Anishinaabemowin in *Indianland*, *The Marrow Thieves*, and *Crow Winter* as a Key to Cultural and Political Resurgence

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> I assert that when we read, we read from where we are and from who we are. If we are from Anishinaabe people and places, we read from there. Our experiences as Anishinaabe people are vastly varied, but still we read others like us with a distinct understanding of our shared place, particularly our place in land and language.
>
> — Heid E. Erdrich (13-14)

In her insightful article "Code-Switching Humour in Aboriginal Literature," NunatuKavut scholar Kristina (Fagan) Bidwell discusses how Marie Annharte Baker (Anishinaabe), Louise Halfe (Cree), Tomson Highway (Cree), and Thomas King (Cherokee) resort to "code-switching" in their poetry and fiction both to amuse and to confuse their readers. According to Bidwell, these authors use words and phrases from their ancestral languages in texts written in English to "create both anxiety and laughter in their audience" by "refusing to let readers see language as a transparent mode of communication" and ultimately to challenge "the dominance of any one language" (288, 289). Bidwell compares the purpose of code-switching in literary texts to the common practice of Indigenous writers introducing themselves in their ancestral languages at the beginning of a public reading: "[I]t maintains the writer's resistance to English as the only public language," and "it reaches out to those in the room who also speak the Aboriginal language, encouraging a sense of community and communicating a respect for the language" (290). In other words, the public use of Indigenous languages in these situations serves as a tool for both resistance to the colonizing hegemony of the English language and enhancement of community among Indigenous Peoples.

Building upon Bidwell's important work on code-switching — that is, the playful, humorous, and unsettling shifting between English and an Indigenous language — I will explore the more explicitly political and nation-centred use of Anishinaabemowin in recent texts by Lesley Belleau (Anishinaabe), Cherie Dimaline (Métis descended from Manitoba Road Allowance People and Anishinaabeg from Georgian Bay), and Karen McBride (Algonquin Anishinaabe) as it contributes to language revitalization and resurgence.[1] I argue that these authors, whose first language is English, draw on Anishinaabemowin in their texts to connect to ancestors and literary predecessors as well as to affirm Indigenous Peoples' right to live free of colonial violence on their own lands. Through their exploration in their literary texts of how Anishinaabemowin disrupts the flow of English,[2] these authors not only address the tremendous harm caused by continuing settler colonialism but also emphasize resilience and hope for the future by drawing attention to the shortcomings of the discourse on reconciliation. Scholar, poet, and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, one of the most outspoken Anishinaabe proponents of "radical resurgence," explains that

> I am using radical to separate the kind of resurgence I'm talking about from other modifiers. In the context of settler colonialism and neo-liberalism, the term cultural resurgence, as opposed to political resurgence, which refers to a resurgence of story, song, dance, art, language, and culture, is compatible with the reconciliation discourse, the healing industry, or other depoliticized recovery-based narratives. I get worried when I hear the state and its institutions using the term resurgence. Cultural resurgence can take place within the current settler colonial structure of Canada because it is not concerned with dispossession, whereas political resurgence is seen as a direct threat to settler sovereignty. From within Indigenous thought, however, the cultural and the political are joined and inseparable, and they are both generated through place-based practices — practices that require land . . . . Community-based resurgence projects like the language nests are inherently political and cultural because the intent is to facilitate radical transformation rather than just a cultural transformation. (49-50)

Simpson points to the Ogimaa Mikana ("Leader's Trail") Project in Toronto — which, among other things, has been inserting Anishinaabemowin "into the urban spaces of downtown cores" (194) —

as an example of an act of resurgence that promotes both decolonization and healing.[3] According to Simpson, Indigenous aesthetics in artistic practice as a means to "'disrupt the noise of colonialism,' to speak to multiple audiences, and to enact affirmative and generative forms of refusal" (200) is also a form of resurgence. Keeping her observations in mind, I will discuss how the use of Anishinaabemowin in Belleau's poetry collection *Indianland* (2017), Dimaline's young adult novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), and McBride's novel *Crow Winter* (2019) is intimately linked to decolonization, renewal of land-based practices, and language revitalization.

