Care as Resistance: Indigenous Feminist and Queer Survivance in *The Marrow Thieves*

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"And I understood just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held us all. Anything. Everything." In this way, Cherie Dimaline (Métis Nation of Ontario) ends the 2017 novel *The Marrow Thieves*. This article argues that the novel reimagines resistance to settler colonialism through an Indigenous feminist and queer ethic of intergenerational care. Dimaline centers Elders and queer kinship as the primary agents of survivance (Vizenor), showing how practices of teaching, tending, ceremony, and story constitute counter-violence. Methodologically, I draw on Indigenous feminist theory and resurgence (Simpson), refusal (Audra Simpson), and decolonial critique (Mignolo and Walsh) to read the novel's aesthetic, narrative, and epistemic interventions. I show how *The Marrow Thieves* relocates sovereignty from the state to land-based kin-structures. I examine how chosen, non-biological family reorders value beyond heteropatriarchal nuclear logics and how Minerva's and Miig's teachings help their kin and ultimately the nation to actively practice resurgence. Finally, I argue that the text revises colonial temporality by insisting that time is non-linear, meaning that ancestors, present kin, and future beings co-occur. The sections that follow map (1) colonial extractivism; (2) care as counter-violence; (3) queer/Elder kinship as epistemic sovereignty; (4) story and language as insurgent and resurgent; and (5) Indigenous Futurisms.

Although *The Marrow Thieves* has received considerable critical attention, particularly in relation to temporality (De Vos), storytelling and resurgence (Samuelson and Evans), Indigenous futurisms (Pravinchandra, Tillett), ecocriticism (Tillett), waterways and ecology (Turner), and sovereign memory (Borowska-Szerszun), the figure of the Elder has remained largely undertheorized. Existing scholarship has illuminated the novel's narrative structure and political commitments, yet few analyses have examined how Elderhood functions as a site of epistemic, ethical, and affective resistance. My article therefore shifts the critical lens toward the Elder as a central relational and narrative figure through which the novel redefines care, intergenerational knowledge, and survival. By doing so, it contributes

to broader conversations in Indigenous studies, age studies, and queer studies, foregrounding elderhood as actively practicing futurity.

The Marrow Thieves is a landmark work within Indigenous speculative fiction, which is a site for theorizing Indigenous futurisms. In direct resistance to what Thomas King (Cherokee) critiques as the colonial construction of the "Dead Indian" (53), Dimaline's novel foregrounds Indigenous cultures and epistemologies on Turtle Island. Through aesthetic, narrative, and epistemic interventions, the text challenges the racist universalization of settler colonial worldviews, repositioning Indigenous knowledge systems and temporalities as central to the planet's survival.

At the heart of *The Marrow Thieves* is the idea of resurging epistemologies and taking care of knowledge systems. As in Indigenous nations across Turtle Island, in the novel, Indigenous epistemology is embodied, relational, and fundamentally tied to ancestral lands. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) emphasizes that "knowledge needs to be learned in relationship to the place that generated it, with or in our languages, using Indigenous processes and expertise" ("Indigenous Resurgence and Co-resistance," 26). Indigenous knowledge is intrinsically linked to the body and to the lands of its nation. Throughout *The Marrow Thieves*, the characters, especially Elder characters such as Minerva (Anishinaabe) and Miigwans (called Miig) (Anishinaabe), embody and transmit teachings that are, to use Simpson's words from her theorization of Anishinaabe epistemologies, "highly contextualized, soulful, (re)membered, and experienced" (Simpson, 27). Their survival and survivance (Vizenor) strategies are rooted in the embodied practice of living in reciprocity and care with the lands and the more-than-human. This methodology revolves around the understanding of the world as interrelated, where human presence is dependent on and situated "in the intimate and embodied expressions of place" (27). Writing about her own Indigenous background, Deborah McGregor states that while humans are responsible for one another, in Anishinaabe epistemology, the concept of "all our relations" encompasses "all living things, the spirit world, our ancestors and those yet to come" (McGregor, "Anishinaabe Environmental Knowledge," 78). The important role of all beings highlights the centrality of "relationships and responsibilities" (78). For the Anishinaabe, this is about regaining sovereignty over the lands which will facilitate a healing of the planet. In the novel, Indigenous stewardship is synonymous with a future in which the planet may heal from degradation and exploitation. This idea shapes how the characters act and the dream they follow: namely to reclaim land, epistemologies,

and a futurity, in which healing from colonial trauma is possible. It has to be said here that Indigenous epistemologies are always in a struggle for resurgence with universalized Eurocentric paradigms. The concept of Indigeneity itself—as defined by Eurocentric epistemologies—serves as a political tool for Western nations to enforce and further the attempted genocide project.

