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Indigenous diasporas in speculative fiction: Writing through estrangement

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Abstract

This article explores diasporic dimensions of Indigenous experiences and narratives on Turtle Island, by looking at the Indigenous speculative fiction novels *The Back of the Turtle* (2014) by Thomas King, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) by Cherie Dimaline, and *The Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018) by Waubgeshig Rice. The three evoke (post)apocalyptic or dystopic futures involving environmental crises and destruction. As Indigenous peoples have historically witnessed and experienced Apocalypse with colonization, both in the past and the present, speculative fiction provides fertile narrative ground to work with and through those legacies of devastation. I particularly focus on how these novels offer accounts of different forms of mobility that may be defined as diasporic. Often prompted by settler use and abuse of the land, and even the exploitation of Indigenous peoples as resource, the displacements and movements recorded in these stories trace routes of both oppression and resistance. These diasporas have fundamental political and historical significance, in that they highlight connections between past acts of colonialization and the violence of present-day neoliberal capitalist practices. Simultaneously, speculating with estrangement in the form of the supernatural, apocalyptic or dystopic, serves as a mechanism to delineate decolonial stories of presence and survivance. These stories, while constantly referring to the past, also include motion

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towards possible better futures, countering Western notions of Indigenous peoples as static and futureless.

KEYWORDS
Apocalypse, decoloniality, estrangement, indigenous diaspora, speculative fiction, survivance

Scholarship around migration movements and diaspora often discuss these experiences of mobility in juxtaposition with native or indigenous relationships between space and self. This article takes a different direction, arguing that the polarization between the diasporic and the indigenous collapses in what can be called the Indigenous diaspora. Although there are undeniable specificities to diaspora and indigeneity—even more so in the politically situated context of Indigeneity within settler nation-states—there are also critical and analytical benefits to blurring the lines between these seemingly opposed paradigms. Thus, I explore the "diasporic dimensions or conjunctures in contemporary native lives" (Clifford, 2013, p. 71) by looking at historicized experiences of Indigenous communities in Turtle Island (the Indigenous name for North America). My aim is to open new conceptual spaces in diaspora studies, by exploring the particular temporalities (past, present and future) that situate Indigenous peoples in dynamics of movement, displacement and migration, thus defying essentialist assumptions of spatial immobility and cultural fixity. To do so, I engage with three works of speculative fiction by Indigenous writers: *The Back of the Turtle* (2014) by Thomas King (Cherokee), *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) by Cherie Dimaline (Georgian Bay Métis), and *The Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018) by Waubgeshig Rice (Anishinaabe). Through a close reading of these texts, I identify the narrative mechanisms that inscribe the diasporic into Indigenous history/story, as well as how speculative fiction helps materialize these experiences as new discursive trajectories. Focusing on estrangement, which in these novels is closely related to the (post)apocalyptic disruption of normalcy, helps me highlight the complex geographical (as well as cultural and ontological) itineraries that connect past and present histories of colonization and struggle. I thus argue that Indigenous speculative fiction contributes to the articulation of a diasporic consciousness and experience that is particular to Indigenous communities.

The stark division between the diasporic and the indigenous has been problematized, for instance, by Avtar Brah, whose concept of diaspora space includes "those who have migrated and their descendants" and "those who are constructed and represented as indigenous" (1996, p. 205). However, these approaches still operate on the dichotomy diaspora/indigeneity, albeit recognizing mutual interactions based on complex power relationships and processes of transculturation (Kuortti, 2015). On the other hand, it is crucial to emphasize that conflating the Indigenous and the diasporic as social categories can certainly be problematic. That indigeneity and diaspora constitute differentiated experiences acquires particular saliency in settler nation-states such as the United States or Canada. Here, struggles over sovereignty, recognition, citizenship and politics of national inclusion may derive in oppositional stances between migrant/diasporic groups on the one hand and Indigenous groups on the other (Byrd, 2011; Coleman, 2016). But concerns over self-determination should be put in conversation with—rather than in opposition to—Indigenous translocal and transnational movements in all their complexity, both before and after colonial contact. As well as studies on diasporas in the form of migrations, displacement and exile resulting from politics of relocation, removal or land allotment (Sturgis, 2007; Smithers & Newman, 2014; Smithers, 2015; Rymhs, 2019), there is a growing awareness of and interest in experiences of Indigenous peoples in urban contexts that are sometimes articulated as diasporic or cosmopolitan (Forte, 2010; Clifford, 2013; Furlan, 2017). As Sophie McCall and others suggest, addressing the intersections of Indigeneity and diaspora may be productive in rethinking the articulation of both Indigenous and diasporic identities, as well as challenging white-centric notions of national identity (McCall, 2012; Fachinger, 2014). Keeping these intricacies in mind, I proceed to give a more detailed account of the relevance of Indigenous stories in writing decolonial, counter-hegemonic notions of Indigeneity, situating this approach in the specific context of the Indigenous diaspora. I then explain why the speculative fiction genre is particularly suited

