Home-Work
Sugars, Cynthia

Published by University of Ottawa Press

Sugars, Cynthia.
Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature.

⇒ For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/4460

🔗 For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=252177
The famous "four freedoms" laid out by Franklin Roosevelt were freedom of speech and religion, freedom from want and fear. . . . My candidate for top of the list is freedom of memory.

Most Canadians are lucky enough to enjoy extensive access to their own history, with relatively few restrictions. In far too much of the world, . . . efforts to recapture the history of war, abuse and injustice are met with denial, indifference, scorn or outright terror.

Yet there are people, often survivors of atrocities, who insist on the right to remember . . . Such a man is Marco Pablo, . . . [a] 43-year-old Chuj Maya Indian, [who witnessed] the slaughter . . . [of] his wife and two children [by the] Guatemalan army. [He] now lives in Montreal.

— Paul Knox, "On the Right to Remember"

We have to campaign for human rights as a whole. The victims of new incurable diseases, the victims of social injustice, and the victims of war and impunity—all these are equally important. Often when we talk of human rights we get stuck in the particular. I don't think the nations of the world have ever really thought of human rights in global terms. The UN does not always apply its own universal principles consistently.

— Rigoberta Menchú, Crossing Borders 137
Epigraphs, Contexts, Positions

Both of these epigraphs serve as a rough itinerary of this essay’s conceptual inquiries and multi-generic reading practices. Through their different political perspectives, the two quotations raise questions about, first, indigenous accounts of what Zygmunt Bauman calls the “human” and “social consequences of the globalizing process” (1), and, second, the theoretical and pedagogical value of diverse concepts and metaphors of cultural hybridity in an indigenous context. But they are also a reminder that “epigraph[s],” in Jacques Derrida’s words, “will never make a beginning” but comprise an indefinite network of texts (Dissemination 43) and conversations. Indeed, to a great extent, the topic of this essay and the selection of my epigraphs are contingent on Jeannette Armstrong’s arrangement and choice of epigraphs to her novel Whispering in Shadows. Both her epigraphs from Pauline Johnson’s (Tekahionwake) poem “Moon-set”¹ and Armstrong’s poem “frogs singing”² draw attention to the physicality of land and the human connections it facilitates. Also, the absence of a clear demarcation between the end of the epigraphs and the beginning of the novel emphasizes cultural continuity and prohibits a clear division between an hors texte and the beginning of the novel proper. More specifically, both poems stretch over two pages and “frogs singing,” the second epigraph, is printed parallel to the opening of the novel, which is itself a prose fragment written through metaphors of illness, land, and interior and exterior maps of belonging.

But rather than situating Armstrong’s novel in a Derridean paradigm of an all-encompassing and consuming textuality, I suggest that the epigraphs foreground the generic hybridity of Armstrong’s text and locate it in the heterogeneous but culturally specific traditions of First Nations women’s writing and representation. To begin with, thematically Johnson and Armstrong share an interest in the modes of indigenous knowledge production. Like the speaker of Johnson’s poem, Armstrong’s protagonist, Penny Jackson, an Okanagan visual artist and environmental activist, examines the relationship between colonial and indigenous languages, between the land, community, and the social and individual body, or what she calls “cell memory” (191). Furthermore, by quoting Johnson, Armstrong signals the need to investigate culturally hybrid practices of identity and representation from an indigenous perspective. Such an investigation would
Heike Härting

displace the term hybridity from its past uses as a means and sign of cultural assimilation and death in, for example, Duncan Campbell Scott's and Catharine Parr Traill's imperial narratives of Canadian nation formation. It is against the imperial desire for, in Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson's words, "a new 'hybrid' people" that would guarantee the "survival of superior Aboriginal individuals and traits in a population amalgamated under Anglo-Canadian suzerainty" (23), that we must read Armstrong's dramatization of cultural hybridity.

In particular, Johnson's repeated metaphor of the "shadow-land" in "Moonset" recalls her poem "In the Shadows." Both of these poems, we might argue, could be easily misread as nature poems in the tradition of Wordsworthian Romanticism. But it is precisely through their organic construction of theme, rhythm, and sound that these poems foreground what Armstrong sees as the "musical coherence" ("Land Speaking" 189) of indigenous land and language. As Armstrong explains, in the case of her people, the Okanagan language, N'silkux, "was given to us by the land we live within" and it "recreates sounds of the land in its utterance" (175, 188). These sounds and words of "the Okanagan language carr[y] meanings about a time that is no more. . . . [They] whisper more than the retelling of the world" (181). In a different language context, the "discrepant engagements" and noises (Mackey) that result from the translation of indigenous voices into an imperial language context underlie the indigenous presence in Johnson's poems. The title of *Whispering in Shadows*, then, points to the subjective agency and generic hybridity produced through the interplay of the colonial and indigenous languages in Armstrong's text. Moreover, beyond paying homage to Pauline Johnson as a cultural translator and vanguard of First Nations women's writing, the metaphors of "shadows" and "shadow-land" open up a liminal but never fully transparent space of individual, communal, and spiritual transformation. It is this socially hybrid space that Armstrong's novel inhabits and re-inscribes with the ecological effects of global neo-colonialism, with the invisible but perpetual presence of systematized racism, and with acts of anti-colonial resistance. Thus, Armstrong's epigraphs engage in a dialogue between two First Nations women writers, who, across their historical and political divides, recognize cultural hybridity as a contested space, which, in Gayatri Spivak's words, "one cannot not want to inhabit yet must criticize" (*Outside* 64).
It is clear, however, that a reading of cultural hybridity in the context of First Nations writing entails certain risks for a non-indigenous critic, and relative newcomer to Canada, such as myself. First, given my own history of migration from Berlin (Germany) to Canada's West Coast and subsequent settlement on land belonging to First Nations, I bring to mind the figure of the privileged hybrid migrant, who is complicit with rather than resists dominant pluralist identity politics. From this latter perspective, hybridity is easily co-opted by an “unexamined culturalism” (Spivak, Critique 377) and employed in the global trafficking of indigenous and other cultures. Indeed, as a hegemonic concept of identity management, cultural hybridity ensures that, under the rules of global capital expansion, “trading the [indigenous] Other” (89), as Maori theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith puts it, remains “big business” (90). Smith's comment stands as a reminder of the flexibility of capital and its ability not only to accommodate but to thrive on cultural difference and multiculturalism, with which hybridity is frequently associated. In fact, as San Juan, Jr. recently argued, “capital ethnicizes peoples to promote labor segmentation [, resulting in] hybridity and other differential phenomena” (6).

