“Far From Their Original Homeland”: Encountering Decolonial Families in Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* and Waubgeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow*

Beth Aherne
School of English and Digital Humanities, University College Cork

Abstract
Cherie Dimaline’s The Marrow Thieves *(2017) and Waubgeshig Rice’s* Moon of the Crusted Snow *(2018) have been studied as Indigenous critiques of the climate crisis, Western knowledge systems, and Canadian concepts of reconciliation. Scholars argue that both Indigenous futurist novels criticise the systemic marginalisation of First Nations people in Canada. According to Mark Rifkin, central to settler-state encounters with Indigenous people in North America are the imposition of European constructions of the family and the erasure of Native kinship systems. However, the subversive depictions of the family in Rice’s and Dimaline’s texts have yet to be explored in-depth and in conversation with each other. To address this gap, this article conducts a comparative analysis of* The Marrow Thieves *and* Moon of the Crusted Snow *to investigate how Indigenous futurist texts transform science fiction (SF) conventions to decolonise and queer the family.*
This analysis uses postcolonial and queer theories alongside theories of Indigenous futurisms to critically examine the families in Dimaline’s and Rice’s novels. This study contextualises the contemporary Canadian family and considers the implications of Western settler-colonial family ideology for Indigenous groups in North America, investigating how the two authors employ Indigenous futurisms in their portrayals of First Nations’ gender roles, parenthood and kinship systems. Both texts are set in the near future where Indigenous families and communities are forced to hone their survival skills to avoid succumbing to the apocalypse. The families resist exploitation through storytelling and cultural inheritance. Central to their resistance against the effects of the colonial encounter is their transgression of Western gender and familial norms as well as their cosmologies of kinship which foster their relationship with the land. Ultimately, both Dimaline and Rice employ dystopian settings typical of SF to subvert traditional family structures in defiance of settler-coloniality.

The study of the family in SF has been limited to conventional biological families depicted in narratives that perpetuate imperialist endeavours through tales of space exploration and interplanetary colonisation. By conducting a comparative analysis of the portrayal of queer decolonial families in Indigenous futurist texts, this article expands the study of the family in SF outside the boundaries of traditional Western encounter narratives and the nuclear family form.

Introduction

John Rieder (2012, p. 19) argues that in the process of mapping the “non-Western world”, Western imperialists “developed a scientific discourse about culture and mankind” which influenced the beginnings of what is now called science fiction (SF). Indeed, Sheryl Vint (2021, p. 62) notes that space colonisation narratives transpose colonial powers’ historical subjugation of Indigenous people onto futuristic settings. Consequently, traditional SF narratives of colonisation, conquest and the exploitation of other people’s worlds closely resemble the real

© 2024 *Aigne*, University College Cork

experiences of Indigenous people and their ancestors (Medak-Saltzman, 2017, p. 139). In response to the imperialist roots of SF, Indigenous futurist texts such as Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) and Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018) appropriate and transform the genre's conventions to resist the stereotypes and oppressive norms imposed on Indigenous people since their initial encounters with European colonisers. *The Marrow Thieves* and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* have been examined as acts of literary resistance to climate change, Western scientific paradigms, notions of historical progress and Canadian settler ideologies of reconciliation (Bussière, 2020, p. 47; Childers and Menendez, 2022, p. 212; Zanella, 2022, p. 9). However, these novels' portrayals of queer Indigenous family formations have yet to be explored in-depth and in conversation with each other. To address this discrepancy, this article undertakes a comparative examination of how Dimaline and Rice utilise SF conventions to decolonise and queer the family.

The imposition of settler norms on Indigenous peoples and the assimilation of Indigenous people into settler society in Canada resulted from historical encounters between colonisers and Native populations. In particular, British, French and Canadian settlers have used family discourse to facilitate and justify the oppression and dislocation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. The First Nations people are the original inhabitants of Canada and live mostly in the south. The Inuit are Arctic Indigenous people, while the Métis have mixed French and Cree ancestry.[1] Historically, families who belong to these Indigenous groups have opposed the white middle-class nuclear family model, which consists of married parents and their biological children. The concept of family may differ among Indigenous groups due to factors such as "higher mobility" and "cultural kinship systems", with many Indigenous families being much larger than the nuclear family unit, often including multiple generations and members not related by blood (Tam *et al.*, 2017, p. 245). Colonisers aligned these non-nuclear Indigenous kinship systems with primitivity. Consequently, as Mark Rifkin (2011, p. 4) argues, marriage and the nuclear family form that it dictates have been imposed on Indigenous people to erase their supposedly "uncivilised" kinship formations. Simultaneously, justifications for the eradication of Native sovereignty have, in part, been legitimised by family discourse that disapproves of Indigenous family forms.

The apocalyptic scenarios in the two novels under examination vary. In *The Marrow Thieves*, society has collapsed due to water shortages, whereas in *Moon of the Crusted* Snow,

[1] The Cree are a North American Indigenous group. They primarily live in Canada and are one of the country's largest First Nations.