To briefly provide context: the maxim "ego conquiro" (Grosfoguel, 73) and the intellectual, philosophical movement of Enlightenment amongst others legitimized European conquests around the globe. Eurocentric conceptualizations of reason, culture, and scientific progress act/ed as legitimizing aspects for the control of the natural world. As epistemic and ontological structures of central and western Europe, England, and the USA spun their all-encompassing webs across cultures and nations, cultural spheres and processes of knowledge production were shaped alongside economic and political systems. This epistemic "sense of totality" (Mignolo and Walsh, 195) legitimized the ordering of the world according to Western, Christian, and white traditions and continues to do so. These "universal fictions" (187) propose that epistemologies are the result of ongoing social, cultural, economic, historical processes, which were and are promoted as progressive. One such narrative is that racialized bodies are synonymized with nature. Simultaneously, the construction of whiteness as superior and racialized bodies as less than human was one tactic of the attempted colonization project (Dhillon, "Indigenous Resistance"). *The Marrow Thieves* exposes and resists these colonial narratives by centering characters and communities who remember, resurge, and reclaim relationships to land and their traditional knowledge systems. The novel insists that Indigenous epistemologies are living alternatives to colonial "universal fictions."

By foregrounding these living epistemologies, Dimaline's novel directly confronts the violent logics of extraction and disposability that underpin colonial systems. The text makes visible how Indigenous knowledge, land, and bodies are devalued and targeted as resources to be exploited. This becomes especially clear in the novel's treatment of extraction and the settler colonial system itself. In *The Marrow Thieves*, the Indigenous body is valuable in the sense that the white population could not survive without it, but it is nonetheless defined as exposable. This contradiction lies at the heart of settler colonial logic. While the survival of settler society literally depends on the extraction of Indigenous marrow in which dreams are stored, the bodies themselves are rendered disposable. Their genocide is framed as a means to a biopolitical end. This dynamic mirrors the historical and ongoing genocidal practices enacted on Turtle Island for the

attempted purposes of possession, extraction, and the obliteration of anything perceived as "non-European." Dimaline's speculative futurism is the logical extension of the present tense.

The Present Tense of the Novel

In *The Marrow Thieves*, the world has been devastated by generations of environmental abuse, resource extraction, and the ongoing legacies of colonialism. Miig, the main leader of the group, tells how the Earth was pushed to its limit until "she finally broke" (88). Rather than adapt or address the roots of the problem, governments doubled down on old patterns. As the environment grew more unstable, people lost their capacity to dream. This loss is of course both literal and metaphorical and it became a social crisis, as people grew unstable, hopeless, and society began to break down. Miig describes how Indigenous epistemologies were first commodified under the guise of curiosity and reverence at the beginning of the dream crisis: "They asked for our ceremonies in all reverence and curiosity, like New Agers" (88). The desire to possess Indigenous ways of knowing is bound to histories of appropriation, betrayal, and violence. The text critiques settler theft as an epistemological violation that consistently leads to Indigenous death. The further institutionalization of this violence becomes clear in Miig's retelling of what happened after the initial curiosity of Indigenous capability to dream came to an end because it proved too tedious in a capitalist, neoliberal society.

> We were moved off lands that were deemed "necessary" to that government […] the Church and the scientists that were working day and night on the dream problem came up with their solution and everything went to hell. They asked for volunteers first. Put out ads asking for people with "Indigenous bloodlines and good general health" to check in with local clinics for medical trials […]. The first people to go missing were prisoners—our people, always overrepresented in jails (89).

This is a direct reference to the prison industrial complex and the history of biomedical experimentation on Indigenous peoples. The novel names incarceration, surveillance, and medical abuse as structural components of settler colonialism. Indigenous peoples are displaced and extracted from (both literally—the extraction of bone marrow—and symbolically—the extraction of their epistemologies) and they are rendered test subjects in a system designed to attempt to disappear them. The novel situates its environmental apocalypse and the resulting violence in the form of bone marrow extraction as a direct continuation and intensification of colonialism, framing the catastrophe as a "second coming" of settler colonial apocalypse. By

describing the mass migration of survivors as a new wave of settler "arrival," Dimaline underscores that the structures and logics of colonialism have never truly ended, but instead reemerge under new conditions. The collapse of the environment and society is depicted as inseparable from the histories of land theft, dispossession, and attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples. In this way, *The Marrow Thieves* refuses to see apocalypse as a singular event. Instead, it exposes the ongoing nature of attempted genocide:

> In setting this scene, Dimaline actively exposes and traces the direct connections between historic acts of settler colonial genocide against Indigenous peoples and the contemporary actions of the contemporary settler colonial state, and of global corporate capitalism. This continuum is driven by an ideological worldview that demands ever more, regardless of the cost: more land, more resources, more profit. (Tillett 110)

In this light, the marrow extraction as a process stands allegorically and materially for a convergence of violences: environmental violence and genocide in the most literal sense. Physical elimination is only one axis of violence. Cultural, intellectual, and spiritual genocide—what Grosfoguel terms "epistemicide" and "spiritualicide" (80)—are just as centrally occurring in the novel and in reality. Coloniality relies on the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples and the erasure of their knowledge systems, and most importantly their dreams. As storytelling, language, and ceremony are targeted, the very foundations of Indigenous worldbuilding are attacked.

Dimaline's intervention is therefore twofold. She exposes these layered violences, and she counters them through storytelling, which becomes a method of epistemic resurgence. Drawing from Cree and Anishinaabe oral traditions, Dimaline positions story as a political praxis of resurgence and survivance. As Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice asks in his meditations on storytelling and language loss: "Are [our stories] dead, or merely sleeping?" (51). Dimaline insists they are alive and more than that, they are dangerous to colonial power.

