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Care and Liberation in the Black Anthropocenes: apocalypse, justice and family abolition in N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy and Cherie Dimaline's *Marrow Thieves* series

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ABSTRACT

Cherie Dimaline's *Marrow Thieves* series (2017-2021) and N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy (2015-2017) are examples of speculative fiction that interweave post-apocalyptic settings with issues of racial, social and climate (in)justice. Dimaline's work is a Young Adult dystopian series in which the Indigenous people of Canada are hunted for their bone marrow, which is employed to cure settlers from a madness-inducing incapacity to dream, resulting from the effects of climate collapse and capitalism. Jemisin's novels are a speculative fiction series set in a world besieged by earthquakes, whose planetary predicament is connected to the ongoing oppression of marginalized groups. Both writers explore worlds in which the vulnerability of oppressed racialized people is inseparable from a proximity with, and an intimacy with, ecological devastation, staging speculative versions of what Kathryn Yusoff has called, in reference to real-world contexts, Black Anthropocenes. Since both series connect the project of *ending* the Black Anthropocenes with kinship and family, while being fully aware that kinship/familial formations can either be revolutionary or reinforcing systems of oppression, I read both through the concept of *family abolition*, understood as finding alternatives to the hegemonic institution of the family while dismantling the hierarchies, systems and uneven power relations it helps to defend. Relying on family-abolitionists like Sophie Lewis, Brigitte Vassallo and others, I explore, through Jemisin, how relations of care, liberation and autonomy can be revolutionary antidotes to kinship relations of ownership; and, through Dimaline, how the nuclear family (and the nation) entails a logic of sacrificial otherness.

Keywords

N. K. Jemisin, Cherie Dimaline, family abolition, Black Anthropocenes, kinship, apocalypse

Ending the Black Anthropocenes

Both N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy – comprising *The Fifth Season* (2015), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016) and *The Stone Sky* (2017) – and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* series – consisting of the eponymous 2017 book and its sequel *Hunting by Stars* (2021) – have brought to the foreground marginalised voices within the heterogeneous "field of cultural production" (Oziewicz 2017) of speculative fiction. Jemisin was the first Black American writer to win a Hugo award with *The Fifth Season* in 2016, amidst reactionary backlash, and went on winning for two consecutive years (see Dosser 2023). During her award speech for *The Stone Sky* in 2018, she declared that she wrote the trilogy to address "what it takes just to live, let alone

thrive, in a world that seems determined to break you" – referring both to the "the human history of structural oppression" that inspired her work, and to her feelings about the gatekeeping mechanisms of the world of science fiction (Jemisin 2018). Dimaline, a member of the Métis Nation of Ontario, claimed that she wrote her dystopian novel as she "wanted Indigenous readers to feel strong and powerful," and "to break down some of the isolation that Indigenous youth might feel. […] To know that they belong to a larger community and they're loved" (Dimaline 2017b). Just as Jemisin's work represents a major victory for the diversification of fantasy and science fiction, Dimaline's is an important intervention within the popular subgenre of Young Adult dystopias, "[addressing] Indigenous people's lived experiences explicitly in a genre that has too few Indigenous voices" (Murphy 2024, 77).

An equally significant convergence between the two series is how they use post-apocalyptic settings to connect issues of racial, social *and* climate/environmental (in)justice. In Dimaline's series, set in Canada in the mid-21th century, Indigenous peoples are hunted for their bone marrow, employed to cure white settlers from a madness-inducing incapacity to dream, resulting from the conjoined effects of climate breakdown, the conflicts it sparked, and post-collapse capitalism attempting to rebuild itself. The series also revisits the legacy of the Canadian residential schools, which become the model for a new set of institutions where settlers extract bone marrow from their Indigenous victims. As the series proceeds, the new schools grow increasingly monstrous, being transformed into human farms where Indigenous babies are intended to be bred from captive mothers and harvested. On the other hand, the narrative establishes that fighting the plague of dreamlessness would require to uphold social, political and ecological 'dreams' that precede and overcome capitalist and colonial extractivism, as the Indigenous protagonists aspire to do.

