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**“Stories wrapped in Stories”: Analyzing  
Survivance and Kinship in *The Marrow Thieves*  
(2017)**

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## **Abstract**

*The Marrow Thieves* (2017) is an Indigenous futuristic novel written by Cherie Dimaline that presents a group of Indigenous characters being persecuted by settler colonists, who seek to consume the Indigenous people's marrow in order to regain the ability to dream. According to Vizenor (2010), the term survivance describes the active sense of defending and vindicating a culture, not only by keeping its members alive, but also by participating in its customs and traditions. This project examines how the Indigenous communities in the novel enact survivance through interactions with their cultures and among themselves, in comparison with the approach of the settler colonists who hunt them. For this purpose, this project studies how the characters in the story negotiate their treatment of the land, their connection to their cultures and their relationships with other members of their communities, based on the knowledge and ways of their nations. The text argues that Dimaline's novel highlights how, owing to their nurture-based culture, in addition to the importance of connections, Indigenous people maintain a deep kinship with the land, with their communities and with the communal knowledge, which allows them to dream and prosper as a community. This is in contrast to the settlers' colonial society, whose relationship with the land is based on overexploitation of natural resources and their connections with themselves and others are competitive, rather than nurturing. This dichotomy shows how the Indigenous cultures in the narrative survive thanks to the connections of their members among themselves, with the land and with their traditions and customs.

Keywords: Survivance, Kinship, *The Marrow Thieves*, Indigenous futurism, Indigenous Storytelling.

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## Introduction

In 2019, when the Métis Nation of Ontario asked the author Cherie Dimaline about the importance of stories for the Métis community, Dimaline responded: “stories are everything (...). For us, a lot of the time we carry home in the stories” (Dimaline, 2019). Stories inside cultures carry a significant value as connectors of community members among themselves, but their value for a community raises when the community is at constant risk of extinction. The most clear examples are the North-American Indigenous communities, who are in constant danger due to the hostilities against their culture and their members by many parties. Some of those associations would be the local governments, who carry out laws that endanger the ways of living of the Indigenous communities by forcing them into a globalized world. Another example would be the non-Indigenous population of those regions, who directly attack the members of the communities and their culture.

One way of talking back to these aggressions is through the eyes of literature, and one of the most important trends in North American Indigenous literature to express the response of the Indigenous writers is Speculative Fiction, and in particular Native Apocalyptic literature. According to Grace Dillon: “Native apocalyptic storytelling, then, shows the ruptures, the scars, and the trauma in its effort ultimately to provide healing and a return to *bimaadiziwin*. This is the path to a sovereignty embedded in selfdetermination” (Dillon 2012, 9). Thanks to this kind of literature, First Nation writers and readers get the chance to vindicate their position in the story, to express how they have survived and regain *bimaadiziwin*, “the state of balance” (9). In addition to these ideas, Judith Leggatt states that: “Rather than focusing on the past, these narratives look toward the future. Speculative Fiction, which has at its heart imaging otherwise, is essential in creating visions of strong Indigenous futures” (Leggatt 2019, 141). Speculative Fictions not only serve as tools for vindication, but they also help to imagine a future where Indigenous communities are stronger thanks to the union of the communities and can stand against the globalized world that tries to consume them.

In literature, one of the main concepts that tackles the struggle between First Nation Communities and the globalized world, which constitutes the most dangerous peril to their cultures, is the concept of *survivance*. This term was first coined by Gerald Vizenor and it expresses “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native

stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name” (Vizenor 2010, vii). Survivance embodies the central idea that Dimaline wanted to express with her statement about the importance of stories, and it is connected tightly to her novel of 2017, *The Marrow Thieves*.

Dimaline’s novel is an excellent representation of the ideas defined by the concept of survivance through connections, and how Indigenous cultures survive thanks to their attachment to the land, to the relation of its members among themselves and to their communal knowledge. In this essay, *The Marrow Thieves* will be analyzed primarily by means of the concept of survivance through connections, among other concepts and theories, to prove the cultural value of stories and the nurture of communities through them. This study will be carried out by analyzing the ways in which the Indigenous communities in the novel are connected to the land and their culture, with emphasis in their stories, how the members of the community interact among themselves through dialogue and how they survive complex times thanks to their kinship and their nurture-based way of life. In contrast, the colonial communities will be analyzed by looking at their ways of approaching the land and their culture, based on consumption, to present the core differences of the cultures of the First Nation and the ones of the globalized communities.