Decolonial Resistance

The novel is deeply decolonial. Various scholars have coined praxis-oriented terminology for the concept of decoloniality. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg)'s term "resurgence" ("Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance," 19) refers to the active practice of Indigenous/Anishinaabe traditions and values in the cause of decoloniality and resistance against settler colonial genocidal tactics. Resurgence seeks to center Indigenous ways of

being, knowing, and interacting with the world and thereby address colonial violence. As will become clear from the analysis, this concept rejects colonial frameworks and actively heals Indigenous practices, languages, and connections to the land that were and are being harmed during the settler colonial project of attempted genocide. Resurgence is actively happening within nations, but also transnationally, across spatial and colonial boundaries, and across communities, as Indigenous nations and allies challenge and dismantle colonial and oppressive hegemonic structures. Simpson refers to this as "co-resistance" (27). This coalition-based resistance is rooted in centering Indigenous relationships and communities (32-33) amongst one another and with the land. In the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, decoloniality means a "[r]ecovery of Indigenous self-determination and the recovery of Indigenous national territories are crucial elements for the renewal of Indigenous Knowledge" ("Anticolonial Strategies," 375). Access to ancient land and restitution but also epistemic sovereignty are key factors in the overall sovereignty of Indigenous people(s) and the decolonization efforts.

A similar idea is offered by Gerald Vizenor's (Anishinaabe; Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, White Earth Reservation) neologism "survivance"—stemming from the two words survival and resistance—in which he conveys the "active resistance […], the refusal of the 'manifest manners' of dominance" and "a strategy that resists the passive position of the victim and the hopeless victim at that" (Survivance 66). Survivance refers to the permanence of Indigenous cultures, histories, traditions, and epistemologies, and includes the active practice and renewal of them. Similarly to the concept of resurgence, survivance focuses on the extant heterogeneity of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies as well as the diverse relationships between Indigenous P/peoples and their lands.

Just as resurgence and survivance foreground the complexity and diversity of Indigenous knowledges and their relationships to land, so too must any meaningful decolonial project take account of gender and feminist critique. Decoloniality is also always feminist and gendered. Simpson argues,

> Indigenous feminisms are No Wave feminisms and are intrinsically a result of and a connection to colonialism and settler colonialism, which brought to our nations white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, and capitalism. Gender[ed] colonial violence has been a primary tool and strategy on the part of the states to attack and remove our bodies from our homelands. (qtd. in Stern par. 9)

As Indigenous feminist thinkers have long emphasized, colonialism fundamentally attempted to restructure gender, kinship, and power

within Indigenous nations. The introduction of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalist frameworks was a central strategy designed to fracture Indigenous communities at the most intimate levels. Through the regulation and removal of Indigenous bodies—especially women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people—from their lands, the state attempted to break the care systems that sustain Indigenous existences. Cherie Dimaline's novel confronts readers with these same, deeply embedded logics of settler colonial violence. In *The Marrow Thieves*, we witness both the violent loss of land and the theft of bodies. All of the (Indigenous) characters are marked by how their Indigeneity interrupts settler frameworks of time and identity. This interruption is precisely what the state seeks to discipline, control, and remove. To understand *The Marrow Thieves* is to understand colonial violence as deeply gendered. This form of violence is enacted by the state to maintain control. It allows the state to define how it constructs value, and how it identifies "surplus" life. The targeted harvesting of bone marrow in Indigenous peoples is an allegory for extractivism.

The novel repeatedly demonstrates how the logic of extractivism is deeply and undeniably gendered. The binary gender system was not Indigenous to Turtle Island (i.e., what is now called United States and Canada) but violently imposed through colonial expansion, institutionalization of Christian dogmas, and patriarchal governance structures. Alongside settler invasion came heteronormativity, heteropaternalism, and sexualized violence. These were and are instruments designed to discipline Indigenous life and disrupt kinship networks that exceeded, or outright refused, European norms. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson asserts, the binary gender system

> makes no sense from within Anishinaabeg thought, because first off, we've always had more than two genders in our nation and we've also always practiced a fluidity around gender in general. The rigidity seen in colonial society doesn't make much sense within an Anishinaabeg reality or the reality of any so called "hunting and gathering society." (Simpson, "Not Murdered, Not Missing" n.p.)

This refusal of the gender binary is one of the many forms of Indigenous resurgence embodied in *The Marrow Thieves*: "Survivance, Dimaline's novel suggests, only reveals its full countergenetic potential when it ceases to allude to futurity in an exclusively heteroreproductive vein" (Pravichandra 135). Pravichandra challenges the notion that Indigenous survivance must depend on biological or linear reproduction. In *The Marrow Thieves*, futurity is not secured through the birth of new generations alone but through acts of

relational care, storytelling, and intergenerational reciprocity. This perspective opens the conceptual space for elderhood as an alternative mode of futurity that allows the nation to move forward through onto-epistemologies. The Elder's role in Dimaline's narrative thus expands survivance beyond its genealogical framing. Elders sustain the community through the transfer of memory and (embodied) knowledge.