a reserve in the far north of Canada becomes isolated from the rest of the world. In both Dimaline's and Rice's novels, their resistance to imperialist family norms facilitates the characters' survival. Western family ideology is undoubtedly heteronormative and according to Rifkin (2011, p. 32), heteronormativity is often confined to "an unmarked whiteness in ways that consign people of colour to an undifferentiated sexual savagery outside the hetero/homo binary". As heteronormativity "excludes those who are seen as straight but still perverse due to their performance of desire, homemaking, and family", Indigenous families that do not conform to settler norms of marriage and kinship can be defined as queer (Rifkin, 2011, p. 33). Despite queer analytical frameworks originating in Western critical theory, Indigenous scholars have adopted queer theory as a decolonial resistance to white-normative modes of queerness as well as imperialist attitudes toward Native gender, sexuality and family. Instead of casting Indigenous people's non-heteronormative behaviours, such as gender and sexual non-binarism as well as communal modes of kinship as tradition, Indigenous scholars such as Qwi-Li Driskill (Cherokee) [2] (2010, p. 69) and Sandy O'Sullivan (Wiradjuri)[3] (2021, p. 3) reclaim the term queer as a political mode of decolonising Indigenous kinship and family systems which defy Western family ideology. The use of the term queer in the analysis of Indigenous modes of being is, therefore, a rejection of imperialist queer histories, which assert that modern queer subjects and politics have developed within whiteness and in opposition to Indigeneity (Morgensen, 2011, p. 43).

Both *Marrow Thieves* and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* constitute critical dystopias, aligning them with queer, feminist and Indigenous dystopian and utopian literary traditions. According to Matias Thaler (2019, p. 608), critical dystopias are categorised by the recounting of "painful stories" that allow us to determine "where danger looms in the present" so that we can then "gesture towards potential responses in the future". For Indigenous writers, dystopian settings are particularly generative; they acknowledge Indigenous oppression throughout history but are also an opportunity to imagine a better future (Whyte, 2018, p. 224). To examine how apocalyptic encounters with the settler state facilitate the queer decolonisation of the family in Rice's and Dimaline's Indigenous futurist novels, this article first considers how Indigenous people have historically survived apocalyptic circumstances, and the role of ancestral memory in asserting Indigenous presence. Subsequently, it analyses the texts' intersectional critiques of the imposition of binarised systems of gender and their effects on

[2] The Cherokee are one of the Indigenous groups from the Southeastern Woodlands of the United States.
[3] The Wiradjuri are the largest Aboriginal group in New South Wales, Australia.

Indigenous women as well as settler-state imposed ruptures of Indigenous fatherhood. Finally, this article explores how the texts transform the consequences of the apocalyptic colonial encounter into an opportunity for the reclamation of Native sovereignty through their portrayal of the relationship between the land and queer decolonial families.

Apocalyptic Encounters

Dimaline's and Rice's dystopian novels resist the colonisation of the family by first illuminating Indigenous people's apocalyptic encounters with the colonial conditions of contemporary Canada and projecting them into the future. Kyle P. Whyte (2018, p. 224) argues that some Indigenous perspectives on climate change situate the present time as already dystopian. In other words, Indigenous knowledge systems acknowledge that the world has already entered an era of climate dystopia. The near futures of *The Marrow Thieves* and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* imagine the decline of our present climate dystopia to envision how it might be escaped. *The Marrow Thieves* is told from the perspective of Frenchie, a Métis teenager who has witnessed several climate disasters including the "Water Wars", during which drinking water was in short supply. At this time, rising sea levels caused fifty per cent of the population to perish, threatening the survivors with a disease that caused an incapacity to dream. This affliction does not affect the Native population, whose bone marrow is believed to cure the settlers' illness. In their search for a cure, the "Department of Oneirology"—utilising the scientific term for the study of dreams as a guise for the mass genocide of Native people and the development of a white-supremacist nation—begin to abduct Indigenous people and extract their bone marrow in reinstated residential schools[4] (2017, p. 14). The use of Indigenous people as a cure for the settlers' disease results in the displacement and destruction of persecuted Indigenous families and reflects how in *The Marrow Thieves*, according to Emily Childers and Hannah Menendez (2022, p. 213), "Indigenous bodies become literal commodities in yet another settler-state enacted genocide". The dystopian apocalypse in Dimaline's novel is fuelled by scientific ideology typical of SF. More specifically, the scientific study of dreams—Oneirology—is used to identify treatments for the settler's inability to dream, justifying the genocide of their Indigenous counterparts. As imperialist scientific discourse dictates that Indigenous people are considered less than human, and that which is non-human is devalued by settler governments, settler colonialism easily transfers technologies

[4] Residential schools were government-sponsored religious schools established in Canada in the nineteenth century to "sever familial and cultural ties and indoctrinate [First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people] into the hegemonic Euro-Canadian cultural order" (Hutchings, 2016, p. 301).

of domination. These technologies move seamlessly from environmental destruction, which led to the "Water Wars" and to the massacre of Indigenous people.

In contrast, although scholars speculate that environmental destruction triggers *Moon of the Crusted Snow*'s dystopian setting, the cause of the apocalypse in Rice's novel is unknown. The Anishinaabe[5] protagonist, Evan Whitskey, and his community, located in the far north of Canada, are cut off from all electricity and outside communication. People from the south infiltrate the community, and as supplies diminish, attempt to create animosity amongst the community's struggling inhabitants. The novel's apocalyptic setting highlights the failure of Western science and progress within Indigenous communities, disrupting Western narratives of science as an overwhelmingly positive force. In the opening chapters of the novel, Evan arrives home from hunting and notices that "It's so quiet" in the house (2018, p. 8). He and his partner, Nicole, soon realise that the electricity is off, and that internet and phone reception have dropped. Evan comments that losing phone reception "was common" because the

> cell tower had only gone up a few years before [...] when construction contractors from the south wanted a good signal while they built the massive new hydro dam farther north on the bay. (2018, p. 14)

Encounters between Western Europeans and the Anishinaabe people resulted in the forced migration of Evan's ancestors and their confinement on a reserve in a remote part of Canada, far from their original lands by the Great Lakes. Here, the inadequate facilities and harsh weather have caused Evan and his family to become accustomed to the electricity switching off and the internet and cell phone reception dropping. For settler populations, the loss of resources such as electricity and phone service indicate catastrophe and feature in many dystopian and apocalyptic narratives. However, for Evan and his community, the loss of these technologies is part of everyday life. Thus, the contemporary Indigenous experience of settler colonialism is akin to an apocalypse, elucidating the continued negative impact of Western colonisation on Native North American families.

