Colonial Exploitation and Indigenous Resistance in Sheila Watt-Cloutier and Cherie Dimaline

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Introduction

Capitalism feeds on systemic exploitation, imperialist and colonialist expansion, settler colonialism, militarism, and other systems of violence. On the one hand, it demarcates and hierarchizes existence, treating nonhumans and Indigenous populations (amongst historically marginalized others) as commodities to be co-opted for its sociopolitical and economic power.[1] On the other, as Heather Davis and Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd point out, it "erases difference by way of genocide and forced integration and through projects of climate change that imply the radical transformation of the biosphere" (769). Indigenous identities and cultures are built on, and embedded in, their ancestral and spiritual connections to particular places. Thus, as capitalist settler colonialism dispossesses lands and ruthlessly extracts natural resources, culminating in the current ecological crisis, it displaces and severs many Indigenous peoples' relations to the land. Under capitalist logic, nonhumans face habitat loss and can be pushed to the brink of extinction. Meanwhile, settler states force Indigenous societies to forego their lifeways, abandon their extended familial ties that include nonhuman others, and become part of the dominant, singular colonial voice.

Despite the endeavors of the colonial enterprise to erase and exploit Indigenous lands, cultures and identities, Indigenous peoples have continuously resisted and resurged through the stories they tell and the futures they forge. They have grounded their resistances and resurgences in truth, justice, and relationality, and have pursued them responsibly through questions of why, how and to whom these actions matter.[2] Their narratives serve to amplify Indigenous resistance and foster solidarity amongst Indigenous groups and with the land. Canadian Inuit activist Sheila Watt-Cloutier's *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic, and the Whole Planet* (2015) and Georgian Bay Métis writer Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) are testaments to this resistance and solidarity. I argue that through their different modes of storytelling, both texts investigate the history of colonial oppression,

detail the fierce fight of Indigenous communities against it and foreground their ways of life built on post/colonial solidarity: on mutual respect, reciprocity and accountability.

The Right to Be Cold is a memoir that narrates Watt-Cloutier's personal and political journey to safeguard the Arctic and Inuit culture in the face of planetary degradation and colonial imposition upon her people. Moving back and forth between home and the world, the memoir captures the heart-breaking cultural and environmental changes settlers have wreaked on her communities over the years. For most of *The Right to Be Cold*, Watt-Cloutier meets with her people and engages government officials worldwide to persuade the latter and her readers to pay attention to the melting ice and the gradual melting away of a people and a culture. The book's provocative title demands the right not just to a feeling, an experience others might consider uncomfortable and unwelcoming, but to an identity, a whole way of life associated with, and born out of, that feeling and experience. *The Marrow Thieves* is a postapocalyptic novel describing a Canada polluted and ravaged by the settler population who has lost their ability to dream and, to cure the epidemic of dreamlessness that has befallen them, harvests Indigenous bodies for this ability. Central to the text is a diverse group of young and old Indigenous survivors from different Nations who share suffering and protect each other from the settlers' grasp. The horror of the exploitation does not weaken these survivors; rather, they reclaim and rebuild their Indigenous past, present, and future through their loving kinships with each other and with nonhumans.

Critical analyses by Renée Hulan and Claudia Miller investigate Watt-Cloutier's use of autobiography to showcase her endeavours to influence the international world of public policy and diplomacy with Inuit traditions and connections to the Arctic environment. Regarding *The Marrow Thieves*, Chiara Xausa, Diletta De Cristofaro, and Métis critic Melissa Horner *et al*, for instance, have discussed at length the role of Indigenous storytelling in articulating ongoing colonial violence, its human and nonhuman costs and Indigenous resistance to it. However, each of these critiques focuses on similar genres rather than explores how different generic categories offer their own potentiality in co-illuminating issues of colonialism and Indigenous oppression. This article thus builds on existing studies on the two texts by showing how, read together and within broader Indigenous scholarship, both the novel and the memoir blur the distinction between the imaginary and the real. Watt-Cloutier and Dimaline demonstrate that the ecological crisis is a human rights crisis, through which they interrogate the ideologies of capitalist settler colonialism and draw attention to the powerful survival strategies of Indigenous peoples rooted in their traditions, languages, and kinships.

As a Global South scholar reading Indigenous texts, I work to stay true to their stories, voices, and worldviews through careful analysis of *The Right to Be Cold* and *The Marrow Thieves* and by consulting commentaries from Indigenous and allied critics. In so doing, I hope not only to do justice to the sociopolitical significance of these texts but also to participate in practices of co-resistance, respectful listening, and land stewardship as someone coming from a country once subject to colonial invasion and occupation. In what follows, I lay out and unpack Indigenous narratology that serves as this article's core methodological framework. I then examine how Watt-Cloutier and Dimaline interrogate the intersectional colonial exploitation of Indigenous peoples and nonhumans and how they offer revelatory stories about their attempts to disrupt this enterprise and safeguard their lands and cultures.