Smith, however, situates her materialist critique of hybridity in a historically specific understanding of how Western theories of expansion, i.e., “cultural imperialism” and today's “reframed discourse of globalization” (88), have produced the indigenous Other as the “first truly global commercial enterprise” (89) and cultural commodity. Examining the functions and effects of hybridity in an indigenous context, particularly from my privileged, Western perspective, then, has to work through an ethical caveat that acknowledges difference as difference and as a sign of uneven power relations. For, as Smith avers, in the past, Western researchers have generally theorized the “fatal impact of the West on indigenous societies...as a phased progression from: (1) initial discovery and contact, (2) population decline, (3) acculturation, (4) assimilation, (5) 'reinvention' as a hybrid, ethnic culture” (88). This kind of taxonomy confines indigenous subjectivity to a state of perpetual victimization and “hopelessness,” while denying “indigenous perspectives” that articulate the same process of colonization in terms of “(1) contact and invasion, (2) genocide and destruction, (3) resistance and survival, (4) recovery as indigenous peoples” (Smith 88). The latter account replaces the colonial practices of “reinvent[ing]” indigenous as “hybrid” culture by indigenous practices of
self-determination and political autonomy. Thus, to me, dealing with questions of hybridity in an indigenous framework requires that I address the ways in which Western practices of knowing—popular and academic modes of knowledge production—transform the indigenous subject into an object of knowledge and a global commodity fetish. Put differently, reinventing the particularities of indigenous cultures and histories in terms of hybrid identities involves, in the classical Marxist sense of commodity fetishism, erasing the material conditions, namely the history of conquest and imperialism, that produced hybrid identities as commodities of the exotic and erotic in the first place.

Furthermore, as a postcolonial scholar, I work within an institutional and national context of power that is designed to promote a politically sanitized version of cultural hybridity. Indeed, postcolonial studies has often and rightly been charged with homogenizing different histories of colonialism and resistance and with perpetuating the self-consolidating practices of Western modes of knowledge production about the colonial Other. Especially pertinent to a critique of postcolonial studies in the context of this paper is Thomas King’s observation that “[p]ostcolonial might be an excellent term to use to describe Canadian literature, but it will not do to describe Native literature” (12). The term postcolonial, he insists, relies on a linear understanding of time, takes the arrival of the Europeans as its dominant point of reference, and “remains, in the end, a hostage to nationalism” (12), and thus cannot account for indigenous concepts of time, aesthetic standards, and modes of self-identification. In other words, as an academic discipline, postcolonialism more often than not covers over political and historical differences in the name of a global “hybrid, ethnic culture” (Smith). Yet, if, as Diana Brydon argues, postcolonial thinking is “a locally situated ... attempt to think through the consequences of colonialism” and “to circumvent imperial ... habits of mind” (10, 11), postcolonial reading practices still perform an interventive act of cultural critique. Provided they heed Len Findlay’s provocative exhortation to “always indigenize” (307), postcolonial reading practices help to trace the particular colonial legacies of our global present. Armstrong’s novel, I suggest, mediates the complex relationships between imperialist habits of thought, neo-colonialism as globalization, and indigenous “recovery” (Smith).

According to Smith and Findlay, the challenge is to create the
conditions of possibility for strategic alliances between non-indigenous postcolonial and indigenous researchers. But what do such alliances involve? With great vision and theoretical rigour—but perhaps with too much optimism, considering the present conservative political climate of the academy—Findlay suggests that such an alliance would produce “innovative, non-appropriative, ethical cross-cultural research, postcolonial institutional ethnographies, and a more just understanding and achievement of the strategic as such” (313). From my perspective, building such an alliance also requires that we examine what Armstrong’s protagonist, Penny, calls “globe plotting” (152) in order to shift such dominant paradigms of postcolonial analysis as the nation-state, hybridity, and cultural difference into the field of transnational studies. The term globe plotting seems particularly apposite for developing, in Spivak’s words, a pedagogy of “transnational literacy” (Critique 315), and an indigenous critique of global neo-colonialism. For, “globe plotting” addresses the dispossession of indigenous land through transnational corporations and the NAFTA. It examines the ecological and social ramifications of the restructuring of indigenous land under the guise of development and progress, as well as indigenous resistance to land theft. Simultaneously, it draws attention to the ways in which globalization connives with or “plots” narratives of deliberate social and economic underdevelopment and reinvents itself as the sign and carrier of the good and just society. Read as a new trope of transnationalism, “globe plotting” urges us to ask: What are the strategies of containment or divide and rule that continuously keep indigeneity from the purview of postcolonial critiques of globalization? “In what interest,” to quote Spivak again, “are differences [of indigeneity] defined” or concealed (Critique 357)? As a pedagogical task, learning to become transnationally literate entails an active participation in “the production of legitimizing cultural” narratives of globalization (Critique 340). By staging the ideological contradictions of hybridity in different cultural, political, and communal contexts, Armstrong’s novel generates a critique of the legitimizing practices of globalization while articulating narratives and communities of anti-global resistance.

The remainder of my essay, then, examines some of the contradictions of hybridity in greater detail and argues that, in the context of Armstrong’s novel, cultural hybridity functions as a postcolonial pharmakon. At no point, however, do I wish to promote hybridity as a
normative concept of cultural pluralism or of cosmopolitan agency. On the contrary, my discussion problematizes hybridity as an analytical category that mediates between the local and the global through the practices of a "critical localism" (Dirlik 22) and thereby seeks to contribute to the development of a pedagogy of transnational literacy. In particular, I ask how we can read emerging narratives of globalization. For example, what are the tropes through which these narratives "plot" a global imaginary? Furthermore, given that the notion of cultural hybridity has been instrumental in rethinking the field of Canadian literature in postcolonial terms, I ask what kinds of knowledge does cultural hybridity yield if read through indigenous accounts of Western global expansion? In what follows, I first read cultural hybridity, in Homi Bhabha's terms, as "a problem of colonial representation" (114) with which to probe the representation of indigenous peoples in Canadian media and academic discourses of globalization. In particular, my reading of Paul Knox's Globe and Mail article, "On the Right to Remember: The Petanac Massacre," employs cultural hybridity as a discursive reading practice through which to examine the structure of colonial desire that shapes Canada's dominant imaginary. I will then take a closer look at the rhetoric of hybridity and its ideological functions in discourses of biodiversity and the Human Genome Project as they relate to Armstrong's novel. By way of conclusion I discuss two of the novel's recurring tropes of hybridity, namely the metaphors of cancer and "cell memory," and their transformative effects.