While the novel is often read through the lens of environmental apocalypse or youth resurgence, its critique of gender violence and its focus on Elder characters deserve specific attention. The rigid gender roles characteristic of Eurocentric governing systems are not enforced among the protagonists. The characters organize duties according to specific Anishinaabe kinship roles. Simpson states that within the Anishinaabe nation, "the degree to which individuals engaged in each of these activities depended upon their name, their clan, their extended family, their skill and interest and most importantly individual self-determination or agency" ("Not Murdered, Not Missing" n.p.). In other words, roles and responsibilities within the Anishinaabe kinship framework are shaped less by rigid hierarchies or the gender/sex binary system than by agency, community need, and capacity. This attention to individual strengths stands in stark contrast to the nuclear family model imposed by settler colonialism.

Additionally, the main characters are part of a familial system that is not rooted in biological relation. None of the characters in the community are biologically related, a structure that inherently mimics queer kinship models. Queer familial structures, which often emerge from chosen rather than biological relations, emphasize a form of care which is not tied to colonial ideas of family. This underscores a broader critique of heteronormative and colonial family constructs, presenting an alternative, resilient model of communal belonging. Their community operates instead through chosen kinship and care across Elders, young adults, and children. As Aaron Mills (Anishinaabe, Couchiching First Nation) writes, these kinship ties were present before settler colonialism, and in the case of *The Marrow Thieves* before the current apocalypse. He continues: "kinship is its own model of belonging to a political community: a model internal to Indigenous law, understood on its own terms" (2). The novel's kinship system is therefore not merely an improvisation in times of crisis but rather drawing from pre-existing frameworks of relationality and kinship beyond biological lineages. Mills further explains that,

> in many systems of Indigenous law, certainly in Anishinaabe law, kinship is an ordered system of social relations in which relatedness is the organizing feature. Blood may factor in but need not. Kinship, then, is neither a relation

> of genetic descent nor a formal status (as in citizenship), but instead a dynamic set of social positions to inhabit. (24)

In the novel, the characters' community is not defined by descent or legal status, but by an ongoing, negotiated set of relations. It is a model of care, responsibility, and mutual recognition that both predates and outlasts the disruptions of settler colonial violence. Kinship has to do with care and "mutual aid" (24). It offers a sense of "belonging which corresponds to a political community" (24) which helps to bring forth each individual member of the nation. The main goal is to help each kin flourish. "Kinship positions achieve this purpose by structuring the exchange of needs and gifts throughout the community in dynamic sets of position-specific responsibilities" (24). In *The Marrow Thieves*, these "gifts" are often embodied in storytelling, which functions as a primary mode of care and a key tool for survivance. Kinship in the novel is a system that structures care, mutual support, and responsibility. While the ongoing violence and attempted genocide threaten to sever these ties, the ancestral kinship system endures as a form of resistance. Importantly, the text resists rigid gender binaries: roles are not assigned according to colonial expectations of women as nurturers or men as protectors. Instead, care, leadership, and love—including queer love—are practiced by various characters. Thereby, the novel refuses the logics of Euro-Western nuclear family, instead foregrounding intergenerational and non-normative relationalities that resist both genocide and epistemicide. What emerges is a community structure where age, skill, and reciprocity as opposed to the binary gender/sex system determines roles within the kinship group.

The everyday, feminized labor (i.e., cooking, caring, organizing) is not devalued but positioned as central to survival. "Not that she [meaning Wab] had to cook everything herself, just that she got to say who did it and how. As the woman of the group, she was in charge of the important things" (MT 37). The language here is significant: "important things" are the daily chores and ritual that sustain community. Yet, even this "womanhood" is queered and decolonial by the fact that leadership is not strictly divided along binary gender lines. Miig is the group's primary leader, and after Minerva's murder, he becomes the group's only Elder. His story and presence fundamentally unsettle the settler-colonial expectation of the patriarchal father-figure. Miig's queerness is never depicted as an anomaly or stylized as a site of trauma, but is instead taken for granted within the group. His relationship with his lost husband Isaac demonstrates the normalization of queer love and kinship within this decolonial structure and further within the Anishinaabe nation. Queerness here is not stylized as a spectacle. It models a decolonial

alternative to the compulsory heterosexual nuclear family imposed by colonial structures. Miig's main roles are the "teaching" of the coming-to-story of each member of the group and his collaborative leadership with Minerva. He thereby holds suffering and hope for a decolonized future at once and exemplifies a form of queer Indigenous kinship. Gender is not fixed and neither are responsibilities and relations strictly bound to binary gender or sex categories. This is also why Miig's queerness and Minerva's age are not limitations but categorizations connoted as *as-is* conditions. The imperative of each member is to resist colonial binaries and to sustain a living practice of resurgence with the capabilities one has as a person.

This refusal to align with colonial sex and gender norms is lived decoloniality and resurgence. It is what Audra Simpson (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Nation) terms refusal; a deliberate stance that rejects settler-colonial demands and interruptions at every level of Indigenous life. For Simpson, this means privileging the concerns, desires, and self-definitions of her own Mohawk nation. The burden of the boarding school system, the criminalization of Two-Spirit identities, and the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) all reflect attempts to destroy the complexity and fluidity of Indigenous kinship. Genocide here is physical, spiritual, cultural, and epistemic. *The Marrow Thieves* insists that gender fluidity and the agency to define one's role within the community are essential to practice resurgence and survivance.