Methods and Worldviews

The historical construction of colonial narratives could be described as what Ellen Swartz calls "the master script," which refers to practices, pedagogies and theoretical paradigms created by, and grounded in, Eurocentric and White supremacist ideologies (341). Colonial storytelling practices work to silence multiple voices and perspectives as they legitimize "dominant, White, upper-class, male voicings as the 'standard' knowledge" that controls and assimilates all "other" knowledges (Swartz 341). Nonetheless, as Stó:lõ writer Lee Maracle states, "[a]lthough our knowledge was scattered, it was not destroyed" so that as long as there are story-tellers, story-keepers and story-listeners, there is resistance, restoration and healing (128). In her conceptual framework of Indigenous storytelling, Mescalero Apache epistemologist Doreen Martinez argues that storying ethics, storying methods of truth telling and boundary crossing, storying ruptures and storying interventions are "elements, premises and practices distinctive to Indigenous storying" (2). Indigenous narratives offer alternative truths that rupture the expected and normative colonial story aimed at eradicating Indigeneity: they shift Indigenous peoples from "a prop or object" to "full humanity, histories and modern representations" (Martinez 8, 9). Indigenous stories function as a double-edged sword in that they testify and resist; their ethics and methods are based on truth, justice, relationality, collaboration and accountability – practices of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that are central to "remembrance as resistance" (Martinez 4). As Métis artist and scholar Judy Iseke emphasizes, Indigenous storytelling "sustains communities," "validates the experiences and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples" and "nurtures relationships and the sharing of Indigenous knowledges and cultures" (559). Cultivated over time and place and through generations, it holds an ancestral and futural power

that fuels the continuation of Indigenous traditions, giving Indigenous communities strength to face colonial oppression and reclaim their cultures, stories and, ultimately, lands. Importantly, it offers readers a perspective into colonial history other than the Western one and redefines what it means to stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. *The Right to Be Cold* and *The Marrow Thieves* engage in and with these systems of storying that, to borrow from Martinez, "offer truths, ruptures, interventions and beauty, power and awe" and "go beyond notions of myths, individual notes or peculiar realities" (3). Martinez's conceptualization of Indigenous storytelling framework thus provides a narratological foundation for analyzing the unique characteristics of these texts' storywork and their implications for Indigenous pasts, presents and futures. It helps illuminate how the multi-voices and multi-perspectives Watt-Cloutier and Dimaline provide disrupt the single, dominant colonial story centred on silencing and objectification and tell tales of pride, revelation and attachment that refuse the status of victimhood. These authors accentuate what Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor calls "Native survivance," which he defines as "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response": it is "an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Vizenor 15).[3] Bringing to the fore stories of exploitation and dispossession as well as ones of love, care and reciprocity that are not limited to the nuclear family and blood relatives, Watt-Cloutier and Dimaline challenge colonial ideologies of hierarchization and universalization and (re)assert their lifeways and ethos as counterarguments to powerful colonial interests.

Besides Indigenous narratology, this article consults Indigenous scholarly positions on the ongoing project of settler colonialism and their sociocultural impacts upon Indigenous communities, insight which helps further the close-textual analysis of the two texts. In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013), Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer speaks about the Windigo, the legendary monster of her Anishinaabe people, and compares it to extractive and individualistic capitalism. She shares that it is born of fears and failings, of self-interests rather than reciprocity, characterized by its insatiable hunger and isolation as the Windigo "shrieks with its craving, its mind a torture of unmet want" (Kimmerer 362). During the time of the fur trade, where overexploitation of game devastated the livelihoods of Indigenous communities, Windigo stories spread quickly across villages (Kimmerer 362). They are old teachings warning us of "Windigo nature [...] in each of us" so that we could "recoil from the greedy part of ourselves" but, analogous to capitalist overconsumption and infinite growth, the Windigo is also a figure of the industrial-capitalist-colonial triad that feeds on Indigenous lands and bodies (Kimmerer 363). This explains why the current ecological apocalypse

that befalls Indigenous communities, as Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte points out, is only one amongst many other apocalypses they have undergone, namely "ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration" that are different forms of colonialism (236, 226). Similarly, Davis and Todd problematize how human responsibility for the climate crisis is often evened out, instead stressing the uneven and already existing suffering of Indigenous peoples as forced integration and displacement have broken off their spiritual and ancestral ties to their human and nonhuman kin (771). To heal these ties then is to continue attending to the principles of relationality, respect, and coexistence central to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

Mohawk and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts puts forward the concept of "Place-Thought" to describe how "land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts" (21). For many Indigenous peoples, this mode of being that sees and treasures the inseparable link between place and thought – the fact that one is intrinsically part of, and a literal expression of, one's surroundings – means that one must "maintain communication with it" (Watts 23). Put differently, they must foster relational solidarity with the land – be grateful for, and reciprocate, all the gifts, knowledges and sustenance that it offers them, a notion and practice also honored and carried out by Kimmerer and her communities. Whereas Western thinking tends to commoditize all parts of the Earth, human and nonhuman alike, regarding them as private property and resource, many Indigenous lifeways treat them as families, as persons and subjects, and with reverence and kindness. In this gift economy, as Kimmerer calls it, the relationships between one and others are open, ongoing and imbued with responsibility.[4] Put in conversation with *The Right to be Cold* and *The Marrow Thieves*, these Indigenous teachings are crucial for illuminating the texts' emotional accounts of continuous colonial assaults on the cultures and bodies of Indigenous peoples and their nonhuman kins and Indigenous communities' protection of their kinship systems. This article carefully addresses these points in the sections below, amplifying Indigenous struggles that are also Indigenous resistance and resurgence.