## **Theoretical Framework**

*The MarrowThieves* is a Canadian Indigenous futuristic novel set in a near future where, after a series of cataclysmic events that come as a result of the excessive consumerism of the western cultures, settler colonists have lost the ability to dream. After these events, Indigenous people in North America and Canada are being hunted for their marrow, as it is the main ingredient to create a cure for the globalized loss. The genre of Indigenous futurism plays a key role in the creation of the novel at its core since, in words of Dillon:

‘Writers of Indigenous futurisms sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably change the perimeters of sf. Liberated from the constraints of genre expectations, or what “serious” Native authors are supposed to write, they have room to play with setting, character, and dialogue; to stretch boundaries; and, perhaps most significantly, to reenlist the science of indigeneity in a discourse that invites discerning readers to realize that Indigenous science is not just complementary to a

perceived western enlightenment but is indeed integral to a refined twenty-first-century sensibility.’ (Dillon 2012, 3)

The genre of Indigenous futurism allows Indigenous authors, like Dimaline, to go beyond what is expected from them as native authors, but also to go beyond as science fiction writers and tackle issues in their novels that would be impossible to consider in any other genre. It is also essential for blurring the limits of what authors and genres can do. These types of novels are used both as a way of escapism from real issues, while also dealing with real issues. An example of this would be Dimaline’s novel, which is based in a post-apocalyptic world, but at the same time is used to talk about the horrors of the residential school system in Canada for the Indigenous communities. These horrors came both in terms of the loss of communities, but also the loss of pieces of their cultures.

The importance of the genre in this type of novels makes it mandatory to look at the ideas of professor Grace Dillon about the Indigenous Speculative Fiction and the Indigenous Futurism genres presented in *Walking the Clouds*. Her analysis would be extremely helpful to set the tone and ideas about the Indigenous Speculative Fiction genre, since Dillon theorizes about the type of narratives that Dimaline wrote, in which authors try to illustrate a future where First Nation Communities can be far from, or at least fight, colonialism. In relation to the depiction of the world, James W. Moore analyses the treatment of ecological crisis in a capitalistic world awfully similar to the one that preceded the world presented in the novel, which would be extremely important to depict the ways of the settlers of the lands in the novel.

One crucial theory related to the Indigenous futurism, and therefore it should be considered for this research, is the Anishnaabe term *biskaabiiyang*, which would be translated to “returning to ourselves” (Simpsons 2011, 48). This concept would be helpful to understand the relation of the Indigenous characters with their culture in a world where the survival of both the culture and its members is at stakes. In relation to this concept, on one hand the researcher Leanna Betasamosake Simpson wrote *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back*, where she analyzes the importance of the concept of *biskaabiiyang* for the First Nation cultures and values. She also studies the relevance of giving voice to the Indigenous cultures by giving voice to their stories. On the other hand, Judith Leggatt wrote a chapter in *Canadian, Science Fiction, Fantasy, And*

*Horror*, where she considers the same topics applied in literary and cinematographic texts.

In relation to the importance of the stories, a huge value is given to the origin stories in Dimaline's novel. Their investigation leads to the author Thomas King, whose study about origin stories from different cultures would be important to analyze the contrast between cultures and their traditions. In addition, Professor Robin Ridington wrote an article called *Coyote's Cannon: Sharing Stories With Thomas King* where he analyzes the weight of origin stories in Indigenous narratives, among many other aspects of King's novels.

Finally, another significant aspect that should be considered in the study would be the ideas of professor Donna Haraway about Kin presented in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*, where new interpretations regarding kinship are suggested for an ecologically devastated world, just like the one presented in the novel of Dimaline.

