Spiralic Temporality and Cultural Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty: Idle No More and *The Marrow Thieves*

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In *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (2014), Tanya Kappo (Sturgeon Lake Cree) details a round dance flash mob at West Edmonton Mall, describing how the "people were glowing" and how, even if the dancing itself was only a moment, "it was powerful enough to awaken in them what needed to be woken up—a remembering of who we were, who we are" (Kappo and King 70). Cree elder John Cuthand tells the story of how the round dance was a gift from an ancestor who was unable to find rest because her daughter would not stop grieving her death. The mother brought "*something from the other world to help the people grieve in a good way*" and taught her daughter the round dance ceremony; the round dance ceremony creates a space where the ancestors can join the dancers and all are "*as one*" (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 24, italics in original).

Idle No More's round dancing in malls, public squares, and legislative buildings as such thus directly calls up support from and involvement of the ancestors; round dancing is powerful in part thanks to its expression of cultural continuity and relations across many generations. Through the round dance, the ancestors were brought in to connect with the people, and the dancers imagined themselves as future ancestors, creating a space for those not yet born. As a result, the "people were glowing." This physical, circular movement, which connects the future ancestors dancing in the present with their ancestors invited into the space, is adaptable to different settings,

and will never be exactly the same twice. The power in the round dance ceremony can be better understood if we see how it is informed by a worldview organized according to an experience of time we can describe as spiralic: cyclical, but transforming for the moment rather than merely repeating. Idle No More's focus on the spiralic resurgence of cultural traditions and ancestral knowledges are exemplary of a new generation's experience of spiralic time. This is an experience of time that is better able to intervene in Canada's national temporality of reconciliation.

"Spiralic temporality" refers to an Indigenous experience of time that is informed by a people's particular relationships to the seasonal cycles on their lands, and which acknowledges the present generations' responsibilities to the ancestors and those not yet born. This complex of relations to the land, lived in an embodied manner on that land or in diaspora, together make up the Indigenous concept of *place* as explained by Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene). By his formulation "land" and "place" in this way do not just refer to territory, but are expressions of an "ontological framework for understanding relationships," i.e. the terms *land* and *place* are used to refer more broadly to all the relations in that place, which includes rivers, rocks, and mountains, animal and plant nations, who all have agency (Coulthard 79-80). In such a worldview, *when* things happened in time becomes less important than *where* they happen(ed) and to which relations; the past and the future are all relevant in the now, what matters is how the events or actors are related to a particular *place*.

The Canadian nation sees historical redress through the process of reconciliation as an end in itself, rather than a continuing spiral. In the same way young people in this movement are experiencing time through round dancing, we can come to understand how they are able to counteract or respond to the underlying assumptions of a Canadian national temporality of reconciliation that is linear and progress-oriented.

Writing about Idle No More in the conclusion to his 2014 book *Red Skins, White Masks*, Coulthard describes the movement as "what a resurgent Indigenous politics might look like on the ground" (160). In an interview with Leah Gazan, Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Derek Nepinak (Minegoziibe Anishinabe) explains the essential role younger generations play in Idle No More and Indigenous resurgence more broadly. New generations of leaders did not personally experience the residential schools, Nepinak claims, so they do not suffer as much from the negative connotations settler colonizer violence attaches to Indigenous cultures (Nepinak 84). Residential schools taught Indigenous students, at the risk of severe punishment, not to speak their languages, not to practice their spiritualities. In short, they were told to assimilate the best they could, or else. This new generation is freer to look back, says Nepinak, and to discern what Indigenous knowledges are helpful and essential to build the thriving future older generations have been working for.

In this article, I argue that a heuristic of spiralic temporality helps us see how Métis author Cherie Dimaline's (post-) apocalyptic young adult novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) does similar consciousness-raising work on resurgence and Indigenous youth's power to build their futures in the now as the Idle No More Movement. Like other Indigenous futurist texts, *The Marrow Thieves* employs a temporality which refuses the common dismissal of tradition as outdated, by imagining futures that are "intimately connected to the past" (Cornum). Grace L. Dillon (Anishnaabe) coined the term "Indigenous Futurisms" based on the existing "Afrofuturism," which Dillon describes as "weav[ing] in traditional knowledge and culture with futuristic ideas and settings" (Muzyka). Indigenous futurism is centrally about bringing traditional knowledges into faraway futures, privileging traditional values like sustainable, balanced relationality over so-called progress (Cornum). Lou Cornum further explains

the project of Indigenous futurisms as the "profound deconstruction of how we imagine time, progress, and who is worthy of the future" (Cornum). In this way, the genre pushes back on the limited vision offered by linear settler temporality—where Indigenous people can only ever be "authentic" in some faraway past—and instead evidences the possibilities for Indigenous futures informed and embraced by their relations across time.

Through *The Marrow Thieves'* organizing principle of spiralic time, which puts Indigenous youth at the center, the novel reveals a temporal aspect to the Idle No More movement that otherwise might go unnoticed. Round dancing is also about bringing a future into the present, one that pushes back against the temporality of a progressive narrative where the Canadian state seeks to remake the Indigenous. The novel offers a counter reality to that of Canadian settler "progress" and "reconciliation" and emphasizes Indigenous youth's critical role in resurgence, within and beyond Idle No More. Writing directly to Indigenous youth, Dimaline invites them to see themselves as part of a continuing spiral of Indigenous presence going back to when time began and continuing into a time when they themselves will be ancestors.

The Marrow Thieves responds to the Native youth suicide epidemic by inviting youth to see the central role they play in the spiralic history of their nations and how thriving futures can be lived in the present. The novel models Indigenous alternative ways of being in relation despite of or against settler colonizer oppressions, emphasizing the importance of conceiving of a different world, and living in it in whatever ways that one can (even though limited by settler colonizer violence). The novel's spiralic temporal structure invites a heuristic of spiralic temporality to see the communities in *The Marrow Thieves* in relation with historic and contemporary Turtle Island Indigenous communities and the issues and values they have been and are

currently experiencing, defending, and living. The novel illustrates how the spiral of Indigenous life is still moving into the future, settler violence and oppression be damned.

I first detail how we might theorize and experience spiralic temporality; this discussion considers spiralic temporality not just as a heuristic, but also as an organizing structure. Then, I discuss how seeing spiralic relations across time helps us better understand Idle No More's focus on Indigenous resurgence not as a "moving backwards" to "archaic" tradition, but as participating in a continuing history of cyclical return, with essential transformations, rather than repetitions. From there, I address how Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* takes up the themes from Idle No More to illustrate how spiralic temporality informs Indigenous resurgence and resistance. In this sense, what the novel in relation to the movement reveals, is how using a heuristic of spiralic temporality can support thriving Indigenous futures through making visible the larger spirals of Indigenous cultural continuity, as well as Indigenous youths' central role in them.