The use of Indigenous languages in literary texts by Indigenous authors has attracted astonishingly little commentary from literary scholars. In his essay "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial," King refers to "interfusional" literature "to describe that part of Native Literature which is a blending of oral literature and written literature" (41). Author, literary scholar, and environmental activist Jeannette Armstrong (Syilx) discusses a similar technique in her essay "Land Speaking," in which she describes "Rez English" as a form of North American colloquial English that facilitates "construct[ing] bridges" (192) between English and N'syilxčn̓. She describes Okanagan Rez English as having "a structural quality syntactically and semantically closer to the way the Okanagan language is arranged" (193). Armstrong believes "that Rez English from any part of the country, if examined, will display the sound and syntax patterns of the indigenous language of that area and subsequently the sounds that the landscape speaks" (193).[4] King's interfusional and Rez English can be compared to what the authors of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* identify as "interlanguage," which they define as "the fusion of the linguistic structures of two languages" (Ashcroft et al. 65), or "syntactic fusion," the "adaptation of vernacular syntax to standard orthography" (69) — both strategies of decolonization in postcolonial writing (58). Two further strategies of "installing cultural distinctiveness in the writing" (71), namely "untranslated words" and "code-switching," can be compared to the use of Indigenous words in English language texts. I would argue that, in addition to emphasizing "cultural distinctiveness," the insertion of Anishinaabemowin into the texts discussed here has several other functions. Untranslated words might convey private messages to those who do speak Anishinaabemowin, excluding those who do not, in an attempt to undermine the hegemony of English. The use of Anishinaabemowin in these texts might also encourage readers to become students of the language. Indeed, the three authors have benefited from the revitalization of Anishinaabemowin on reserves, in rural communities, and in urban environments over the past few years. By incorporating the language into their literary texts, the authors perhaps intend to give back to these communities in a reciprocal way and, in doing so, reinforce efforts at language revitalization. Moreover, Indigenous writers who reclaim ancestral languages might do so to become "good ancestors" (Justice 113). Daniel Heath Justice concludes his chapter "How Do We Become Good Ancestors?" thus: "[I]f anything, that's the true wonderwork, the truest realization of being a good ancestor, and one worthy of deepest gratitude: imagining beyond the wounding now into a better tomorrow, working, writing, and dreaming a future into being" (156). As I will show in this essay, reclaiming Anishinaabemowin in poetry and prose activates the potential for such transformative change.

In the way in which they promote language revitalization as part of cultural and political resurgence, Belleau, Dimaline, and McBride — all avid learners of Anishinaabemowin — follow in the tracks of Louise Erdrich, a prominent Anishinaabe literary predecessor. According to poet and playwright Heid E. Erdrich, "we [Anishinaabeg authors] follow our literary ancestors — not with a destination in mind, not with intent to claim territory, but because we want to know who has gone before us, who now guides us. We take comfort in their signs of presence along our way" (14). Although Louise Erdrich uses Anishinaabemowin in almost all of her books, she talks most explicitly about its role as a place-based practice and tool for resurgence in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, a memoir of her journey to Lake of the Woods in southern Ontario in the company of her eighteen-month-old daughter, Kiizhikok, to visit the sites of rock paintings. By drawing attention to the pictographs and petroglyphs as reminders of the precontact presence of the Anishinaabeg in this area and teaching her daughter her ancestral language with the help of picture books, in which Erdrich has substituted the English words with their Anishinaabemowin counterparts, she makes a powerful connection among past, present, and future.

This multifaceted text can be read, among other things, as an introduction to how Anishinaabemowin works grammatically and to Anishinaabe culture and ways of knowing more generally. It can also be read, as literary critic Joëlle Bonnevin claims, as "a tool for the cultural (re)construction of the Ojibwe nation" (40). Although the Anishinaabe side of the narrator's/Erdrich's family is from North Dakota, her daughter's father, Tobasonakwut Kinew, a pipe carrier, traditional healer, sun dancer, member of the Anishinaabe Midewiwin, and fluent speaker of Anishinaabemowin, was born on a trapline near Niiyaawaangashing, Lake of the Woods, the land "that once belonged, and by treaty rights should still belong, solely to the Ojibwe" (Louise Erdrich 34). The third and middle chapter of the book, also the most substantial, describes the reunion between Louise and Tobasonakwut and their exploration of the lakes by canoe, the traditional Anishinaabe way of travel and a reminder of the symbolic role of the canoe in representing the respective First Nation in a wampum belt that records a relationship of mutual respect between that nation and the British crown.

The company of her mentor and language instructor inspires Louise to share insights into Anishinaabe language, culture, and epistemology with her readers. She emphasizes the intimate connection between the language and the land, which holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher. In this way, Anishinaabemowin is generated by the precise geography of "Ojibwe country": that is, the territory where it is spoken: Michigan, Minnesota, Ontario, Manitoba, and North Dakota (5). As her ruminations on the language demonstrate, the distinctive way in which Anishinaabemowin reflects and expresses this precise geography affects how its speakers view the world and how language is related to ongoing presence in place. The text thus promotes, at least in the imagination, a united Ojibwe country. However, Ojibwe sovereignty is undermined by the physical presence of the border between Canada and the United States. The narrator's crossing of the border back into Minnesota to visit an island in Rainy Lake, where Ernest Oberholtzer's[5] voluminous library is housed, is traumatic. In disrespect of the Jay Treaty, which guarantees Indigenous Peoples unrestricted passage across the border, the border guard asks Louise for proof that Kiizhikok is her daughter. The text thus links the colonizer's disregard for the intimate bond between mother and child to the trauma of the residential school/boarding school experience and the injustices of the child welfare system.