Cultural Hybridity: Public Discourse and Colonial Desire

Knox's article was published in the Globe and Mail's Comment section, "Worldbeat," and thereby, in advance, is associated with the rhetoric of cultural syncretism rather than with a radicalized form of multiculturalism that "performs a critique . . . of the limits of . . . civil society" (Spivak, Critique 353). The article tells the story of Mateo Pablo, one of 13 survivors of the Petanac massacre perpetrated against indigenous Mayans by the Guatemalan government on 14 July 1982, and its recent documentation in Montreal filmmaker Mary Ellen Davis's film Haunted Land (2002). At first reading, the article appears to support the concerns of the survivors of indigenous genocide in Guatemala's 36-year-long civil war, a
war that claimed over 200,000 victims. In fact, when Knox writes that the survivors’ “right to remember . . . inscribe[s] in our collective memory inconvenient facts and deeds,” he supports the collective lawsuit the Petanac survivors filed against General Efrain Rios Montt in June 2001 and submitted to the International Criminal Court (ICC). General Montt was Guatemala’s president at the time of the massacre and is now, as Knox mentions, leader of the government faction in Guatemala’s congress. The article echoes what the survivors articulate in their “Public Statement” (Projet Accompagnement) as “their right to historic memory and . . . to bring dignity and justice to those who have seen their family members massacred” (Knox). But how does the article translate—as I think it does—a highly political undertaking into a “cultural dominant” (Spivak, Critique 313) of Canada’s nation-state?

At second glance, the article reveals a number of significant gaps. For one, Knox consistently neglects to mention the involvement of the USA in Guatemala’s civil war. This kind of elision suggests a double standard of moral judgment when it comes to assigning blame for indigenous genocide. For, while the USA, and by extension Canada, mobilizes for its own “war on terrorism,” it conveniently forgets its support of state terrorism in South America for its economic and political gain in the past. Guatemala is only one of many examples. In a similar vein, Knox’s reluctance to address US complicity with Guatemala’s military junta inadvertently endorses the US’s scandalous demand for “immunity from investigation and prosecution for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in the ICC” (Amnesty International 2). Furthermore, at closer inspection, the article seems concerned less with the rights of indigenous peoples to social justice and redress, than with what I see as a double disavowal of Canada’s practices of “internal colonialism” (Tennant 3). First, Knox’s binary narrative constructs Canada in opposition to the despotism and corruption of Guatemala’s government as a free and democratic nation, which offers “most Canadians” equal “access to their own history.” The words “most Canadians,” however, suggest, in Bhabha’s terms, an instance of “colonialist disavowal” because they reveal a moment of guilty hesitation and textual instability. Through this textual ambiguity we can glimpse both Knox’s denial of Canada’s perpetual yet constitutive violence enacted against indigenous peoples—the minus, to paraphrase Bhabha’s brilliant phrase, at the origin of the nation (160)—and, as a character of Armstrong’s novel observes, a political blindness towards
Canada's secret acceptance of Guatemala's government for the sake of American free trade (164).

Interestingly, Knox's denial or act of willful forgetting of Canada's own history of indigenous genocide goes hand in hand with his defense of Mateo Pablo's "right to remember." Knox's call for the "freedom of memory" designates an instance of colonial hybridity because it functions as the "sign of the productivity of colonial power" (Bhabha 112). More specifically, Knox's advocacy of indigenous peoples' right to remember is premised on the invocation of and adherence to the four founding freedoms of Western democracy as they have been articulated by Franklin Roosevelt. For this reason, the "freedom of memory" Knox calls for is a priori embedded in the Preamble to the Human Rights Charter rather than in the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Thus, Knox's article inserts Mateo Pablo's testimony and his position as an indigenous subject into the dominant grammar of Western democracy. The unwitting ruse of Knox's narrative is twofold. First, it conceals that, in the words of Maria, a Guatemalan activist in Armstrong's novel, democracy functions as an alibi of global development politics and as a means "to further dispossess the desperate" (148). Second, it consists in what Bhabha sees as the "strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal," which "secure[s]" "the . . . authority" of Western democracy as globalism's political dominant (112). In Knox's case, championing a global cause of indigenous justice occasions the promotion of Western democracy, regardless of its colonial legacies.

Read through Bhabha's notion of hybridity, Knox's article reveals its own hidden marks of colonial desire. For, in his narrative of indigenous rights, the indigenous subject acts as Canada's moral conscience and serves to establish and legitimize Canada's political claims to global citizenship. It is at this juncture of the national and the global that my reading of Knox's article becomes an exercise in transnational literacy. For, while Knox's article emerges as one of Canada's new and populist narratives of global citizenship, it can do so only by perpetuating what Jack Healy aptly defines as a pervasive colonial "habit of power," a missionary "habit of mind" (73) that Europeans have adopted to legitimize their subjugation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australia since the Renaissance. In the context of Canadian history, this way of enacting power, Healy argues, "established the text of Amerindian-European relations as religious, theological, and ethical. The frame within which an Indian subject would
emerge would often be a moral one" (77). Similarly, in Knox's text Pablo Mateo becomes visible as a moral subject. More precisely, as in the history of colonialism, Knox's uncritical humanism works in self-consolidating ways. It seeks out the encounter with the "indigenous Other" as an ethical but not political subject to be saved and reformed in the name of democracy. In this way the article domesticates Mateo Pablo's political struggle, inserts it into a dominant culturalist vision of global justice, and, to adapt Armstrong's term, re-plots Mateo Pablo's story as an "inscape" (Healy 76) into Canada's emerging global imaginary. Read as a lesson in "transnational literacy," then, the article teaches us that in the technologies of colonial desire and disavowal, "[e]very declared rupture is an undeclared repetition" (Spivak, Critique 333).