Colonial Legacies and the Human Cost

Told from a first-person point of view, *The Right to be Cold* is profoundly personal and intimate, and in that space Watt-Cloutier details the long and devastating impacts of settler colonialism upon her people—their ways of life and identities. In the chapter "From Dog Teams to Miniskirts and Rock 'n' Roll," she shares her emotional story of spending eight years in southern Canada, during which she attended residential schools far from home and was forcefully disconnected

from “family, culture, traditions, and community” (Watt-Cloutier 53). At the Churchill Vocational Centre, she and other Inuit students were taught “academics as well as vocational skills” (39). Although these skills, Watt-Cloutier admits, are similar to what Inuit children would have learned with their families and in their communities, “the instruction was in southern ways”: “We were being deprogrammed from our Inuit culture and reprogrammed for the southern world” (39). Through the use of candid and direct language, they felt the loss of “Inuit knowledge and skills” that many Inuit students experienced, those which they held dear but which they were forced to forego (33). Watt-Cloutier’s factual narrative serves as clear proof of colonial strategies of assimilation by dispossession of Indigenous cultures and identities while also attending to the deeply affective emotional dimensions of these developments.

As the story unfolds, Watt-Cloutier highlights the history of the residential school system in Canada, which “spans nearly a century, with the last school closing as recently as 1996” (47). She writes that approximately “150,000 children in all were taken from their families to be ‘re-educated’ in English or French and Christianity” and resistance “was rewarded with punishment, and many students experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse” (47). Watt-Cloutier blends historical facts and figures with irony, anger and indignation to expose the absurdity of the residential school system – how it delegitimizes Inuit education and debilitates communities – and to invite readers to co-witness this absurdity and its consequences for her people. The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC) states that the residential schools are a means of “cultural genocide,” whereby the Canadian government “wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources” (3). With the settler state now giving apologies and promoting reconciliation following the establishment of the TRC, Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang assert that these solutions are mere formal gestures and empty words (35). They function to relegate the Canadian government’s treatment of Indigenous peoples to the past and uphold its narrative of temporal linearity. But memoirs like *The Right to Be Cold* unearth this past and bring it into the present because much of what the settler state has done to Indigenous communities – forced integration and removal of spiritual, ancestral and familial kinships – is still felt today as many struggle to heal from the intergenerational traumas caused by these horrific acts.

Unrestricted by the realism which the memoir genre demands and enabled by the form of the postapocalyptic novel, which helps Dimaline re-examine the past and explore the present through the future, *The Marrow Thieves* illustrates this ongoing struggle and what the Canadian government desires to keep hidden. In a different generic

register than Watt-Cloutier, but with similar sociopolitical and affective drive, Dimaline joins in the project to bring to light a plethora of post/colonial solidarities. In her novel, in an attempt to harvest Indigenous bone marrow as a cure for the epidemic of dreamlessness that is killing them, the settler population reconstructs the residential school system advertised at first as "local clinics for medical trials" later turned into "prisons" (Dimaline 102). This reconstruction serves to highlight the continuity of colonial exploitation and objectification of Indigenous peoples, challenging the colonial narrative of progression. Miigwans, an older member of the group of Indigenous survivors, recounts how "[w]e were moved off lands that were deemed 'necessary' for that government, same way they took reserve land during wartime [because they] cared about things like keeping valued, wealthy [white] community members safe" (101). As Diletta De Cristofaro rightly observes, this story "replicate[s] a long history of colonial displacement and land dispossession which continues to affect Indigenous peoples today" (25). The act of extracting bone marrow by way of imprisonment and destruction of Indigenous communities and families literalizes the physical and emotional abuse that Watt-Cloutier mentions in her memoir, and symbolizes the extraction of cultures and kinships integral to Indigenous lives. In this sense, what seems to be at first imaginary could in fact be real, and is based indeed in reality, showing that Indigenous truths can be told in different ways and through various forms rather than via a rigid, singular colonial voice. The harvesting of bone marrow is a powerful image that exposes and articulates the brutal ways in which settlers drain the very core of Indigenous peoples and lands to pursue their colonial interests.