Jemisin's novels, on the other hand, are set in the ironically named continent called the Stillness, besieged by earthquakes and by phases of environmental collapse called Fifth Seasons. Central to the trilogy is the predicament of orogenes (disparagingly called 'roggas'), who can control the earth's seismic force. Orogenes are shunned and murdered due to their feared gift, while also forcibly recruited and exploited by an institution called the Fulcrum. Jemisin's setting is fictional, but the oppression of orogenes echoes aspects of the Black experience in America: orogenes can be killed, are legally considered non-humans, are denied bodily and reproductive autonomy, and are subjected to surveillance and self-policing to ensure that they are not a danger to "stills" (non-orogenes) – which translates in faithfully obeying their merciless custodians, the Guardians. Moreover, the oppression of orogenes, whose nature is initially unknown to themselves and others, and can disrupt otherwise 'normal' families, is also queer-coded. Finally, like in Dimaline, the oppression of minorities is linked with environmental breakdown. As revealed in *The Stone Sky*, the world's state of upheaval is the legacy of a collapsed, technocratic civilization that attempted to control the very energy of

the Earth through a network of obelisks called the Plutonic Engine. The Engine, built through the genocide of another people, the Thniess, was sabotaged by a group of artificial slaves called tuners, and by the very Earth, who is revealed, throughout the series, as a sentient living being. This sabotage, however, kicked off the Moon – the Earth's only child – from the Earth's orbit, and initiated the Seasons, which the vengeful entity periodically unleashes over humanity.

Both writers employ speculative imagination to explore how the vulnerability of oppressed racialized people is inseparable from ecological devastation, staging (semi-) fictional versions of what Kathryn Yusoff has called Black Anthropocenes: "the proximity of black and brown bodies to harm in [an] intimacy with the nonhuman" (Yusoff 2018, xii). In both series, the oppression of marginalized groups – the enslaved orogenes, used as tools against the Earth's revenge, and Indigenous peoples, harvested to produce medicine – provide a temporary fix to a societal and ecological crisis that, however, postpones the actual solution: the abolition of those very systems of exploitation that are responsible for, and perpetuate, the crisis. Crucially, Yusoff talks of a *billion* Black Anthropocenes, to stress how "imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialism have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence" (xiii). The point, then, in Jemisin's words, is to ensure that "*the world ends*. For the last time" (Jemisin 2015, 14): these are the ominous words that accompany the moment in which Alabaster, a rebel orogene, unleashes a Fifth Season as he destroys the seat of the Fulcrum, Yumenes, at the beginning of the series. However, this latest apocalypse is part of a plan to broker a truce with the Earth and *end* the Seasons. 'Ending the world for the last time' means finding a way to vanquish the forces and systems that have locked the world in a state of catastrophe and oppression, and actually end the Black Anthropocenes.

Neither series, however, suggests that intensifying the crisis will, by itself, solve anything. Apocalyptic times can only by survived by generating networks of care, family and kinship *while* abolishing the oppressive status quo – though discriminating which networks are truly revolutionary is one of the central problems of both series. In the *Broken Earth* trilogy, the burden of finalizing the truce with the Earth is put on the series' protagonist, the orogene Essun, whose quest will be to use the Plutonic Engine to return the Earth's missing child – the Moon – to her father's orbit. Alabaster' plan, therefore, starts with massive destruction but entails *restitution* on a planetary scale. To do so, however, Essun will need the support of a network of companions, and, simultaneously, to make amends with her estranged daughter Nassun. Dimaline, in turn, points out that Indigenous peoples are the ideal protagonists of an apocalyptic setting – "who better to write a story about people surviving an apocalypse than a people who already had?" (Diaz and Dimaline 2017, n.p.) – but posits, as key for their survival, the existence of networks of kinship like those sustaining Frenchie, the Métis protagonist of the series.

It is no surprise, then, that many scholars have analysed the *Broken Earth* trilogy and *The Marrow Thieves* series thorough the lenses of kinship and family. In the following sections of this essay I join this critical discussion, but I also shift the theoretical focus to the concept of *family abolition*, understood as finding alternatives to the hegemonic institution of the family while dismantling the hierarchies, systems and uneven power relations it helps defend. An abolitionist framework, as I argue in the next section, suits the poetics of both series.