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to flesh out these experiences thanks to the incorporation of estrangement, and I finish with a close analysis of the novels under study.

Settler colonies, Patrick Wolfe indicates (2006), operate on structural logics of elimination of Indigenous peoples. This means that genocide involves not only mass murder, but other long-term strategies of population management such as displacement, spatial confinement and various form of dispossession, including cultural and epistemological (see also Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016). Settler discourses work through these logics to construct Indigenous subjectivities as inferior, always in the process of disappearing, or positioned them in a primitive or pre-modern past (Clifford, 2013; Rymhs, 2019; Rifkin, 2017; Tomiak & Patrick, 2010). Against these "stories of Indigenous deficiency" (Justice, 2018, p. 5), Indigenous scholars have emphasized the transformative power of stories of continuance (Gunn Allen, 1992), stories of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) or stories of presence (Justice, 2018). It bears remarking that, while these narratives certainly engage with the suffering engendered by past and present histories of colonization, they veer away from discourses of victimhood and are not to be read merely as a reaction to settler colonial determinisms (Vizenor, 2008). Rather, they come to terms with these histories by asserting a sense of presence (Justice, 2018); they are stories of survival and resistance, but also (and this is especially so in speculative fiction, as I will later argue) stories of hope that reclaim a thriving existence in a denied future.

In the context of the Indigenous diaspora I am addressing, I draw on Neal McLeod's take on the effects of colonialism on Indigenous groups in Turtle Island, which he reads precisely in terms of diaspora. He talks about the double displacement in this process of alienation: "the removal of an Indigenous group from their land is defined as *spatial diaspora*, and the alienation from one's stories, *ideological diaspora*" (1998, p. 52, emphasis in original). Crucially, McLeod also emphasizes the role of storytelling as "a way of resisting colonization and of trying to find location and discursive space in the face of diaspora" (1998, p. 53), allowing "the possibility of cultural transmission and of coming home in an ideological sense" (1998, p. 61). I argue that it is equally important to tell stories, not only 'from' diaspora, but also 'about' diaspora in Indigenous contexts. Settler colonial discourses that produce Indigenous subjectivity as backward and fated to extinction also situate the 'real' or 'authentic Indian' as static, fixed in place (Goeman, 2013; Rifkin, 2017). As Chadwick Allen explains, "the Indigenous easily becomes the binary opposite of the transnational [...], representing instead the static, homogeneous tribal, inherently backward and doomed because inherently unwilling and unable to embrace change and movement" (2017, p. 253). This stereotype is further reinforced with the association between Indigenous peoples and the land in ways that are "oversimplified as natural and even worse, romanticized" (Goeman, 2013, p. 28). It is thus important to pay attention to stories about Indigenous experiences of mobility, migration and displacement, so as to redress limiting narratives that situate Indigenous peoples as necessarily outside transnational or diasporic paradigms. Within the settler nation-state context, these stories of movement and itinerance are necessarily framed by the violence of colonization (Rymhs, 2019). At the same time, they create new narrative spaces, or "maps that make possible different visions of the world" (Goeman, 2013, p. 31) and "that interrogate and complicate state-bounded territory" (Goeman, 2013, p. 34). Stories of Indigenous diasporas do voice a complex relationship to the (home)land and negotiate belonging in contexts of alienation, spatial and ideological, marked by past and ongoing colonial policies. Yet, while they do often highlight the importance of tradition and of restoring cultural practices, and may deal with the search for a home, this should not be seen as an uncomplicated longing for an ideal homeland situated in a pre-colonial past. Rather, many of these stories inscribe new directions that represent Indigenous peoples moving towards a more hopeful future.