Indigenous Resurgence & Spiralic Time

The Kino-nda-niimi Collective's edited collection of writings on Idle No More, *The Winter We Danced,* begins with an emphasis on this spiralic continuity, making clear that "most Indigenous peoples have never been idle in their efforts to protect what is meaningful to our communities—*nor will we ever be*" (21, my emphasis). This relationship to what came before is not merely one of repeating a sterile past, but one of an unstoppable continuation of peoplehoods, transformed in and for each moment, always with an eye on creating a thriving future for Indigenous peoples. Spiralic time emphasizes the relationships across time between related, transformed experiences

and allows for a dynamic return and rebirth of the past into the future.

In order to think spiralically, one might need to start with undoing the lock Western teleological temporality has on the structure of their thinking. The settler colonial project limits Indigenous nationhood to either something from a long ago past that is no longer relevant—as such their treaties become "archaic premises and promises, from another time, which are not applicable in modern American time," or something that is always limited to traditional practices: any participation in so-called "modern American time" is considered evidence of the fact that the nations are no longer authentically Indigenous, and as such they also should not/do not have sovereignty (Bruyneel 172; 203). Both options evidence a settler obsession with "progress," which makes Indigenous sovereignty unthinkable in the present, let alone the future (See also O'Brien, Rifkin). Settler time limits Indigenous peoples to either a noble past or an inauthentic present: there is no Indigenous future in a settler temporality.

Syilx scholar and author Jeanette Armstrong explains how in her Syilx worldview, "physical-earth time is conceived of as cyclic, as in a spiral. Day becomes night and returns to day *but never to the same day*" (167, my emphasis). She is clear that cyclic or spiralic do not mean repetition or routine, but instead point to cycles of transformation, cycles where new iterations return transformed. She explains that "[w]ithin that stable spiraling from one year to the next," physical beings on this earth change, "are born, grow, reproduce and die," while the cycles themselves, of the seasons, of the moon, of the days, do not change (167). The only thing for sure in her worldview is the spiral: the endless cycles of transformations, or of "continuous physical changes" (167).[1] Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks has theorized the spiral as "embedded in place(s)", allowing both for a deep grounding in a particular land or water, while also allowing for movement

(309). Thus, Indigenous peoples are not prisoners of their traditional lands —many peoples have always moved around seasonally, traded across large territories, and fought or built kinship relations with other tribes (Vizenor *Manifest Manners* ix).

Vanessa Watts (Mohawk and Anishnaabe) thinks through Indigenous relationships to the land (and the central role of the feminine), in an onto-epistemological model of "place-thought" which assumes a non-linear temporality that allows the past to always also be the future. Starting from the Indigenous worldviews of the Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee (of which the Mohawk are part), and moving through the story of Sky Woman's body becoming the land, Watts explains how going back to traditional knowledge is also listening to what is currently being said as well as leading us to imagining a transformed future, and a path to starting to live that future in the present. She emphasizes this is "not a question of 'going backwards,' for this implies there is a static place to return to" when, instead, traditional knowledges have always adapted and changed through time (Watts 32). Since Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee never understood time as linear, they can connect with their traditional teachings also through dreaming, shapeshifting, and premonition.[2] Thus, resurgence is not an attempt to access something otherwise confined to the past, but rather "simply to listen. To act" (Watts 32). Through remembering traditional practices, relations across time are strengthened and perhaps rebuilt.

These renewed relations then bring also renewed responsibilities with them, responsibilities to maintain continuity. In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) describes that

> this is the reason traditionals say we must remember our origins, our cultures, our histories, our mothers and grandmothers, for without that memory, which implies *continuance rather than nostalgia*, we are doomed to engulfment by a

> paradigm that is fundamentally inimical to the vitality, autonomy, and self-empowerment essential for satisfying, high-quality life. (214, my emphasis)

Resurgence is not about reminiscing about an "authentic" past, but rather about the ways that, despite the interruptions by settler violences of land theft; residential schools; violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people; commodification of the environment, of Indigenous cultures, and of Indigenous people; Indigenous cultures persist. This cultural persistence is key to maintaining thriving lives and resisting the settler colonizer attempts to swallow Indigenous peoples whole.

Culture can still be traditional, even when it must resurge transformed in the present, for example through expression in a colonizer language. We learn this from Joy Harjo (Mvskoke) and others in the edited collection of Native women's writing *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* (1997). In the introduction, Gloria Bird (Spokane) explains how Indigenous peoplehood lasts despite of all of the attacks by colonization. Despite the loss of language, Indigenous worldviews continue (Bird and Harjo 24). Bird describes an example:

> my aunt once, when we were looking at what was left of Mt. St. Helen's, commented in English, "Poor thing." Later, I realized that she spoke of the mountain as a person. In our stories about the mountain range that runs from the Olympic Peninsula to the border between southern Oregon and northern California our relationship to the mountains as characters in the stories is one of human-to-human. (24)

Despite the take-over by English—the enemy language—the worldview where non-human peoples have agency as much as human peoples do persists. Joy Harjo reminds us that the war on Indigenous peoples has not ended, but that to use "the enemy

language" in a way that expresses Indigenous worldviews, be it in a necessarily limited way because of the use of English rather than the appropriate tribal language, is a practice of "*de*colonization" (Bird and Harjo 25, emphasis in original). According to her tribal worldview, language is a tool for healing, to express yourself through words, through song, is "to remember ourselves during these troubled times." She writes that "to speak, at whatever cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction" (Bird and Harjo 21). The power of language to help Indigenous people "remember themselves," to be a tool for healing from colonizer violence, to be a path to cultural continuance, explains why story, poetry, and even long-form writing such as novels are so important to Indigenous resurgence. *The Marrow Thieves* is a clear part of this work.

The spiralic Syilx temporality that Armstrong describes resonates with Aymara scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's description of Aymara Indigenous time as moving in circles and spirals, not stretching taut in a linear sense of history. In her critique of how the North American academy has taken up postcolonial studies and the decolonial, Rivera Cusicanqui emphasizes the need to be responsible to the Indigenous worldview those ideas developed in, and to remain responsible to the Indigenous social movements on the ground. This spiralic conception of time and responsibility to place—and the relations it requires—demands a fundamental change in colonizer worldviews, one necessitated if there will be "a 'radical and profound decolonization' in its political, economic, and, above all, mental structures" (Rivera Cusicanqui 97). Rivera Cusicanqui explains, within her Bolivian context, how colonizer attempts to reconcile and include Indigenous peoples through "the rhetoric of equality and citizenship" eventually just "allow for the reproduction of the colonial structures of oppression," where everyone in power remains firmly entrenched (97). These words might as well

describe the Canadian linear epistemology of "reconciliation," which Idle No More organizers understood as limited in this way. They call for a shift in worldview (informed by spiralic temporality) which is needed to understand Indigenous resurgence and resistance against colonizer oppression.