"The Miracle of Minerva"

The figure of Minerva in *The Marrow Thieves* demands a closer look that bridges decolonial and feminist analysis and age studies. Her mere existence unsettles both the colonial gaze and the narrative of Indigenous disposability. The imagery utilized to describe Minerva complicates linear temporality. She is described as "dark, round, and tiny like a tree stump. She kept her long grey hair in two braids like a little girl with a flowered kerchief tied over her head and under her round chin" (20). Her "long grey hair in two braids like a little girl" is not meant to equate elders with infants, but rather to visually evoke the Anishinaabe medicine wheel's cyclical understanding of life. In Anishinaabe cosmology, both infants and Elders hold distinct yet deeply revered positions, each close to the spirit world in their own unique way (Hulko *et al*., 330). Minerva's characterization gestures toward Indigenous worldviews that honor all ages as vital and spiritually significant, though for different reasons. She is attuned to the land like no other characters are. She witnesses the subtle signs of

danger others miss. She is a vessel for her Anishinaabe epistemology and this epistemic tradition guides her in her main goal, to protect her kinship group and resurge her onto-epistemology.

> She had old-timey ways, but you couldn't get much from her, either. She didn't talk, and when she did it was in bursts accompanied by laughter and maybe a scream or two. Mostly she watched … everything: us kids playing in the river, the way the trees tilted to the north towards what was left of the natural landscape beyond the clear-cuts stripped of topsoil. She watched the birds on their perpetual migration to anywhere, the fire at [the] end of the day, and the way we clapped each other's backs when trading off on the traplines. (20)

From her introduction, Minerva's body is described in earthy, land-based terms—"dark, round, and tiny like a tree stump"—immediately situating her within the ecology that settler colonialism has attempted to devastate. The repeated metaphoric associations between Minerva and the beyond-human—tree stumps, rivers, birds, the fire—gesture toward Anishinaabe epistemology in which knowledge is distributed across bodies and environments, and in which Elders are essential in carrying forth knowledges about the ongoing web of relations. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Deborah McGregor both emphasize, Anishinaabe knowledge is not housed solely within human minds or transmitted through written text, but rather emerges from a continual engagement with land, water, animals, and all relations. Knowledge and the body, in this sense, are always interconnected with the land and with one another. By interlacing Minerva's existence with the land, the novel disrupts Eurocentric, Western tendencies to anthropomorphize epistemologies by isolating the human from its environment. Thus, Minerva's mere presence already signals a mode of survivance and epistemic resilience that is rooted in ongoing, reciprocal relationships with the living world.

The most interesting aspect about Minerva's characterization is how her watchfulness, slowness, and apparent silence are first misread by the focalizer Frenchie, as passivity or absence. Frenchie, the adolescent narrator, initially fails to recognize the epistemic and spiritual labor that Minerva is engaged in. Her stillness is a survival tactic. She practices an embodied mode of refusal. She refuses both to be made legible to the colonial gaze and to relinquish the ancestral teachings stored within her body. In this sense, Minerva's refusal is fundamentally gendered and aged. Throughout the novel, characters read her through colonially constructed ideas of age and womanness. This specific liminal position as a woman Elder enables her to subvert expectations and ultimately to destroy one extraction facility.

While colonial regimes have historically defined Indigenous women and Elders as frail, disposable, and in need of rescue or containment, Minerva subverts these scripts. Her body has been the target of colonial sexualized violence as well as institutional violence. For her, however, her body is a source of resistance. On the one hand, her very presence is a refusal to disappear. On the other hand, the novel subverts the reader's expectations, as she is later recognized as one of the strongest fighters against the settler colonial occupation and attempted genocide. She thereby subverts colonial narratives of frailty and disposability. Within the group, her presence is central to survival, both epistemic and literal survival. Her stories help young generations understand the importance of watchfulness and learning one's history. Additionally, Minerva's watchfulness functions as a kind of counter-surveillance. She does not speak much; however, when she does, she teaches her kins Anishinaabe. Her silence is a strategy, as Minerva maintains the sovereignty of her knowledge, sharing it only in ways and at times that sustain the group.

Crucially, Minerva's ultimate act of resistance is not violence *per se*, but song. When captured and subjected to the marrow extraction process, she turns the very process against itself. Her refusal to speak English and her insistence on Anishinaabemowin, becomes the rupture that destroys the apparatus meant to extract and steal Indigenous dreams, and thereby knowledge. It also becomes clear, as Vanessa Evans writes, that "their [all characters'] refusal to 'release' these words, to 'hoard' them, is an act of dissent against settler colonial silencing" (128). Audra Simpson's aforementioned framework of refusal becomes clear in the climax of the novel, when Minerva is abducted by Recruiters and brought into a facility to have her bone marrow extracted. During her abduction, Minerva is described as "jovial" and "compliant" (171) by the recruiters and therefore she frightens them. It shows that the Recruiters expect and desire fear, anxiety, and panic. Minerva does not provide these affects and emotions; therefore, she is met with epistemic violence. Just as her frequent refusal to speak in English is an act of refusal throughout the novel, so is her calm a form of affective refusal.