### **Man Plans; God Laughs: When the world cannot follow the rhythm of the globalized world**

In *The Marrow Thieves*, this not so distant future world has been devastated as a consequence of the overwhelming exploitation of the limited natural resources. This scenario sets a clear distinction between the ways of the globalized lifestyle, which is based on consuming resources, and the ones of the Indigenous communities, which are based on nurturing the people, but also on nurturing the land and their culture. This parallelism can be seen throughout the novel; one example of the former would be the thoughts of the main character, Frenchie, about the ways of the white population, who not only consume natural resources, but also consume the Indigenous marrows: "Poisoning your own drinking water, changing air so much the earth shook and melted and crumbled, harvesting a race for medicine. How? How could this happen? Were they that much different from us? Would we be like them if we'd had a choice? Were they like us enough to let us live?" (Dimaline 2017, 47). On the other hand, the nurturing treatment of the First Nation communities can be seen later on, when the main characters have just hunted a deer and they respect its bones: "Miig was preparing the ceremony when I got there to send it off in a good way. We allowed the deer to take his dreams with him so he had all the magic he would need to find the next world" (194).



This dichotomy ties deeply with what Moore states about the division of nature and mankind in the globalized society lead by the white settlers that precedes the devastated world of the novel, primarily based on consumption:

‘Human/Nature dualisms presume what needs to be explained: How have we reached the point where we assume a separation that so clearly does not exist? Such dualisms confuse modernity’s historical movements for philosophical abstractions. They elide the deep, profound and intimate porosity and permeability of human sociality, whose forms are specific, uneven and distinctive. Nature/Society dualisms cannot discern the flows of human and extra-human life as they bond and bundle with each other; they prevent us from asking questions about the connective tissues of human sociality.’ (Moore 2017, 5)

Due to a lack of understanding of the intrinsic connections of mankind with nature, white settlers disregard the environment and perceive it as something to be exploited and consumed, causing dreadful consequences for the ecosystem and those who live in it, even those who do not consider themselves as part of the natural environment, like the settlers.

In comparison to the ways of the Indigenous cultures, which are based on a deep connections to the land and its rhythms, the culture of the settlers has been transformed into a culture of destruction of the wild in favour of the construction of the comfortable for their ways. The prioritization of the needs of the colonists causes the constant consumption of the natural elements to sustain a system too focused on overexploitation rather than connections. The overexploitation of resources is a key element of the globalized society of today, and Dimaline clearly states that this consumption does not end at non-living elements or animals, but it also consumes communities and their cultures, whether they want to form a part of it or not.

The main cause of this dichotomy lies in what Dimaline stated previously; non-Indigenous people have lost their ability to dream, therefore they have lost their ability to live. By losing their ties with the land, and subsequently their dreams, they have lost their humanity. This emptiness causes an ongoing overexploitation of resources, whether they are natural, animal or human ones. Once the decision of keeping the consumption from a harmed land is taken, Indigenous people decide to run away, to survive far from the cities and fight back to defend their members and to vindicate the survival of their ways, which are based on more than exhaustion of supplies.

## **Broken, but not lost: The importance of kinship for Indigenous people**

In contrast with the non-Indigenous communities, the First Nation community members still have the ability to dream, which comes from their kinship with the earth and among themselves. Nevertheless, the ability to dream is what grants them the capacity to make connections with their community and the land, as it is what keeps their humanity intact. This reciprocity is a key element in the Indigenous culture, as this circularity leaves room for dialogue and interaction of different members of the community and their ideas, which allows them to bond as part of the same group and survive together.

Throughout the novel, the group of main characters show wide demonstrations of affection among them. An example of this would be when the group sits around a fire and talk about the recruiters, who hunt Indigenous people for their bones:

Miig steepled his hands and paused before he asked, "What would you do to save us?"

We looked at each other, faces bright in the singular light of the fire. We were family. We were all we had. The rest was dark and unknown.

It was Chi-Boy who answered. "Anything."

Wab spoke after him. "Everything." (Dimaline 2017, 54-55)

Even though they do not have family bonds, they do behave as a family, thanks to their willingness to survive all together as a whole community. In relation to this, Dimaline mentioned this when she was asked about the survival of the First Nation communities and its members: "it is not just about survival, it's about who do you want to be at that moment of survival" (Dimaline, 2019). It is not enough to survive as individuals if the culture and the family disappear in the way. Kinship plays a key role in the survival of the cultures, as it is thanks to connections that communities and their members survive.

In relation to the importance of kinship for the survival of the Indigenous cultures, Haraway stated that: "Kin making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans. (...) Making kin and making kind (...) stretch(es) the imagination and can change the story" (Haraway 2016, 103). Thanks to their ability to demonstrate kinship, the First Nation members are still connected to the land and among themselves as a community, which saves them from losing their dreams. Moreover, the kinship is the key element that allows the communities to dialogue and create strong bonds, which saves them from losing their ability to dream.