Spiralic temporality is made not just invisible but also *unthinkable* by a hegemonic settler temporality which is palimpsestic: settler time aims to obscure the past and replace it with its own settler ideals. Yet, this process can never be completed, and as such, the settler colonial is always in tension with the Indigenous presence it aims to replace. Settler time is a fiction that is always in the process of being uncovered for its deceit. Instead, a heuristic of spiralic temporality helps us see how the settler temporal structure obscures the genocidal processes of settler colonialism, and it foregrounds the Indigenous ways of knowing and being that inform Indigenous social movements and literatures. I want to emphasize that I am not suggesting an *analytic* of the spiral that is always one-hundred percent perfectly applicable across the board. I rather suggest that it is a useful *heuristic* to understand some of the values, relations, and transformations in one place across time, to make visible the complexity of Indigenous worldviews, the absence of absolutes and universalisms, and to make legible just one way of relating, theorizing, and practicing at work in Indigenous social movements and literatures which a Eurocentric analytic does not allow for.

"When the circle is made, we the ancestors will be dancing with you and we will be as one."

The Idle No More movement started out of a one-day workshop organized by four women in Saskatchewan: Sylvia McAdam (Nehiyaw), Jessica Gordon (Pasqua), Nina

Wilson (Nakota and Plains Cree), and Sheelah McLean (non-Native). Their aim was to educate both Native and non-Native communities on how the 457-page Bill C-45, a proposed measure to modify a number of laws, would directly affect First Nations in Canada (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 21).[3] The "teach-in" was in direct response to this newly proposed Canadian governmental policy that would endanger Indigenous peoples and non-human relations and the land and water. It focused on the legislation's clearing space for further commodification of all relations, through scaling back consultation requirements with Indigenous communities, undoing prior protections to lands and waters, and allowing access to First Nations territories without proper consent (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 21). Building on existing community struggles for cultural continuity and against settler colonizer encroachment, the one-day event sparked into a large-scale, eventually global movement collectively named "Idle No More," which brought people together through a focus on "three broad motivations or objectives" (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22).

The first of the three demands was the repeal of many sections in the new "omnibus legislation (Bills C-38 and C-45)" pertaining to "the exploitation of the environment, water, and First Nations territories" (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22). The second addressed the need to alleviate the emergency conditions in many First Nations—related to "self-sustainability, land, education, housing, healthcare, and others"—most notoriously Attawapiskat (known for its high youth suicide rate), in respectful collaboration with First Nations communities (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22). The third objective was for the Canadian government to commit to a reciprocal nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and Indigenous communities. These "mutually beneficial" relationships should be informed by the "spirit and intent of treaties" and the related "recognition of inherent and shared rights and responsibilities

as equal and unique partners," instead of unilaterally making decisions harmful to Indigenous (First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit, and Métis) nations such as the proposed omnibus bill (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22). At the core of all the demands is a demand for respect for Indigenous sovereignty and an end to Canadian legislative violence against Indigenous peoples.

The focus of Idle No More was shared and purposely without central leadership. Instead, myriad local groups addressed their own issues in ways that were suitable for their place and time. In his book *#IdleNoMore: And the Remaking of Canada* (2015), Ken Coates (non-Native) describes the movement as one "of mothers and children more than warriors and activists," naming Idle No More's purpose as being more about culture than about politics (xi). A closer look at the movements' concerns and actions makes clear that on the ground, it was a movement of mothers and children who also were warriors and activists, with concerns that were cultural as much as political. Idle No More was Indigenous families fighting for Indigenous families, i.e. for continuity of their peoples *as peoples*. In order to secure cultural continuity and Indigenous sovereignty, matters of governmental policy needed to be addressed head on. Modeling the world they were fighting for in the process of the struggle, actions took the shape of "flash mobs" of round dancing. This embodied practice and ceremony that connects generations across time, reclaimed space for Indigenous continuity often in spaces usually controlled by settler colonizers, such as malls, city centers, and Canadian legislative buildings (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 24).

Describing the origin of Idle No More's 2012-2013 winter of actions, The Kino-nda-niimi Collective emphasizes the relation of Idle No More to Indigenous history and future, describing it as "an emergence of past efforts that reverberated into the future" (21). In Sylvia McAdam (Saysewahum)'s words, "Idle No More resistance began long

before in different names, different locations through the generations since the arrival of Europeans" (65). Naming the relations of Idle No More's actions with "the maelstrom of treaty-making, political waves like the Red Power Movement and the 1969-1970 mobilization against the White Paper, and resistance movements at Oka, Gustafson Lake, Ipperwash, Burnt Church, Goose Bay, Kanostaton, and so on," The Kino-nda-niimi Collective suggests a vision of Idle No More as one flashpoint that received a lot of attention in an expansive spiralic history of continued Indigenous resistance to Canadian encroachment on Indigenous lands, languages, and lifeways which often goes unnoticed (21).

Kahnawake Mohawk activist Russ Diabo's 2012 article "Harper Launches Major First Termination Plan: As Negotiating Tables Legitimize Canada's Colonialism," reprinted in *The Winter We Danced*, makes clear how Canadian "reconciliation" efforts continue to happen on settler colonizer Canadian terms. Diabo's dissection of Harper's 2012 termination strategies shows how the current "reconciliation" is built on efforts to "negotiate" with tribal leadership in order to diminish Indigenous sovereignty, turn Indigenous nations into Canadian municipalities, and always work toward the goal of legitimizing the settler state through this disappearance and assimilation of Indigenous nations (55).[4] Both example of and metaphor for Canada's vision for Indigenous Peoples, Canada originally rejected the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 because of its incommensurability with "Canada's domestic policies, especially the articles dealing with Indigenous Peoples' Self-Determination, Land Rights, and Free, Prior Informed Consent" (Diabo 57). Canada eventually signed the UNDRIP in 2010, but treats it as subordinate to its own federal domestic policy (despite it being an act of international law) and continues to make unilateral policy decisions concerning First Nations. Sylvia McAdam describes

how despite Idle No More's global traction and the many "resounding 'no consent' protests, rallies, and teach-ins" it provoked, most of the proposed measures "aimed at privatizing Treaty land, extinguishing Treaty terms and promises as well as Indigenous sovereignty" were accepted and turned into legislation (66). Notwithstanding a supposed commitment to reconciliation, Canada continues to make unilateral decisions that negatively affect the Indigenous peoples whose territories it occupies in an apparent attempt to fold Indigenous peoples into its progress narrative.

Idle No More defied this attempted erasure by centering and practicing Indigenous resurgence and continuity. The movement and its legacy refuse(d) to "reconcile" away Indigenous sovereignty. In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Coulthard summarizes resurgence as theorized by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig) and Taiaiake Alfred (Kanien'kehá:ka) as "draw[ing] critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present" (157). Correspondingly, considering resurgence through spiralic temporality renders legible the ways that reclaiming the past does not mean being limited to an infinite repetition of the same cycle of traditional knowledge, but rather signifies the fluidity of the continued relevance of the core values of Indigenous ways of knowing (156). Speaking from a Nishnaabeg context in her 2017 book, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Simpson conveys the "real urgency of resurgence" as continued settler encroachment on treaty lands and treaty rights makes it increasingly important for Indigenous peoples to exercise their treaty rights and to continue to embody the systemic alternatives to the settler colonial structures, as Nishnaabe people "have always done" (5-6).