This scene operates through a doubled focalization: while the reader is made privy to the thoughts and expectations of the recruiters—through an insider employee who informs her kinship group— the actual violence enacted on Minerva's body is deliberately left unwritten. The focalization in this chapter only describes the thoughts of the recruiters. I argue that this serves a dual function. First, it allows the reader to focus specifically on the recruiter's thoughts as opposed to the violence that had already been envisioned and told by

the main characters throughout the novel. This emphasizes and exposes the underlying logic of the institution. Ableist, ageist, and sexist narratives that emphasize productivity and rationality align with colonial narratives of successful aging. One of the recruiters describes that "there might be something fatally wrong with the subject's mind" (171). Productivity, rationality, and legibility become the metrics by which Indigenous people (and women Elders in particular) are measured, and inevitably found wanting. Recruiters dismiss her language as nonsensical, only English is defined as "sensible" (171).

The very language of the facility is saturated with the violence of settler colonial interpretation: an environment where the refusal to be readable within colonial logics is marked as deficiency, threat, or pathology. At the same time, Minerva's refusal is not isolated from the broader reality of refusal in and by Indigenous nations. As Anishinaabe and Ashkenazi theater scholar Jill Carter reminds us, central to Indigenous epistemology is "maintaining balance, arriving at consensus, avoiding conflict, and fulfilling responsibility for the good of all" (2). Yet, colonial systems persistently silence these "traditional templates" (3), forcing Indigenous nations to continuously defend their rights to self-governance, kinship, and embodied ways of knowing. Minerva's resistance, then, is both individual and collective. It is an act of refusal that draws strength from, and contributes to, the broader project of Indigenous survivance and self-determination.

The violence Minerva endures at the marrow extraction facility, such as cutting her hair and shaving her skin, also directly references historical practices of assimilation processes such as in boarding schools, which were intended to strip Indigenous peoples, especially women, of their cultural and personal identity, as well as women of their importance in their nations. The epistemic violence against Minerva is coupled with a forceful and violent preparation for marrow extraction which exemplifies the physical violence committed toward Indigenous people. The environment to which Minerva was abducted is deeply colonial. The space as well as the recruiter's language signify the oppressive and reductive nature of settler-colonial interpretations of Indigenous people in general and women Elders specifically. Second, and more importantly, it allows the entire focus to be on the "miracle" of Minerva's resistance. As she is prepared for extraction, Minerva hums and drums "an old song on her flannel thighs" (172), drawing on what the text calls her "blood memory." When "the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct" (172,) she is capable of drawing from her "blood memory" (172).

Notably, when Minerva draws on the old-timey resources she has to hand—the (blood) memory of her ancestors, the link to her

forebears through their songs and teachings, and her deep connection to the Anishinaabe language—she taps into a source of power that produces decidedly biological effects: her heartbeat "changes," her voice "morphs." The probes of the neural connectors she is attached to seem, in spite of themselves, to measure not just the physiological ("her heartbeat") but also hit on her "instinct," a deliberate reminder, I would argue, of the impossibility of reducing the Indigenous person to a series of biological properties and functions. Part allegory, part warning, the scene underscores that Indigenous Peoples cannot be reduced to their genetic properties in the way that population genetics projects profess. Rather, Indigenous distinctiveness, this scene makes clear, lies in the Indigenous Person's ability to draw on her blood ties, her relations and the more-than-biological elements of memory, story and language that these ties of blood anchor her to, in order to perpetuate her actual biological survival (Pravinchandra 140).

Her song and her blood memory enact an embodied, intuitive form of resistance that defies settler logic and settler technology. Her song, which begins as a hum, swells into a "heartbreaking wail" (172), while "her singular voice [morphs] into many" (172), signaling a coming together of all ancestors and descendants in a voice of both mourning and resistance. In this moment, the scene expands beyond the individual to encompass collective Indigenous grief, remembrance, and survivance. Inside her marrow, all of Anishinaabe epistemology is stored and she now utilizes it to protect her kin from the suffering of the settler colonial project. The dream that the genocidal settler state attempts to extract, now resists and fights back.

Frenchie comes to realize that Minerva has, over the course of her life, gathered her dreams "like bright beads on a string of nights that wound around her each day, every day until this one" (172). The act of gathering, coiling, and preserving these dreams becomes a metaphorical and literal act of resistance to extraction. She spiritually and tangibly resists the extraction of her larger dream, namely the survival of her nation. Additionally, the text's play on the word "wound"—both injury and a coiling or binding—emphasizes the multilayered relationships between resistance and suffering. Minerva's resistance is embodied, because it is her body, as much as her spirit, that holds Anishinaabe onto-epistemology and refuses to have it extracted and further stolen.

Her refusal turns the facility, symbolically part of the larger machinery of the settler colonial state, against itself, collapsing its capacity to contain and own Indigenous knowledges. The entire facility is destroyed and collapses. The destruction of the facility renders it both physically into "one storey" and symbolically through a

homophone into "one story." The facility's story is now one of resistance and hope as opposed to the overarching genocide and suffering occurred within it.