At this point I would like to discuss the prominence of a growing literary corpus of Indigenous speculative fiction. This genre, which Grace Dillon first denominated Indigenous futurisms (2012), has proven particularly adequate to fictionalize Indigenous realities. Several Indigenous scholars and writers have argued that literary tropes common in speculative fiction, such as contact with alien species, apocalyptic disasters or dystopic scenarios, can be easily related to the lived experiences of many Indigenous communities (Dillon, 2012; Newman Fricke, 2019; Nixon, 2020; Whitehead, 2020). This is perhaps why speculative fiction, more than other forms of literature, "provides the language to conceptualize a world outside of colonial influences, beyond the loss of homeland, resources, and the unethical treatment of the population" (Newman Fricke, 2019, p. 109). The novels I analyze in this article contain speculative

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elements of estrangement. Indigenous stories often incorporate the strange or supernatural, such as dreams or visions, which from a Euro-Western perspective belong in the realm of fantasy, but are in fact ways of articulating and interpreting reality in many Indigenous cosmologies (Gunn Allen, 1992, p. 71). In this vein, Justice asserts that, "[f]or Indigenous writers of speculative fiction, the fantastic is an extension of the possible, not the impossible" (2018, p.149) and argues for the term "wonderworks" to designate fiction that recognizes the strange elements and processes of estrangement within Indigenous epistemological approaches (2018, p.152). From an Indigenous perspective, then, the use of estrangement blurs the lines between fantasy and reality. Throughout this article I talk about speculative fiction as a descriptive term that helps navigate the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction specific to Indigenous futurisms. Moreover, all three novels take place in what can be called (post)apocalyptic or dystopic scenarios, which remove the protagonists from a 'normal' environment and are suggestive of paradigmatic shifts (Kaup, 2021). As I mentioned above, (post)apocalyptic stories contain not only projections onto the future, but also past and present realities for Indigenous peoples. This narrative context reveals "new insights and perspectives" by making "the strange familiar and the familiar strange but also the present future and the future present" (Lempert, 2018, p. 210). I argue that it is precisely the disruptive presence of estrangement, the mingling of historical events and supernatural elements that opens up new avenues for "imagining otherwise" (Justice, 2018, p. 142) and "choosing and acting otherwise" (Vowel, 2022, p. 200).

In sociology, processes of cultural estrangement and defamiliarization are identified as possessing valuable, self-reflexive potential (Braidotti, 2013, p. 20; Gilroy, 2004, p.78). This capacity of estrangement to question the normative is also one of the characteristics of speculative fiction that makes it so apt to represent and talk about subaltern ontologies. The strange in speculative fiction, when read from a non-hegemonic perspective, may function not only to signify that which is not normal, but also to challenge normative assumptions and colonial logics, contributing to "the healing and decolonizing processes of Indigenous futurisms" (Bouich, 2021, p. 169). Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out that decolonization should be "about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (1999, p. 39; see also Lee, 2021). With this in mind, I argue that stories that emerge from the juncture between Indigenous diasporic experience, decolonial narratives of survivance and the speculative medium, have a subversive effect, one "that reworlds and opens another world for a people in the face of colonial violence" (Cheah, 2016, p. 195).