The urgency is real, as Simpson argues, because the violent erasure of Indigenous peoples by settler societies is real and ongoing. In its hunger for land,

settler colonization disrupted Simpson's relationship to her lands, her history and thus what her life could have been, and is also the cause for the ongoing Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit People epidemic (7). Describing her first experience learning from Nishnaabe Elders, Simpson explains how her reconnecting to Nishnaabewin through the Elders' practice "was a returning, in the present, to [her]self. It was an unfolding of a different present" (18).[5] Spiralic temporality allows us to see how embodied experiences of Indigenous cultural continuity are related across moments in time, and how these relations (embodied in practices) can structure the present and inform the future to ensure Indigenous thriving.

Sylvia McAdam explains in *The Winter We Danced* how the Cree elders she consulted were on board with Idle No More's efforts and offered their prayers, and underscored the need to use their own laws, particularly "nahtamawasewin" which, "invoked in times of crisis and great threat… means to defend for the children," including the non-human children of the plant, animal, and other nations (McAdam 66). Through invoking place-based traditional knowledges to inform Indigenous resistance, Indigenous organizers and activists are revealing how their actions *in their time* are in relation with those that came before and those that are still to come. Idle No More is just one contemporary iteration of a spiral of Indigenous resistance rooted in cultural continuity.

"To Set the Memory in Perpetuity": Spiralic Temporality in *The Marrow Thieves*

Full of metaphors and different tools to help interpret the present day colonial context in what is currently the U.S. and Canada, Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* explicitly models how Indigenous resurgence is continuity, and that traditional Indigenous ways of knowing are—quite literally in the novel's case—the key to

Indigenous thriving. In *The Marrow Thieves*, Dimaline shows how the colonial, capitalist progress narrative is embodied through environmental destruction and imagines a further development where the issues with "progress" are reflected in colonizers' loss of their ability to dream, or their ability to imagine a thriving future for themselves. Rather than addressing the settler colonizer anti-Indigenous policies and treaty-breaking habits directly, *The Marrow Thieves* is set in a future which echoes contemporary concerns by Indigenous people regarding reconciliation discussed above. This future contains a (post-) apocalyptic world where all of the Canadian government's termination and so-called "reconciliation" efforts have paid off in favor of the settler colonizer state. There appear to be no strong Indigenous nations anymore, tribal leadership has very limited power, and Native people have been forcibly assimilated into Canadian society in a way that detached many from their languages and cultures. The novel uses the familiar images of "blood memory" and bone marrow to embody Indigenous ways of knowing and being in ways they can be passed on.

The Marrow Thieves itself appears to take the shape of a spiralic transformation of an earlier iteration of this blood narrative in Native literature: White Earth Ojibwe author Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991). Chadwick Allen, in his 2002 book *Blood Narrative*, describes how Vizenor's humorous story takes the concept of "blood memory" coined by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), and turns it into a tangible substance that can be extracted from Indigenous people's DNA in order to literally, physically heal Indigenous children (Allen 192). Transforming Vizenor's satirical take on "blood quantum politics" through the empowering qualities of Indigenous memory physically present in the blood, Dimaline starts from the other side of the same idea. That is, she imagines the ways settler colonizers, perhaps through the process of reconciliation, could learn how to turn that into a tool to help themselves (and) further

destroy Indigenous people and peoples. *The Marrow Thieves* addresses the histories and present of anti-Indigenous capitalist violence, which is also violence against the non-human world, and centers Indigenous radical relationality and cultural continuity as the guides to building thriving futures in spite of and against this violence.

In *The Marrow Thieves,* non-Natives lose their ability to dream, and thus their vision for living. Dimaline describes how the changing earth gave all the signs that the human peoples neglected their obligations towards it and cried out in devastation ("she went out like a wild horse, bucking off as much as she could before lying down" (Dimaline 87)). Nevertheless, settler governments would not and did not change their linear "progression" towards total destruction; millions of people died; melting polar ice changed climates and caused violent weather, tsunamis, tornados, and earthquakes; oil and gas pipelines "snapped like icicles and spewed bile over forests, into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns" (Dimaline 88). Despite all this tumult, settlers would not change their ways. Dimaline writes,

> But the powers that be still refused to change and bent the already stooped under the whips of a schedule made for a population twice its size and inflated by the need to rebuild. Those that were left worked longer, worked harder. And now the sun was gone for weeks at a time. The suburban structure of their lives had been upended. And so they got sicker, this time in the head. They stopped dreaming. And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge. (Dimaline 88)

The progress-oriented settler temporality and worldview preclude futurity through their "miscalculation of infallibility" (Dimaline 87). Because settlers use up every resource until they are all gone and do not honor reciprocal relations, they have little to guide them, and thriving futures are hard to imagine (or "dream"). Thus, they reach for

Indigenous people to ensure their own futurity. However, much like their extractive relationship to the land, settlers did not attempt to enter in reciprocal relationships with Indigenous peoples; rather, they treat them like another resource to exploit.

The novel takes up the issue of settlers finding themselves through the foil of the Native in the most literal way;[6] it connects the driving plot point of colonizers taking Native people's dream-holding bone marrow for themselves with earlier iterations of appropriation and extraction. Dimaline writes how, at first, non-Native people looked to Native peoples for teachings and guidance, in a way Native people had experienced before: "the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity" (88). However, also "like the New Agers," they swiftly changed course and started trying to appropriate traditional knowledges to better serve themselves, without taking on the according obligations. The settlers asked themselves, "[h]ow could they best appropriate the uncanny ability we kept to dream? How could they make ceremony better, more efficient, more economical?" (88). This commodification of traditional ways led directly to the commodification of Indigenous peoples, and as a result of these developments, Indigenous bodies are turned into resources to serve settler "progress."

In the novel, colonizers lost their ability to dream, but their Church and their scientists figure out that Native people still can dream and that they hold their dreams in their bone marrow (89). In the new residential schools, non-Native people leech the bone marrow out of the Native people they have been able to catch, in order for those stolen dreams to sustain non-Native life. The new iteration of these "schools" takes up the original project of disrupting traditional kinship relations and forbidding Indigenous languages in order to disappear the Indigenous in a new way, while continuing "the theft of memory, growth, and dreams" (Zanella 8). Using the same term is a powerful way to make that connection clear and comment both on the past of residential school

violence and the present of superficial Canadian reconciliation attempts that are a violence in their wish for easy "progress" and erasure of past harms, despite their current reverberations.

The colonial violence and racism Dimaline describes in the hellscape of a future in which the story is set is not hard to believe, because this future society she imagines builds on what we have already seen happen in the past and which we continue to see happening in the present. In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) emphasizes that "[w]hen apocalypse appears as an overt theme in Indigenous writing, it's more than speculation – it's experiential, even in its most fantastical, because in a very real way it hasn't ended" (168). Through a depiction of what the world might look like if the current threads of colonial power imbalances and violences are allowed to develop further, the novel shows it all has come to pass in different iterations before: through the residential schools, through different waves of genocide, through the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people epidemic.