The ability of dreaming not only allows them to survive, but it also gives them the opportunity to decide how they want to survive through dialogue. The capacity of choosing makes that, aside from some Indigenous characters who are forced to betray the community for personal salvation, every First Nation member chooses to survive in a community and to protect each other for the good of the culture and the family.

### **Return to ourselves: Reconnecting with an endangered culture**

In relation to family and culture, the group of main characters, who most of them are teenagers, does not have a close relationship with their culture. This comes as a consequence of the persecution of the Indigenous population, that put the teaching of their ways on a second level. The hunting, however, does not push the teens away from their culture, but the other way around, they feel the urge to learn it and be able to participate in it. This can be seen in many ways, but one of the most important ones is the determination of Frenchie and the other teens to learn their language: “How do you have language?” My voice broke on the last syllable. My chest tightened. How could she have the language? She was the same age as me, and I deserved it more. I don’t know why, but I felt certain that I did” (Dimaline 2017, 38). This position is based on what Dimaline sees every day with the youth of the Métis nation and what she desired to present in her novel: “There’s this great energy that is coming from the youth. They are refusing to work within the old frameworks that a lot of our leaders had to. They come from a place of community, from a grassroots position and with so much education, experience, knowledge and community knowledge with them” (Dimaline, 2019). Thanks to their willingness of keeping the culture alive, the Indigenous youth is taking an active position for the salvation of the community knowledge. This role appears as a consequence of the grassroots position that Dimaline talks about, which comes from the combination of the experience of living inside the settler colonists’ society, plus the knowledge earned from the Indigenous communities. This combination of ideas and cultures is pivotal to create a resistance to defend the Indigenous traditions.

The position of resistance against the non-Indigenous cultures and its attempts to avoid the consumption of the Indigenous ones and their members links perfectly with what Simpson wrote about the survival of the indigenous culture, not by direct confrontation, but by saving the most valued thing for them:

‘My ancestors resisted and survived what must have seemed like an apocalyptic reality of occupation and subjugation in a context where they had few choices. They resisted by simply surviving and being alive. They resisted by holding onto their stories. They resisted by taking the seeds of our culture and political systems and packing them away, so that one day another generation of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg might be able to plant them. I am sure of their resistance (...). Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg people are the evidence. Now, nearly two hundred years after surviving an attempted political and cultural genocide, it is the responsibility of my generation to plant and nurture those seeds and to make our Ancestors proud.’ (Simpson 2011, 16)

The Indigenous traditions survived the occupation thanks to the attempts of the whole community to prevent this apocalyptic loss. However, the main objective of this process was to save a culture that future generations could reconnect with, once the cultural genocide was over. The main reason to save their culture was to allow the survivors to replant the seeds and start a process of *Biskaabiiyang* and revitalize their traditions and spread it to the youth.

As a consequence of the persecution and abandonment of the culture, Indigenous teenagers in the novel feel encouraged to start a process of *Biskaabiiyang* and reclaim their culture and their communal knowledge. This process would help to vindicate their families and social groups as something more than products to be consumed or members of a deceased community, but as part of a rich culture that still fights for their survival thanks to lots of stories and knowledge that could be learned from the elders, and also taught to the next generations. Both groups that, in a certain way, actually embody the grassroots position of their communities.

### **Grassroots dialogue: Discussion about the most important community members**

When Dimaline created the group of Indigenous survivors that would conform the main characters, she was clever enough to make almost all of them teenagers, as they would represent better the ideal readers of her novel and their points of view. However, Dimaline proved to be even more clever when she decided to introduce the characters of the young girl RiRi, and the elder lady Minerva, as these two characters represent both groups that are extremely important for the survival of a culture; those who have the knowledge and those who will eventually receive it. Dimaline herself commented this when she was asked about the importance of stories:

‘My grandmother explained to me like this: when you are from a people who is forced to move, you have to bring everything that it is important to you to start over and to continue on being a community (...) but when you’re running the only thing that your hands are for is for along bringing the youth and for holding the hands of the elders, so they can guide you. Everything that you need has to be carried inside of a story.’ (Dimaline, 2019)

As members of a community that is forced to run away constantly, the priorities are based on the survival of the whole nation. The reality that Indigenous communities had to endure forced them to focus the survival of their culture on orality and storytelling, which put even more weight on the stories of the cultures, and specially on those members who already have the stories and can narrate them to the next generations.