Indigenous futurisms uncover the historical experience of apocalyptic conditions for Native North Americans by projecting Indigenous genocide into the future. By envisioning dystopian futures that draw on Indigenous oppression in the past and present, Indigenous futurist writers imagine "way[s] out" of the "dystopic present into better futures" (Medak-

[5] The Anishinaabe (alternatively spelt Anishinabe, Anicinape, Nishnaabe, Neshnabé, Anishinaabeg, Anishinabek, Aanishnaabe) are an Indigenous group situated in the Great Lakes region of Canada and the United States.

Saltzman, 2017, p. 145). In *The Marrow Thieves*, when Frenchie is separated from his family and living alone in the overgrown landscape, he encounters Miigwans who adopts him into his patchwork family. An important practice in Frenchie's new Native family is "Story" during which members of the group recall their own and their ancestors' past. Frenchie recounts how Rose, a girl who joins the group "was raised by old people" and "spoke like them" which made their family "feel surrounded on both ends—like [they] had a future and a past" (2017, p. 44). During "Story", Frenchie's found family strengthen their kinship with their ancestors who encountered French, British and Canadian colonisers. Kinship is a central aspect of Indigenous life and links family and community. Becoming kin, according to Patty Krawec (2022, p. 1), means being "related to everything" and being one's "relatives, all of them". This sense of responsibility and connection to those who are both family and community is fostered by storytelling in *The Marrow Thieves* (Zanella, 2020, p. 9). To reassure the group that they have a future, Miigwans tells of how they had "survived this before"—this being genocide—and how they "will survive it again" (2017, p. 45). The apocalypse and Indigenous genocide are therefore invoked as a continued experience for Indigenous nations in Canada, not merely a memory or historical phenomenon. Aileen, an Elder in Evan's community in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, makes a similar point when she recalls how a child told her that they thought the world was ending, prompting her to remind Evan that:

> Our world isn't ending. It already ended. It ended when the Zhagnaash[6] came into our original home down south on that bay and took it from us. (2018, p. 149)

The Anishinaabe people's world as they knew it was destroyed by their encounters with Western imperialists and the subsequent displacement and genocide of their people occurring over the course of over five hundred years. Therefore, both Rice and Dimaline appropriate the apocalyptic setting of SF to invoke ancestral memory and to situate Indigenous people firmly in the present, while also denying the erasure of their past and projecting them into the future through their continued survival. Simultaneously, the never-ending apocalypse challenges Western concepts of linear time where "civilisation" continuously "progresses" away from the past—a way of thinking many Indigenous societies did not espouse historically.

Moreover, the invocation of ancestral memory of the apocalyptic displacement and separation of Indigenous families is an act of resistance to the annihilation of Indigenous kinship systems. In the nineteenth century, Canadian federal government policy enforced marriage as a means of "dissolving tribal modes of collective ownership that went along with

[6] Englishmen in Ojibwe (a language spoken by many Indigenous people in North America).

gender-nonbinarism, non-monogamy, and/or matrilocal open marriage" and assigned property to the heads-of-household—the husband and father of the Indigenous family (Lewis, 2022, p. 40). At this point, the goal of the Canadian government altered from eradicating all First Nations, Métis and Inuit people to assimilating them into Western European culture and the new culture of the Canadian nation-state. The forced "conversion of Indigenous people to Christianity–especially through residential and boarding Schools, most of which were run by Christian institutions" inculcated binary gender and heteronormativity which resulted in some Indigenous groups rejecting Native gender roles and non-nuclear family formations (Robinson, 2019, pp. 1676–1677). Aileen's ancestral remembering, storytelling and recounting serve to underscore for her relatives the historical imperialist endeavour to destroy the Indigenous family and reshape it in the European image when she tells her community that their ancestors:

> whispered stories and the language in each other's ears, even when they were stolen from their families to endure forced and often violent assimilation at church-run residential schools. (2018, p. 53)

Aileen's storytelling emphasises that their relatives also experienced an apocalypse and encourages them to come together as a family, denying the erasure of Anishinaabe history as an act of resistance to the separation and destruction of Native families.

Similarly, Dimaline projects the terror of the Canadian residential schools into the future to emphasise the continued impact of colonial family ideology on First Nations and Métis families. In the near future of the text, the recruiters from the Department of Oneirology imprison Indigenous people in residential schools where they extract their bone marrow. Frenchie recounts how his dad arrived home one day before both he and Frenchie's mother were abducted by recruiters—and told them how:

> the Governor's Committee didn't set up the schools brand new […] they were based on the old residential school system they used to try to break our people, to begin with, way back. (2017, p. 15)

Many Indigenous groups, including the Métis, to whom Frenchie and his biological family belong, were nomadic people and their confinement to residential schools and reservations destroyed their families. Frenchie's mother reminds him of how—following the arrival of Europeans—his ancestors' movements were no longer autonomous but resulted from their persecution by the settler state:

> There were generations in our family where all we did was move. First by choice, then every time the black cars came from town and burned out our homes […] Now the cars are here again. Only now, they are white vans. (2017, p. 22)

Sarah Nickel (2017, p. 303) argues that acts of displacing Indigenous people and keeping them in strictly monitored reserves or residential schools "were grounded in the belief that Indigenous standards of living were too low". In particular, nomadism was considered primitive, animal-like behaviour. As such, their persecution was legitimised by the belief that Indigenous families were uncivilised and incapable of caring for their own children, themselves or their land. Dimaline's portrayal of reinstated residential schools and the destruction of a Métis family in the future rejects the consignment of Indigenous people to the past while illuminating the Canadian government's continued efforts to alter and destroy the Indigenous family both in reality and in this dystopian future.