The violence Native people are subjected to in the text builds on what we have seen in the past and continue to see; it appears as a vision of a spiralic transformation of settler colonizer anti-Indigenous violence.[7] Yet, the alternatives Dimaline posits, the new world building possibilities as well as the way people survive through the hardships, are also not new; they are rooted in long histories of survivance and relations across time and space, cultural resurgence, and traditional knowledges. Indigenous strength lies in their spiralic relations across time.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, we follow a teen boy, Francis, or French(ie), a nickname inspired by his Métis identity. We first meet him when he loses his family to the marrow thieving colonizers (specifically to their police-like force called "Recruiters"). He soon

encounters a new, complex family, created out of different people who were on the run separately and came together for safety and for community, and starts to build relations with them (15). We learn about Frenchie's experiences in his voice, but it is Miigwans, the father figure in the new family Frenchie becomes a part of, who tells "Story," the complex of narratives which holds Indigenous knowledges and experiences all should know to be able to live and thrive in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Marrow Thieves*.

The novel itself uses a thematic spiralic structure, which allows transformation to come to pass. We learn that Frenchie's new composite family is attempting to run away to safety, on foot through the snow and the woods, with only what they can carry on their backs. They are headed north, away from a new wave of residential schools. Stories from survivors who ran away, like Miigwans himself, taught them that colonizers are locking up and killing Native people. In the beginning of the text, we are told that Frenchie's father, when they were still together, had already told him to walk north:

> "North is where the others will head. We'll spend a season up by the Bay Zone. We'll hole up in one of those cabins up there and I'll try to find others. We'll find a way, Frenchie. And up north is where we'll find home."
>
> "For sure?" [Frenchie asks, and his dad responds,]
>
> "Hells yes, for sure. I know so because we're going to make a home there. If you make something happen you can count on it being for sure." (Dimaline 6)

In an experience of time as spiralic, the knowledge of the victories against oppression gained by earlier generations helps lend confidence in their own generation's ability to endure and succeed in turn.

Eventually, Frenchie does find a thriving Indigenous community up north, and he is reunited with his father who turns out to be a part of it. Through the central role

of cultural continuity and relations across time, both to the ancestors and to those not yet born, spiralic time is evidenced to be a central trope in the text, essential in the struggle against settler colonizer violence. Frenchie's father's confidence in the future underscores both the importance of this image of a thriving future to motivate the struggle that is happening in the current moment, and the knowledge that this future can and will exist, no matter how hard settler colonizers work to keep Indigenous people(s) confined to the past and outside of the contemporary experience.

The Marrow Thieves places Indigenous youths' ability to thrive not in a future of Indigenous liberation but in one of a renewed iteration of the constant state of emergency of Indigenous apocalypse (Canadian "reconciliation" claims notwithstanding). In this way, the novel models resurgence, existing, resisting, loving, surviving, and thriving in a way which can be related directly to our current moment, which is one of an apocalypse in progress since 1492. The novel emphasizes the importance of intergenerational relationality, of cultural continuity, of building relations (blood and otherwise), and both to live fully as Indigenous youth and also to resist the violences and the pressures of the settler colonizer structures. The text is not one where Indigenous youth live happily ever after in a world that appreciates them; rather, it is a story about Indigenous youth figuring out how to still live happily while the apocalypse is everywhere around them. The aim is to show Indigenous youth that there is a future in which they can thrive, and that they already have the power to create it.

The Marrow Thieves engages with an Indigenous temporality and imagines an Indigenous future which is not quite like the next step in the settler colonizer teleological "progress" narrative. It is a future which is, instead, still deeply grounded in the relations to the lands and the stories and histories of the pasts and present times. In a 2017 interview with *The Star*, Dimaline explains that she sees her young

adult novel functioning as making visible the spiralic relations between the ancestors, the youth today, and those not yet born:

> We have a suicide epidemic in our communities. I've done a lot of work in the past with Indigenous youth and one of the things I realized is that they didn't look forward, they didn't see themselves in any kind of a viable future. And I thought, what if they read this book where they literally see themselves in the future, and not just surviving but being the heroes and being the answer, then that's it. (Dundas)

The novel traces a route to cultural continuity despite of and in spite of the contemporary experience where "[t]he end of the world is every day right now" (Dundas). While imagining this future of struggle, Dimaline's characters all still get to enjoy life, too. The story is about more than survival in the face of violence. There is also much room for reconnecting to traditional knowledges as they exist transformed in the novel's future present, as well as for teen angst and joy about love and sex and family. Despite the violence of commodification of their literal beings, the characters remain strongly connected to their relations, old and new, and to their own humanity. Surviving is more than just physically making it to the next day: it is also about building "a life worth living," a life where Indigenous people can thrive (Dimaline 152).

The epigraph of the novel reads, *"For the Grandmothers who gave me strength. / To the children who give me hope,"* firmly placing *The Marrow Thieves* into relation with both those who came before and those who are yet to grow or even to be born. This relationship across generations is evidence of the spiralic relations going from when time began into the future, as well as a call to attention and action of the need to strengthen these intergenerational relations, for the well-being of Indigenous children (both alive today and those not yet born) and, by extension, of Indigenous nations and

their sovereignty. Michael Chandler and Travis Proulx (both non-Native)'s 2006 research on First Nations youth suicide suggests that "cultural continuity" is a core factor in youth suicide. Chandler and Proulx refer to the discussion of time in Western philosophy, from Heidegger and Kierkegaard to Ricoeur to Gallagher, to establish that a human's daily choice to keep living despite hardship is decided by the person's ability to imagine themselves in a future (127). For humans, our lives only make sense when we can understand ourselves as part of larger story, when we can see our pasts and our presents in a way that helps us anticipate our futures (Chandler and Proulx 127). A second important aspect of this continuity in time is that, for Indigenous youth specifically, this *self-continuity* is keyed in to cultural continuity. Chandler and Proulx demonstrate that "persistent peoples require access to *shared* procedures and practices (cultural tools, if you will) that allow them to imagine and sustain a *shared* history and a *common* future" (136, emphasis mine, brackets in the original). Their research with First Nations in what is currently British Columbia, Canada indicates that those communities with strong cultural continuity have low or zero rates of youth suicide, while youth suicide rates are "many hundreds of times higher than the national average" for nations that so far have been less successful in maintaining cultural continuity and political sovereignty (138). Chandler and Proulx conclude that projects that support the continuation or redeveloping of ties to their past and future "work as protective factors that shield [Native youth] from the threat of self-harm" (140).

Lisa Wexler (non-Native) similarly posits "that a historical understanding of and affiliation with one's culture can provide Indigenous youth with a perspective that transcends the self," which can help them see themselves as part of their nation's story and "offers young people a collective pathway forward" (272). Her research shows that Native American children who know more about their cultural identities and about their

communities' histories have a stronger sense of belonging and identity. This supports their self-continuity: when the youth know more about their past and their connections with their ancestors and their place in the community, these are "cultural tools" that they can use so that they can more easily imagine a successful future for themselves in this community (Wexler 272). The focus on the relational aspect of this experience is essential here. For Indigenous people, self-continuity requires cultural continuity, the belonging in the larger story of the nation and larger sets of relations with traditional lands.