My reading of Knox's text, then, raises the question as to what extent theories of hybridity can produce accounts of "global plotting." In his influential critique of cultural hybridity, Pheng Cheah argues that Bhabha's notion of hybridity is no more than a "closet idealism" (302) and is unable to engender critical explanations of globalization's uneven economic effects. With their "antilocalist" tendencies (297), hybridity theories "reduce" the "material realities" of globalization to "its symbolic dimension" (302). Contrary to Bhabha, Cheah argues that, despite its many problems, the nation-state needs to be acknowledged as "both historically unavoidable and ethically imperative" to counter the polarizing effects of globalization (300). Although Cheah is right to argue that cultural hybridity cannot account for the complexity of postcolonial agency, his wholesale dismissal of the concept also undermines a still urgently needed analysis of the technologies of colonial desire in current political and cultural discourses of globalization. But more importantly, Cheah's renewed faith in the nation-state ignores that, in Spivak's words, the "failure of a civil society" in both the postcolonial and the Western nation-state "is now a global situation" ("Diasporas" 91). To a considerable degree, this failure consists of the exclusion of indigenous concerns and rights from the theoretical discourses of re-imagining the nation through linked global and local social and economic relationships.

In contrast to Cheah, Armstrong invites a reading of hybridity as an analytical frame of colonial desire. At an early stage of both the novel and Penny's developing political consciousness, she and her White friend Julie meet a group of male political science students who, along with their professor, ponder their professional careers as members of the educated
White middle class. Having little sympathy with the self-centred lamentations of her peers, Julie confronts them with a future of global impoverishment, rising local unemployment, and "government deficits" (64), while exposing the sexist behaviour of their professor. But Julie's stance as a feminist with an awareness of global politics is, in part, purchased at the price of Penny's voice. When, in spite of Julie's repeated invitation, Penny refuses to participate in the debate, Julie calls to the male students: "Hey you guys, did you know Penny's an Indian? . . . She's a legend. . . . She's absolutely irreverent to the status-quo. Are you an anarchist Penny?" (67). Like Knox's self-consolidating practice of Othering, Julie's colonial disavowal is expressed in her desire to turn Penny into an exotic subject of cultural difference. In fact, by addressing Penny at once as "an Indian," "a legend," and "an anarchist," she revamps the colonial stereotype of the noble savage to authorize her own political agency. Moreover, Julie's attempt to incorporate Penny into a universalized model of political liberation constructs Penny as a generic "Third World Woman" (Mohanty) and romanticizes her as "woman-native-other" (Trinh). Through Julie's interpellation, Penny emerges as a monolithic subject whose native status becomes the guarantor of truth and authenticity in the service of Julie's "radical" feminist politics. Despite her courage and later solidarity and continued friendship with Penny, Julie unwittingly reduces Penny to an allegory of her own political desire and thereby not only instrumentalizes Penny but signifies what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call the "cultural imperialism" of "global feminism" (17).

As I have argued in this section, hybridity needs to be understood as an interventive practice into the operations of White colonial desire if it is to maintain its critical purchase. The next section investigates the instrumental and destabilizing function of indigenous peoples in the production of legitimizing narratives of neo-colonial globalism and proposes a critique of hybridity as a normalizing rhetoric of biodiversity.

"Global Plottings" of the Indigenous: Biodiversity and Genetic Mapping

The second epigraph of this essay is an excerpt from Rigoberta Menchú's *Crossing Borders*, a collection of essays that documents her global campaign for the recognition of indigenous peoples and their rights on an interna-
tional level. As Penny’s partner, David, remarks, “[n]ot a single seat in the United Nations from the western hemisphere is an Indigenous Nation” (Whispering 147). In contrast to Cheah, Menchú insists on thinking about human and indigenous rights through a global rather than a national perspective. Because, on the one hand, she maintains that indigenous people “don’t appear as specific peoples in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and therefore neither occupy a legally enshrined position in most national constitutions nor have any rights in an international court of law (144). On the other hand, she advocates the protection of the social and political autonomy of those who are at the receiving end of globalization, who are, to a large extent but not exclusively, the indigenous peoples of the world. Yet, Menchú’s work is frequently hampered by the UN’s lack of a serious commitment to social justice for indigenous peoples. For similar reasons, Penny considers The International Year for the World’s Indigenous People (1993) as declared by the UN a “damn farce” (184).

Despite the seemingly coincidental nature of the thematic contingency between Menchú’s and Armstrong’s texts, the links between both writers become less arbitrary once we consider how the testimonial writing practices of Menchú’s famous autobiographical narrative, I, Rigoberta Menchú, inform the generically hybrid narrative form of Armstrong’s novel. Moreover, both writers address and condemn the ways in which transnational corporations are indirectly and directly responsible for the recurrence of old diseases and the emergence of new diseases. After all, Penny’s cancer and the death of Menchú’s friend Maria are caused by pesticide poisoning contracted through spraying apples in Penny’s case and spraying cotton in Maria’s.12

Furthermore, as political activists working on a national and international level, Penny and Menchú participate, however unwillingly, in the structures of oppression they seek to dismantle. For example, as a UN delegate, Menchú must work within the framework of the Human Rights Declaration yet knows that “the issue of human rights—connected with their systematic violation, with cholera, with AIDS, or with political repression—is often used as an excuse for not tackling the global issue of a people’s economic, social and political rights” (Crossing 138). Here, Menchú insists that the battle against violations of human rights comes at the cost of a deliberate political blindness towards the violation of basic human rights and the systemic poverty suffered by those who live under the rule of
multinational capital. Second, her words sound a warning to all political fetishists of authenticity because in order “for the victims of the world’s problems to gain entrance” into “the world’s main problem-solving body” (Crossing 138), they must work within the ideological framework and administrative structures of the UN. Political change, or what, in a different context, Edward Said calls the “voyage in” (244), takes place in an at once hybrid and limited framework of cultural negotiations. This perhaps also accounts for Penny’s “deep and silent rage . . . [a] rage for all that she is somehow complicit in” (184). Menchú’s political critique, then, points to the predicament of the indigenous subject in a transnational world.