Books and Islands addresses many other acts of colonization, including the racist defacement of the rock paintings, the renaming of ancient geographical landmarks, harmful environmental interventions such as overfishing of sturgeon by settlers, "the buffalo of the Ojibwe" (75), and the destruction of wild rice beds by the government's raising of water levels. As Bonnevin explains (44), Erdrich points to Tobasonakwut's and her own line of Anishinaabeg ancestors to affirm the Anishinaabeg claim to the land. Erdrich also highlights recent successful acts of resurgence such as the sturgeon conservation program (76), Tobasonakwut's efforts to raise money to rebuild a Midewiwin lodge (37), Anishinaabe poet Al Hunter's work on disputes over Indigenous title "that has had promising results" (99), and the accomplishments of Nancy Jones, "fiercely devoted to Ojibwe culture" and language revitalization (116). Erdrich concludes Chapter 3 by emphasizing the vitality of Anishinaabemowin and drawing attention to its innate resilient qualities:

> Ojibwemowin is one of the few surviving languages that evolved to the present here in North America. For an American writer, it seems crucial to at least have a passing familiarity with the language, which is adapted to the land as no other language can possibly be. Its philosophy is bound up in northern earth, lakes, rivers, forests, and plains. Its origins pertain to the animals and their particular habits, to the shades of meaning in the very placement of stones. . . . That is not to say that Ojibwemowin is an elevated language of vanished spirituality. One of my favorite words is *wiindibaanens* or computer. It means "little brain machine." Ojibwe people have words for animals from other continents. *Genwaabiigigwed*, the long-necked horse, is a giraffe. *Ojaanzhingwedeyshkanaad*, rhinoceros, the one with the horn sticking out of his nose. *Nandookomeshiinh* is the lice hunter, the monkey. (85)

With these examples, Erdrich demonstrates that the polysynthetic nature of Anishinaabemowin — lexical expansion is attained not with loan words from other languages but by creating news words with Ojibwe morphemes — which contrasts sharply with the analytic nature of the English language, makes it highly adaptable, and enables it to represent relationships in a much more creative and nuanced way than English.[6]

Lesley Belleau also draws from this fluidity and relational capacity of Anishinaabemowin as a tool for resurgence in *Indianland*, which takes its title from the Canadian Pacific Railway bridge sign "This Is Indian Land" on the Garden River First Nation. The message serves as a powerful reminder that the sign is located on land owned by First

Nations as recorded in the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850. Belleau, from Garden River First Nation (Ketegaunseebee) near Sault Ste. Marie in northern Ontario, includes several poems in *Indianland* that explicitly address settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance linked to language.

In an interview with Ryan Patrick, Belleau comments on her writing process as follows: "When I write, I think a lot about image and about ancestral culture. The Ojibwe language is a language that is an image in itself. One word could be an entire story. I looked at things that way to add some additional layers and elements within it" ("How"). In the poem entitled "Elijah Harper," in memory of the former member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba and chief of the Oji-Cree Red Sucker Lake community, Belleau juxtaposes the English word *no* with the Cree word *Mo'na*, which means "no," in the opening line. By voicing his opposition to the Meech Lake Accord, citing the lack of adequate participation and recognition of Indigenous Peoples in the process, Harper helped to inspire a new generation of Indigenous leaders. Using both a Néhinaw word and the Anishinaabemowin word *migizi*, which means "eagle," in reference to the fact that Harper expressed his resistance by holding an eagle feather, Belleau recognizes inter-Indigenous solidarity in the common struggle against colonization. The poem's concluding lines celebrate this resistance:

> *No* —
> a word
> more powerful
> than freedom.
>
> *no* and it was *no*.
> Elijah
>
> Mo'na. (35)

In the poem that opens the collection, "This Is Indian Land," the speaker addresses the lawsuit in which Garden River First Nation has been engaged with the federal and provincial governments over the western boundary of the reserve since 2003:

> when I was a child I would watch the bridge
> and wonder what people thought of us here

in G.R.
in the middle of nowhere
with the loudest bridge in the world
a screaming bridge
wailing from one end to the other
THIS IS INDIAN LAND

but now I know why our bridge needs to howl
why the birds slow over the bridge
why the eagles protect the small black statue
why the paint never fades or dulls or
disappears

because we are not in the middle of nowhere
after all
this is the war zone picket sign
the biggest picket sign
our bridge is
the middle of the war
every reserve is the middle of it
every brown face is howling
and those who are tired
I don't want to fight because nobody listens
it gets too hard and too long and too quiet
and nobody hears us anyway
and I am getting old and my body is dying

and so the bridge
speaks for us (12)

The poem speaks to continuing conflicts over Indigenous title across Canada and the burnout that individuals and communities suffer from ceaseless fights for legal justice. The final stanza of the poem links the disputes over land with other violent acts of colonization such as residential schools, the racist child welfare system, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls:

the warrior words scream out
the howl of Indian Land
each lost voice
dead baby

> stolen child
> each woman lost to the streets
> every man
> who doesn't see the
> thunder of our histories (12)

Whereas the sign on the CPR bridge stands defiant, the sign "*Remember Oka*" that the speaker's father in "Oka Eyes" puts up in front of his house in memory of his participation in the 1990 standoff at Kanesatake and Kahnawake eventually blows away in a storm. At the heart of the "Oka Crisis," which changed Indigenous-settler relations in Canada in many ways, was the proposed expansion of a golf course and development of condominiums on disputed land that included a Mohawk burial ground. The resistance proved to be particularly successful in that the golf course expansion and condominium construction were cancelled, and the federal government eventually purchased plots of land for Kanesatake. The so-called crisis has been responsible for greater awareness of the territorial rights of First Nations and inspired Indigenous Peoples across Canada to take action. The speaker explains the significance of the sign as follows:

> people would stop outside our house
> and take pictures of my daddy's sign.
> *Remember Oka* it read and at first
> people beeped when they passed.
> or sometimes threw bottles.
> . . .
> one day the beeping stopped and daddy's
> Oka eyes went blind, but the sign stayed
> there, barely hanging on, until it blew
> away one november night, leaving a long
> board-piece weaving back and forth like
> an upstream salmon. (99-100)

That the sign in memory of Oka eventually disappears seems to suggest that disagreements between the government and Indigenous Peoples have been part of everyday reality in the decades following the standoff and that Indigenous Peoples cannot afford to let their guard down when celebrating partial victories. The disappearance of the sign also speaks to the tremendous emotional toll that participating in the standoff took on individuals like the speaker's father.