Outside of the gates, Indigenous peoples gather to collectively inhale and bless themselves with the ashes and smoke of the burning building. It is a ritual to cleanse themselves and their ancestors from the evil that has occurred in this facility. They reclaim their trauma and turn the destruction Minerva caused into a form of sacred remembrance. They collectively heal from the genocide and help the souls murdered within the building return home to their families and ancestral lands. The trauma is not ignored but the hope of resistance turns the spatial sphere into a site for resurgence.

Minerva's lifelong strategic silence is thus revealed as having been a deliberate, tactical form of care. Her dream had been oriented toward protecting the community's dreams and knowledges. It is an attempt to find healing in a system that is ultimately against Indigenous existence. Jeffrey Paul Ansloos (Nêhiyaw/Cree; Fisher River Cree Nation/Ochekwi-Sipi) argues that resurgence helps his people "heal the relational fractures produced through colonial oppression" (14) and ultimately "giv[e] hope to our people" (14). For Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) resurgence "means having the courage and imagination to envision life beyond the state" ("Re-Envisioning Resurgence" 89) and communicating Indigenous epistemologies within both a planetary and local realm to unify Indigenous peoples. Thus, resurgence is "political, social, and economic" (88), and personal and community-oriented simultaneously. Minerva's actions open up a space for possibility and becoming that is deeply future-oriented, personal, and communal. The destruction of the extraction facility invites us to consider what it means to move beyond survival and toward the construction of Indigenous futures grounded in resurgence and survivance.

Indigenous Futurisms

This jump from refusal to resurgence is precisely an act of Indigenous futurisms. Indigenous futurisms are a movement, ideology, and artistic intervention that asserts alternative worlds, temporalities, and ontologies. By foregrounding the power of collective dreaming, *The Marrow Thieves* participates in a broader tradition of Indigenous speculative fiction and Indigenous futurisms that envisions futures that are decolonial and radically possible. Minerva opens a space for future imaginaries that make space for healing, renewal, and the continued flourishing of Indigenous existences and worlds.

Indigenous futurisms make place for resilient efforts "to the necropolitics" (3) executed by states. The "Indigenous-centered future" (Baudemann, "Indigenous Futurist Film" 152) is imagined by basing, for example, literature on Indigenous notions of past, present, and future and creating "sovereign Indigenous spaces" (152). Medak-Saltzman argues that mainstream representations of Indigenous futures relegate Indigenous peoples to the past and further racist stereotypes by feeding into hegemonic conceptualizations of Indigenous peoples as the Other (Medak-Saltzman 141). Racism against and dehumanization of Indigenous people are prominent in mainstream media and have been a central factor in maintaining the colonial system and structures of power established through colonial rule. Indigenous peoples are also frequently absent in media representation. This is a settler tactic that functions to erase Indigenous peoples from public memory: "[P]reventing Indigenous futures has been (and remains) part and parcel of core settler logics" (Medak-Saltzman 144). In this context, decoloniality emerges as a necessary analytic and political intervention.

By foregrounding the covert operations of colonialism within Western/colonially constructed spatial and temporal frameworks, decoloniality offers tools to disrupt and reshape the very terms of how society is organized. If the terms under which society is structured are contested, corroded, and ultimately changed, reality radically transforms as well. Decoloniality is inherently removed from seeing humans and cultures as homogenous and, therefore, "promotes pluriversality as a universal option" (Mignolo and Walsh 147). Decoloniality as opposed to decolonization refers to "the analytic of […] underlying logic rather than the historic-socio-economic analysis of colonization" (227). It engages with a reassessment of epistemologies by questioning how knowledge has been generated, legitimated, and distributed in colonial contexts in order to expose and deconstruct coloniality/modernity. In short, decoloniality is resistance. It emphasizes the daily practice of undoing that is necessary to approach a future beyond coloniality. For Poka Laenui (Native Hawai'ian) practiced decoloniality may be composed of "(1) rediscovery and recovery, (2) mourning, (3) dreaming, (4) commitment, and (5) action" (Laenui, 152). Although such processes cannot be easily categorized, they do demonstrate the tremendous amount of work that is involved in the decolonization effort. *In The Marrow Thieves*, it is especially the Elder characters who facilitate this process within their community. Rediscovery and recovery occur as Miig and Minerva actively transmit Cree and Anishinaabe languages to the younger generation, resurging ways of knowing otherwise

suppressed by colonial violence. Mourning is embedded in daily life under apocalypse. Dreaming, commitment, and action find consistent expression in the existences of Miig and Minerva, whose dream is to lead their kin North and into safety. This functions as both a survival strategy and an act of collective resurgence. In this way, the novel underscores the essential role of Elders, who model for their kin not only how to survive, but how to live relationally, grounded in reciprocity, respect, and the work of imagining a future after coloniality.

The Marrow Thieves makes place for a resurgence of Indigenous ancestral traditions, as well as fluid gender roles and expressions, and sexuality by bringing ancestral past traditions into the present and future. A key feature of Indigenous futurisms is the reconfiguration of time and temporality. The novel deliberately destabilizes Eurocentric, linear conceptions of time, foregrounding instead a temporality that is multilayered and profoundly relational. Past, present, and future are not separated from one another but interlaced and interconnected. This is foundational to the epistemic and political project of Indigenous resurgence.