After having told her interlocutor, the anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, her life-story, Menchú ends her account with a rhetorical flourish, reminding the reader that although she “travelled to many places . . . to talk about [her] people,” she is “still keeping [her] Indian identity a secret” (I, Rigoberta 247). As a resisting indigenous subject, Menchú situates herself on the cusp of three converging positions: a global and necessarily heterogeneous position; a communal position that refuses absolute transparency to guard against cultural appropriation; and a personal position that makes her both an outsider and insider to her people.13 A negotiation of these shifting positions through different forms of learning also lies at the heart of Armstrong’s novel. Like Menchú, Penny travels around the Americas to talk about the Okanagan people and learn about the plight of other indigenous peoples. She participates in many international conferences on indigenous rights and discovers that “the stories [of speakers from different communities around the globe] mesh and overlap as one story. . . . Millions of brown people, despised, abused, hungry, landless, reduced to slave-like labour. Disease and death” (148). From different perspectives, all of these stories deal with the “plotting” of the globe through, in Armstrong’s words, a common experience and “perspective toward colonialism and [its] contemporary issues” (Interview 137). While Armstrong certainly concurs with Spivak’s notion of a “kinship in exploitation” (Critique 380), she also insists on establishing particular narratives of indigenous exploitation. Through these narratives, she argues, indigenous writers not only establish and communicate different experiences of colonialism to each other, but they also resist the colonizers’ identification and representation of indigenous peoples.14

In Armstrong’s novel, these narratives of exploitation and resistance
examine the changes particular indigenous communities experience through the local effects of globalization. On a fact-finding mission to Chiapas, Penny realizes that the plight of the Mayan people is an effect of war, neocolonial global restructuring, and the collaboration of Mexico’s comprador government. Readers who are familiar with Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*—a novel that relates to Armstrong’s novel in numerous ways—recognize that Penny witnesses, according to a descendant of the Maya, a character in Silko’s novel, “[t]he time called ‘Death-Eye Dog’” or “‘The Reign of Fire-Eye Macaw’” (257). Both phrases refer to the ecological and human catastrophes that followed in the wake of the European invasion of the Americas and mark the “radicalising of modernity” Anthony Giddens calls globalization (*Consequences* 52). As Emilio tells Penny, since the NAFTA, the “Mayan cooperatives” have been squeezed out of the “market” and suffered “severe economic hardships.” In old colonial fashion, the NAFTA first makes sure that Mayan lands are no longer protected under Mexican law and then gradually “force[s coffee and textile co-ops] to sell their land cheap” (168). As a corollary, the local autonomy of indigenous populations is, in Roland Robertson’s terms, “globally instituted” (172). The dialectical but unequal relationship between the global and the local has turned McLuhan’s utopia of the “global village” into permanent “global pillage” (Giddens, *Runaway* 64).

Through structural adjustment programs, the former Mayan collective landowners become landless labourers for a ruthless “tributary system” that ensures, in Spivak’s and Samir Amin’s Marxist analysis, the feudalization of global social and economic relationships in the interest of the “financialization of the globe” (*Critique* 95). Similar to Amin and Spivak, Penny diagnoses the global expansion of capitalism as a systemic form of social and economic violence inherent in development. The “global system,” she argues, “relies on the violence of poverty itself as a way to insure [sic] commerce continues and expands. It squashes people who are at the lowest of income levels” (189). For this reason, globalization erodes the classical division between economic centres and peripheries, a phenomenon Penny observes on her journey through the poverty-stricken areas of Los Angeles. Globalization no longer polarizes along the lines of colonially established geographies. Instead, as Amin, along with other critics of development, contends, “[u]nderdevelopment is . . . the effect of the logic of accumulation [of capital] on a world scale. The law of accumulation
and pauperization operate on this scale and not in the centers treated artificially in isolation" (64). Polarization, then, depends on the flows and blockages of capital and the continuation of global dependency of the postcolonial nation-state. In a cogent article on the communal identity of the Okanagan people in the age of "world economic disorder," Armstrong shifts Amin's argument into an indigenous context. "Indigenous people," she writes, "do not survive well in this atmosphere of aggression and dispassion," where "[w]hile itself becomes continuous as dispossession, privatization of lands, and exploitation of resources and a cheap labor force become the mission of 'peacekeeping.' The goal of finding new markets is the justification for the westernization of 'undeveloped' cultures" ("Sharing" 467). The subtlety of Armstrong's argument lies in its refusal to reduce the forces of globalization to the intrinsic operations of capitalism. What she advocates is both a clearer understanding of mediagenerated global cultures of emotional poverty and a skepticism towards an easy formation of global citizenship. Thus, given the state's obligation to transnational agencies in the service of global market development, indigenous rights movements can neither rely on the nation-state as a political ally nor depend on dominant NGOs. On the contrary, as Menchú and Smith emphasize, in "a self-determining indigenous world," "nation states [may not] remain . . . effective political ways of organizing politics" (115). Instead, various alliances of "globally based" collaborative "interest groups suggest a possible space for indigenous peoples" (Smith 115).

The most devastating effect of the dispossession of indigenous land, however, is, according to Penny, the simultaneous destruction of "the only hope for protecting biodiversity" and "natural sustainability" (147). Without indigenous land control, transnational biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries can engage freely in bio-prospecting of indigenous genetic materials, cell lines, and resources of knowledge. Rather than going into the politics of bio-piracy, I am interested in the rhetoric of what is clearly a new global phase of older forms of ecological imperialism. In her provocative article "Indigenous Nations and the Human Genome Diversity Project," Sandra S. Awang outlines the stated goals of the project, one of which is to "preserve DNA cell lines of indigenous populations before these populations and/or their cell lines become extinct . . . through intercultural marriage" (123). In this example, the term "biodiversity" acts as a rhetorical cloak for a neo-colonial investment in old racial categories of genetic
purity and racial degeneration through hybridization. The rhetoric of the architects of the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP), Professors Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Allan Wilson, conjures the image of the "vanishing" and disintegrating "Indian" that characterizes, to put it mildly, the assimilationist ideology of, for example, Duncan Campbell Scott's "Onondaga Madonna." In the HGDP debate, hybridity acts as a biological determinant and presents one of the two binary poles of the colonial debate over racial authenticity. As with earlier colonial discourses on authenticity, biodiversity is premised, as Patricia Monture-Angus argues, on "the existence of colonizers and those that are colonized. That is a relation of power" (28). Under the pretext of scientific progress, the HGDP has produced a "life industry" (Awang) that exploits indigenous bio-capital in ways reminiscent of the racial objectives of the eugenics movement of the Third Reich. This legacy, I think, demonstrates in the most radical form globalization's indebtedness to the project of modernity and its perversions.