The chapter "A Return Home" in *The Right to Be Cold* reflects this brutality by offering a time-lapse narrative of the drastic changes that had occurred in Watt-Cloutier hometown in Kuujjuaq, where the impacts of settler interventions into their ways of being brought about detrimental consequences for them (61). Working at the Kuujjuaq hospital as an interpreter, Watt-Cloutier witnessed escalating health issues over the years due to "the conditions in the tiny frame and matchbox houses that had been provided to so many families" and the "crowding and lack of running water in these homes" (61). The narrative that conveys these impacts is steeped in detail, an attempt not only to thoroughly illustrate how the colonial system rapidly infiltrates every corner of Inuit life, but also to convince readers of its truth-telling grounded in honesty and accountability. Furthermore, in a heart-rending tone, Watt-Cloutier meticulously documents how the sense of safety and security she once experienced in Old and New Fort Chimo was replaced with violent incidents engendered by the rise in alcohol and drug addiction. They affected "many women of [her] community" and "the very core and soul of the grounded, reflective, caring hunter spirit of [her] men" (63, 63-64). Across the pages, we

feel the immense loss of a way of life, of the honoring traits of these men – a cultural identity. But Watt-Cloutier does not stop here; she traces the root cause of this breakdown of Inuit society to settlers' ongoing oppression. Her "Return Home" is a return to the "litany of historical traumas" of families being "moved off the land" and having their children sent to residential schools, of being forced to become "increasingly dependent on the government and southern institutions for survival" (73). This information is repeated throughout the memoir, reminding readers of how, as the settler state commercializes Indigenous lands and supresses Indigenous means of subsistence, it impairs and demoralizes Indigenous communities from without and within, undermining their sovereignty, pride and integrity, slowly debilitating their spirits and self-sufficiency. Watt-Cloutier authenticates her stories with both facts and emotions, prompting readers to inhabit and *feel* such enormous transformations of one's people and home in such a short amount of time.

Similarly, *The Marrow Thieves* highlights the disintegration of Indigenous solidarity because of colonial infiltration in its portrayal of Indigenous peoples turning on each other, working with "the school truancy officers" or "the Recruiters" to capture other Indigenous members (Dimaline 12). Coming across a group of three Indigenous people, with one of them injured, Miigwans's husband Isaac offers them a place to stay at their cottage. However, his hospitality and kindness are met with betrayal as the group's aim is to notify the Recruiters of Indigenous peoples' whereabouts (117). In that moment of disclosure, Dimaline conveys Miigwans's bitter feelings of anger and injustice, which she amplifies by showing what the character has lost in the face of this breach of kinship trust through his first-person perspective: "I wanted to [...] ask a thousand questions, make them pay for bringing all this into our beautiful home with our books and the fireplace we'd built out of dry river rocks" (118). The pages that follow are filled with a sense of urgency as Miigwans entreats his husband[5] to run away from the Recruiters now outside their house. The quickening of time here compared to the lengthening of time at the beginning of this episode indicates the sweeping transformation that occurs to Miigwans's and Isaac's lives. That they have no choice but to leave behind their "beautiful home" echoes and parallels the experience of being "moved off the land" without negotiations reiterated throughout *The Right to be Cold*. This textual correlation reveals how Dimaline depicts Indigenous suffering and colonial tyranny on both micro and macro levels; that is, how she accentuates the granular and far-reaching consequences of colonialism. Importantly, manifesting how Indigenous peoples and land are commodified and sucked dry by the settler state, both Watt-Cloutier and Dimaline go even further to connect the problems of the colonial

treatment of Indigenous peoples with those of the nonhuman, which this article elaborates in the following section.

Colonial Legacies and the Nonhuman Cost

If earlier we see in *The Right to be Cold* how Inuit communities are broken apart because government policies and colonial practices force them to rely on "southern habits," what is also highlighted is the damaging environmental consequences of these policies and practices for the Arctic landscape (Watt-Cloutier xviii). Watt-Cloutier discusses the processes of globalization that continue to take place despite environmental destruction, of commercial flights arriving "daily in the North filled with those from mining, oil, and gas companies [...] eager to exploit the riches below the melting ice" (xxi). As a result, she laments: the "Arctic ice and snow, the frozen terrain that Inuit life has depended on for millennia, is now diminishing in front of our eyes" (xx). Kimmerer remarks that in Western thinking, the Earth exists as private property to be owned and commodified, whereas in many Indigenous worldviews, it is "a commons, to be tended with respect and reciprocity for the benefit of all" (40, 449). This contrast is visually and audibly reflected in Watt-Cloutier's employment of "terrain," "ice," and "snow" which conjure up the image of a silent, peaceful expanse in juxtaposition to daily "commercial flights" with an eagerness to "exploit." If these words alone evoke a sense of disruption, this is only heightened by Watt-Cloutier's statement that the land is "an important part of our spirit, our culture, and our physical and economic well-being," but climate change has made it "an often unpredictable and precarious place for us" (xix). I argue that in speaking in collective terms, Watt-Cloutier does not invite an us/them divide but rather indicates a destructive entanglement, where forces coming from outside insert themselves in Inuit land and life and devastate them. This usage addresses both Inuit and non-Inuit readers, reiterating what is happening to the former and asking the latter to imagine what it is like to witness one's home and relationality to it "diminishing in front of [one's] eyes" (xx).