Family Abolition

Family abolition can be defined as a project to "overcome privatised family arrangements as the basis for survival" in order to "[articulate] alternative social forms capable of meeting people's needs" (Gotby 2022, 112). It starts from the insight that capitalist and colonial modernity has imposed a normative form of the family as its fundamental reproductive unit: the nuclear family, also understood as a "familial romantic dyad" that produces a baby on which it has "property rights […] but also quasi-exclusive accountability" (Lewis 2022, 5). As Sophie Lewis argues, such societal arrangement, tasked with care work in capitalist (and especially neoliberal) societies, is actually "doing a bad job at care" and "is getting in the way of alternatives" (Lewis 2022, 5). Family abolitionist alternatives may variously encompass collective child-bearing, non-monogamous relationships, re-envisioning elder care, imagining forms of communal living, implementing radical welfare policies, or conceiving/practicing forms of queer kinship that are able to deconstruct the principle of genealogy (see Guarracino 2025). Their core principle, however, is always a democratization and universalization of care, through a "commitment to making care necessary for human flourishing freely available throughout society" (O'Brien 2023, 6), while also rejecting "the harmful relationships of domination that the family form enables" (O'Brien 2023, 6).

Family abolition is not new: Lewis reconstructs a "potted history" of 'family abolitionist' ideas that ranges from 19th French philosopher Charles Fourier and early Bolshevik utopianism to second-wave feminism, Gay, Lesbian – and Children's – liberation, and contemporary trans Marxism (Lewis 2022, 40-74). This history is by no means exclusively white or western. It also includes the experience of "pre-colonized and Indigenous populations" who "did not develop the form of private property 'the family'," but "had it imposed on them as part of the process of disciplining them into capitalism" (Lewis 2019, 40); and of "people newly emancipated from chattel slavery in the US," who "also pursued heterogeneous, anti-propertarian versions of kinship" (Lewis 2019, 43). Both experiences variously find echo in contemporary Indigenous and Black thought on family and kinship. Dakota scholar Kim TallBear, for instance, reflects on kinmaking as a better alternative to liberal multiculturalism to tackle the genocidal actions of the US settler state, which encompassed, historically, "forced conversion to private property, agriculture, Christianity, monogamous marriage and nuclear family" (TallBear 2021, n.p.).

Black British writer Lola Olufemi includes, in her book *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, reflections on how "the nuclear family turns children into property" and how "to be young is to know that much of your life […] is being organised by some other entity: your caregivers, the state, structuralised brutality" (Olufemi 2021, 144). She therefore engages with family abolitionist ideas as part of a Black feminist framework.

Being posited to operate against multiple, interlocked forms of oppression, family abolition can thus be connected to a decolonial project of undoing the "several entangled global hierarchies" (Grosfoguel 2010, 70) introduced globally by modernity/coloniality, including the superiority of the nuclear family over other forms of communal (and commons-oriented) love, relationality, care and mutual aid. Family abolition, therefore, also recovers practices that "pre-date anti-capitalism and [that] weren't originally projects to 'abolish' or 'queer' anything" (Lewis 2019, 148); that said, in trying to "overcome familial sexual regulation" and the way it produces "appropriately heterosexual and cis gendered subjects with the correct desires – not only for heterosex but for the reproduction of the family form and its attendant forms of property," family abolition is "inherently queer" (Gotby 2022, 112).

Family abolition is complicated by the fact that the 'family' is often seen as a last line of defence against exploitation and scarcity. However, as Kathy Weeks points out:

> the model of the nuclear family that has served subordinated groups as a fence against the state, society and capital is the very same white, settler, bourgeois, heterosexual and patriarchal institution that was imposed by the state, society and capital on the formerly enslaved, indigenous peoples, and waves of immigrants, all of whom continue to be at once in need of its meagre protections and marginalized by its legacies and prescriptions. (Weeks 2021, 436)

That means that family abolition cannot be a purely destructive project, leaving unaddressed a specific function that family is, however badly, currently responding to, especially for marginalized people. Instead, it entails "[isolating] that which is liberatory about the kinship-ideal, buried within the material misery that is familiarized society," namely "reciprocal care, interdependence, and belonging" (Lewis 2022, 81-82), and finding better vehicles to actualize these "utopian kernels" (81). This process of creative destruction is actually at the heart of other abolitionist processes: projects of police and prison abolition, for instance, are "a bigger idea than firing cops and closing prisons," and include "eliminating the reasons people think they need cops and prisons in the first place" (Purnell 2021, 6) by building meaningful alternatives.