To illustrate the productive and creative ways that decolonial-speculative narratives engage the diasporic in Indigenous history/story, I will first address *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (Rice, 2018), which focuses on an Anishinaabe community living in a reserve in northern Ontario. The novel connects past and present colonialist practices by centering the story around a crisis caused by the permanent breakdown of the hydro dam the reserve depends on to get electricity. Many Indigenous communities in the twentieth century were led to reluctantly adopt settler-state-promoted infrastructures of energy generation and distribution. As Reuben Martens explains, this was done "through the promise to fulfill the social aspirations of the colonized, yet with a complete disregard (inertia) as to how this affects local communities, ecosystems, and political structures" (2020, p. 196). Spatial regulations through which Indigenous peoples were displaced from their lands or relocated to reserves point to a colonial violence which is also replicated in present-day state politics of resource management, all undergirded by a discourse on progress that situates settlers as civilized and Indigenous as uncivilized. The novel exposes the interconnected spatial and ideological dimensions of the Indigenous diaspora described by Neal McLeod (1998, discussed above). Talking about a smudging ceremony (where herbs are burned for spirit cleansing), the narrator explains that "[t]his protocol had once been forbidden, outlawed by the government and shunned by the church. When the ancestors of these Anishinaabe people were forced to settle in this unfamiliar land, distant from their traditional home near the Great Lakes, their culture withered under the pressure of the incomers' Christianity" (Rice, 2018, p. 52). The complex entanglement of power dynamics that extends from the past to the present and transcends the political to permeate the personal is made even more explicit in the following passage of the novel: "for decades, despairing men had gotten drunk and beaten their partners and children, feeding a cycle of abuse that continued when those kids grew up. It became so normal that everyone forgot about the root of this turmoil: their forced displacement from their homelands and the

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violent erasure of their culture, language, and ceremonies" (Rice, 2018, p. 44). The novel thus fills the gaps of history through story. On the one hand, it attests to the migration paths that are part of Indigenous histories. On the other, it (re)connects spatial violence with the erasure of cultures and epistemologies, and the profound impact that this has had on Indigenous relationships to self and to others (Alfred, 2015).

It gradually transpires that the catastrophe affecting the reserve's electricity supply is a nation-wide phenomenon, and that the southern cities have descended into chaos and panic. The people in the reserve fair better thanks to traditional knowledge, survival strategies and abilities and a more sustainable lifestyle. These are again connected with Indigenous experiences of dislocation in a passage that reiterates survivance: "Survival had always been an integral part of their culture. It was their history. 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" (Rice, 2018, p. 48). However, facing this crisis requires the whole community work closely together, and this delicate balance is broken with the arrival of a white man named Scott, who is from the beginning described as "a beast of a man who was invading his people's space" (Rice, 2018, p. 100). Scott's presence becomes gradually more threatening, as the winter advances and the situation becomes more unbearable. At one point, Evan, the protagonist, whose dreams are described throughout the novel, has one of Scott turned into a beast: "It was disfigured yet oddly familiar. Scott. His cheeks and lips were pulled tight against his skull. He breathed heavily through his mouth, with long incisors jutting upward and downward from rows of black teeth. His eyes were blacked out" (Rice, 2018, p. 187). In Evan's vision, Scott embodies the windigo, a figure from Indigenous lore associated with hunger and cannibalism in extreme conditions in the northern winters. Here, the use of the supernatural can be read allegorically: the connection between the windigo and the white man illustrates how Indigenous worlds were and still are consumed and ravaged after the arrival of the Europeans (Bussiere, 2020; Lee, 2021).

Another way in which estrangement works to visibilize a decolonial struggle is precisely through the apocalyptic setting. When Evan tells Aileen, one of the elders, that some see the catastrophe they are living through as an Apocalypse, the woman voices the paradox that Apocalypse has already happened to Indigenous peoples: "Our world isn't ending. It already ended" (Rice, 2018, p.149). Diasporic dislocation is signalsed once more as the cause for the people's despair: "They made us come all the way up here. This isn't our homeland!" (Rice, 2018, p.149). And yet, this is followed by a statement of resistance and hope for a thriving future: "Yes, Apocalypse. We've had that over and over. But we survived. We're still here. And we'll still be here, even if the power and the radios don't come back on and we never see any white people ever again" (Rice, 2018, p. 150). I believe the same hopeful sentiment can be inferred from the novel's ending, despite Martens' affirmation that the group "may leave the reservation in search for a new home, but there is little to suggest that the Anishinaabe have a long and prosperous future ahead of them" (2020, p. 209). The exodus of the community, once the situation becomes too dire, establishes again a continuum of settler violence in different forms, as waves of migration succeed each other: "The collapse of the white man's modern systems further withered the Anishinaabeg here. But they refused to wither completely" (Rice, 2018, p. 212). Yet, the last lines—"they stepped onto the trail, one by one, to begin this new life nestled deep in the heart of Anishinaabe territory" (Rice, 2018, p. 213)—convey a sense of strength. Migrations here signify past and present struggle, but also potential and hope for a future in a reclaimed homeland (Lee, 2021).