Whyte points out that different forms of colonialism, be it through environmental destruction, land dispossession or forced relocation, have "ended Indigenous peoples' local relationships to thousands of plants, animals, insects, and entire ecosystems" (226). It is no wonder that for him, as for Watt-Cloutier, the ecological crisis is yet "another rapid assault on [their] way of life" amongst myriad other hardships Indigenous peoples have already endured (226). The details of the personal and communal loss of Inuit lands and cultures that we witness in *The Right to be Cold* direct attention to this issue and make a sincere appeal for their protection. As Watt-Cloutier forcefully puts it: the global community needs to recognize that "the well-being of our

environment is in itself a fundamental human right. Without a stable, safe climate, people cannot exercise their economic, social, or cultural rights" (xxii). Alternating between emotional and matter-of-fact tones, she exposes the severity of colonial legacies and the suffering of Indigenous peoples and their nonhuman kin. These issues also appear in *The Marrow Thieves*, turning the fictional into a reflection of a frighteningly true reality when analyzed in tandem with *The Right to be Cold*.

In the first part of what Dimaline calls Story, which is the shared oral history of settler colonization, Miigwans describes how "America reached up and started sipping on [their] lakes with a great metal straw," how they polluted the Great Lakes, making them "too poisonous for use," and how, when that happened, they expanded their frontiers for more resource extraction (35). This description intersects with that of coerced relocations and the forced separation of families discussed above, and both are repeated in the second part of Story which is set in the postapocalyptic present. Miigwans says that as the epidemic of dreamlessness decimates the settler population, the government "kept sending us away, enticing us to seek medical care and then keeping us locked up, figuring out ways to hone and perfect their 'solution' for sale" (102). Soon, he continues, "they needed too many bodies, and they turned to history to show them how to best keep us warehoused, how to best position the culling" (102). In addition to words such as "locked up," "warehoused," "sale," and "culling," Dimaline uses others like "crop," "commoditised," and "harvest" throughout the novel to describe the ways in which "the Governors" manipulate and exploit Indigenous bodies. Considering the time span between the first and second parts of Story, these words not only evoke the long-held logics of settler society in light of the Windigo whose hunger and greed are forever insatiable. They also underline the collateral patterns of violence towards Indigenous peoples and nonhumans, patterns that are thought to sustain infinite growth and underpin the colonial enterprise. Yet once again, the form of the postapocalyptic novel, which engages (post)catastrophic scenarios of the future, allows Dimaline to demonstrate that this enterprise is doomed to fail. This is because Indigenous peoples are not victims, but fighters whose tools cannot be snatched away no matter how hard settlers try to eradicate them, a point I will further elaborate on in the section below.

Truth Telling and Glocal Solidarity

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Indigenous storytelling maintains "an active sense of presence, the continuance of Indigenous stories" resisting and disrupting colonial narratives (Vizenor 15). Correspondingly, *The Right to be Cold* works as a testimony and

repudiation of "dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Vizenor 15), enacting resistance and resurgence through storytelling. As we shall see later in this section, the text is a result of Watt-Cloutier's endeavor to highlight how the issues facing her communities are both local and global (or glocal) and how there is, therefore, a need for glocal solidarity.

During her journey to help her communities deal with social issues, Watt-Cloutier becomes ever more active in her involvement with governmental and non-governmental organizations. Her memoir is a conglomeration of many reviews, findings and heartfelt narratives of not only her life story but also her people and their struggles, bringing her and their multi-voiced testimonies to the forefront of public attention. The report "The Validation of Health Objectives in the Kativik Region" (1990) that Watt-Cloutier mentions in *The Right to be Cold* addresses the problems of addiction and its damaging consequences for the individual and family life, such as domestic violence, suicide, low family income and teenage delinquency (99). She emphasizes the fact that these problems, previously rare in her communities, are a direct result of the ways the settler state has rendered them highly dependent on institutions. Coupled with the historical traumas of colonial violence and dispossession, her people have resorted to "alcohol and drugs, as a means to cope with the tumultuous changes to [their] Inuit world" (Watt-Cloutier 100). If, according to Darren Ranco, a member of the Penobscot Nation, and Jamie Haverkamp, Indigenous stories are "meaning-making and world-making practices that teach, heal, restore, remember, and resist," this report – entwined with Watt-Cloutier's memories and personal opinions and insights – carries a similar function (1). It asserts Indigenous presence and is a testament to, and a remembrance of, what has happened in the past and how it has translated into social issues of the present, demanding social justice for Inuit people.