Encountering Resistance

Settler encounters with Indigenous people in North America not only transformed the landscape of what was once known as Turtle Island (North America), but they permanently altered the cultural and social lives of the people who lived there. Emma Battel Lowman and Adam J. Barker (2015, p. 79) posit that "settler colonialism does not rely solely on the elimination of Indigenous bodies but on the elimination of Indigenous identity and peoplehood". In the early twentieth century, "enfranchisement" policy was designed to bring Indigenous people into Canadian work and education systems so they could be "civilized…out of existence as Indigenous" (Lowman and Barker, 2015, p. 80). Dimaline's text depicts how settler ideology facilitates the eradication of Indigeneity when Wab, an enigmatic young woman in Frenchie's newfound family, tells her "Story". Prior to joining Miigwans' family, Wab lived in the inner city with her mother who was a drug addict and sex worker. In this dystopian future, non-Indigenous people are taken to safeguarded areas and Native people are left to survive in the crumbling cities. Wab recalls how the military took "cleaner citizens to new settlements and gated communities" while her Indigenous neighbours went to "the death camps" to be "murdered real slow" (2017, p. 94). The use of the word "cleaner" to describe the non-Indigenous or settler people who were brought to safety suggests an innocence or unmarkedness not available to the Indigenous people of the city. Instead, their Indigeneity marks them as "unclean" and consigns them to savagery. From their first encounter with Indigenous people in the Americas, settlers used uncleanliness as a marker of Indigenous primitivity as exemplified by Anishinaabe scholar, Shelly Knott Fire's (2021, p. 122), recollection of her mother roughly cleaning her and brushing her hair "in order to avoid being called 'dirty' by the zhaagnosh who were tourists in the village". To be seen as civilised, according to Western colonialism, one must be unmarked by primitivity. The gated suburban

community within which atomised white middle-class nuclear families live has long been a symbol of American family life. Wab and her Indigenous neighbours' persecution is justified by colonial family discourse which perceives them as unclean, and consequently unfit for the safety of the gated community.

A core aspect of the imperialist attack on Native peoplehood is the dehumanisation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women. Wab's experience as an Indigenous woman in a colonial nation-state elucidates *The Marrow Thieves*' intersectional resistance to the dehumanisation of Native women. Due to a lack of employment and resources in the city, Wab brings messages and other commodities to people in exchange for food. She is eventually caught by a gang of her competitors and is raped repeatedly over two days. Wab's story reflects the violence Indigenous women suffer because of settler colonialism. According to Krawec (2022, p. 116), "Black and Native women […] were seen in the past, and still today, as always sexually available, always promiscuous", unclean, and animalistic. As a result, encounters between Indigenous women and settlers often lead to sexual assault and rape. In contemporary Canada, Indigenous women who go missing or who are murdered are often assumed to be sex workers, an assumption that is typically used to justify sexual violence against them. Wab's story illuminates the unique lived experience of Indigenous women as a result of the colonial encounter which inscribes them with a sexuality that defies the image of white civilised purity—symbolised by the docile white wife and mother of the nuclear family—consigning them to a less-than-human status and justifying their subjection to rape and sexual assault.

In addition to highlighting the plight of Indigenous women in settler societies, both Dimaline's and Rice's texts resist the gender binarism imposed on Indigenous people through the enforcement of Western conceptions of marriage and the family. In many pre-colonial societies, women had a high degree of autonomy and the female gender role was not situated in opposition to that of the male (Vázquez García, 2002, p. 91). However, the imposition of the

> European model of the nuclear monogamous male-headed family as legislation limits native women's access to land in their own communities and places them in a vulnerable position vis a vis their male counterparts. (Vázquez García, 2002, p. 91)

The apocalyptic conditions in both Dimaline and Rice's novels are used to emphasise Native women Elders' spiritual and leadership roles in defiance of the limitations of Western patriarchy. Minerva, the grandmother figure in Frenchie's family in *Marrow Thieves*, and Aileen in *Moon of the Crusted Snow* are responsible for passing on the cultural teachings and language of their ancestors to the children and young adults in their communities. In *Marrow Thieves*, Frenchie remarks to Rose that he "feel[s] bad for you guys" when they have to stay at

the camp while he and the other boys hunt with Miigwans (2017, p. 50). Rose, however, rejects the implication that spending time with the Elder Minerva at their homestead is any less important or exciting than the act of hunting for food when Frenchie expresses his shock at hearing her speak Ojibwe[7] and Rose tells him that she learned the language from Minerva because "Minerva has the language and us poor guys are stuck with her so we learn" (2017, p. 51). Frenchie's dismay at Rose knowing more "language" than he does highlights the high status of language for Native people in contemporary Canada, situating Minerva's position as a teacher of that language as a decolonial act of resistance to not only the erasure of Indigeneity but to the devaluation of Indigenous women. At the same time, Rose's rejection of Frenchie's belief that staying at the homestead is less vital to their survival is a rejection of Western family discourse where domestic work is undervalued. Thus, the Native women in *Marrow Thieves* resist colonial family discourse supported by patriarchal legislation, towards reclaiming Native sovereignty and decolonising the Indigenous family.