In *The Back of the Turtle* (King, 2014) an environmental catastrophe caused by a biochemical defoliant (used to open the way for an oil pipeline) affects the entire ecosystem of the coastal area of Samaritan Bay and leads to the total evacuation of the Smoke River Reserve. The plot revolves around this tragedy, which comes to be known as The Ruin, and which contains elements of exile and displacement: "After the spill, the government had forced the surviving families off the reserve. For their own safety, the officials had said. And for their own safety, the families had been relocated to Saskatchewan and Manitoba, to communities as far as Samaritan Bay as possible" (King, 2014, p. 156). Like *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, this novel, too, emphasizes that "the current environmental crises which are named through the designation of the Anthropocene, can be viewed as a continuation of, rather than a break from, previous eras that begin with colonialism and extend through advanced capitalism" (Davis & Todd, 2017, p. 771; see also Whyte, 2018). Crucially, the devastation produced by the excesses of unfettered capitalism is not restricted to

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the local context of Indigenous communities. The protagonist of the novel, Gabriel Quinn, was as a scientist at the Domidion corporation, where he developed the biochemical product that caused the death of many in the Smoke River Reserve, including his own mother and sister. Assaulted by grief and guilt, he becomes obsessed with listing man-made ecological disasters, which are referenced throughout the novel: the Halifax Explosion of 1917 and the Benxihu Coillery explosion of 1942 in China (p. 38); the gas crater known as The Gates of Hell in Turkmenistan (p. 137); or the Aral Sea (p. 167). The presence of two Taiwanese families on board the *Anguis*, a Domidion freighter containing toxic waste, is also crucial in the story to highlight "the dystopian condition not only of Indigenous peoples in North America but of disenfranchised peoples generally" (Morrison, 2018, p. 46). The story brings together global examples of climate necropolitics (DeBoom, 2021) and establishes dialogues between vulnerable communities diversely affected by capitalist exploitation around the world. In doing so, it defies the notion that Indigenous struggles are limited to the local and somehow cut off from global concerns and processes, and are instead contextualized transnationally in a local-global continuum.

As I mentioned before, the apocalyptic context has an effect of estrangement from normal reality. The novel certainly concentrates on the all-encompassing destruction after The Ruin. The displaced Indigenous families, whose absence the remaining characters lament, are in fact even associated with ghosts. However, this becomes a spectral presence throughout the novel, which serves to critically reflect on the causes and consequences of the catastrophe, as well as leaves open the possibility for restoration: "But the reserve was still band land. The families would return. Over time, they would find their way home" (King, 2014, p. 156). In fact, repeated allusions to new beginnings suggest the whole novel points rather to a post-apocalyptic ethos of renewal and hope after the end (Kaup, 2021), which becomes most apparent when the ecosystem eventually shows signs of recovery, epitomized by the return of the turtles to Samaritan Bay. Interestingly, this last episode constitutes one of the supernatural elements interspersed in the novel. The first turtle to return to Samaritan Bay after The Ruin seems to be the same turtle that was kept in an aquarium in Domidion, which is situated in Toronto. This has strong symbolic connotations, given the salience of the Sky Woman story (more on this later), where the world is built on the back of a turtle, and taking into account the parallel journey Gabriel takes, from working in Domidion to returning 'home' to Samaritan Bay. Another supernatural presence is that of the character of Nicholas Crisp, who has been associated with figures from different mythologies, from ancient Roman, to Christian and Indigenous (Rhoads, 2019). I further argue that it is Nicholas Crisp's female counterpart or aspect that Dorian Asher (CEO of Domidion) finds one night in Toronto. The woman has red hair, like Crisp, and also blue eyes, which are (coincidentally?) described as "crisp" (King, 2014, p. 469). Also, both utter the same cryptic words: "Did ye know that a fortune may be read on a face and a fate found in a query?" (King, 2014, pp. 1, 469) and "I am well, if ye be well, too" (King, 2014, pp. 2, 471). This male-female duality accentuates Crisp's trickster dimension and it is no surprise that this episode is one of the few that shows implacable Dorian in a psychologically vulnerable moment.