Dimaline reflects this drive for self-continuity through cultural continuity in the younger generations' wish to re-learn and live the traditional ways of knowing, embodied in cultural practices they only sort of know. Frenchie relays how during their family's travel north,

> Us kids, we longed for the old-timey. We wore our hair in braids to show it. We made sweat lodges out of broken branches dug back into the earth, covered over with our shirts tied together at the buttonholes. Those lodges weren't very hot, but we sat in them for hours and willed the sweat to pop over our willowy arms and hairless cheeks. (Dimaline 21-22)

Even though they are on the run for the marrow-thieving Recruiters forever on their heels, the youth desire to make space and time to re-learn and practice as well as they could those traditional knowledges that teach them who they are, how to relate, and how to be. Healing and meaning are found through these resurgence practices, by creating connections between the present generation and all those who have come before. Through these practices, the youth actively work to participate in the spiral of Indigenous sovereignty of which they are a part.

Thinking of the past as always present, and of the current self as that of a future

ancestor—and thus of the present as also a future past—informs the living of the future in the now. There is a present potential to actively choose to make the future that we strive for real in our present. Not only does one need to be able to imagine a future to see purpose in living in the now, we need to work on making that future our current reality. Through making the spiralic movements and relations visible, *The Marrow Thieves* models the many small ways in which we can do that now and speaks directly to Indigenous youth to invite them into these spiralic relations. Re-centering Indigenous ways of knowing is one of the key ways to strengthen self- and cultural continuity.

In a 2017 interview with Trevor Corkum (non-Native) for 49th Shelf, Cherie Dimaline herself explains how *The Marrow Thieves* grapples with settler colonizers violences such as "residential schools and the danger of shallow reconciliation efforts, commodification of culture," and she emphasizes that "[i]t's crucial at this time that we accept that the Western way of thinking about our world is a broken theory, that Indigenous Traditional Knowledge is vital to any forward movement" (Corkum). One moment in *The Marrow Thieves* that illustrates this lesson is when it describes a Council, led by Frenchie's father, setting off to the capital to try and convince the people in power that a whole new world grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing was necessary for a future where everyone could thrive to be possible (Dimaline 141). The Council recognize that the key to ensuring a futurity on the dying Earth is to unlearn Eurowestern settler logics and to start from the land. It is crucial to reconceive of the world in a way that will not inevitability lead to another repeat of violence like the coming of early explorers and settlers, like the residential schools, like the destruction of the environment.

Miigwans, who takes on the role of the family's mentor and guide, was the guide

on Frenchie's father and his Council's journey to the seat of the settler government, and describes the reasoning for the attempt:

> They had this crazy notion that there was goodness left, that someone, somewhere, would see just how insane this whole school thing was. That they could dialogue. That they could explain the system had to die and a new one be built in its place. Like that wasn't scarier to those still in the system than all the dreamlessness and desert wastelands in the world. (Dimaline 141)

David Gaertner (non-Native), in a blog post titled "Welcome to the Desert of Reconciliation," concurs that this moment is one of the most essential in *The Marrow Thieves*. Gaertner, referring to the same 2017 interview with Dimaline by Corkum, understands Miigwans' analysis of the moment as Dimaline's refusal of "shallow reconciliation efforts." The call to take Indigenous ways of knowing seriously, and to acknowledge their incommensurability with capitalist settler colonizer societal structures, sets up an understanding of Canadian reconciliation as always limited by the state's own settler colonizer worldview, a worldview which leads Canada directly to its own as well as larger planetary destruction. Instead, in order to break out of the system non-Native people are committed to because of how it solidifies their own position of power, the settler colonizer political economy needs to be thoroughly transformed, starting from Indigenous worldviews (Gaertner, via Coulthard, Aug. 2018). *The Marrow Thieves* models what centering Indigenous ways of knowing during a state of constant, settler colonizer imposed emergency looks like, and, importantly, shows them to be the key to liberation.

The novel itself is a story about how things came to be how they are at the end of the narrative, offering teachings on how to understand the world we live in today, and modeling ways to use Indigenous ways of knowing to transform the future. We

begin with Frenchie, who never learned his language, and who loses all of his remaining family members at the beginning of the novel. We follow him as he makes a new set of relations, learns some of the language, works to reconnect with ancestral knowledges (with some stumbling, like when he at first does not recognize the importance of the elder Minerva's teachings (38)), and then chooses a path which catalyzes a renewed empowerment of both his new family and larger Indigenous communities. He does this so successfully that he even reconnects with his father. This does not, however, mean Frenchie is confronted with a choice between the two sets of relations: the story models how he can hold all of his complex relations at once, and remain in reciprocal relations of responsibility with both his blood and chosen relations (Zanella 13). The fact that the narrative is told in the past tense by someone who participated in the events suggests that they survived, that they made it, that they are in a situation where they have the time to tell this story which makes up the novel.

The story of the novel is a continuation of the "Story" that is being told in the novel, the "Story" of how the world of the novel came to be how it is. "Story" in the novel serves as teachings and guidance for Frenchie's complex new family while they try to find a way to escape the mortal danger of the Recruiters. Miigwans explains that they all need to know "Story,"

> because it was imperative that we know. He said it was the only way to make the kinds of *changes that were necessary to really survive.* "A general has to see the whole field to make good strategy," he'd explain. "When you're down there fighting, you can't see much past the threat directly in front of you." (Dimaline 25, my emphasis)

"Story" are teachings from past iterations of both anti-Indigenous violence and Indigenous cultural practices. This knowledge is shared so as to allow the listeners of

"Story," the members of the new family, to make the necessary transformations rather than have repeat experiences.

It is through the knowledge of "Story" and the earlier iterations of settler violence and Indigenous resistance and resurgence that Frenchie and his new family know that, if they work to continue their traditional practices, they too can survive this violence. And not only can they survive, but perhaps lessons can be learned from the previous generations' experiences to ensure Indigenous futurity for good. Miigwans starts "Story" by explaining "Anishnaabe people, us, lived on these land for a thousand years," and when the newcomers "who renamed the land Canada" came, the Anishnaabe people welcomed them. He goes on the explain how war and disease brought the Indigenous peoples to their knees, despite the fact that they were supported by their traditional knowledges. Miigwans tells the family, "We were great fighters — warriors, we called ourselves and each other — and we knew these lands, so we kicked a lot of ass." … "But we lost a lot. Mostly because we got sick with new germs" (Dimaline 23). Because they did not yet have the knowledge needed to defend themselves against these "new germs," Indigenous peoples suffered immense loss.

Miigwans explains how settler colonizers doubled down on these losses and opened the first residential schools, striving to eradicate Indigenous ways of knowing, languages, and even lives. He describes the painful experiences of the earlier generations with a previous iteration of residential schools. These schools might not have been bone marrow factories, but they too were destructive: "We suffered there. We almost lost our languages. Many lost their innocence, their laughter, their lives" (Dimaline 23). However, the insight Miigwans wants the youth to take away is that despite all of the violence and the great losses, as a people, Anishnaabe not only survived, but got the schools to close. He explains, "we got through it, and the schools

were shut down. We returned to our home places and rebuilt, relearned, regrouped. We picked up and carried on" (23). Miigwans family, too, can rebuild, relearn, regroup, and carry on. This is what "Story" teaches them.