Of course, proponents of the HGDP not only deny that the project "will benefit financially" from possible "commercial products" that result from their work (Cavalli-Sforza 4), but they also object to comparisons of their enterprise with any form of racist selection program that leads to genocide. Penny's comments on bio-piracy and her outrage about "collecting gene samples from unsuspecting Indigenous people...[or] from tribes going extinct...because there's big money to be made" (223) Cavalli-Sforza is likely to equate with the language of "science haters" who mix "ignorance" with their "personal political agenda" (7). Indeed, Cavalli-Sforza contends that a central goal of the project is to battle racism, for mapping the human genome shows that although "individual humans are genetically quite diverse...[,][] the average differences among human groups are small" (6). For this reason, he proposes to "replace the common word 'race'" with the term "population" (6). The politically sanitizing effects of Cavalli-Sforza's proposal, not to mention its historical naiveté and its ignorance of the research undertaken by critical race theorists, I think, is self-evident. What is stunning, however, is Cavalli-Sforza's belief in the explanatory rather than potentially destructive power of genetics when confronted with cultural and anthropological questions.

It is precisely this blindness that defines what Donna Haraway calls "gene fetishism" (116). In her article "Deanimations: Maps and Portraits
Heike Häring

of Life Itself,” Haraway discusses the ways in which scientists construct the gene as the new transcendental signifier of Western progress in the discourse of “contemporary technoscience,” including the HGDP (112). The gene, she forcefully argues, has been advanced to the Kantian “thing-in-itself where no trope can be admitted” (113). Similar to eighteenth-century empiricists, today’s geneticists believe that science must and does occupy a space beyond metaphor and representation. Positioned outside the “economy of troping,” the gene operates, as Haraway aptly argues, as the new, high-tech commodity fetish (113). In other words, in the context of the HGDP, biodiversity, and bio-prospecting, “genes are sources of value” (113) and, through a considerable amount of ideological work, reified and prepared for the global market. But, as we have learned from Marx, reification is but an ideological ruse that conceals the labour, human interaction, and production that goes into the making of a commodity. According to Haraway, then, “gene fetishism rests on the denial of all the natural-social articulation and agentic relationships . . . that bring ‘genes’ into material-semiotic being” (116) and requires the “fetishist[s] [such as Cavalli-Sforza’s] constitutional inability to recognize the trope that denies its own status as figure” (115). Thus, along with Armstrong’s novel, we need to ask, what kind of knowledge does the symbolic language of the HGDP produce, and what does it deny? What is the project’s cultural logic?

The dominant rhetoric of the HGDP draws from “new-world imagery” (Haraway 129) and metaphors of mapping that all promise the discovery of new frontiers of technological invention and exploration. Rather than acknowledging that maps produce the reality they purport to represent, the cartographers of the human genome insist that their maps objectively chart the reality of the genes themselves without being encumbered by metaphor. But like older colonial cartographic practices, mapping the human genome is primarily directed at claiming and controlling indigenous space and territory. In the present context, the space to be mapped is the indigenous body. In fact, mapping and sequencing the body “spatializ[es]” and “enclos[es]” the body for scientific purposes (Haraway 115, 120). The logic of colonial and genetic cartographies clearly intersect in that they both rely on a practice of consecutively surveying, naming, categorizing, claiming, and controlling the indigenous body/land as a quarry for precious DNA strings and the symbolic means to articulate the
emergence of the “Global Native” (Haraway 130). In her ingenious discussion of a New England BioLabs advertisement for “Mapping the Human Genome,” Haraway demystifies the epistemological violence through which the HGDP operates. The advertisement depicts an indigenous woman whose naked body is wrapped in a transparent facsimile of what looks like a nineteenth-century colonial map of the world. She “embodies,” as Haraway points out, “the Global Gene, literally” (130). Thus the HGDP erases indigenous particularity in the name of a universally shared human genome. Under the guise of scientific objectivity and genetic authenticity, the HGDP simultaneously aestheticizes and sexualizes the indigenous body, while participating in what might be called genetic necrophilia, namely the mining of DNA from extinct indigenous peoples or from those who are on the verge of extinction (Armstrong, Whispering 238). The indigenous body once again serves as the object rather than subject of new Western master-narratives of technological development and the origin of life, regardless of how much these narratives violate indigenous integrity, autonomy, and belief systems. Subsequently, as David rightly contends, “breaking the illusion of western development and progress as a world order is critical to changing it” (189-90).

What is at stake in such programs as the HGDP is perhaps not the revival of Mengele-style eugenics. Instead, the HGDP perpetuates the logic of cultural authenticity as an ideology of marketable difference; encourages quick fixes for environmental disease; strives for complete cultural and genetic transparency; and increasingly depoliticizes the structures of indigenous exploitation and resistance. The shift of modern biotechnology from examining such external causes for diseases as chemical toxins, environmental pollution, and widespread poverty, towards internal, genetic explanations of old and new diseases puts the blame for such diseases on their victims and forestalls a debate over political accountability. Moreover, as Penny ceaselessly argues, in the discourse of biodiversity, indigenous peoples find themselves in a predicament because as the objects of bio-prospecting, they are its victims, but since they are all that stands between “the untouched land” left to them and its transformation into global real estate, they are also “the only hope for protecting biodiversity” (147). The protection of biodiversity involves both the development of “direct sustainable support” for “local Indigenous communities” (Whispering 223) and the ability to decipher the rhetorical logic of the HGDP and
its commodification of the indigenous subject for the sake of gene fetishism. As should be clear by now, the HGDP is not interested in genuine diversity. Instead, it instrumentalizes the human body and tends to "mistak[e] heterogeneous relationality for a fixed, seemingly objective thing [the human genome]" (Haraway 116). Yet, against its own desire for purity, it cannot keep metaphor at bay and thus confirms that it is in part about "inhabiting" narratives of life and disavowal (117) that are always already hybrid, always contaminated by metaphor.