The role of the elders and the youth is to function as connectors of the whole community, and to prove their importance, both RiRi and Minerva are the only ones who do not make it to the end of the novel. In the group, the loss of both of them causes a sense of uncertainty about what to do next. These feelings are reproduced by Frenchie the following way: “Everything was different. We were faster without our youngest and oldest, but now we were without deep roots, without the acute need to protect and make better” (Dimaline 2017, 154). This imbalance allowed Dimaline to demonstrate how in Indigenous cultures time is interconnected in a non-linear way, but in a circular one, as the loss of RiRi embodies a loss of roots that represent the need to teach the ways to the youth. At the same time, the loss of RiRi causes that Minerva becomes the one that has to be protected the most and the one that pushes the group to act for the good of the nation. Once they are gone, their roles are swapped.

Dimaline’s previous metaphor about the younger generations coming from a grassroots position is ultimately complemented by Frenchie, who claims that it is not the teens, but the children and the elders who embody and represent the roots of their communities. This metaphor shows what Ridginton, through the words of Tedlock, comments about the stories of the Indigenous communities: “In a recent unpublished paper, Dennis Tedlock notes that Native American theorizing about social and natural relations begins with their creation stories. These stories differ from those of the Judeo-Christian tradition, he suggests, because they bring the world into being through dialogue rather than monologue” (Ridginton 1998, 345-346). The confrontation of the author and main character helps perfectly to demonstrate how the Indigenous cultures

behave and evolve through dialogue between its members, which helps to shape their world and their storytelling techniques.

In addition, Ridginton states this about the study of Native American stories: “Native American story telling is, I believe, the key to their way of theorizing. Stories function as metonyms, parts that stand for wholes. Each story is connected to every other and to a highly contextualized discourse that assumes familiarity with biography and shared experience. Storied characters converse with one another to create the world” (346). Both RiRi and Minerva are important for the family, as they embody what the culture needs to keep surviving, deep roots to nurture themselves and something worth surviving for. Furthermore, the loss of both the youngest and the eldest cause the loss of dialogue extremely essential for the ways of the culture to be created and to continue existing. The loss of both members of the community causes that the roots of the community, its stories, lose their opportunities of being retold, as they cannot be passed to the next generations and be reshaped.

Having said that, it is important to notice how at the end of the novel, it is neither a child nor an elder who ultimately finds the key to the survival of the culture and the Indigenous themselves, but a teen. The character of Rose is first described as someone who has been raised by old people, which is praised by Frenchie, who says: “It made us feel surrounded on both ends — like we had a future and a past all bundled up in her round dark cheeks and loose curls.” (Dimaline 2017, 32). This embodiment of both segments is crucial at the end of the novel. On one hand, she personifies the circularity of time by being a teen, but also an elder. On the other hand, she is the one who figures out how to survive and defeat the recruiters. In her own words: “The key doesn’t have to be old, the language already is” (227). With this statement, Rose discovers that in order to survive, they need their languages and stories, who are old and already have their history inside them, but also young and open to evolution.

Ultimately, the dialogue about who embodies the roots of the cultures and communities between Dimaline and Frenchie is proved to be correct by both parties. The elders and the youth are the ones who cause the community to continue, as they are both the source and the reason to do so, but the teens are the ones who move the community onwards, just like Rose, who discovers how to do so through their language and their stories.

## **“It is time for Story”: Indigenous stories as connectors with cultures through dialogue**

As it has been previously stated, the survival of language and stories plays a huge role in the survival of the cultures, not only because they are examples of their ways, but also because they are the main tool to spread their knowledge. In *The Marrow Thieves*, oral stories play a huge role in relation to the novel and its structure, since almost every relevant piece of information that Frenchie needs to learn or find out is told through a story.