The image of salmon migrating upstream is evocative within the context of the colonizer's greed since salmon, along with sturgeon once a staple of the Anishinaabe diet, have been fished to extinction in the Great Lakes. In the interview with Patrick, Belleau explains that *Indianland* "can almost be seen like a river, where you can stream through time. I relied on the images of water. Nibi is the Ojibwe word for water. I wanted it to remain that way, without having to categorize it a lot. It's circular and free flowing" ("How"). The poems "The First Swimming" and "Niibinabe," for example, are connected through similar water images. The image of the sturgeon, to which Louise Erdrich dedicates a section in *Books and Islands*, has particular significance in Belleau's poetry as well. In Erdrich's text, the narrator's and Tobasonakwut's encounter with an old sturgeon while paddling their canoe in the middle of the lake prompts the narrator to contemplate the cultural importance of the sturgeon to the Anishinaabeg:

> At the base of the very first rock painting that we visited, a great sturgeon floats above a tiny triangular tent. It is a divining tent, a place where Ojibwe people have always gone to learn the wishes of the spirits and to gain comfort from their teachings. Someday perhaps Kiizhikok's children will find the sturgeon vaulting from the water around Big Island a common sight. I hope so. It was a moment out of time. (77)

In "The First Swimming," Belleau plays with the two different meanings of the Anishinaabemowin word *name*. The noun *name* means "sturgeon" in English, whereas the transitive animate verb *name'* means "find/leave signs of somebody's presence":

> [W]hile engaging in research in order to recover an Ojibwe tradition of writing in English, I find landmarks of literature, signs of presence, and draw them toward my understanding of the Anishinaabe word name'. It seems apt: What helps us know a place? Landmarks. What helps us know a people? The marks/signs they leave, that we find. These marks and landmarks help us follow their path across a landscape of time. . . . Name' is the perfect metaphor for the Anishinaabe poet-critic to employ in a search for literary ancestry. (Heid Erdrich 14)

The notion of *name'* is thus closely related to resurgence in that it connects the present to the past in an act of *biiskaabiyang*, which Simpson defines as “the process of returning to ourselves, a reengagement with the things we have left behind, a re-emergence, an unfolding from the inside out” (17). In “The First Swimming,” *name*, meaning “sturgeon,” the English word *name*, and *name’*, meaning “leaving signs/traces,” are brought together in a web of relationships:

> A sturgeon
> Pulled
> to giizis[7]
> Let me hear your
> name
> tonight.
> Name.
> Like sturgeon gasping.
> Namê[8]
> Tracing our veins
> Down soft arms
> Naming
> And pointing
> textual drownings
> like the gasping
> stillgills
> like the breathing
> never happened. (Belleau, *Indianland* 27)

The poem juxtaposes the two images, the one of the sacred fish and the one of leaving traces on a page, alluding to the fact that the paint used in the creation of pictographs was a mixture of powdered hematite and sturgeon oil. The sturgeon, ancient writing, and blood memory — the ancestral or genetic connection to language, spirituality, and teachings — are thus intricately linked.

In “Niibinabe,” which can be translated as “mermaid” or “water woman” and refers to the Anishinaabe water spirit, the speaker connects the challenges that contemporary Indigenous female writers face with regard to readers’ expectations and with the difficulty of expressing Indigenous reality in the dominant language:

> I have learned to write from all angles.
> When we are allowed to speak, understand
> without writing or performing for cultural insistence
> from a particular audience.

> This is the Anishinaabe woman and stories.
> Just for stories. For words.
> Diving into them. (Belleau, *Indianland* 47)

In this poem, the disruption of history and story is linked to the fate of hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. In the face of such colonial violence, the speaker asks

> How does a country endure on top of piles and piles
>   and piles and piles
> Of disposed women's bodies? How can a conscience
>   persist here?
> Dissonance, like arduous, imploring flesh
> Pants ankling like a prison
> Faces painted like petroglyphs, seared into the earthface.
> Flakes of skin embedding onto ahki[9]
> and screams pouring out of the earth's drilling, blood mixed
>   with oil and soil
> And soaking into footsteps like moans
> Giizi watching, recording
> These women
> Into Canada's writhing landscape.
> I come to you in a loud silence
> DEBWEWIN screaming.[10]
>
> And this is where I create a
> Throatsound so that you might understand.
> Gdi-nweninaa. (48-49)[11]

The poem joins images of Mother Earth violated by resource extraction, murdered women whose assaulted bodies have been found floating in rivers, and sturgeons slaughtered to satisfy white settler greed:

> His cock swam like a sturgeon. So copious.
> Do you know how large sturgeons can grow?
> The biggest fish, that is why they sustained us for centuries.
> Name. Nameo. The largest fish.
> One which slices the narrow skin of water apart.
> And they went missing.
> One by one by the dozen, but the thousands
> their bodies writing in zhaagonosh hands — currency.[12]
> . . . .