Similarly, in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Aileen's role as an Elder garners her respect from her community. Aileen is empowered by her knowledge of Indigenous language and medicine, and she encourages other women to also adopt these skills. For example, Evan's partner, Nicole, "really appreciates all the things [Aileen is] teaching her about the old medicine ways" (2018, p. 147). Evan works for the roads sector of the band—the governing body for their community's use of reserve lands, money and other resources managed by the Canadian federal government—while his partner, Nicole, remains at home with the children in a reflection of heteronormative Western patriarchal family formations. Nevertheless, Nicole is empowered by working with Aileen to learn Anishinaabemowin and their traditional medicinal practices. However, Aileen is not only an influence on the women of her community but she also often "shared a teaching or an old story with the young men when they came to visit" (2018, p. 148). In this way, Aileen's elevated role in the community, among both men and women, defies binarised imperialist family ideology, which sought to assign power in the form of property to Indigenous men and weaken Indigenous women, to assimilate Indigenous families into Western patriarchal society.

As well as enforcing binary gender roles, European encounters with Indigenous people created long-standing ruptures in Native families by hindering the ability of Indigenous fathers to have meaningful relationships with their children. In contemporary North America,

---

[7] The language spoken by the Indigenous people of the Subarctic and Northeastern woodlands in North America.

Indigenous fathers face high levels of incarceration and historical trauma. According to Jessica Ball:

> Removal of children from family care and families from traditional territories, along with high rates of incarceration of Indigenous men, have produced a fissure in the sociocultural transmission of father roles across generations and created monumental challenges for Indigenous fathers' positive and sustained involvement with their children. (Ball, 2009, p. 29)

Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* use the apocalyptic setting to decolonise fatherhood by portraying positive Indigenous paternal figures. Frenchie is reunited with his father late in the novel once they have both joined new families, but Frenchie is uneasy about their reunion following his experience of taking on the role of protector in his new family. While reminiscing about his life with his family prior to being separated from them, Frenchie notes that his only job was to "Just remain [him]self" but now his "job was to hunt, and scout, and build camp, and break camp, to protect others" (2018, p. 195). The significance of the fatherly role he plays in his new family is made evident by the advice given to Frenchie by his found father Miigwans when he reminds Frenchie to practise safe sex:

> All I'm gonna say is babies are the most important thing we have to move ahead. So when they come, they need to come to families that want them and are ready to take responsibility. (2017, p. 197)

Frenchie is primed to become a father by taking on the role of protector and learning how to be accountable for his actions. Upon reuniting with his father, he realises that the expectations and skills he has inherited from both his biological father and Miigwans re-establishes familial connections severed by the settler state-mandated recruiters. Therefore, through both reuniting Frenchie with his father and portraying the inheritance of skills from father to son, Dimaline uses the apocalyptic conditions of the re-established residential school system to decolonise the family and repair the ruptures inflicted on it by the colonial encounter.

In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the apocalyptic setting decolonises fatherhood by portraying positive Indigenous father figures who ensure the community's survival. In Rice's novel, Indigenous fathers use storytelling and survival techniques passed down through generations to repair and secure the ruptures settler-colonialism inflicts on their families. Evan exemplifies the positive Indigenous father figure in his interactions with his children and his role in the community. Early in the novel, Evan notes his father's influence on him as a child when he remembers how:

> His father had first taught him to identify and follow moose tracks in the deep bush around their reserve when he was five. (2018, p. 5)

Evan is thinking about his upbringing while "tracking his own kill to support his young family" (2018, p. 5). Evan inherited essential hunting skills from his father, who played a crucial role in teaching him how to provide sustenance for his family. Later, Evan arrives home to his partner and family and remarks that "the kids were what pushed Evan through the bush and the hunt", solidifying the connection between inheritance, survival skills and fatherhood (2018, p. 5). This stands in contrast to colonial ideology that perpetuated the belief that Indigenous children should be separated from their parents for their own good. Evan not only provides food for his children but also cultural security, speaking in Anishinaabemowin to his son and daughter and promising that he will teach them how to hunt. The portrayal of a father whose connections to his own father allow him to pass down his cultural knowledge and survival skills to his children repairs the fractures caused by colonial family ideology.

Transforming the Encounter

In their resistance to Western family ideology, the families in the texts transform their apocalyptic encounters into an opportunity to reclaim Native sovereignty. Danika Medak-Saltzman argues that a central motif in Indigenous futurisms is the exploration of dystopian possibilities,

> which allows for contemplation of dangerous 'what ifs', aiding us to imagine our way out of the dystopic present into better futures. (Saltzman, 2017, p. 145)

In other words, dystopian narratives facilitate the transformation of past and present dystopian climates into positive visions of the future by Indigenous futurist writers. A core aspect of this transformation is the queering of the family. As outlined earlier, the families in both texts are decolonial but because they are structurally complex—making them uncivilised according to Western family ideology—the family formations in the texts can be considered queer (Rifkin, 2011, p. 33). This queerness is evoked by the fluidity of their family forms, a fluidity which facilitates a familial relationship with the land and non-human animals and collapses the human/non-human binary. This also aligns with Indigenous cosmologies of kinship which often facilitate queer ecologies. Kinship is a central aspect of many Indigenous groups' lives and is based on mutual relationships and community. However, the community fostered through kinship is, according to Daniel Heath Justice, not a stable or static group but