As part of this process of restoration and resistance, Watt-Cloutier practises what Martinez describes as Indigenous storying ethics and interventions when it comes to protecting her people and their ancestral homeland. According to Martinez, Indigenous storying ethics require location of storying within "place-based understandings and traditions" and knowledge of "the tellers and tellings of histories and today's needs and living" (5). Meanwhile, Indigenous storying interventions refer to acts of reminding oneself to "capture the 'taste and ache of our lives'" and exploring and implanting "truth telling(s)" (Martinez 12). Drawing on scientific reports, Watt-Cloutier observes that pollutants from outside of Canada have ended up in the Arctic, harming its human and nonhuman inhabitants. For example, POPs, largely synthetic chemicals used in industrial processes and manufacturing, have been found in the blubber of marine mammals such as "narwhal, beluga, walrus, and seals" (133, 134). Watt-Cloutier

stresses the fact that since they are "the core of our country food, food we have relied on for millennia," the animals "act like global conveyor belts funnelling high concentrations of toxins into our Inuit populations," causing her people to consider relinquishing eating these marine mammals entirely (135). She expresses how this strikes her at "a deeply visceral, emotional level," for the animals "also connect us to the water and the land, to the 'source' of our life, to God" (137). Watt-Cloutier incorporates scientific findings to convince readers of the credibility and seriousness of this cultural and environmental problem, at the same time using language of profound multisensory interconnection to convey how it affects her personally and culturally. She situates her storying in her ancestral traditions and brings them to bear on today's needs and living as she amplifies the importance of her culture through exercise of truth-telling grounded in human-nonhuman kinships.

Proudly sharing the spiritual connection between her country food and identity, Watt-Cloutier remarks: "Our traditional hunting and fishing practices do not destroy habitat. Nor do our practices deplete animal populations, or create waste. […] for thousands of years, Inuit have lived sustainably in our environment. We have been stewards of the land" (xx). In clear, snappy sentences, she prevents in advance any criticism against Inuit hunting and fishing culture and accentuates how Inuit people's sustainable relationships with the Earth have been reproduced and cherished across generations and how they pave the way for other modes of living that help tackle climate issues (141). In the chapter "The Voice of the Hunters," Watt-Cloutier states that "it was becoming increasingly clear to our communities, as well as to much of the scientific world, that our hunters—in fact, any of us who survived on the land—were scientists themselves" (200). This is another storying intervention that disrupts Western biases imposed upon, and frequently utilized to discriminate against, Indigenous consciousness and lifeways, a narrative technique we see in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Martinez 12). Watt-Cloutier indicates the similarity between Western and Inuit (scientific) practices of careful scrutinization of nonhuman worlds to interfere in the self-professed validity and superiority of the former. By closely observing their surroundings, having intense affinity with them, and being finely attuned to small changes, Inuit hunters and elders are "experts" in their environments because "their daily survival on the land and ice depended on it" (200). The crucial difference is that, unlike some Western scientists abusing their knowledge to exploit and destroy the Earth, Inuit people reciprocate and pay respect to the nonhuman that teaches and feeds them. Watt-Cloutier revitalizes Inuit epistemology, showing how Inuit knowing is rooted in the land and cultivated through collective human-nonhuman wisdom and engaging herself in

the important tasks of decolonizing science and redefining it as a pathway towards intimacy and kinship.

In her fight to preserve these sustainable Inuit ways of life, the author practises another mode of Indigenous storying ethics, which is to know her "positionality and intersubjectivity" and be mindful of "how it shows up and influences" (Martinez 5). Aided by the form of the memoir that *shows* glimpses of one's life through actions, conversations and sensory details, Watt-Cloutier's narrative exposes to readers both her vulnerability and courage in her activism, getting them on her side through her sincere and emotional appeal for the safeguarding of the Arctic and her people. She admits that as a young adult, she "would never willingly put [her]self into a position where [she] had to speak to a crowd," and it was because of her "commitment to help [her] communities" that she "projected [her]self into the public sphere in such a big way" (Watt-Cloutier 116). Filled with accounts of her relentless political campaigns, negotiations, persuasions and mobilizations, *The Right to Be Cold* demonstrates Watt-Cloutier's admiring personal and political transformation due to her cause. She understands the importance of her voice and positionality in improving the well-being of her people and the planet and how they could show up and influence political decisions that would protect and promote Aboriginal lifeways. For Watt-Cloutier, "what affects one affects all" (xx). For instance, the melting of the Arctic ice results in "drought, floods, tornadoes, and more intense hurricanes" and could make disappear "small islands from the Caribbean to Florida to the South China Sea" (xx). Watt-Cloutier connects the North-South problems in her international rallying of political support, and as she speaks from her heart about how climate change has impinged on her traditions and communities to appeal to the heart of politicians worldwide, her story is empowering and inspiring. The sense of persistence, perseverance and sincerity that emerges from her stories reflects her devotion to what she believes in and stands for as well as her solidarity with her people and homeland.