Nevertheless, abolitionist projects often exist in a space of fearful uncertainty. Brigitte Vassallo, for instance, discusses the abolition – closely connected to *family* abolition – of the hierarchical, competitive and identitarian logic she calls monogamous thinking, which she sees as the underlying logic of both the romantic dyad/nuclear family and of the nation-state. Embracing this form of abolition, for Vassallo, involves what she calls polyamorous terror: the

sense of vulnerability connected to abandoning the often misery-inducing but *familiar* havens of these 'monogamous' institutions (see Vassallo 2018, 200). Nevertheless, this terror can be channelled in "an actual terrorist movement, turning our body and our affects into a threat to the very foundations of capitalist relations, of the monogamous sex-gender system, and of racial and class privileges" (Vassallo 2018, 200, my translation). The terror may be worth it, because it will, she argues, leave the empire without subjects (Vassallo 2018, 205).

Family abolition is best understood within a series of what Derecka Purnell calls "dynamic abolitionisms that depart from all forms of oppression" (Purnell 2021, 227). Purnell cites "decolonization, disability justice, Earth justice and socialism" (Purnell 2021, 227) as the companions of her police and prison abolitionist project, and the list works for family abolition as well. This intersectionality, as well as the destructive-creative logic of abolition, echoes the politics and poetics of the *Broken Earth* and *Marrow Thieves* series: both are about abolishing and replacing entrenched systems of racial, class *and* ecological exploitation engendering self-perpetuating apocalyptic scenarios; and are concerned with kinship and family as part of this project. In short: what is the space for family-abolitionist ideas in the apocalyptic Black Anthropocenes of Jemisin's and Dimaline's fiction? I am mostly interested in two lines of discussion: through Jemisin, I explore relationships of collective care, liberation and autonomy as revolutionary antidotes to kinship relationships of ownership; and, through Dimaline, I investigate the logic of the nuclear family (and of the nation) as based sacrificing anyone external to it, while extending (hollow) assimilationist promises to Indigenous peoples.

A note on terminology: it may seem that family *reform* is a more palatable alternative to family abolition – and one major (conceptual) reform could simply be arguing, in Harawayian fashion, that 'kinship' actually names the better alternative to the bio-reproductive idea of the family. But I agree with Lewis that it is worth considering the more radical family-abolitionist effort to "loosen, unseat, and unlearn the thought, practice, and language of 'kinship'," which always brings back to the idea of "a *guarantee* (*we are kin*) tethered to a metaphysical plane" and that we would be better served by "concepts with more bite, like 'comradeliness' or 'accomplice'" (Lewis 2022, 84-85). That said, in accommodating the language used in the novels and the scholarship I rely on, my analysis engages with the idea of positively connoted forms of family/kinship. Terminology aside, however, the kind of 'reform' of kinship that both series enact lands us, in my view, within abolitionist territory.

The Broken Earth trilogy

Let us start with Jemisin, whose trilogy conjoins an investigation of the world-saving power of relations predicated on radical autonomy with a staunch attack on proprietary kinship, including the one practiced by marginalized groups. Such reflection, for Jemisin, is rooted in her

experience as a Black woman. In writing about *The Fifth Season*, she points out that a crucial reference for her was:

> the black family. Really, any families formed under oppressive conditions – but obviously black families are what I know best. [...] how people grow and protect and survive together when their very personhood is in question. How love camouflages itself when it's under constant threat. (Jemisin 2016a, n.p.)

