and the notion of rediscovering this knowledge pervades her works in which women's heritage is depicted as one of the most valuable and effective ways of healing the nation. To repeat one more time, she stresses not only the communal dimension of this rediscovery, but also the personal aspect of finding Indigenous women's wisdom within oneself.

The importance of women's knowledge is deeply connected with Lee Maracle's cultural background as she is a representative of the Salish culture, which is a strongly matriarchal system and the position of women is definitely powerful and perceptible, especially in comparison with other First Nations of Canada. Referring to Renate Eigenbrod, undertaking research exploring Native heritage and literature, one has to take into consideration the "positionality," one has to focus on the cultural background of a particular author or scholar as one's roots play a significant role in the process of writing and researching. As Lee Maracle accentuates it, although she writes in English, she tries "to find a way to alter the language to suit [her] own Salish sensibility" (Fee and Gunew 206). She does not say 'Native sensibility,' she says 'Salish

sensibility' which determines the value of her descent and also emphasizes that Indigenous heritage cannot be treated as one homogenous whole, because specificity is crucial when it comes to exploring and understanding Indigenous literature. What is more, for Maracle, rediscovering Indigenous knowledge is necessary as there are very few people "that have any kind of a foundation in the culture, in the knowledge" (Fee and Gunew 211) as Indigenous tradition has been either disregarded, appropriated by the dominant culture, destroyed or even, as she claims, "expropriated and distorted, bowdlerized and then sold back to [Aboriginals] in transformed form" (211).

The matriarchal character of the Salish culture seems to reverberate through Maracle's writings and speeches. In the Salish tradition women are storytellers, guards of heritage and warriors (Benson 14). It is their role to heal individuals as well as the whole communities. As Maracle states, "Salish women don't take care of men during an epidemic. Men are dispensable, but women are not. So they take care of the women" (Fee and Gunew 217). It illustrates how extremely important and high is the position of the female members of a community. That is why Lee Maracle's texts include such a great number of women as main characters fighting for justice and struggling against dehumanization. The Salish background also explains the significance given by Maracle to the Indigenous women's knowledge as a source of healing. Lee Maracle's works are strongly affected by her personal experiences and that is why taking into account her heritage and roots is important while pursuing a thorough research about her. As she claims in an interview, "I know that I had the most amazing teachers, I had an amazing beginning, and I have an amazing mind. I inherited that from my line of mothers and I know that" (Fee and Gunew 214). Maracle's great-grandmother T'a'ah epitomizes the potential of Indigenous women's knowledge which one has to discover in oneself in order to cure the whole community. The power of Indigenous women has been frequently undermined, but it is their role to regain their strength every time they lose it. Maracle comments that her great-grandmother also "endure[d] the outlaw of her language, her medicine, her capacity for taking care of the family. She [was] the sole survivor of seventeen brothers and sisters so she began [their] whole lineage again from 1835 to 1923" (Fee and Gunew 209). This citation explains that the high position of women within the Salish culture cannot be denied as they are very often considered as the doyennes of their families.

There is a wide range of other privileges that prove the matriarchal character of the Salish culture. As has been mentioned above, men take care of women during epidemics, women cultivate the tradition and spread it among new generations. They are the healers of the nations as they have essential knowledge, nevertheless, they have also other advantages, namely, they are entitled to possess their own property and goods and what is more, their position cannot be diminished by a divorce: "In the event of a divorce practically all

common property goes to the women in the south [of Salish territories]" (Jorgensen 81). Women have also the right to inherit property in the case of the death of a female relative as "ceremonials, songs, names and crests [...] are inherited matrilineally by daughters" (81). And female property "is used as grave goods in some places but the more frequent practice is to distribute it to the deceased woman's daughters" (84). Nonetheless, it is very hard to find any information about the position of women in the Salish culture. They are described in the same manner as the male members of a community as their high status is a widely known fact and that is why one has to conduct some careful study in order to discover any outstanding evidence.

With reference to dehumanization Lee Maracle comments that "[l]iberation is not simple" (*I Am Woman* xi) as she is conscious of the conditions under which Indigenous nations live. The rank of women within the Salish culture is highlighted by her words of "re-feminizing [their] original bodies" (xi) as the first step toward defeating dehumanization and rehumanizing the whole community. Women have to regain their power and then use their personal empowerment to reestablish the status of the whole nation. Furthermore, Maracle stresses that referring to one's cultural background is absolutely necessary to maintain one's humanity, she accuses the dominant culture of expecting her to "consider [herself] not Native, not Cree, not Salish, but a person, absent of nationality or racial heritage" (81), which would easily lead to the process of dehumanization. A person denied one's cultural background and heritage might be easily objectified and presented as a non-human creature. Although, she also underlines the force of culture especially "the prohibitive laws surrounding language and cultural expressions [which] were both painful and damaging for [Aboriginal] cultural initiative" (*I Am Woman* 110). She realizes that Indigenous people's position has been diminished by the dominant culture and she strives to change this situation. One more time it is indispensable to highlight the importance of Indigenous women's knowledge in the process of curing the nation and the "brilliance of hundreds of Native women who faced the worst that Can America had to offer and dealt with it" (*I Am Woman* 139). Maracle shows clearly that "One does not lose culture. It is not an object" (*I Am Woman* 110). It might be stolen, appropriated, neglected, diminished, or even damaged; however, the spiritual dimension of culture survives. It is within oneself, hence the significance of self-discovery as a first step toward regaining the humanity of the whole community. This leads to the explanation of the exact meaning of rehumanization. It does not mean that Indigenous peoples have lost their humanity or that they have become non-human beings. It means that they have to surmount internalization of colonial and racist images and rediscover the voice of community within themselves.

Maracle's writing serves as an excellent example of works pervaded by different aspects of dehumanization and reflecting the strength of the struggle

aimed at rehumanizing Indigenous peoples. The magnitude of Indigenous women's knowledge confirms that the patriarchal point of view is not the only legitimate one. Lee Maracle always places herself among other women, she does not claim that her methodology or writings are her own achievements, she always highlights that in her works there is "the great sea of knowledge that it took to overcome the paralysis of a colonized mind. I did not come to this clearing alone. Hundreds walked alongside me – Black, Asian and Native women whose tide of knowledge was bestowed upon me are the key to every Can American's emancipation" (*I Am Woman* 139). What is more, she is one of the many authors who propagate Indigenous research methodologies and open-mindedness, but she also maintains that "it's the Western knowledge system, and I think we've all, in some way or another, acquiesced to it. I try to keep myself as free from it as possible [...]" (Fee and Gunew 211). Her purpose is to speak on behalf of herself and her community because Natives "were denied access to any language" (Fee and Gunew 218), they "weren't allowed to speak [their] own language, and [they] weren't taught English" (218). That is why she uses English "to master this language and turn it to account to make it work for [them]" (218). Although many passages in her writing seem to be petrifying rather than comforting as she describes the atrocities experienced by Aboriginals, "comfort," as Jo-Ann Thom writes, "[...] is not her point. Readers [...] will find that transformation through narrative can move them from discomfort to enlightenment" (qtd. in Fee and Gunew 208).

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**Jolanta Dziuba** graduated from the Institute of English Cultures and Literatures at the University of Silesia. Her MA thesis, written under the supervision of Dr Eugenia Sojka, was entitled "Processes of Dehumanization and Rehumanization of Canadian First Nations People in the Context of Indigenous Methodologies. Study of the Work of Salish Writer Lee Maracle." She continues her studies at the University of Silesia to obtain the qualifications for teaching English and German. Her interests include the cultures and literatures of Canada's national minorities, autochthonic methodologies of research, American literature of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.