Narrative Plottings: Metaphors of Global Disease and Local Recovery

In Armstrong's novel, as everywhere else, metaphors have an ambiguous status. In a discussion of Star Trek, Julie ridicules Penny's interpretation of the show's organizing metaphors: "Metaphor, smetaphor! . . . There is always a boss in command." "But," answers Penny, "that's what a metaphor is!" (77). Here, metaphor functions as a master trope that imposes and homogenizes identities through operations of resemblance and substitution. At the same time, the overdetermined and self-deconstructive tendencies of metaphor force knowledge and truth claims into a productive crisis. But more importantly, in the context of Armstrong's writing and language, metaphor is a means of communication, memory, and cultural survival because, as she explains it, "[the Okanagan's] character, our world view, the relationship we have to each other as a people, our humanness towards the world and how we relate to the spiritual is wrapped up in the metaphors we use" ("Words" 26–27). The central metaphors of Whispering in Shadows, however, are not readily identifiable as culturally particular metaphors. Nor do they act in conventional ways through substitution. Instead, Armstrong's metaphors of cancer and "cell memory" enact different experiences of globalization while generating a critique and counter-narrative of neo-ecological imperialism. They literally reshape Penny's body and mediate her changing perception of her environment on a global, communal, and individual level.

When she is diagnosed with a rare form of cancer that "show[s] up in people exposed to strong pesticides and some gulf war veterans" (254), Penny locates its causes not in a genetic predisposition to cancer but in the
environmental pollution and technological alterations wrought on the planet through the pressures of neo-colonial globalization. If, as Penny contemplates, the body is itself a "natural environment" (84) that symptomatically registers the violence done to it through ideologies of progress and development, then cancer becomes a direct inscription of this violence on the human body. Both drug addiction and cancer can be interpreted as diseases resulting from ecological imperialism. It is therefore not surprising and perhaps not at all metaphorical when the novel's implied narrator describes Penny's disease as "the shadows of the new world" she carries "inside her body" (276). Metaphorically, Penny's cancer embodies what Susan Sontag, in "Illness as Metaphor," defines as the disease's primary discursive characteristics. More precisely, according to Sontag, cancer signifies a "pathology of space" and a "disease of the body" (14, 18), insofar as the body constitutes an integral and living organism of the planet as a whole. As Armstrong explains in a number of essays and interviews, the relationship between land, place, body, earth, and healthy living provides the core element of the Okanagan worldview. In the Okanagan community, Armstrong elaborates, "the flesh that is our body is pieces of the land come to us through the things that the land is . . . We are our land/place. Not to know and to celebrate this is to be without language and without land. It is to be displaced" ("'Sharing' " 465-66). Penny's cancer, then, is not merely a symptom of the violated environment written on her body but a physical manifestation of the disintegration and dis-placement of indigenous life, both under the rules of global capital and in a cultural and emotional atmosphere of "destructive disquiet . . . [and] discontent" (Whispering 274).

Furthermore, Armstrong adopts the metaphorical language of cancer to expose the human effects of globalization. In a self-reflexive passage of the novel entitled "Prose Fragment From Her Note Book," Penny enters a string of sentence fragments that could be both part of the poem on globalization or non-fiction: "globalization and supremacy deceit and grudging paternalism sys/tempalized racism colonial practice . . . I THINK IT'S PART OF THE STORY/ OR THE PLOT/ A piece here and a piece there" (185). The fractured and boundless structure of this passage enacts the uncontrolled growth and erratic spread of cancer cells to foreground the disruptive, divisive, and chaotic effects of globalization. While Armstrong's metaphorical use of disease corresponds to Sontag's comparison
of cancer with the operations of "advanced capitalism" (63), it also ques-
tions predominantly individualist and psychosomatic explanations of can-
cer. Instead, cancer features as a sickness that signals a lack of communal
and "environmental consciousness" (Whispering 245), so that the humans
themselves have become the cancer that invades and modifies the environ-
ment. As a result, the "natural order in this world . . . is out of balance" and
is turning upon itself, generating transformations of which cancer is only
one manifestation. However, instead of arguing that "corporations [and]
money mongers . . . are responsible" for the mutation of the environment,
Penny suggests that cancer may also be considered as the body’s "way [of]
transform[ing], cop[ing] with things confronting it," and, paradoxically,
of mutating into a new state of balance.

What is needed to ensure indigenous survival is a recovery of what
Penny calls "cell memory," for the multi-layered and ever-expanding con-
stitution of "cell memory" unites different indigenous rather than national
imaginaries and provides a counter-narrative to the commodification of
biodiversity. In one of her prose poems, Penny writes that

we are bound together by old blood mixed and remixed over time as we
feel its memory stir . . . words pass between the North and the South . . .
on their old movement through eons to warm lands which our blood
together claims that which our cell memories celebrate each time we dance
to this rhythm we all know so well. (289)

In this context, "cell memory" suggests a hybrid and globally connected
form of memory and community, Penny’s "rainbow" (272). It lives in the
recognition of the sound of an unknown yet familiar language (181), and
shapes the relationship between the land, the body, the community, and
the individual. It also inhabits, produces, and cites metaphors of language,
specifically those that are related to the poem "frogs singing" (111, 191),
which I discussed at the beginning of this essay. Cell memories, Penny
writes, are also strong in "Coyote stories about the . . . transformation of
the world" (247), where they provide one version of indigenous globe
plotting.