Storytelling plays a fundamental part in the novel. As Daniel Heath Justice reminds us, stories can be "agents of both harm and healing" (2018, p. 4). This duality is showcased in the contrast between the destructive narratives that stem from the Domidion corporation, and the constructive acts of storytelling coming from the Indigenous context (O'Brien, 2020; Fraile-Marcos, 2020). An example of the latter is the Haudenosaunee creation story of the Sky Woman, or "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" story, which features prominently throughout the novel. According to this story, a woman creates the world on the back of a turtle with help from the water animals, and then gives birth to the twins that represent the forces of order and chaos. This myth emphasizes the dynamic balance between all the beings, sentient and non-sentient, that conform the world; a balance that is completely shattered by the extractivism embedded in the modern myth of progress that Domidion stands for. Most crucially, in this apocalyptic context, "storytelling helps to create the conditions for living on in the years to come, which start with responsibly inhabiting the devastation of the present" (O'Brien, 2020, p. 50). Gabriel, who at one point skeptically declares that "[s]tories were stories. They were not the laws of the universe" (King, 2014, p. 185) participates in the telling of the Sky Woman story—"It had been a while since he had sung like that. In front of people. For a purpose. And he had to admit, it felt good" (King, 2014, p. 235). This constitutes a step towards healing for him, and he eventually recognizes that telling

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his story to others “would allow *him* to understand” (King, 2014, p. 455) and come to terms with his past actions and its present consequences. Storytelling also provides a discursive background to the acts of community-building that are key to the restoration of life in Samaritan Bay. Again, narratives of movement, displacement, return and reunion are framed in Indigenous relational epistemologies and ontologies, pointing to survivance and a potentially thriving future.

The Marrow Thieves (Dimaline, 2017) is set in a dystopic future after climate change has devastated the Earth, producing several natural catastrophes and wars as a consequence. Another effect of this climate Apocalypse is that humans lose their capacity to dream. As Indigenous peoples are the only ones who retain this ability, they are hunted down by the Recruiters (agents from the Canadian government) and taken to new versions of residential schools. There, they are extracted the marrow from their bones (where their dreams are located), dying in the process. The story follows Frenchie and other Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous characters as they escape the Recruiters, fleeing north to safer territories. Again, although the novel develops in the future, the abuse exerted by white settlers on Indigenous peoples should not be read as disconnected or isolated from past and present acts of violence, but as a continuation of those practices. Colonial projects of appropriation and exploitation segue into aggressive capitalist politics of resource extraction, both underlay by racist discourses that entail the erasure of (among others) Indigenous peoples. Here, the speculative elements of the Apocalypse, of dreams being located in the bone marrow and the scientific advances used for its extraction, help to expand the focus from the destruction of the land, natural resources and cultural and epistemic systems to literally the consumption of Indigenous bodies (Zenella, 2020), which become the ultimate “sites of struggle” (Justice, 2018, p. 132; Xausa, 2020, p. 96).