> Sometimes I think the sturgeon are like our women.
> So many lives stuffed and sliced and poured like oil
> On top of drowning waters. (50-51)

The text thus signals that the political objectives of land justice — that is, right to the land and right for the land — and resurgence cannot be separated from gendered violence, cultural genocide, and environmental injustice.

The revitalization of Indigenous languages as an act of resurgence in the face of colonial violence is also a major topic in Cherie Dimaline's young adult novel with crossover appeal, *The Marrow Thieves*. The narrative follows a group of eight Anishinaabeg, Cree, Métis, and Mi'kmaq children and young adults on their five-year-long journey north in the company of two Elders: Minerva, the Anishinaabemowin keeper, and Miigwans, the two-spirited warrior and knowledge holder skilled in land-based practices. The group, whom Miigwans has adopted as his "family" (121) after losing his husband, Isaac, in one of the new residential schools, is on the run from recruiters hunting Indigenous Peoples for their bone marrow, which holds the ability to dream. As Miigwans explains, "dreams get caught in the webs woven in your bones. That's where they live, in that marrow there" (18). All of these young people themselves are survivors and have lost their families to this brutal form of colonialism. The narrative, set in the decade after 2049 (176), closely connects the history of the residential school system with this new form of colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples. The facilities (in the buildings of the old residential schools) in which bone marrow is extracted from Indigenous bodies are run by the Canadian government's Department of Oneirology (4) with the help of churches.

With its main action set in the future, *The Marrow Thieves* joins other recent futurist, speculative, or postapocalyptic Indigenous novels such as Waubgeshig Rice's (Anishinaabe) *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Rebecca Roanhorse's (Okhay Owingeh Pueblo-African American) young adult trilogy, and Ambelin Kwaymullina's (Palyku) young adult series. As Roanhorse observes in "Postcards from the Apocalypse,"

> Indigenous Futurism is a term meant to encourage Native, First Nations, and other Indigenous authors and creators to speak back to the colonial tropes of science fiction — those that celebrate the rugged individual, the conquest of foreign worlds, the taming of the final frontier. . . . Indigenous Futurism also advocates for the

> sovereign. It dares to let Indigenous creators define themselves and their world not just as speaking back to colonialism, but as existing in their own right. That is not to say that the past is ignored, but rather that it is folded into the present, which is folded into the future — a philosophical wormhole that renders the very definition of time and space fluid in the imagination.

Although Dimaline uses only a few Anishinaabemowin words in *The Marrow Thieves*, they are all connected to the idea of hope for the future, resurgence, building community, "honoring of caretakers and protectors" (Roanhorse), and sovereignty. Regaining fluency in the ancestral languages — Anishinaabemowin and Cree in *The Marrow Thieves* — along with storytelling is the key to achieving these goals. As Dimaline explains in an interview, "I purposely made the Indigenous language in this book, when it is used, rudimentary to show that even when you use a word or a phrase as a beginner, as long as you are fighting for its survival, language is powerful, that it encompasses an ideology and life that is worth protecting at all costs" ("Cherie Dimaline"). In *The Marrow Thieves*, Miigwans and his family are on their way north to "the old lands" (9) after settler greed has caused catastrophic environmental degradation. One effect of the environmental crisis is the constant rain because the glaciers are melting (87). This has led in turn to a lack of pollinators and a proliferation and mutation of rodents and insects (8). The Great Lakes are poisoned (11), and pipelines "snapped like icicles and spewed bile over forests into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns" (87). The environmental crisis has had devastating physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual effects on the settlers: "[H]alf the population was lost in the disaster and from the disease that spread from too many corpses and not enough graves. The ones that were left were no better off, really. They worked longer hours, they stopped reproducing without the doctors, and worst of all, they stopped dreaming" (26). Because of their resilience having survived previous apocalypses, their land-based practices, and their continued ability to dream, Indigenous Peoples are in a much better position to survive. Potawatomi philosopher and environmental justice scholar Kyle Powys Whyte explains how Anishinaabeg have faced environmental crises for a long time:

> Anishinaabek already inhabit what our ancestors would have understood as a dystopian future. Indeed, settler colonial cam-

> paigns in the Great Lakes region have already depleted, degraded, or irreversibly damaged the ecosystems, plants, and animals that our ancestors had local living relationships with for hundreds of years and that are the material anchors of our contemporary customs, stories, and ceremonies. . . . This historically brief, highly disruptive moment, "today's dystopia of our ancestors," sounds a lot like what others in the world dread they will face in the future as climate destabilization threatens the existence of species and ecosystems. (207-08)

Dimaline emphasizes the links between environmental apocalypse and cultural genocide facilitated by the residential school system, which killed thousands of Indigenous children[13] and disrupted the intergenerational passing on of language skills and cultural knowledge.