It seems to me that the presence of Coyote also indicates the
ideological but necessary risks that reside in an at once culturally specific
and biologically defined notion of memory and identity. Put differently,
“cell memory” might be understood as a fundamentally hybrid form of memory. This is not to deny that hybridity, as I argued earlier, operates as a normalizing rhetoric of biologic discourses of race. Rather, “cell memory” is organized around an understanding of hybridity that both refuses to move, in Robert Young’s terms, from “biologism and scientism to the [deceptive] safety of culturalism” and “shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse” (27). It is this double inscription that also underpins Neal McLeod’s recent indigenous reconceptualization of hybridity as a variation of Gerald Vizenor’s “Trickster hermeneutics,” which adopts “elements of the colonial presence and transform[s] them to subvert them” (25). In McLeod’s trickster account and Armstrong’s related narrative of cell memory, hybridity is intrinsic to an understanding of “culture [as] a living organism” and to the metaphorical and tropological configuration of “tribal narratives and paradigms” (McLeod 33, 31). As a corollary, Penny recovers her understanding of cell memory through the cancerous disintegration of her own cells that ultimately facilitates Penny’s reconnection with her land and family after years of travelling and political activism across the Americas. In contrast to the metaphorical language of cancer and gene fetishism, the language of cell memory emphasizes the essential heterogeneity of human existence and co-operation, and the inseparability of language, body, and environment. In this way, Armstrong’s novel teaches us that becoming transnationally literate involves outlining the limits of the theoretical models through which we—theorists, critics, students, and teachers—interpret texts and our global present. It requires rigorous analyses of occluded narratives and emerging tropes and metaphors of globalization. It is this commitment to a political and literary critique of the cultural, social, and eco-biological effects of globalization in a specifically but not exclusively indigenous context that Armstrong’s novel invites its readers to make.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the SSHRC for its generous support of my current research project of which the present essay is a substantial part.
1. The original poem is published in Johnson's *Flint and Feather*.

2. “Frogs singing” was first published in *Durable Breath* (Smelcer and Birchfield). It is reprinted in Armstrong's essay “Land Speaking.”

3. In “Land Speaking,” Armstrong describes “frogs singing” as a poem that resulted from “a long discussion on our language and worldview with my sister Delphine, who . . . pointed out that the stars and the frogs in the Okanagan summer nights have the same rhythm.” In recalling it, “the rhythm filled her soul and became hers” (189). Thus the poem creates a unity between land, body, and language that is also crucial to Penny’s quest for social justice and communal and personal survival.

4. Lee Maracle, for example, praises Pauline Johnson’s “translations of old stories [*Legends of Vancouver*]” for their faithfulness to the “voice of Capilano . . . . She was true to his voice, the beautiful language that he used in English. I also wanted to do it that way” (171).

5. I here refer to the Songhees of the Salish First Nation in BC and the Chippewas in London, ON.

6. The concept of commodification has of course been paramount to both Fredric Jameson’s discussion of the “cultural logic of late capitalism” and postcolonial theories of colonial identity and desire. For example, see Ahmad, Bhabha, and Huggan. My reading of Smith’s critique of hybridity is indebted to the work of all of these theorists.

7. Although I couldn’t agree more with Findlay’s warning that within a collaborative situation, outsider theorizing about indigenous concerns “must be respectfully strategic rather than presumptuously exotic” (313), I am worried that such collaborations still risk reproducing imperial patterns of behaviour and thinking. An example of a failed joint project that comes to mind is Maria Campbell’s and Linda Griffith’s collaboration on *The Book of Jessica*. But more importantly, the research alliances Findlay envisions would still be based in academic institutions that, to my mind, are still concerned with reproducing Eurocentric discourses of knowledge and power production. Before it becomes possible to speak of the “Postcolonial Canadian University,” we need to rethink what postcolonial means in transnational terms. On an institutional level, academic departments of the humanities must do more than pay lip service to interdisciplinary studies, be more successful in hiring First Nations faculty, and use the term postcolonial in more responsible ways than just as an umbrella term for an unspecified notion of cultural studies across the periods.

8. I use the term *pharmakon* in the way Derrida discusses it in his essay...
“Plato’s Pharmacy.” In its Greek translation, “this pharmakon, this ‘medicine,’ this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence” (Dissemination 70). The notion of the pharmakon also works as a concept-metaphor to describe the historical and political over-determination of hybridity. Rather than defining hybridity in one particular way, the notion of the pharmakon allows us to fold the multiple and contradicting dimensions of hybridity into such different contexts of critical analysis as scientific racism, colonial discourse analysis, and biotechnology.

9. “Critical localism” considers the local as a site through which “to work out the most fundamental contradictions” of globalization (Dirlik 23), while acknowledging the impossibility of de-linking the local from the global.

10. For an overview of the decade between 1980 and 1990 of Guatemala’s civil war, the period that saw most of the 669 massacres committed against Mayan villages, see Diskin and Warren.

11. In this context Mayan anthropologist Victor D. Montejo’s observations concerning “a group of testimonies collected in the Mayan language” are elucidating: “The Mayan survivors’ descriptions of the torture that has taken place in military barracks are parallel to the cases of torture and dismemberment denounced by las Casas. The comparisons show that five centuries after the first contact, the same crimes continue to be committed against indigenous populations of the Americas” (211), including, one might add, those enacted against indigenous peoples living within Canada’s national borders.

12. For chapter 13 in I, Rigoberta Menchú.

13. For a discussion of Menchú’s multiple subject positions see Susan Sánchez-Casal.

14. In an interview with Hartwig Isernhagen, Armstrong elaborates upon this point:

And we found the commonalities there to be surprising: ... they were the same battles, principally, that we were fighting to bring ourselves, as writers and as people who are carriers of their own literatures, forward through colonialism. [We were] fighting for that space to identify what those literatures are and how those literatures emerged and not to try to emulate the literatures of the people who were the colonizers, and to try to find the difference between the two and to try to state that difference to each other. (137)

15. Cavalli-Sforza emphasizes that the HGDP is not a Western project but an “international anthropology project that seeks to study the genetic richness of the entire human species” that “make[s] the involvement of UNESCO and other international organizations particularly appropriate” (1). Yet, given that “some countries will not, in the foreseeable future, acquire the “cutting edge” technol-
ogy” that is needed for the mapping and sequencing of the HGDP” (2), it is clear that those who possess this kind of technology (i.e., the US, Europe, and Japan) will be at the forefront of the project. Other countries may act as secretarial handmaidens, “collecting and typing . . . samples from their own region” (2). Ultimately, those poorer countries and indigenous nations that cannot afford Western “cutting edge” technology can be usefully enlisted “for spreading the new biotechnology knowledge and methods around the world” (5). In short, the HGDP is prone to serve future development programs regardless of the effects biotechnological knowledge may have on the targeted population.

WORKS CITED


Cavalli-Sforza, Luigi Luca. “The Human Genome Diversity Project.” Speech