Truth Tellings and Ecological Solidarity

As a different form of activism, what Dimaline does in *The Marrow Thieves* works towards a similar goal. She portrays acts of remembrance and transmission of traditional knowledge, language and kinship as modes of Indigenous resistance against the settler colonial construction of vulnerable, vanishing Indigenous peoples (Horner *et al*. 6). The presence of Story, or rather, creative recreation of real historical events discussed above, is proof of this. As Miigwans says to the group of Indigenous survivors, "it was imperative that we know" about the violence and experiences of colonization because "it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really

survive" (Dimaline 36). By remembering what settler colonizers have done to Indigenous peoples, the latter can avoid colonial strategies and tactics that have caused so much suffering for them. The consequences of not knowing this painful past could be detrimental, as demonstrated by the Recruiters' capture of Isaac: he "didn't have grandparents who'd told residential school stories like campfire tales to scare you into acting right" (120). Storytelling and the passing down of vital knowledge are key to enacting Indigenous survivance and defiance, and in this sense, *The Marrow Thieves*, a retelling of colonial history from an Indigenous perspective, functions to materialize this enactment.

In addition to communal Story, Dimaline offers what she calls "Coming-To Story," which is the personal experience of colonization told by a specific member of the group, including that of Frenchie, Miigwans and Wab. While the Coming-To Stories of Frenchie and Miigwans are those of family members scattered and lost to the Recruiters, that of Wab recounts a series of colonial sexual abuse, poverty and addiction she is forced to undergo. That these individual narratives are told from their first-person perspectives renders them all the more visceral and emotional. As Dimaline gives voices to multiple characters, allowing them to come forward and bear witness to colonial violence and showing that their current circumstances are a consequence and manifestation of settler colonization, this multiperspectivity is a direct challenge to "the master script" – the one-sided, single colonial story. The novel emphasises the fact that there is always another point of view, another side to history. Dimaline directs attention to Indigenous storytelling as indeed a mode of Indigenous resistance and resurgence, in that if settler colonialism works to silence their voices, her characters, much like Watt-Cloutier, tell multiple stories to (re)assert and (re)claim their presence.

This fight against colonial oppression in *The Marrow Thieves* is further manifested in its portrayal of the perseverance and continuation of Indigenous language. Horner *et al*. state that "[o]ne of the central targets of settler colonist efforts of cultural genocide was through linguicide, and no other domain illuminates the extraordinary means by which Indigenous peoples have resisted subjugation than through intergenerational linguistic transmission and revitalisation" (14). Dimaline vividly illustrates this when an Anishinaabe Elder named Minerva teaches her language to the younger generation in the group and they learn it with pride and eagerness. Yet the high point of the "linguistic transmission and revitalisation" in *The Marrow Thieves* is the moment at which her Indigenous language revolts against the Recruiters. As they start the process of extracting her dreams,

> [Minerva] sang. She sang with volume and pitch and a heartbreaking wail that echoed through her relatives' bones, rattling them in the ground under the school itself. [...] there were words: words in the language that the

> conductor couldn't process, words the Cardinals couldn't bear, words the wires couldn't transfer. As it turns out, every dream Minerva had ever dreamed was in the language. It was her gift, her secret, her plan. (187)

The repetition of "words" in short, punchy sentences emphasizes the power of Indigenous language while undermining that of colonizers, pointing to the fact that Indigenous peoples possess gift, secret and plan that are beyond the colonizers' ability to comprehend. Rooted in her bone marrow, Minerva's Anishinaabe language and culture are unextractable, and as long as they are passed on through generation to generation, they will continue to survive and thrive.

In the same breath, Dimaline underlines Indigenous peoples' other crucial survival skill that we have come across in *The Right to be Cold*: deep spiritual connection with ancestors. It is not only the Anishinaabe language but also Minerva's act of calling on her "blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors" that destroys the Cardinals to pieces (Dimaline 187). On the one hand, as these computers stand for the colonial enterprise and its exploitative ideologies, this episode offers a powerful symbolic image of its collapse and implies the ruination of the foundation of the residential school system. On the other, Minerva's summoning of her relatives from the ground serves to unearth the colonial history that settlers wish to bury and offers another powerful symbolic image of Indigenous peoples rising up. Importantly, the sense of collectivism emerging from this calling on relatives signals Indigenous resurgent community-building and intergenerational and intertribal kinships that the settler state has tried time and again to destroy. Indeed, the extended makeshift family we see in the novel is formed by Miigwans, Minerva and the young people, most of whom are Cree, Métis or Anishinaabe. For Dimaline, Indigenous close-knit communities pave the way for Indigenous strength and futurity. As Miigwans affirms in his account of Story, "even after our way of life was being commoditised, after our lands were filled with water companies and wealthy corporate investors, we were still hopeful. Because we had each other" (101). Sustained through care and storying, Indigenous ethics of intergenerational and intertribal solidarity, collaboration and reciprocity are Indigenous secrets and powers in fighting the oppressive colonial system.

