

## Extended kinship as a means of *survivance* within Indigenous literary futurism in “Legends are made, not born” by Métis author Cherie Dimaline

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores how Métis author Cherie Dimaline elaborates *wâhkôhtowin*, the Indigenous principle of extended kinship, in her 2016 short story entitled “Legends are made, not born.” The text encapsulates some of the themes and strategies specific to Indigenous futurism, a recent artistic genre which sheds light on survival strategies intended as a restorative coping practice to claim Aboriginal self-determination. Through the vicissitudes of a queer “made-not-born” Native family, the author depicts empowering landscapes – or *kinscapes* – that bind humans and nonhumans to all of creation, giving rise to familial bonds that are not constrained by implications of descent but rather of communal responsibility beyond anthropocentric, heteronormative, and racial colonial logics.

### Keywords

Anthropocene, apocalypse, Indigenous futurism, survivance, *Wâhkôhtowin*

### Back to the future: Indigenous perspectives on the Anthropocene

The current geological era, known by the term Anthropocene, refers to a timeframe marked by revolutionary environmental changes brought about by human activity (Dhillon 2022), as suggested by its Greek prefix *anthropos*. This coinage traces back to the hard sciences and has been circulating for more than four decades, owing to U.S. biologist Eugene Stoermer, who first employed it in the early 1980s and brought it into widespread use as of 2000 along with fellow Dutch Nobel Laureate chemist Paul Crutzen (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). The term has attracted criticism, especially in the last decade, primarily since it overgeneralizes the causes of the current climate emergency by attributing them to the human race as a whole (Yusoff 2018) and, secondly, as it does not identify the phenomenon of capitalism as the main culprit, thus prompting a move to other definitions such as, for example, Capitalocene (Moore 2016). Renowned U.S. philosopher and scientist Donna Haraway proposes an undoubtedly more holistic alternative – or integration: Chthulucene. Borrowing its prefix from the Greek *khthon* meaning earthly, the scholar’s coinage refers to everything that may be traced back to subsurface life and that develops in a tentacular fashion, decentralizing the leading role of the human being to one of the many actors of life on earth. According to this perspective, all living beings exist interconnectedly, forming relationships of responsibility beyond species principles, that is,

kinships centered on care and the ability to meet the needs of others, or “response-ability” (Haraway 2016, 78). By this term, the scientist refers to the responsiveness that human beings should nurture as an ethical and political stance for the purpose of caring for other species. Precisely in terms of responsibility among living beings and the earth, in a recent interview for the journal *Science for the People*, Haraway reflects on the history of racial colonial capitalism and recalls how epistemological appropriation and violence against Indigenous peoples have relegated their knowledge systems to primitive and non-authoritative categories. She believes there is a need to restore them lest they be lost forever as:

There are some modes of knowledge – diet, land, fire regimes, water preservation, multi-species cohabitation – which give evidence that Indigenous knowledge systems are better than the capitalist developmental science systems for long-term cohabitation of peoples, including nonhuman animals, and that these knowledges need to be forwarded (Bryant and Wallenberg 2020, n.p.).

To Indigenous peoples, in fact, the Anthropocene is no recent occurrence. Colonialism has effectively generated a diaspora among Native communities by stripping them of their land on their very own soil, causing forced coexistence with new systems of government as well as ecosystems in an ongoing practice of extraction. In this light, the term *ánthropos* cannot be employed universally as it subtexts a very specific race and gender, namely white and male, peculiar to the imperial power, as consistently argued by postcolonial and ecofeminist studies (Gergan, Smith and Vasudevan 2020). The relationship with the land is paramount for Native peoples globally, which makes them part of a network of connectivity. Specifically, in the Nehinaw<sup>1</sup> tradition – also known as Cree – the term *wâhkôhtowin* is used to refer to the building of relationships as an active and dynamic process that bonds human and non-human animals to nature as a whole. It is constituted by the morpheme *wâki*, which refers to the act of being bent or curved, *pimohtê*, meaning to walk, and *ito*, indicating reciprocity, namely a concept of mutual advancement directed toward the land (Van Essen 2018, 86). This kinship is so vital that it forms an integral part of Cree law and is often traced back to the image of a circle to emphasize the lack of hierarchy in favor of an equal, constant, unbroken bond (Lindberg 2020, 40). Renowned Métis<sup>2</sup> Elder<sup>3</sup> author and scholar Maria Campbell described the term as follows, in a well-known talk she gave at the Chains and Links Human Rights Conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada in 2007:

[...] it meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and interconnected to all things within it. *Wâhkôhtowin* meant honoring and respecting those relationships. They are our stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other. Human to human, human to plants, human to animals, to the water and especially to the earth. And in turn all of creation had responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to us. (Campbell 2007, 5)

Such a notion underlies Indigenous nation-building posited to provide protection for the land according to principles of self-determination in which kin-making occurs following a choice reliant only on collective care, on a “series of radiating responsibilities” (Simpson 2020, 9). This relational vision is explored by various artistic practices, such as speculative fiction that reworks techniques of epistemological reappropriation in the aftermath of settler colonialism.