In the dangerous journey up north, turning to Indigenous epistemologies becomes the most significant strategy of survivance and healing for the protagonists. The characters comprising the group, who come from different Nations, each tell their individual life story, or coming-to story. These are crucial to strengthen the community and are intertwined with the Elders' passing on of historical accounts, as well as songs, language and ceremony. This body of knowledge, known as Story, is crucial to “set the memory in perpetuity” (Dimaline, 2017, p. 25), to teach the young ones that the residential schools where “they leach the dreams from where our ancestors hid them” (Dimaline, 2017, p. 90) replicate those in the residential school system from the 19th and 20th centuries. In these schools, generations of Indigenous children underwent harsh processes of acculturation and often abuse and neglect. They were loci of physical and epistemic violence, and places of extraction too—they “took whatever they wanted from the children, especially at night. [...] suck[ed] the language right out of your lungs” (Dimaline, 2017, p. 107). Knowledge of their history is essential for the group to recognize and fight genocide in this new but familiar guise. The importance of memory, knowledge and stories is perhaps most evident in an episode when one of the Elders, Minerva, is taken by the Recruiters to a residential school facility, which she subsequently destroys during the process when they try to suck the dreams out of her bones:

> 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.
>
> (2017, p. 172)

In this scene, supernatural or estranging elements connected with the speculative genre are notoriously at play. This narrative strategy is used to reiterate the power and potential of ancient knowledge in overthrowing oppressive, institutionalized power.

Movement in the novel is again linked to (neo)colonial violence, but I argue it should not be read as only the desperate escape of a vulnerable community. The protagonists' journey northward is intertwined with the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and stories, and the active search for home. Yet, as Frenchie asks, “How can

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you return home when it's gone?" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 193). The return home that propels this enforced migration does not signify a home(land) understood in white-settler parameters of a territory within property boundaries, or a nation defined by state law. Returning home means "healing the land", using Indigenous knowledge, skills and practices—"When we heal our land, we are healed also" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 193). This home is a direction towards the future, a future of Indigenous healing, resurgence and thriving. This implies repairing the damage done to the land by irresponsible misuse and abuse of nature and natural resources. Most importantly, it requires retrieving Indigenous relational ways of being in the world, for which securing the transmission of stories down the generational line is paramount. For these reasons, as Patrizia Zenella has argued, the group's itineraries constitute "a deliberate flight inward to rebuild, reclaim the language, and return to their caretaking responsibilities towards their extended kin" (2020, p. 192). The following passage, which takes place towards the end of the novel, after Minerva's death, reveals the difficulty of the process:

> It was Bullet's idea to start a youth council, to start passing on the teachings right away, while they were still relearning themselves. [...] We were desperate to craft more keys, to give shape to the kind of Indians who could not be robbed. It was hard, desperate work. We had to be careful we weren't making things up, half remembered, half dreamed. We felt inadequate. We felt hollow in places and at certain hours we didn't have names for in our languages.
>
> (Dimaline, 2017, p. 214)

Patent in these lines are the cultural, epistemic, and ontological gaps produced by past colonial violence that extends to the present and future. Yet, in these acts of learning and improvising lies agency over future directions. Minerva's last message to Frenchie is that "You must always go home" (Dimaline, 2017, p. 211). This constant moving towards home signifies a process, rather than completeness or arrival at a fixed destination, "always looking to both past and future, always producing diversity" (Lyons, 2010, p. 13).

I have argued throughout this article for the importance of recognizing the inextricable link between Indigenous histories on Turtle Island and diverse acts of migration, movement and displacement. The literary analyses I have conducted show how estrangement in these novels contains diasporic dimensions, pointing to those already experienced by Indigenous Nations and to those to come in the aftermath of climatic catastrophe. Framing these movements as an Indigenous diaspora helps underscore the implicit historical trauma behind them, but also the new directions these communities are taking. The speculative stories I have analyzed portray Indigenous diasporas as having fundamental political and historical significance, in that they chart a genealogy connecting colonialism with neoliberal capitalism. Writing through estrangement helps these authors orchestrate alternative realties to speak about these connected violences in an augmented way, especially through the form of the (post)apocalyptic narrative. Yet, this engagement with the (post)apocalyptic does not function as a metaphor for extinction—rather, speculative elements contribute to figuring new and future itineraries of survivance and growth. Thus, these novels, as well as the stories told within them, defy the simplistic discourse of victimhood, of the diasporic subject forever damaged by alienation. Speculative stories from and about the Indigenous diaspora draw alternative maps of resistance and hope in a space marked by historical and ongoing violence. They become stories-as-maps (Goeman, 2013) that assert Indigenous presence and point to the generative process of the yet-to-come.

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