While struggles continued and many years were lost to the deep hurt caused by all the losses ("too much pain drowned in forgetting that came in convenient packages: bottles, pills, cubicles where we settled to move around papers" (Dimaline 23)), the resurgence of traditional practices, of education within the appropriate cultural contexts ("classrooms we built on our own lands and filled with our own words and books" (24)) is what made the people, the people again. They regained their strength and their inherent sovereignty through remembering their spiralic relations across the generations which informed their identities. Miigwans emphasizes that "once we remembered that we were warriors, once we honored the pain and left it on the side of the road, we moved ahead. We were back" (24). The "we" here is the people, his people, yet of many generations ago. It was by reestablishing relations with the earlier generations and the resurgence of traditional knowledges embodied in practices that the earlier generations' eventual victory was brought into the present, Indigenous self- and cultural continuity was strengthened, and sovereignty was rebuilt. An attentive listener to "Story" can learn from their ancestors, reach for their traditions, and let them be guides in their own struggle for survival.

Through a reflection of time as spiralic, "Story" explains how the thieving of the marrow began: "It was like the second coming of the boats, so many sick people and not enough time to organize peacefully,", and it describes how Native people "were moved off the lands that were deemed 'necessary' to that government, same way they took reserve land during wartime" (Dimaline 87-88). So that the violence of earlier iterations might not return to finish the job, it is important to remember its "Story" and

"set the memory in perpetuity" (25). Importantly, traditional knowledges can and should be transformed to fit the new conditions, as a full understanding of history and culture is needed "to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive" and build thriving futures (25).

Crucially to the novel's plot and concerns, "Story" shows how not just anti-Indigenous violence reiterates through spiralic movements in time; the key to ending all the violence does too. Dimaline locates this key in Indigenous cultural continuity, personified by the character of an elder named Minerva who speaks the language, practices the culture, and knows how to use herbs for healing (38; 152; 93). When the core family we follow loses Minerva, they find her collection of jagged-edged jingles, made from lids taken off with the "camp can opener and stamped with expiry dates and some with company names: Campbell's, Heinz" (152). One of the younger ones is confused because jingles are meant to produce noise, which they are told not to do in this current world in which they are being hunted. When he voices this confusion the response is powerful, even though at that point it is still unknown that the jingles are exactly what holds the key to their liberation. One of the older family members explains how "[s]ometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you're not the one that'll be alive to live it" (152). This is one of the many moments where the relations across time, across generations, are shown to be central to the characters' way of conceiving of the world and of their place in it. They are led by their awareness of their roles as future ancestors.

Not only are their traditional cultural practices essential to their survival as a people, they can be transformed in the moment without losing value (using Campbell's & Heinz lids, for example). The jingles connect the people we are following in the story with their ancestors through the continuation of the healing cultural practice of the

jingle dress dance, born during a previous apocalyptic time, the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-1919, transformed for their present (Child 126). At the same time, the jingles also connect them to a future where their descendants are thriving, as they are cause for the people to imagine themselves as future ancestors continuing the culture transformed. Frenchie's new community consider themselves not just in relation with their ancestors, but also conceive of themselves as future ancestors to those who are not yet born. In this way, the jingles represent spiralic time through their cultural meaning and the connection across time they represent.

When Minerva is taken, and the jingles she secretly had been collecting are found, Frenchie's new family decides to stop running. At that point, the new family had lost both their youngest member (Riri) to Native people collaborating with the Recruiters, and their elder (Minerva) to the Recruiters themselves. Having lost their most direct links to the future and the ancestors respectively (Zanella 16), and struggling with what it means that he killed a man involved in Riri's murder, Frenchie comes to the painful realization that the only way to ensure their continuity is by standing up to their oppressors. He urges his family to stop running away from the danger and instead to charge towards it:

> The rest of my little family looked at me with curiosity. Something had changed. Whether it was this second huge loss or the life I'd taken with all the speed of vengeance back at the cliff, I wasn't sure. But there was no more north in my heart. And I wasn't sure what I meant to do until I said it out loud.
>
> "I'm going after Minerva." (Dimaline 153)

Minerva might have been stolen from them, but the jingles she left them are a strong reminder of the power the family has in their shared knowledges and spiralic relations across time, as well as of the central importance of Minerva herself as holder of so

much knowledge. Even without having been sewn onto a dress to perform the healing jingle dress dance, the jingles already carry cultural power to remind the family of their inherent sovereignty and the strength in their relations.

Once they change direction, the family find another, bigger community made up out of Native people from all over. This bigger community is leading a fight against the marrow thieves, and in the process, or as a basis, created a safe-haven for Native refugees north of the existing residential schools. Hidden behind a cave, their camp, smells of "[t]obacco. Cedar. And the thick curl of something more, something I thought I'd only ever smelled with the memory of smell" (Dimaline 168). This memory of a smell suggests that the knowledge of it was passed on through the generations, without Frenchie ever having been able to experience it himself until he gets to this camp.

This memory could be interpreted as a "blood memory." This recurring trope suggests a kind of memory of a knowledge that is passed on through the generations, without actually ever having been taught. We see it, for example, when Frenchie tries to hunt by himself in the very beginning without ever having hunted before. He describes he hopes it will somehow come to him, as some kind of "blood memory" (Dimaline 10). The use of "blood memory" here emphasizes the connections across time, even when people were forced to skip the practice of cultural continuity for one or more generations. We learn that the smell of the camp which is known without ever having been smelled before is the smell of sweetgrass, a traditional herb (168).

Other traditions guide the Indigenous community as well: right when Frenchie's family first enters the camp, the Council of that camp just ended a sweat to welcome a new Council member (Dimaline 168). We learn that it is the same Council that Frenchie's father traveled with to try and change the world's leaders' minds, but with some new members as well. The Council members are described to be seven people

all from different nations, Frenchie's father still with them (169). Frenchie finding his father, and the smaller complex family finding this culturally strong and resilient community, is interpreted as proof that the decision to stop running and to take matters in their own hands was a good one (177). From this community, Frenchie and his family learn what happened with Minerva.

The moment Recruiters try to take Minerva's bone marrow in the so-called "school," her singing in the language explodes the whole system. This resurgence of traditional knowledge relies on her "blood memory:"

> The Recruiters would later be identified through dental records… Minerva hummed and drummed out an old song on her flannel thighs throughout it all. But when the wires were fastened to her own neural connectors, and the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct, that's when she opened her mouth. That's when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors. That's when she brought the whole thing down. She 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. (Dimaline 172)

As a result, the whole building is blown up, ending the operations there. The comment on dental records suggest all workers present were killed in the explosion, but Minerva survives. Through her singing in the language, she connects with the ancestors who are buried underneath the building. This connection through land, through language, through ceremony, and through kinship across time, is what transforms the cultural teachings into the power to bring down the destructive so-called school, and into an opening for a future where Indigenous people's fates are transformed. Other Native refugees camped in the woods in the area use the smoke of the burning building to smudge. The "campers made their hands into shallow cups and pulled the air over

their heads and faces, making prayers out of ashes and smoke. Real old-timey," and so they make ceremony out of the end of the violence there (Dimaline 174). The power of cultural continuity is in Indigenous self-determination and transformation. Minerva's cultural knowledge, some of it passed on through blood memory and thus despite the oppression by settler colonizers, is shown to be the key to the possibility for a thriving Indigenous future.