By focalizing the story through Indigenous characters and communities, Dimaline invites the reader to experience the world through Indigenous frameworks of time and space. The text's refusal to universalize a single settler narrative of apocalypse or "progress" becomes, in itself, a form of artistic resistance. Thereby, speculative and futurist aesthetics are mobilized to imagine, dream, and enact Indigenous futurities.

Through aesthetic, narrative, and epistemic interventions, the text challenges the racist universalization of settler colonial worldviews. Especially the role of Elders is essential. Minerva becomes the embodiment of and for hope. It is revealed that Minerva did not die during her destruction of the building. She becomes a symbol for hope for her immediate kin and for Indigenous nations across what is now called the Americas. Metaphorically, *The Marrow Thieves* clearly communicates that Elders are powerful and their resistance is capable of physically destroying the settler state. The epistemological force of blood memory, tradition, and traditional language is articulated as active, future-oriented resurgence. The past is brought into the future to argue for a conflation of temporal spheres as it is the case in Anishinaabe onto-epistemology (Awâsis 832). Elders like Miig and Minerva mobilize epistemology as a tool of survivance and co-resistance, ensuring that each generation is equipped to navigate the ongoing violence of coloniality and to imagine a future beyond the logics and geographies of settler colonialism.

The Marrow Thieves thus functions as both a critique and a proposal. It critiques the violent reductionism of settler narratives and offers, through its speculative vision, the lineaments of an Indigenous futurism that is plural, resilient, and committed to the ongoing project of decolonial world-building. By foregrounding Indigenous temporalities, epistemologies, and the importance of Elders, Dimaline's novel refuses closure and finality, insisting instead on a future that is not only possible but already in the making. In the face of colonial attempts to define, contain, and erase, Indigenous futurisms assert the right to imagine, to persist, and to become.

Minerva survives the obliteration of the facility, but is murdered in the aftermath during a rescue mission coordinated by her kin. The murder of the group's most experienced and knowledgeable Elder and most powerful source of resistance strikes everyone, even those outside of the kinship group. Her killing at the hands of a Recruiter—state-sanctioned agents who hunt Indigenous people to forcibly capture them and deliver them to residential-school-style facilities— underscores the relentless violence of the colonial apparatus and the impossibility of easy redemption within the settler state's machinery. The kinship group has lost their epistemological center as well as a knowledge keeper of their traditional onto-epistemology. The survivors collect and store everything Minerva knew and they preserve and resurge the knowledge she has endowed them with. However, they do realize that the knowledge transmitted in writing and orally through them cannot fully replace what was carried in Minerva's living body. The most powerful forms of Indigenous resistance futurity cannot be entirely contained or recovered once lost. The group continues to collectively remember and this in itself becomes a form of resurgence and co-resistance. It shows that Indigenous futurisms are practices of decoloniality, care, and continuity even in times of crisis and loss.

However, the novel refuses to end with grief. The closing scenes, in which Miig is finally reunited with his husband, Isaac, introduce a vision of queer kinship and relational repair. Their reunion is again emblematic of the broader reclamation of Indigenous futures, where queer love, chosen family, and kin-making practices thrive against the logic of attempted settler erasure. *The Marrow Thieves* entwines loss and hope, refusal and resurgence, grief and the radical potential of queer kinship. Minerva's murder does not mean an ending to Indigenous futurisms. Rather, it opens up new questions about how knowledge, memory, and love are sustained and transformed across generations. The novel's ending gestures toward an Indigenous futurism that is insurgent. It is rooted in the hard labor of

remembering, the necessity of grieving, and the ongoing work of building worlds in which Indigenous and queer futures remain lived reality and continue to be forms of active resistance to violent settler politics.

By insisting on the unfinished business of colonialism and highlighting the resilience, creativity, and refusal at the heart of Indigenous resurgence, Dimaline's novel demands resistance. The text exposes how settler colonial systems continue to organize violence through land theft, environmental destruction, gendered dispossession, and the commodification of Indigenous knowledge and bodies. Yet it also refuses the narrative of Indigenous erasure, centering relational epistemologies, kinship, and the transformative power of refusal as the ground from which real alternatives can be built. In the end, Dimaline's vision makes clear that Indigenous futurisms are not only possible, but necessary. The labor of remembering, the daily acts of refusal, and the collective work of world-building modeled by the novel's characters offer a political possibility grounded in accountability, care, and the ongoing fight for justice.

The futures imagined in *The Marrow Thieves* challenge allied scholars and allied readers to recognize the persistence of colonial structures in Western, settler institutions. It is allied scholars' duty to support Indigenous self-determination, and to defend the sovereignty of Indigenous knowledges, languages, and lands. Political solidarity with Indigenous struggles requires more than symbolic gestures (Tuck and Yang 5): it demands disrupting extractive economies, supporting the return of land, and strengthening Indigenous governance and resurgence. Such commitments are ongoing practices of decoloniality, i.e., daily refusals of settler-colonial logics and active participation in Indigenous-led relational futures. By listening, supporting, and intervening against the continuities of settler violence, non-Indigenous people can contribute to sustaining Indigenous world-making in the present, rather than imagining a distant "decolonized" future.

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