> an adaptive state of being that requires its members to maintain it through their willingness to perform necessary rituals […] to keep the kinship network in balance with itself and the rest of creation. (Heath Justice, 2008, p. 149)

The flexibility and balance of the families in the text are what Timothy Morton (2010, pp. 275–276) terms queer ecologies, where

> Life-forms constitute a mesh, a nontotalisable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the non-living, between organism and environment. (Morton, 2010, p. 275)

A boundaryless relationship to the land and the non-humans that live on it is central to decolonisation and, according to Patty Krawec (2022, p. 11), First Nations and Métis people do not own the land but view "land itself and conditions of that land, like altitude and climate" as part of their genome. Krawec (2022, p. 11) explains that as an Anishinaabe woman, her

> roots reach out and draw upon the land of many places, connecting [her] here, where they reach deeply into the land that created [her] paternal ancestors.

The families in both texts cultivate kinship connections such as those described by Krawec and Morton with the non-human beings they encounter.

In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Evan, his friends, and his brother take Scott—a white settler from the south whom they welcome into their community—out hunting moose. After he shoots and easily kills a moose, Scott comments that "They're basically like sitting ducks out there", prompting Evan's uncle to explain that the bulls are vulnerable in the Winter following their rut and that hunting them at this time is "kinda like cheating" emphasising that "It's not the Anishinaabe way to take more than you need" (2018, pp. 125–126). Scott's comment reflects imperialist extractionist attitudes toward Indigenous territory by disregarding the detrimental consequences of overhunting the moose. For Evan's people, however, "the land is in all of them" and the non-human animals on that land are of equal value to the humans living on it (2018, p. 202). As a result, they are aware of the destruction that could be caused by over-hunting and offer prayers and gratitude to the land and Mother Earth when they do kill moose, thanking the "Great spirit […] for the life you have given us today" (2018, p. 4). In contrast to thoughtless imperialist destruction and appropriation of resources, Evan, his family and his community embody a queer ecology and view the land as their relative that must be cared for and maintained. The portrayal of a queer ecology—within which the human/non-human binary collapses—undermines imperialist narratives which use this binary to support the domination of Indigenous people and is thus, an act of decolonial resistance.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, environmental destruction directly results in the development of the disease that causes settlers to lose their ability to dream. While the subsequent genocide of Indigenous people forces them to abandon their homes, it also presents an opportunity for healing the natural world and for Indigenous people to re-establish their connections to the

land. The settlers and other non-Indigenous people are moved to gated communities by the government facilitating the natural world's reclamation of areas once urbanised. Frenchie notes the cause of the current apocalyptic conditions: "The Earth was broken. Too much taking for too damn long, so she finally broke" (2017, p. 100). Just as the land was taken from the Indigenous people of Canada to eventually diminish their population and their culture, so the Earth is broken by imperialist extraction and capitalist pollution. Rather than lamenting their new reliance on the land in the absence of brick-and-mortar homes, electricity, and other modern resources, Frenchie and his new family feel connected to their ancestors and Indigenous identity through the land, with Slopper (one of Frenchie's non-biological brothers) remarking that they are "bush Indians for real now" (2017, p. 141). When they meet Frenchie's father and his new family, they and Miigwans are tasked by Frenchie to consider what is next for them as Indigenous people:

> I mean we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge, kept through the first round of these blasted schools, from before that, when these visitors first made their way over here like angry children throwing tantrums. When we heal our land, we are healed also. (2017, p. 208)

This exemplifies the interdependence of Indigenous people and the land; their healing relies on the healing of the land and vice-versa. As a result, in *The Marrow Thieves*, Frenchie and his relatives form a mesh with the natural world in a queer ecology, which is central to their efforts to decolonise Canada and regain their sovereignty. As Krawec (2022, p. 141) states, "Decolonising means returning the land to the people from whom it was taken". This is not because the land "belongs" to Indigenous people in terms of neoliberal capitalist property ownership, but because Indigenous people view the land as their kin and exist in an intricate reciprocal relationship with it.

The families in Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* extend beyond the walls of their homes into the natural world and their community. When the electricity, following the cell phone towers, goes out Evan's community congregate to discuss their strategies for surviving autumn and winter. Evan, his father, the chief, and other council members are joined by Aileen at a meeting in the town hall where Aileen addresses the crowd, and greeting them, says "Good afternoon, my relatives" (2018, p. 53). Scholars argue that pre-colonisation, many Indigenous nations were communal and egalitarian, with the needs of the many subsuming the needs of the individual. In *Indigenous Continent*, Pekka Hämäläinen (2022, p. 63) asserts that "The collective mindset that prevailed, reflecting broad-based and carefully balanced economies, also distinguished North America's Indigenous peoples". This collective mindset is reflected

by the extension of the family in *Moon of the Crusted Snow* to encompass the entire community which includes the land and the non-human beings that live on it. Rather than splintering into atomised units, the community come together as relatives to preserve their existence allowing them to survive an apocalypse reminiscent of their ancestors' original encounters with European and Canadian colonisers. The supposed primitivity of their egalitarian and non-hierarchical familial arrangements justified the Canadian settler state's continued attempts to destroy Indigenous families through the removal of Indigenous children from their reservations and by placing them into white settler homes as well as residential schools. If queerness is a radical rejection of settler-imposed sanctions on the non-Western family, Evan's community/family's assertion of their kinship ties and marked resistance to atomisation and rigidity is a queer act of decolonisation.

Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* similarly queers the family. According to Patricia Zanella, *The Marrow Thieves*

> offers a radically different vision rooted in the liberatory practices of Indigenous worldmaking through an expansive understanding of kinship embedded in Indigenous landscapes and soundscapes. (Zanella, 2020, p. 178)

This radically different version of the future is entangled in creating new family forms that directly challenge the heteronormative and nuclear visions of family imposed on Indigenous people by colonisers since their first encounters with them. Frenchie's biological family, which replicates that of a nuclear family consisting of married, heterosexual parents and their biological children, is broken up by the emergence of the new residential schools. However, he soon finds a new, non-biological, non-nuclear family that lies somewhere between the Indigenous families of the "old days" when they "were huge and sprawling" but without "the common connection of grandparents or aunties like [they] used to have so often" (2017, p. 31). The family that Frenchie joins is not exactly like the ones of old because "none of [them were] related by blood", but it is unlike a nuclear family because there is no mother, just a father figure in Miigwans and a grandmother figure in the Elder, Minerva (2017, p. 31). The children are also not all like siblings with some of them forming romantic relationships with each other. Consequently, family in the text is not rigidly defined but is fluid and is based on shared experiences rather than biology. As in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Frenchie's family strengthen their familial bond through storytelling. Miigwans tells the story of the first residential schools to the young people of the group as a means of strengthening their connection as a family and stoking their desire to not only survive but to flourish:

> when we were on our knees with the pukes, they decided they liked us there, on our knees. And that's when they opened the first schools. (2017, p. 34)

He tells the story of how their ancestors also fought to survive genocide and sustained their nations. This serves as a reminder that their people have persevered through times not dissimilar to those they are experiencing now. At the centre of this survival is the maintenance of non-Western family formations in defiance of settler attempts to separate and displace them. The fluidity of Frenchie's found family and their rejection of the hermetic definitions of colonial family ideology is undoubtedly queer.

The Indigenous families in Rice and Dimaline's texts do not merely survive their apocalyptic encounters but they transform them into opportunities to reclaim the land and assert Indigenous sovereignty. Indeed, the apocalypse in both texts allows the families to imagine a future where they no longer need to resist colonisation but can flourish (Bussière, 2020, p. 47). Samuel R. Delany argues that imagining the future gives one agency:

> Without an image of tomorrow, one is trapped by blind history, economics, and politics beyond our control. One is tied up in a web, in a net, with no way to struggle free. Only by having clear and vital images of the many alternatives, good and bad, of where one can go, will we have any control over the way we may actually get there in a reality tomorrow will bring all too quickly. (Delany, 2012, p. 14)

Though *The Marrow Thieves* and *Moon of the Crusted Snow*'s critiques of the effects of settler colonialism seem to imagine a dark future for Indigenous people, their vision of the future also provides hope for how Indigenous people might take advantage of the collapse of society to reclaim their sovereignty. Throughout history, Anishinaabeg, much like Evan's community have taken the consequences of colonialism and transformed them into new opportunities:

> The skills they needed to persevere in this northern terrain, far from their original homeland farther south, were proud knowledge held close through the decades of imposed adversity. (2018, p. 48)

The skills honed from other apocalyptic encounters with settlers allow them to overcome the harsh apocalyptic winter and, in the summer, to leave their community in the north eventually prompting them to step "onto the trail, one by one, to begin this new life nestled deep in the heart of Anishinaabe territory" (2018, p. 213). Their collective mindset allowed them to come together as a family to take the "collapse of the white man's modern systems" and regain the lands they were displaced from (2018, p. 212). Evan's family/community's reclamation of their former homeland is the ultimate queer act of resistance—the radical decolonisation of Canadian "territory" through the assertion of non-Western kinship ties that extend into the natural world.

Dimaline's text also transfigures the apocalypse to imagine the possibility of Indigenous sovereignty. Central to this transfiguration is the metamorphosis of Frenchie's kinship system from the rigidity of the nuclear family to his new mutable family. Instead of staying with his biological father and his dad's new community, Frenchie is drawn toward Rose and his found family which represents "an idea of home [he] wasn't willing to lose" (2017, p. 233). A stationary life with his biological father is no longer satisfactory to Frenchie. He would rather continue his found family's decolonisation efforts. In the final paragraphs of the text, Miigwans is reunited with his husband, Isaac, and through this reuniting, the dream of a better future is stoked in Frenchie:

> I watched it in the steps that pulled Isaac, the man who dreamed in Cree, home to his love. The love who'd carried him against the rib and breath and hurt of his chest as ceremony in a glass vial. And I understood that as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream. 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. (2017, p. 247)

This article contends that the "bigger dream" that holds them all is the decolonisation of Canada and the reclamation of Indigenous lands. The return of Isaac to Miigwans represents the dream of Indigenous sovereignty, a dream that is reflected by the same-sex love between two men and is the ultimate rejection of colonial heteronormativity. The apocalypse facilitates the creation of newfound Indigenous families as well as the restoration of Native connections to the land. For this dream to become a reality, however, they need to cast off heteronormative systems of kinship and hold onto the new and diverse ones they have created.

Conclusion

Rice's and Dimaline's dystopian Indigenous futurist novels use apocalyptic settings to project Indigenous people's encounters with colonisers into the future to illuminate their continued battle for Native sovereignty. Central to their apocalyptic settings are the detrimental effects of colonialism on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families in Canada. By projecting Indigenous suffering and genocide into the future, they challenge the naturalisation of apocalyptic conditions for Native people while rejecting their eradication, their assimilation into Canadian culture, and the appropriation of their lands. *The Marrow Thieves* and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* centre Indigenous kinship systems that oppose colonial heteronormative nuclear family formations, and through their invocation of ancestral memory of the displacement of Indigenous people and their incarceration in residential schools, they challenge the separation and destruction of First Nations and Métis families at the hands of the Canadian settler state.