Implied in this statement is the question of how (familial) love can become revolutionary – instead of reproducing oppressive dynamics – under a state of vulnerability. In the trilogy, this is explored through Essun – also called Damaya and Syenite. Specifically, Essun's engagement with kinship – rejecting some forms and embracing others – is key to shape her revolutionary subjecthood. I agree with Michael Pitts that "a pivotal message of Jemisin's trilogy is that kinship is a salient ingredient of revolution and that the concept itself must be divorced from strict genealogical accounts to bring about such meaningful change" (Pitts 2023, 135–36).

Essun/Damaya's birth family immediately expels her when her orogeny is discovered. Lisa Swanstrom interprets Essun's orogeny as symbolic of the violation of "the nuclear family—that special 'triad'," which, if understood as an "an inviolable structure," must swiftly punish transgressions from the norm (Swanstrom 2023, 157).In her interpretation, Damaya's 'transgression' "is not causally linked to the nuclear family, but her punishment, handed down by her mother and father, is" (Swanstrom 2023, 157). Her punishment, besides, involves handing her to the Fulcrum, thus reinforcing one of the hegemonic institutions of this world, sustained by oppressive kinship formations. Case in point, Damaya's Guardian Schaffa, who does happen to actually 'love' the orogenes in his care, nevertheless breaks her hand to teach her that, as Damaya puts it:

> "I have to do what you say or you'll hurt me."
> "And?"
> "And," she adds, "you'll hurt me even when I do obey. If you think you should." (Jemisin 2015, 102)

To this, Schaffa adds: "What I do [is] about control. Give me no reason to doubt yours, and I will never hurt you again" (Jemisin 2015, 102–103). Schaffa epitomizes the conditional love that proprietary relations – from parenthood-as-ownership to the master-slave relationship – cloak themselves with. That form of love, and the constant threat of retribution, disciplines Damaya into an obedient Fulcrum orogene. This is the mindset in which she, now named Syenite, encounters Alabaster, with whom she is being forced to conceive a child as part of the Fulcrum's attempt to breed powerful orogenes. Alabaster, however, opens her eyes to the full extent of orogene exploitation – he reveals to her that the Fulcrum uses orogene children as "node maintainers," bounding them to wire chairs and transforming them in semi-conscious, suffering but "reliable, harmless, completely beneficial source of orogeny" (Jemisin 2015, 142).

The child they have been compelled to conceive together is likely to meet a similar fate. The first shift in the protagonist's consciousness is then rooted in rejecting her role in a system of kinship relations in which 'love' (and life) is conditional to a loss of gestational and bodily autonomy.

The island of Meov, a pirate community outside the Fulcrum's purview where Alabaster and Syenite find shelter, allows Jemisin to sketch an alternative structure. Here "they don't kill their roggas […]. They put them in charge" (Jemisin 2015, 296); Alabaster and Syenite, who have a child, Corundrum, discover that here childcare is collective, as "in Meov that sort of things is done communally, same as everything else" (Jemisin 2015, 362). Lastly, they enter in a polyamorous relationship with the pirate leader (and orogene) Innon, whose mediation allows Alabaster and Syenite to create an emotional and erotic bond among themselves and becoming lovers and co-parents. Admittedly, one of the core conflicts of the Meov section is that Syenite wants to join Innon's pirate raids, possibly as a first step to return to the mainland, and not *just* caring for her child Coru. This provokes Innon's reprimands – "Corundum is *your son*, Syenite. Do you feel nothing for him, that you constantly chafe to be away?" (Jemisin 2015, 365) – and hence Meov is not immune to a "regulative attitude towards mothering" (Åström 2023, 69). Nevertheless, this space allows Syenite to elaborate her position on care and liberation. She denies that her desire to be something other than a mother is incompatible with her love for Coru: "she loves her son. But that doesn't mean she wants to spend every hour of every rusting day in his presence" (Jemisin 2015, 366); but she is also driven to find "*A way to change things. Because this is not right*" (Jemisin 2015, 371). This sentiment does not clash but emerges from her love for Coru: when Innon suggests her that their reclusive life is the best they all can get, she replies that "Corundum should have better" (Jemisin 2015, 371). In other words, she conceives systemic change *as* care for her child – as Jemisin puts it, she yearns to "give Coru a whole world in which he could be safe and happy and human, rather than just one island" (Jemisin 2016a, n.p.).