Language revitalization in *The Marrow Thieves* is thus closely related to the healing of land and the building of community. As Dimaline points out, "cultural survival is as imperative as physical survival, and in fact is intertwined" ("Cherie Dimaline"). The first word that Minerva teaches the group is *nishin*, which means "good" in English (Dimaline, *Marrow Thieves* 38). By choosing this word for the young women's first language lesson, Minerva emphasizes the importance of dreaming and hoping and building community based on love and care rather than survival. It is also significant that none of the words that Minerva chooses is a noun. The anti-materialist ideology of the family of Miigwans contrasts with the materialism and wastefulness of settler society as portrayed in the novel. Moreover, they manage to be self-sustaining by foraging, bow hunting, trapping, and snaring. While roasting a couple of ground squirrels, Minerva teaches the young people the word *abwaad* (109),[14] one of many Anishinaabemowin verbs to refer to a specific way of preparing food. Commenting on the link between language and food, Anishinaabe scholar and "language warrior" Anton Treuer observes that

> Everything about being Native has been under assault for generations, even our food. For my tribe, the Ojibwe, our staples before contact were wild rice, blueberries, and wild game and fish (boiled, not fried). Confined to small remnants of our traditional homeland and given rations of lard and flour, Ojibwe and other Indigenous peoples figured out how to make fry bread — high in fat and high in its glycemic load. They survived, at least some of them. And today Indigenous Americans have the highest dia-

> betes rate of any ethnic group on the planet. We have to change that by re-indigenizing our diets. Language and culture go hand in hand, so a meaningful language revitalization effort will necessarily force a reimagining and reconstructing of everything, including our food. (15)

When the group meets two Anishinaabeg recruiters — according to Miigwans, "not every Indian is an Indian" — he asks them "aandi wenjibaayan?" (Dimaline, *Marrow Thieves* 55).[15] As Frenchie explains, "playing Indian geography meant you could figure out who was who before you even saw them. And for Miig, I could see why it was doubly important to establish nationhood" (120). Language skills and nationhood are thus shown as closely connected and as playing an even greater role in the described environmental crisis and renewed outbursts of colonial violence. The notion of *kiiwe* (210, 211, 212), which means "he/she goes home," is synonymous with going north in the novel.[16] Returning home physically, and culturally in the sense of *biskaabiyang*, becomes more challenging after Minerva is shot by the recruiters.

Dimaline further emphasizes the importance of Indigenous language by portraying it as the "key" (213, 227) to destroying the new residential schools and ultimately settler colonialism. When taken to one of the marrow-draining facilities, Minerva "brought the whole thing down" by calling "on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors" (172). Her special gift is that every dream she has ever had has been in Anishinaabemowin, which causes the wires and probes of the machines to malfunction (172). After her death, Isaac, who (unknown to Miigwans) has escaped physically unharmed from the school, replaces Minerva as the one with the key to bring down the colonial system since he dreams in Cree (228). The group of Indigenous people whom Miigwans's family joins at the end of the novel has been working on reviving traditions, ceremonies, and language in a well-organized fashion. The group has been putting together picture books in Cree and Anishinaabemowin to "start passing on the teachings right away" (214) and developing the tools needed to heal the land. As the leader explains, "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" (193). In "Earth-Bound: Indigenous Resurgence and Environmental Reconciliation," Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows explains that legal practice "starts with understanding our language and drawing analogies from the earth," which means that moral standards can be found in the natural world as described in Anishinaabemowin (51). It is no coincidence that *The Marrow Thieves* embraces the future by showing how the community celebrates the fact that one of the young couples is expecting a child. The manifestation of a future generation makes the group's efforts to revitalize language and gain food sovereignty even more pressing.

Like *The Marrow Thieves*, *Crow Winter* emphasizes the healing power of both land and home. Home for Hazel Ellis, the novel's protagonist, is the fictive Spirit Bear Point First Nation reserve. She continues to grieve the death of her father, who died a year a half earlier of cancer. In an interview with Shelagh Rogers, Karen McBride explains that she wanted to portray the reserve as a "real place" and to write about all kinds of trauma in her characters' lives, such as the death of a loved one, not just trauma as a result of colonialism. But home is more than the house in which Hazel grew up and to which she has now returned after completing her "very White, very male-centric" (McBride, *Crow Winter* 15) degree in English literature. Home also means a return to ceremony — she participates in a sweat lodge encouraged by her childhood friend Mia — as well as refamiliarizing herself with her ancestral language. Like the characters in *The Marrow Thieves*, Hazel thus engages in what Simpson refers to as *biskaabiyang*. Simpson describes her own "flight to escape colonial reality" as a "flight into Nishnaabewin" (18). Like Simpson, Hazel is aware that there is no escape from colonial reality in her everyday life: "[T]he Trans-Canada cuts right through the reserve, which means there's always traffic. The only gas station runs out of gas so often that it's more of a corner store. Sometimes we have to boil our water before we drink it, but that's only if pipes burst. Spirit Bear Point is far from perfect. But I don't care. It's home" (McBride, *Crow Winter* 9). What Simpson argues in *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* and what McBride shows in her novel are that the time has come for Indigenous Peoples to disengage from the colonizers' tools and reconnect with their own cultural teachings to be able to revive land-based practices and protect the Earth by taking moral guidance from Anishinaabemowin.