By depicting nuanced Indigenous womanhood, positive Indigenous fatherhood, and the intricate relationship between Native people and the non-human, the texts assert modes of relation that queer Western conceptions of family. Moreover, they affirm Indigenous community/family and found family ties that, ultimately, ground the transformation of the apocalyptic setting of SF into an opportunity for the reclamation of Native sovereignty.

Works Cited

Ball, J. (2009) 'Fathering in the Shadows: Indigenous Fathers and Canada's Colonial Legacies', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 624, pp. 29–48. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716209334181.

Bussière, K. (2020) 'Beginning at the End: Indigenous Survivance in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*', *Foundation*, 49(136), pp. 47–58. Available at: https://www-proquest-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/beginning-at-end-indigenous-survivance-moon/docview/2432561289/se-2?accountid=14504 (Accessed: 10 December 2022).

Childers, E. and Menendez, H. (2022) 'Apocalypse When? Storytelling and Spiralic Time in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*', *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture*, 12, pp. 211–226. doi: https://doi.org/10.18778/2083-2931.12.13.

Delany, S.R. (2012) 'The Necessity of Tomorrows', in Cheney, M. (ed.) *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, pp. 2–16.

Dimaline, C. (2017) *The Marrow Thieves*. Toronto: Dancing Cat Books.

Driskell, Q. (2010) Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances Between Native and Queer Studies', *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16, pp. 69–92. doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2009-013.

Hämäläinen, P. (2022) *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Conquest for North America*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation. [Apple Books Version] (Accessed: 20 June 2023).

Hutchings, K. (2016) 'Cultural Genocide and the First Nations of Upper Canada: Some Romantic-Era Roots of Canada's Residential School System', *European Romantic Review*, 27(3) pp. 301–308. doi: https://doiorg.ucc.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10509585.2016.1163787.

Justice, D. H. (2008) '"Go Away Water!": Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative', in Womack, C. *et al*. (eds.) *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collection*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, pp. 147–168.

Knott Fire, S. (2021) 'Our Education Tomorrow', in Hayden Taylor, D. (ed) *Me Tomorrow: Indigenous Views on the Future*. British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, pp. 121–139.

Krawec, P. (2022) *Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining our Future*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books.

Lewis, S. (2022) *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation*. London: Verso.

Liddell, J.L., Mckinley, C.E., Knipp, H. and Scarnato, J.M. (2021) '"She's the Center of My Life, the One That Keeps My Heart Open": Roles and Expectations of Native American Women', *Affilia*, 36(3), pp. 357–375. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109920954409.

Lone Fight, D. (2019) 'The Indigenous Imposition: Settling Expectation, Unsettling Revision, and the Politics of Playing with Familiarity', *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 31(3–4), pp. 1–35. doi: https://doi.org/10.5250/studamerindilite.31.3-4.0001.

Lowman, E.B. and Barker, A. (2015) *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Medak-Saltzman, D. (2017) ‘Coming to You from the Indigenous Future: Native Women, Speculative Film Shorts, and the Art of the Possible’, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 29(1), pp. 140–174. doi: https://doi.org/10.5250/studamerindilite.29.1.0139.

Morgensen, S. (2011) *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Colonization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Morton, T. (2010) ‘Guest Column: Queer Ecology’, *PMLA*, 125(2), pp. 273–282. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25704424 (Accessed: 28 May 2023).

Nickel, S.A. (2017) ‘“I Am Not a Women’s Libber Although Sometimes I Sound Like One”: Indigenous Feminism and Politicized Motherhood’, *The American Indian Quarterly*, 41(4), pp. 299–335. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.2017.a679037.

O’Sullivan, S. (2021) ‘The Colonial Project of Gender (and Everything Else)’, *Genealogy*, 5(67), pp. 1–9. doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030067.

Rice, W. (2018) *Moon of Crusted Snow*. Toronto: ECW Press.

Rieder, J. (2012) *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Rifkin, M. (2011) *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*. Oxford University Press.

Robinson, M. (2019) ‘Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(12), pp. 1675–1690. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1613853.

Smith, S.E.K. and Taunton, C. (2018) ‘Unsettling Canadian Heritage: Decolonial Aesthetics in Canadian Video and Performance Art’, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 52(1), pp. 306–341. doi: https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.2017-0053.r2.

Tam, B.Y., Findlay, L.C. and Kohen, D.E. (2016) ‘Indigenous Families: Who Do You Call Family?’, *Journal of Family Studies*, 23(3), pp. 243–259. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2015.1093536.

Thaler, M. (2019) ‘Bleak Dreams, Not Nightmares: Critical Dystopias and the Necessity of Melancholic Hope’, *Constellations*, 26, pp. 607–622. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12401.

Vázquez García, V. (2002) ‘Native Women and State Legislation in Mexico and Canada: The Agrarian Law and the Indian Act’, in Hunt, T.L. and Lessard, M.R. (eds.) *Women and the Colonial Gaze*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 91–103.

Vint, S. (2021) *Science Fiction: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury.

White, K.P. (2018) ‘Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change’, *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 1(1–2), pp. 224–242. doi: https://doiorg.ucc.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/2514848618777621.

Zanella, P. (2020) ‘Witnessing Story and Creating Kinship in a New Era of Residential Schools: Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves*’, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 32(3), pp. 176–200. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/ail.2020.0023