The concept of stories plays an important role through the character of Miig, who is the one who tells them to the teens to learn their history. According to Frenchie, talking with Miig involved: “Too many metaphors and stories wrapped in stories. It could be exhausting, talking to Miig” (Dimaline 2017, 20). However, when it is “time for Story” (Dimaline 2017, 22), no one objects it, since it is knowledge that is yearned to be learned. In Frenchie’s words:

‘We needed to remember Story. It was his [Miig] job to set the memory in perpetuity. He spoke to us every week. Sometimes Story was focused on one area, like the first residential schools: where they were, what happened there, when they closed. Other times he told a hundred years in one long narrative, blunt and without detail. Sometimes we gathered for an hour so he could explain treaties, and others it was ten minutes to list the earthquakes in the sequence that they occurred, peeling the edging off the continents back like diseased gums. But every week we spoke, 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.’ (Dimaline 2017, 25)

The role of stories in the novel is extremely important for the survival of the nation, since it is through their history that they are able to learn what has happened, the reasons behind it and how to prevent it. The fragments of Story vary in an apparent no particular order, but there are two reasons behind it: the first goal would be to give the same amount of importance to every part of Story in order to understand the present through the past. The second reason behind it would be the importance of circularity and dialogue for the Indigenous cultures. Thanks to this circularity, their past becomes their present in the form of knowledge that helps to build their future. In addition, the role of Miig in the group, aside from being the leader, is the one of storyteller, which is a crucial position to encourage the teens of the group to learn their Story and the

traditions of their culture, in order to gain the knowledge of their culture and allow it to survive through dialogue.

The value of Indigenous stories is evident when an Indigenous story is compared with one of the settlers' culture. The value of Indigenous stories is huge, since according to Ridginton: "Each story, like each piece of a hologram, contains information about the entire structure of which it is a part" (Ridginton 1998, 348). Just like the marrow inside the bones, Indigenous stories are connected to an unlimited number of other stories that conform the culture and create a dialogue among them. This dialogue evidences that the erasing of one story would imply the death of several fragments of the culture.

Furthermore, this contrast can also be extended to the perception of the stories based on how they are constructed and presented. In relation to the narrative techniques, King points out that: "These strategies colour the stories and suggest values that may be neither inherent nor warranted. In the Native story, the conversational voice tends to highlight the exuberance of the story but diminishes its authority, while the sober voice in the Christian story makes for a formal recitation but creates a sense of veracity" (King 2003, 22). The native stories are meant to be used and understood by everyone, since they are meant to carry the knowledge through a dialogue, which allows the possibility of changing the story and to adapt it to the narrator or the listeners. As for the non-native ones, they are meant to be solidified, both in structure and ideas, since this type of stories is meant to be consumed as monologues and any change in its content or narrative will be received as negative, which will affect the perception of the narrator of the story.

The different understandings of how to tell stories reflects clearly the different visions of the cultures regarding the concept of stories. However, both cultures see stories as tools to teach certain knowledge to the community, but based on different treatments of the land and their relationship with others and themselves.

### **"When we heal the land, we heal ourselves": Salvation of Indigenous communities thanks to connections to the land**

Ultimately, the main dichotomy between both cultures represented in the novel is based on their treatment of the land. The settler colonists represented in the novel perceive the territory as a product to own, to exploit and as a necessary element to sustain the system



in which their culture is established on. However, once the earth cannot produce anymore and the consequences of it emerge, the community loses its ability to dream. This is expressed in the novel in a piece of Story, where Miig states: “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 2017, 88). Since their connection to the land is once-sided, once it stops producing, the last threat that connected the land and the community breaks, which causes the loss of the ability to dream and turns them into machines.

On the other hand, the connections to earth of the Indigenous communities are based on mutual nurturing and respect. This is seen in the novel when it is claimed: “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” (193). Unlike the settlers, the Indigenous communities still have connections to the land, since their relationship was not based on consumerism, but on hope on their members and their culture. Their connection is evident when the Indigenous communities get harmed as a consequence of the injuries caused to the land by those who are not connected with it and their healing can only come from healing the territory.

These connections to the land are based on their cultures, and can be easily retrieved from their respective origin stories. In words of King: “in Genesis, the post-garden world we inherit is decidedly martial in nature, a world at war — God vs. the Devil, humans vs. the elements. Or to put things into corporate parlance, competitive. In our Native story, the world is at peace, and the pivotal concern is not with the ascendancy of good over evil but with the issue of balance” (King 2003, 24). In comparison with the competitive nature of the settlers’ culture, where the search of power is pivotal, the Indigenous world is based on sharing and the most important thing is the search of balance among all living creatures on earth.