Crow Winter also shares with *Indianland* and *The Marrow Thieves* the preoccupation with Indigenous rights to land and with colonial resource extraction. Hazel grew up believing that the site of the abandoned silver mine belonged to her father and, after his death, was handed down to her brother and her. However, as she finds out, her father struck a deal shortly before his death with the land developer Thomas Gagnon believing that reopening the mine would benefit both his family and the community. Gagnon, an astute businessman, sees himself as an Indigenous ally. He seems to be aware that his ancestor, from whom he inherited his company, treated the Spirit Bear Point First Nation unfairly and claims that he wants to make amends, assuring Hazel's father that he "wouldn't want to do anything that would disrupt the community" (McBride, *Crow Winter* 167). Her father was happy to hear that his community would not be hurt by the development and that Gagnon seems to be a harbinger of a more respectful relationship between settlers and Indigenous Peoples. Her father also believed that the community would benefit from the money and be able to build a better future (168) and dismissed Gagnon's fear of potential backlash from his people. This scenario uncannily resembles that of colonialism dividing communities by pitting hereditary chiefs against band council chiefs, as in the recent protest of the hereditary Wet'suwet'en Nation chiefs against the construction of the Coastal GasLink in northwestern British Columbia. As Simpson observes, "by far the largest attack on Indigenous Knowledge systems right now is land dispossession, and the people that are actively protecting Nishnaabewin are not those at academic conferences advocating for its use in research and course work, but those who are currently putting their bodies on the land" (170). In the chapter of *Crow Winter* titled "*Sasagiwichigewin*," which means "sacrifice," Hazel literally puts her body down on the land to save it in an attempt to right her father's wrong.

Although the novel emphasizes the role that colonialism has played in "breaking" (105) Indigenous Peoples, it expresses hope that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples might find a way to collaborate respectfully with each other. Gagnon is willing to learn from his mistakes and, even more importantly, to make financial reparations. But it almost costs Hazel her life to get him to that point. This plot detail gestures to the fact that Indigenous people are still doing most of the heavy lifting with regard to "reconciliation." Unknown to Gagnon, one of his ancestors altered the map to make it appear as if the relevant lot was surrendered. Hazel attempts in vain to convince Gagnon of the fraud. Her father appears to her in a dream to implore her to right his wrong (274), and to put him at peace, and to buy more time for her brother to locate an archival copy of the surveyor's map to prove her claim, Hazel jumps off a cliff into the quarry to discourage the workers from blasting its walls. When she wakes up in a hospital bed, her brother tells her that, once Gagnon received proof that the lot in question had never been surrendered because it is on sacred ground, he abandoned the project immediately (316).

Whereas her brother searches the archives for evidence of the sacredness of the site, Hazel uses personal and spiritual approaches such as dreams and visions. Upon her arrival home, she learns that she has a special gift: she is able to cross into the Spirit World. She also begins to converse with Nanabush, the Anishinaabe shapeshifter and transformer, whom coincidentally she sets free (177) and who has been following her around ever since in the shape of a crow. It seems to be fitting that Hazel is associated with the western doorway, according to Anishinaabe teaching "the direction from which darkness comes. It is the direction of the unknown, of going within, of dreams, of prayer and of meditation. The West is the place of testing, where the will is stretched to its outer limits so that the gift of perseverance may be won. For the nearer one draws toward a goal the more difficult the journey becomes" (*Teachings*). The Seven Grandfathers (Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth), given the responsibility by the Creator to watch over the Anishinaabeg, and whose teachings guide them to lead a healthy and morally "good life" (*mino-bimaadiziwin*), have struck a deal with Nanabush. They will allow him to return to his human shape as a reward for helping Hazel to overcome her grief and restore the quarry to the community.[17] Nanabush takes Hazel back into the past to show her how her father came to an arrangement with Gagnon and how his ancestor forged the map for his own financial gain. According to Simpson, Nanabush as a non-conformist and idiosyncratic teacher plays a major role in Nishnaabewin (Anishinaabeg intelligence) because he "continually shows us what happens when we are not responsible for our own baggage or trauma or emotional responses" (163). In *Crow Winter*, Hazel finds out about the sacredness of the quarry site by overhearing a conversation between the Seven Grandfathers and Nanabush. She learns that the clearing, where she and Mia come to pick medicines and seem to hear strange "humming" or "thrumming" (196) sounds, is the western doorway, "the door closest to the Spirit World" (41), which will be destroyed if the mining project goes ahead (235). Hazel is confused by the fact that the Seven Grandfathers seem to be able to predict the future. But Nanabush explains to her that their ability has nothing to do with "story-book magic with a crystal ball"; rather, it is "heightened intuition" (263), a reference to Anishinaabe ways of knowing. By telling this new Nanabush story in her novel, McBride contributes to keeping the stories viable. According to Anishinaabe scholar Lawrence W. Gross, "variant versions and readings [of the Nanabush stories] can be seen as a sign of continuing cultural sovereignty. This is especially indicated by new myths and new presentations of old myths in the modern period" (250). Knowledge of the language is a prerequisite for storytelling. As McBride explains in the interview with Rogers when asked about her use of Anishinaabemowin in the novel — the book includes a glossary of approximately sixty words — Anishinaabemowin is instrumental in reclaiming the connection to culture: "[I]t needs to be seen, and it needs to be heard" ("Why").