### Apocalypse now? Futurist landscapes of Indigenous literature

Science Fiction, a “genre that emerged in the context of evolutionary theory and anthropology of the mid-19th century, deeply intertwined with colonial ideology” (Dillon 2012, 3), is generally rooted in patriarchal scenarios in which white cis men paradoxically stand as the sole saviors of the world they materially brought to collapse. The salvific visions these works depict are mere neo-colonial projections of planetary conquests, in which the same imperialist schemes find embodiment in the replication of capitalist perspectives sustained by heteronormative family units in which BIPOC and women’s voices find almost no room for agency or representation. It is from this genre that the more recent strand of Climate Fiction has emerged, which focuses on climate change as an emergency that disrupts global order, works on power relations between humans and the environment, and serves as a vector for climate advocacy (Daniels and Endfield 2009). Such literature has established an intersectional narrative that also investigates issues of gender, race, and class, further probing post- and decolonial discourse. Professor of Human Geography Andrew Baldwin argues that Cli-Fi is critical to revising the Anthropocene as it focuses on minority subjects through whose vision it is possible to deviate from a narrative that mirrors that of imperialism (Baldwin 2017). In contemporary Cli-Fi, the inflection point that weighs on the narrative is coincident with the idea of a looming and seemingly inevitable apocalypse, which affects the actions of the main characters in a dynamic of survival at any cost. If apocalypse refers more broadly to a cataclysmic event, the term comes from the Latin *apocalypsis* as applied to sacred texts, translating as “revelation” or “manifestation” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007). This can serve as a reading framework to reveal the non-unique nature of the event; the apocalypse that this literary genre addresses as a future projection is actually an event that has been recurring for centuries for Native peoples. Métis author Chelsea Vowel foregrounds the rejection of apocalypse as any kind of beginning or end, as Native peoples are “post-apocalyptic peoples” and consequently know from experience that it does not necessarily imply an end, but only “something you go through” (Vowel 2024, n.p.). In this sense, it would seem more appropriate to refer to apocalypses rather than ‘the Apocalypse’ since there are no historical terms of comparison. For many speculative writers such as Vowel, dystopian fiction reformulates the idea of the apocalypse by facilitating a paradigm shift in stories centered on the relationship between humans, the land, and nonhuman animals, finding its expressive space within a stream of art that has gained momentum, especially over the past decade (Fricke 2019): Indigenous futurism.

This movement arose in the late 1990s and builds on diverse artistic expressions peculiar to the literary, architectural, and cinematic arenas, among others, by means of experimenting with the language of science fiction to reclaim the presence of Indigenous peoples in the future through a reworking of past and present. Regarding its literary declension, the most prominent voice on the subject is undoubtedly that of Grace L. Dillon, Anishinaabe<sup>4</sup> professor of Indigenous Nation Studies at Portland State University. In 2003, she coined the term to encompass those art forms that investigate the personal fallout caused by colonization in an attempt to dislodge the underlying emotional and psychological baggage with the means – as well as the purpose – of recovering ancestral traditions. In 2012, Dillon edited the most significant work to date on this genre under the title *Walking the Clouds. An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, a collection of short stories and novels interweaving “sf theory and Native intellectualism, Indigenous scientific literacy and Western techno-cultural science” (Dillon 2012, 3). Indigenous futurists are shifting the boundaries of Sci-Fi through experimentation untethered from genre and plot expectations, thus moving away from colonial dynamics in the aspect of discovery, as Vowel argues:

In (re)imagining history, whitestream speculative fiction is particularly adept at repressing the violent histories of colonialism from the public imaginary. This does not mean that the topic of colonization is absent from science fiction – far from it. We find constant dichotomous reframing of settler colonials as agents of space-faring Manifest Destiny or the inevitable subjects of colonization at the hands (tentacles, squishy pseudopods, or furry appendages) of aliens. Whitestream science fiction insists that colonialism is inevitable. It’s “us or them,” and it had better be “us”. (Vowel 2022, 9)