Such philosophy is put aside when Meov is destroyed by the Guardians, Syenite kills Coru to spare him the fate of node maintainer, and she reinvents herself as Essun, marrying a man called Jija in the comm of Tirimo. Within her new nuclear family, and deeply damaged by her inability to save Coru, Essun now adheres to the idea that she should focus on protecting *only* the ones closest to her, at any cost necessary. She behaves towards her daughter Nassun according to Schaffa's cruel pedagogy, secretly training her to control her orogene power with the same relentless discipline and punitive vigour that was inflicted on her, even repeating Schaffa's favourite teaching method by pre-emptively breaking Nassun's hand. Essun rationalizes this as a necessary price to keep Nassun safe (Jemisin 2016b, 140), but that does not change the fact that she has internalized Schaffa's proprietary parenthood, based on the violent denial of her child's agency. Granted, Essun does this from a marginalized

position and out of motivated fear, but the process nevertheless scars Nassun, and contributes to her decision, matured at the end of *The Obelisk Gate*, to commit to crash the Moon onto the Earth in a suicidal attempt at collective deliverance. Moreover, Essun's parenting does not save her family: when Jija finds out that Essun, Nassun and Uche are orogenes, he murders Uche and kidnaps Nassun. Before she can reunite with Nassun *and* save the world, then, Essun has to recover and refine her (family abolitionist) notion of collective care and liberation.

This happens through her engagement with Castrima, a community that attempts, not unlike Meov, to foster the coexistence of orogenes and stills. Essun initially thinks of Castrima opportunistically, as a step in her quest to recover Nassun, but her experience of Castrima, which ranges from mundane organizational tasks to defending its inhabitants against invaders and staying with them during a harrowing crossing of a desert, reawakens her conception of care and liberation as interwoven, and to be pursued beyond the family unit. As Essun realizes towards the end of *The Stone Sky*:

> you aren't alone. You have […] *friends*, who know you in your rogga monstrosity and accept you despite it [...] you have *Castrima*, too, if you want it. This ridiculous comm of unpleasant people who are impossibly still together, which you have fought for and which has, however grudgingly, fought for you in return. […]
> […] The world is broken and you can fix it […]. Castrima is *more* reason for you to do it, not less. And it's time you stopped being a coward, too, and went to find Nassun. Even if she hates you. Even if you left her to face a terrible world alone. (Jemisin 2017, 283–284)

Essun, in short, understands that her seemingly competing undertakings – caring for Castrima and its people, healing the rift between the Earth and humanity, and rescuing Nassun and repairing their relationship – are one and the same.

In the climatic ending, Essun and Nassun engage in a struggle to wrest control of the Plutonic Engine from each other: Nassun, having abandoned her initial plan to end all life, is trying to use the Engine to forcibly turn all humanity into beings called Stone Eaters; Essun wants to use the Engine to return the Moon to the Earth's orbit. As Essun understands that the struggle is killing them both, she realizes that "the only way to win, then, is not to fight anymore" (Jemisin 2017, 385). Essun allows the force of the Engine to petrify her, granting Nassun control of the Engine and, more importantly, the agency she had denied her through her upbringing, in an ultimate, supremely risky disavowal of her ownership over her child. This is not just a pragmatical calculation, and is motivated by Essun's desire to ensure that Nassun will live. It does, however, save the world, because it prompts Nassun to carry out Essun's plan to restore the Moon:

> She perceives your plan as commands locked and aimed but unfired. Open the Gate, pour the Rifting's power through it, catch the Moon. End the Seasons. Fix the world. This, Nassun sesses-feels-knows, was your last wish.

The onyx says, in its ponderous, wordless way: *Execute Y/N*?
And in the cold stone silence, alone, Nassun chooses.
YES. (Jemisin 2017, 387)

The world is fixed, in short, by an act of yielding trust, agency, autonomy and power to a fellow oppressed being. To make this point, Jemisin uses a family abolitionist image: a formerly abusive parent that acknowledges and grants, in concrete terms, the freedom of her child.