The texts that I have discussed in this essay take an Anishinaabe-centred approach to language revitalization since it is intricately connected to a return to Anishinaabe stories, traditions, and ceremonies as a path to resurgence. The first chapter of *Crow Winter*, "Homecoming," opens with Hazel's musings about the nature of the trickster/transformer who suddenly appears in her life: "I always thought it would be Raven" (3). But then she asserts that neither Raven, "who found the first People on the beaches of the West Coast (3),[18] nor the Cree Wisakedjak belongs to Spirit Bear Point. "Anishnaabeg call him something else": Nanabush (4). She wonders why Nanabush — with his contradictory qualities of one moment being teacher and spirit guide and the next moment playing the fool — had come to her: "[H]e's looking for a chance to rewrite his history" (5). The texts that I have analyzed here discuss this kind of transformation and resurgence from within Anishinaabe cultural paradigms with an emphasis on "a re-emergence, an unfolding from the inside out" (Simpson 17). They go beyond what Simpson refers to as "cultural" resurgence by addressing issues of Indigenous title and the need for Indigenous Peoples in general, and Anishinaabeg in particular, to reclaim stewardship of their own lands. They do so by paying respect to ancestors, literary and otherwise, and by emphasizing the importance of language revitalization.

NOTES

[1] I would like to express my utmost gratitude to Vernon Altiman (Mishiikenh, Bkejwanong) and Isadore Toulouse (Nswi Aandegok Bebamikawe, Wiikwemikoong) for teaching me Anishinaabemowin. I am not a speaker of Anishinaabemowin to any meaningful degree, but I will continue to make efforts to acquire a more adequate understanding of the language, for it is important for scholars of Indigenous literatures to learn Indigenous languages. That said, linguistic competence in the respective Indigenous language alone can never replace cultural immersion and community belonging.

[2] Interestingly, first-language speakers such as Jeannette Armstrong (Syilx) and Ruby Slipperjack (Anishinaabe) do not use Indigenous words in their texts. Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe), Linda LeGarde Grover (Anishinaabe), Louise Bernice Halfe (Cree), Gregory Scofield (Cree-Métis), and Marilyn Dumont (Cree-Métis), who all engage intensively in what Bidwell calls code-switching, are not first-language speakers.

[3] Toronto street names include Ishpadinaa for Spadina, Mikana for Indian Road, and Ogimaa Mikana for Queen Street.

[4] Maria Campbell, Lee Maracle, and Louise Halfe also frequently use Rez English.

[5] Ernest Oberholtzer (1884-1977), a prominent American conservationist, lived on Rainy Lake's Mallard Island.

[6] An analytic language primarily conveys relationships between words in sentences by way of particles and word order as opposed to a synthetic language, which utilizes inflection and agglutination.

[7] *Giizis* means "sun" or "month."

[8] Belleau uses a diacritic to indicate the difference between *namel* "sturgeon" and *namêl* "leave a trace."

[9] *Ahki* means "earth."

[10] *Debwewin* means Truth, one of the Seven Grandfathers. The poem also seems to refer to the fact that little has been done by the Canadian government to combat gendered colonial violence in response to the ninety-four recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

[11] *Gdi-nweninaa*, literally "our language," might refer to the title of Anishinaabe scholar Shirley Williams's *Gdi-nweninaa: Our Sound, Our Voice* (2002). This collection of Ojibway and Odawa words, organized and presented by themes, represents a milestone in Anishinaabemowin revitalization.

[12] *Zhaagonosh* is the word for "white settler."

[13] The TRC identified more than four thousand children who died while in residential schools. For decades, residential school survivors have been telling stories about children who disappeared without a trace. Recent findings of unmarked burial grounds corroborate survivors' stories. With the help of ground-penetrating radar, the remains of hundreds of children have been discovered in May and June 2021 at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, Marieval Indian Residential School, and St Eugene's Mission Residential School buried in unmarked graves close to these sites. Indigenous leaders across the country expect that many more unmarked graves are located on the sites of the more than 130 residential schools in Canada. The TRC's Calls to Action 71 to 76 expressly deal with missing children and burial information.

[14] *Abwaad* means "he/she cooks over fire."

[15] "Where are you from?"

[16] In the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel, *keewatinong* is the name for north since it is the direction of the North Star.

[17] For a detailed discussion of the concept of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, see Gross.

[18] McBride is paying homage to Lee Maracle's (Stó:lō) novel *Ravensong* (1993), in which Raven sets out to transform the Stó:lō community, and to Tomson Highway's (Cree) play *The Rez Sisters* (1986), in which Nanabush appears in the guise of a seagull for much of the play. In the play's "A Note on Nanabush," Highway writes that "Some say that 'Nanabush' left this continent when the whiteman came. We believe he is still here among us — albeit a little the worse for wear and tear — having assumed other guises. Without him — and without the spiritual health of this figure — the core of Indian culture would be gone forever" (xii).

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