This clear distinction of ideals is crucial to see how different these two cultures are based on their approaches to solve the problems in the novel. On the one hand, the settler colonists’ culture, based on greed and consumption, is what causes the loss of a part of themselves, since it is the one that causes the hunting of the First Nation population, as the settlers are in search of something to make them whole again, without

considering the cost that it may carry. On the other hand, the Indigenous communities, who are forced to fight not only for their survival as individuals, but also the survival of their culture, are the ones that look for a way of healing the land, as it is the only way to cease the hunting, and it would allow humanity to return to balance.

## **Conclusion**

Thanks to the connections to the land, to their stories and to their community, the Indigenous characters of *The Marrow Thieves* are able to carry out the process of survivance and fight for the survival of their cultures. Survivance is shown in the novel through many forms and behaviours, and each section of the project studies a demonstration of it. The first section studies how the settler colonists have lost their connection to the land in exchange for the overexploitation of its natural resources, which causes their loss of the ability to dream. The second section explains how Indigenous communities still have dreams thanks to the relationships among themselves, based on kinship and dialogue. The third section analyses the way in which the young characters in the novel feel and relate to their culture, even though they are still being hunted, as it helps to create relationships with other members of the community. The following section studies how important are the relationships in the group of main characters and the dialogue that they embody for the survival of their ways. The fifth section considers the importance of stories in Indigenous cultures as tools to instruct the members of the community and the ability of stories to reshape themselves thanks to dialogue. Finally, the last section studies the different approaches and the consequences of the ways of connecting with the land. All of these ideas are tied together thanks to the concept that Indigenous epistemologist called circularity. Thanks to this non-linearity of time, Indigenous cultures are able to survive and reshape themselves constantly, preventing the solidification of their customs and the total erasing of them. This project has been structured following the concept of circularity, creating an arrangement where the first sections mirror the themes and ideas of the last segments, in order to create a sense of familiarity with the concepts, but with different focalizations to go deeper in the ideas presented.

The concept of circularity plays a key role in the understanding of the Indigenous cultures, since it is thanks to this comprehension of the world that they build their customs in the search for *bimaadiziwin*. The search for peace and balance through

dialogue and connections with different cultures and the rest of living creatures is motivated for their goal of achieving a mutual nurturing relationship with the land. The treatment of the land is a pivotal element for the ideas of balance and circularity, since many of the Indigenous origin stories deal with how the humans and the animals live together in harmony through dialogue, which is one of the main goals for the characters in Dimaline's novel. In addition, the dialogue of different cultures would allow room for different ideas and interpretations, which would enable the circularity and flexibility of ideas and customs.

However, Indigenous origin stories do not consider the threat that would impose the capitalistic system. In relation to the Indigenous cultures and their traditions, capitalism operates as a disruptive element for the nurturing of the land and the Indigenous culture, as the land is perceived as a product to consume, and not an element to protect. This capitalistic approach affects *bimaadiziwin* and the circularity that Indigenous cultures are looking for. Once their ways and their perspectives are at risk, Indigenous communities would start the process of survivance, as an attempt to protect their customs, their traditions and ultimately the circularity that would bring balance to everyone.

Dimaline's novel can be easily reinterpreted for future research, since it can be studied from a wide variety of different ideas that were not analysed in this project. A continuation of this paper would include the deeper study of the survival through the salvation of the loved, instead of the salvation through the destruction of the things you despise. This is clearly seen at the end of the novel, where the happy ending comes from a reunion, rather than from the result of a confrontation. Another interesting topic to expand this project would be study of the depiction of the plurality of the Indigenous cultures and how they get stigmatized as only one culture. Throughout this study, there has been an attempt to present the Indigenous cultures as a plural community, in contraposition of the globalized world, which has been presented as a homogeneous structure. Finally, the importance of dreams in the novel would be interesting to study, both as a symbol and as stories to expand the culture. In addition, *The Marrow Thieves*, has different sequels called *Hunting by Stars* and *Empire of Wild*, which means that this study could be expanded with the contents of these novels, plus other authors that may add depth to the study.

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