If the concept of family in *The Marrow Thieves* celebrates and embraces different generations and Nations as part of Indigenous traditions and moral codes, it includes the land and the nonhuman that lives there. Watts argues that "we (humans) are made from the land; our flesh is literally an extension of soil" (27). This explains why, she continues, "place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated": "Place-Thought is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts" (Watts 21). Human and nonhuman epistemologies are deeply place-based – literally rooted

in, and emergent from, soil – and the human-nonhuman entanglement happens on all levels: physical, mental, and spiritual. According to Watts, this concept of "Place-Thought" exists "not only [in] Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people but in a majority of Indigenous societies" (27). We have learned earlier in *The Right to be Cold* that for Inuit people, the land "teaches us what we need to survive" and "builds character, nurturing judgment, courage, patience, and strength under pressure" (Watt-Cloutier 175). Inuit people belong to, and come from, the land, and they appreciate and treasure the wisdom of it, believing that solidarity with, and respect for, the land is vital to confronting not only the historical problems of colonialism but also the dramatic climate changes caused by this sociopolitical system. In *The Marrow Thieves*, this intimate and nurturing kinship with nonhumans is most evident when Frenchie asks how he and other Indigenous peoples can return to their ancestral homelands and start "the process of healing" (Dimaline 208). A character answers: "we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge […]. When we heal our land, we are healed also," adding: "We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually" (Dimaline 208).

Because many Indigenous peoples see themselves as extensions of their land, from which their agencies, knowledges and sustenance derive, they understand that a reciprocal and accountable relationship with it is central to their existence and survival. This principle is evocative of Kimmerer's gift economy where humans and nonhumans thrive on the relationships of gratitude and solidarity. For Dimaline, as for the characters in the novel, it is what will ultimately get Indigenous peoples to that point of healing where they live-with and -through the ecological damages engendered by colonial capitalism and revive both themselves and their nonhuman kins.

Conclusion

Both *The Right to be Cold* and *The Marrow Thieves* expose the exploitative logics of settler colonialism and the parallel patterns of colonial violence across Indigenous bodies and lands. However, as noted earlier, Watt-Cloutier and Dimaline interrogate these points to highlight the powerful survival strategies of Indigenous peoples that are their Indigenous storytelling, languages and kinships with nonhumans. Although employing different genres and modes of narrative (the memoir and the novel), they are faithful to traditional Indigenous storying constitutive of ethics, ruptures and interventions. Watt-Cloutier and Dimaline show how, in building their cultures, identities, lives and families around the moral tenets of respect, reciprocity and accountability, which go beyond the bounds of blood relatives and are cultivated across generations, many Indigenous Nations hold powers and ancestral knowledges that have helped them

fight against settler colonialism again and again. At the end of her memoir, Watt-Cloutier states that she intends to "keep working on the issues [she] feel[s] passionate about": "contributing to the dialogue of bettering our communities and our planet" (326). But she also wants to be able to do what she has often missed over the last twenty years or so doing activism: "pick berries, go fishing, walk the rolling tundra, learn how to sew and bead beautiful things, and spend more time being with and sharing country food with my family and community" (Watt-Cloutier 326). While Watt-Cloutier longs to spend more time with the land to which she belongs, Frenchie says on the last page of *The Marrow Thieves* that "as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream" (Dimaline 247). Together, these yearnings and understandings indicate to Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers that Indigenous lands, traditions and teachings, will be restored and healed so long as there are Indigenous peoples telling, keeping and listening to Indigenous stories.

Notes

1. The use of "Indigenous" throughout this article aligns with how peoples from First Nations refer to themselves (Younging 74). Since the term "Indigenous Peoples" is used to describe the distinct societies of "First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada" as well as "Indigenous Peoples worldwide," the article uses this term where appropriate (74). Furthermore, to emphasize the diversity of different Indigenous worldviews in opposition to mainstream society's tendency to assimilate them into one, when quoting Indigenous scholars, this article mentions the specific Nations to which they are affiliated.

2. The term "resurgence" is used in accordance with Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel's definition of it as "everyday practices of renewal and responsibility within native communities" to which the question of how one's ancestors and future generations recognize one as Indigenous is central to enacting it (86, 88).

3. The term "victimry" is mainly used by Gerald Vizenor in his writings about Indigenous American culture and has the same meaning as victimhood.

4. For another discussion on gift-giving as a way of establishing kinship, see Peri Sipahi's contribution in this special issue on "'not yet / under water' – Rejecting Victimhood and Weaving Solidarity in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's Eco-Poetics."

5. What both the male characters Miigwans and Isaac experience here is part of their love story that Dimaline foregrounds in her novel. She accentuates the struggle and life of Two-Spirit and queer individuals and relationships that the Indigenous community and their ancestors have long cherished and celebrated. Dimaline, then, signals another kind of solidarity that must be fostered and tended to in a time of environmental breakdown when we need multiple forms of diverse and intersectional solidarity. For reference, please consult the news article "A Place in the Circle Two Spirit (LGBTQ+) Leadership Symposium" (2021) from Métis Nation of Ontario and The Queerness of Native American Literature (2014) by Lisa Tatonetti.

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