The Marrow Thieves series

Like Jemisin, Cherie Dimaline's *Marrow Thieves* series includes both destructive and constructive sides as regards her treatment of family and kinship, offering, in particular, a scathing portrayal of the violence of settler family ideology and the proposal of radical alternatives, based on pre-colonial kinship relations. Specifically, the series depicts Indigenous communities that organize themselves in structures that are antithetical to the nuclear family and its large-scale mirror image, the nation-state. The protagonist Frenchie is adopted by a group of Indigenous persons of various origins, led by the Anishinaabe Elder Miigwans; and, throughout the series, Miig's/Frenchie's family stands as a positive model of kinship. First of all, the members of Miig's family "[look out] for one another, without hierarchy, without question" (Dimaline 2021, 18), as Miigwans teaches Frenchie when the boy – eager to impress newcomer Rose – launches himself onto a fence to test if it is electrified. Miig reminds him that "no one is more important than anyone else," and "no one should be sacrificed for anyone else" (Dimaline 2017a, 58) – a sentence that, within the context of the 'sacrifice' of Indigenous peoples to save settlers from dreamlessness, carries a particular weight.

These egalitarian principles are also rooted in "expansive kinship networks and structures of care," which, for Patrizia Zanella (2020, 185), are at the core of the story. She also argues, quoting Métis scholar June Scudeler, that such expansive kinship structure specifically echoes the Cree concept of "wâhkôhtowin," defined as "kinship beyond the immediate family or state of being related" (Scudeler 2016 in Zanella 2020, 77). This emerges from the fact that the main relationships among the protagonists are not, for the most part, biological; and that the Indigenous protagonists also extend their kinship to the nonhuman, "[responding] to the long-lived experience of cultural and environmental violence through a sense of kinship that transcends the human and encompasses nature in all its forms" (Botelho 2023, 33). Finally, this extended sense of kinship incorporates queerness in various forms, from the relationship between Miigwans and his missing husband Isaac, with whom he reunites at the end of the first book, to the family welcoming Nam, a two-spirit/nonbinary youth.

This extended, non-anthropocentric, egalitarian and queer kinship clashes against the hegemonic one espoused by settler society. The series, initially, seems to propose an odd moral equivalence between the two, when Miig comments that also settlers are motivated by

survival – specifically, survival of their *families* – in their hunting down Indigenous peoples for medicine:

> "We are actually both motivated by the same thing: survival. [...] 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." [...]
> "Exactly. We all do what we can to survive. [...]" (Dimaline 2017a, 53-54)

However, the idea of 'doing anything/everything to save your family', throughout the series follows two opposing logics. Frenchie's family – egalitarian and expansive – centres selflessness and reciprocity, epitomized by the idea that "sometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you're not the one that'll be alive to live it" (Dimaline 2017a, 152). Conversely, the settler/colonial/capitalist 'family values' pivot around defending one's familial unit by *actively sacrificing* those perceived as external to it, in an extreme, but not surprising, version of what Vassallo calls the monogamous – hierarchical, competitive, identitarian – logic of the romantic dyad/nuclear family *and* the nation (Vassallo 2018). Dimaline's most straightforward representation of the nuclear family as a logic of sacrifice (of otherness) appears when Frenchie's family is captured by the Mothers of Meaningful Slumber (MOMS), a ruthless organization of self-described "civilized ladies" (Dimaline 2021, 319). These are white mothers that have decided to "secure their future by any means necessary" (Dimaline 2021, 314) and kidnap Indigenous peoples to steal bone marrow for their own children, for "moms do what is best for their children. Always" (Dimaline 2021, 319). Dimaline uses MOMS to reveal the ultimate icon of the settler/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal conception of care and kinship – white motherhood within a nuclear family – as monstrous. As Frenchie points out while being held at gunpoint, "we had obviously been grabbed by monsters, even if they did smell like floral perfume and strong soap" (Dimaline 2021, 323).