Another essential aspect of the work for thriving Indigenous futures is the relationship with place, with the land and all its relations as the people and the land share their experiences with violence as well as their healing capacities. The newly created diasporic community in the north exists out of Indigenous people from all over Turtle Island. Nonetheless, while they come together in their new configurations and in new locations in order to protect their families from the marrow thieves' settler colonizer violence, this does not mean they have given up their relationships of responsibility with their original homelands.

Much of what was the United States has been completely destroyed, either flooded by the rising sea level, or turned toxic from environmental degradation. Clarence, a leader Frenchie meets at the camp up north, explains to him: "Closer you get to the coasts," … "the more water's left that can be drunk. The middle grounds?" … "Nothing. It's like where the bomb landed and the poison leached into the banks, everything's gone in all directions till you get further out" (Dimaline 193). The water and the land were made unlivable. The suffering of Indigenous peoples in this apocalypse caused by a linear settler temporality's obsession with so-called progress and development is directly related to the suffering of the land and its other relations.

For the people who belong to those lands, true healing on Turtle Island requires the healing of the land. Clarence explains this to Frenchie:

> "All we need is the safety to return to our homelands. Then we can start the process of healing."
>
> I was confused. "How can you return home when it's gone? Can't you just heal out here?"
>
> Miig and General gave each other knowing looks, and Clarence was patient with his answer. "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.*" Then he added, "We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually." (Dimaline 193, my emphasis)

The traditional knowledges, passed on through the generations, guide Clarence to knowing that the lands are as important as the cultures. Clarence explains that essential knowledge about the land and how to care for it was passed on across the previous iterations of settler violences. It is that knowledge that informs Indigenous ways of knowing and being even in their apocalyptic future present. They know that "[m]aybe not soon, but eventually," the land to whom they belong will be healed and future generations of Indigenous peoples will live healed and thriving lives. Trusting on the futurity promised in a temporality that is spiralic, their actions are motivated by the idea (discussed above) that "[s]ometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you're not the one that'll be alive to live it" (Dimaline 152).

"Our history is still unfolding"

While not literally in the grip of a bone marrow extricating machine, Indigenous people in Canada *are* in the grip of Canadian genocidal violence, the commodification of Indigenous cultures, and the disruption of their relationships with their lands and

waters. In response to the death grip of the settler colonizer nation on their lands, Idle No More emphasized the central role of culture and continuity for Indigenous sovereignty. Round dance flash mobs were an essential part of Idle No More's actions; centering culture and Indigenous people being Indigenous people (rather than centering the interaction with settler colonizers and/or the settler colonizer state), the round dances were a powerful experience for the drummers, singers, and dancers who participated.

Evidenced by Idle No More, and illustrated by *The Marrow Thieves*, the power of relations, language, culture is in their not being static but living, even as the situations in different moments in time vary. *The Marrow Thieves* offers possibilities of healing in the future. It presents a spiral of relations through writing and telling story that center resurgence, relationality, and a plurality of futures where Native people do more than merely struggle to survive: they find ways to build community, create new relations, and fight for what matters, while still being honest to the experience of violence and other trauma that Native people exponentially have to live through. Recognizing the working of spiralic time as a non-linear temporality that allows the past to also always be the future emphasizes continuity and intergenerational relations.

"Story" within the story of *The Marrow Thieves* models the cyclical churning of time that loops around itself in this imagined future of the novel that is also the present. It models living in good relation and offers cultural resurgence as a key to ending the violence. This resurgence is always also cultural continuity, even if the continuity is one only accessible through "blood memory," rather than being purposely passed on through living relations. *The Marrow Thieves* provides that key through

making its critique on superficial reconciliation and through its embodiment of continuity of culture transformed.

This approach to modeling a possible Indigenous future and to giving space to teen angst, love, and joy in the midst of struggle, as *The Marrow Thieves* does, is essential, because as Aman Sium (Tigrinya and Eritrean) and Eric Ritskes (non-Native) write, "[i]f we are waiting for the dismantling of colonial structures before we focus on rebuilding Indigenous and decolonial alternatives, we will always be too late" (viii). Instead, through the resurgence of embodied practices that rebuild the relationship with the land, both the peoples and the lands to which they belong can be healed. In Sylvia McAdam's words (speaking about Idle No More's purpose):

> it is in the lands and waters that Indigenous people's history is written. Our history is still unfolding; it's led by our song and drums. (67)

Notes

[1] Armstrong gives an example of how the cycles of change inform how Syilx tell time as "change relative to other things" (167). She cites her father's reference to the 1818-1819 Spanish Flu pandemic as "the-winter-people-died." She relays that the "great flu epidemic killed over two-thirds of our population, when my father was in his puberty. That change was what happened, not the number of years counted from some point one thousand nine hundred and nineteen years past. The count of years is irrelevant" (167).

[2] These and other experiences of and perspectives on time are also reflected in the different texts that make up the 2012 anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction *Walking the Clouds,* edited by Grace L. Dillon.

[3] These are listed as "the Indian Act, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, and the *Navigable Water Act* (amongst many others)" (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 21).

[4] Diabo reveals how the 2012 Termination policy was a direct extension from earlier legislation such as the Indian Act and the 1969 "White Paper on Indian Policy which set out a plan to terminate Indian rights," of which the original 5-year timeline to achieve the goal of termination was extended to a slow, "long-term implementation" (55).

[5] Simpson admits it took her many years to realize that the stories the Elders she was learning from told her were of a practice that also embodied a theory, and that she was only able to get to this transformed understanding "through deep engagement with the Nishnaabeg systems inherent in Nishnaabewin… including story or theory, language learning, ceremony, hunting, fishing, ricing, sugar making, medicine making, politics, and governance" (19). Nishnaabeg knowledge is embodied knowledge, which enables a transformation of worldview and of being in the world that strengthens Nishnaabeg nationhood despite, or regardless of, settler colonial structural violence (7).

[6] For more on this common settler trope, see Philip J. Deloria (Yankton Dakota), *Playing Indian*, Yale University Press, 1998.

[7] Where a heuristic of spiralic temporality keeps us focused on the ways Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing and being are always in relation to those who have come before and those who are yet to come, we notice how settler colonial time is a temporality weaponized to obscure the spiralic reality of intergenerational relationality and cyclical returns with transformations. Despite its own attempts to hide the continuous recurrence in different forms of its genocidal project, settler colonial violence, too, participates in Indigenous spiralic temporality, because it is part of Indigenous lived experiences.

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