But Dimaline also exposes the *seductiveness*, for oppressed people, of this logic, particularly in *Hunting by Stars*, in which Frenchie is captured and brought into one of the residential schools. He encounters his brother Mitch, who had saved him in *The Marrow Thieves* but is now – arguably as a way to cope with the ordeal of the schools – a fervent collaborationist. Mitch rejects Frenchie's accusation of being a traitor, claiming that "We are all one people, French. […] All separations are false" (Dimaline 2021, 70), but this appeal to unity is actually intended to naturalize the uneven 'division of labour' within the 'family' of the settler nation. Later, Mitch reveals to Frenchie the plan to transform the residential schools into human farms:

> If we change the institutes to focus on farming newborns, we can cut out all the messy in-between bits. And it means there will be a chance for more of us to integrate. To live like normal people [...] See, there

will be the herd, and then there will be everyone else. Not divided by race, exactly. Just divided by purpose. (Dimaline 2021, 288)

Mitch can only offer Frenchie the impoverished hope of being spared within an institution – the nation – that has marked him as expendable. Crucially this speech – with its clear-cut distinction between "the herd" and "everyone else" – also captures the sacrificial logic that dominates kinship at all levels from a settler/colonial/capitalist perspective, that is, ultimately, the logic of the nuclear family, primed to put discrete units in deadly competition for a scarcity of resources. Mitch has been forced to believe that assimilating and upholding this narrow sense of kinship represents his only possible deliverance.

Frenchie's arc in the second novel is precisely about resisting this nuclear-familial thinking. His strategy to escape the school is to pretend to become a collaborationist, like Mitch. But, in the process, he starts to lose sight of his expansive notion of kinship. Particularly, he starts to be annoyed at the 'sloppiness' of other Indigenous prisoners, whom he starts to see as obstacles to returning to *his* family instead of seeing them as other kin that he is responsible for. This culminates in the sequence in which, to convince his captors of his loyalty, he successfully carries out a mission to capture and bring in two Indigenous persons, including a small child that he personally stops from escaping. This betrayal, committed in the name of rejoining his family at all costs, will haunt him despite any rationalization: "I was a traitor, certified and proven, and not a person (Dimaline 2021, 238).

Miigwans will, nevertheless, accept Frenchie back. If his philosophy had always been that "sometimes the path [...] goes through some pretty dark territory. Just make sure it doesn't change the intent of the trip" (Dimaline 2017a, 145), he knows that Frenchie's intent is still entwined with an idea of collective care and liberation. Frenchie proves this to him by holding himself accountable and by proposing, in the end, to make up for his mistakes by continuing the fight: "we need to get through this so we can help the others, too. […] The ones I had to… The ones I brought in" (Dimaline 2021, 381).

This renewed sense of responsibility towards "the others" resonates with the family abolitionist ideal of unlocking new worlds of care for everyone to dismantle (but also *while* dismantling) systems of oppression. It also recalls, like Essun and Nassun's final encounter at the end of the world, Sophie Lewis' definition of love: "to love a person is to struggle for their autonomy as well as for their immersion in care, insofar such abundance is possible in a world choked by capital" (Lewis 2022, 3).

Conclusion: radical resources

Jemisin's exploration of relationships of care and autonomy as a tool for revolution and as a necessary antidote against kinship-as-ownership, as well as Dimaline's building of an extended sense of kinship to fight the murderous, 'monogamous' logic of the settler family and

nation, are shaped, crucially, in the background of planetary, racialized environmental devastation. They happen in a post-apocalyptic scenario in which both fighting for and against certain 'family values' are essential to survive and thrive in the midst of environmental collapse and injustice.

As such, I think it is useful to see their work as a radical resource to conceive, experiment with and engender the abolition of both the family and the Anthropocene, which are both powers, paraphrasing Ursula K. Le Guin, that only *seem* inescapable (K. Le Guin 2019, 114). But how to use these resources? Mark Bould, elaborating on the idea that "all cultural texts are about climate change," proposes to use such texts "not just as opportunities for dialogue, discussion and debate, but as adventure playgrounds, workshops, studios, festivals, carnivals, invitations to creative play, to thinking through, to action," in a process of "critical creativity" that is to be as widespread and collective as possible (Bould 2021, 132-133). Let us thus collectively play and act with Jemisin and Dimaline, and use their stories to recover lost planets and stolen dreams.

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