The literary genre of Indigenous futurism employs several strategies to reclaim Aboriginal living spaces in an unmodifiable past through storytelling. An example of this is the technique called “Native Slipstream” (Dillon 2012, 2), built on the expedient of the multiverse, that is a reality contemplated as a simultaneous superposition of parallel worlds in which past, present, and future flow in a circular fashion – as in the tradition of Indigenous storytelling – allowing for intervention in colonial history. Another commonly employed practice involves the reworking of TEK, i.e., the traditional ecological knowledge that sustains Indigenous life – medicine, arts, agriculture – explored as a scientific technique rather than a ‘primitive’ ceremonial. Indigenous futurism also includes works that re-imagine “Native Apocalypse” (Dillon 2012, 9), most often reversing history in favor of Native peoples or at least rendering them dignified protagonists and holders of agency. “The Native apocalyptic narrative, then, shows the brokenness, scarring, and trauma in an attempt to provide healing and a return to *bimaadiziwin*” (Dillon 2012, 9), a concept that outlines a process of decolonizing rediscovery that creates “ethnic landscapes in a way that foregrounds the intersection of Indigenous nations and other sovereignty, race, technology, and power” (Dillon 2012, 11).

The following part of the article offers a critical reading of the short story entitled “Legends are made, not born” by Métis author Cherie Dimaline as it encapsulates the healing principles of

Native kinship proper to contemporary Indigenous futurism as experienced through the eyes of a Métis boy under the guidance of Auntie Dave, a queer non-biological parental figure. This made-and-not-born family embodies the relational potential of a dystopian migratory future that reweaves the threads of ancient epistemologies essential to Indigenous survival; such a subversion of the boundaries of whitestream speculative narratives can contribute to the creation of empowering landscapes beyond the familial logics of heteronormativity, race, and gender.

### “Legends are made, not born”: surviving through kinship

Cherie Dimaline is a multiple award-winning Métis author known to the public at large for her mostly YA novels and short stories that re-frame colonial trauma through the genre of speculative fiction. A publisher, editor, and activist, in recent years, she has become the subject of academic research not only within Indigenous Studies but also within Postcolonial and Ecocritical Studies. As opposed to scientific narratives based on genealogical principles, the author turns to the counter-genetic Indigenous fiction, that is, linked to principles of belonging built on bonds of responsibility and preservation of collective memory that prompts the rethinking and reformulation of community tenets in more inclusive terms and with the addition of a queer focus (Pravinchandra 2021). The short story is featured in the 2016 anthology *Love Beyond Body, Space, and Time* (Bedside Press), and it includes thirteen stories by Indigenous authors who step outside Western temporal constraints by means of scenarios and eras trespassing into the past and future, both historical and fictional. In addition to Dimaline, contributors include such notable names as the aforementioned Grace L. Dillon and popular authors and scholars Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) and Darcie Little Badger (Apache).

“My mom was a half-breed Catholic who named me after a pack of smokes, Semaatobacco. She died in a fiery blaze of glory winning a snow-mobile race” (Dimaline 2016, 31). This is the punchy opening line Dimaline elects, which at once establishes the nature of a dry, sarcastic, and no-frills narrative. Details about the identity of the protagonist are and will remain for much longer unknown as if to give him a less specific and more universal dimension as a Métis child with a father who “was not there,” was “less important” (Dimaline 2016, 31) than his mother, and eventually dies from old age in a nursing home:

[...] my father, the short man with the buzz cut who smelled like whiskey and old laundry? I’d met him only a handful of times, but he was always reminding me that he was my dad and should be respected as such. (Dimaline 2016, 37)

Indeed, the young boy of the short story spends much of his time with his maternal grandmother, a loud and unconventional presence who teaches him to play cards in a kitchen shrouded in cigarette smoke and colorful swearing at the age of six. Another male character introduced in this stage is Uncle Travis, who “looked like a bush man, a trapper half-mad with lonely fear” (Dimaline

2016, 31), aligning with the unflattering description of the other men of this Métis family: “My uncles were too busy drinking and getting kicked off the reserve for increasing the population” (Dimaline 2016, 32). These scant but precise details are sufficient to delineate some aspects of Indigenous post-contact domestic life with regard to gender roles. One of the Indigenous scholars who has to date investigated this context most consistently and thoroughly is undoubtedly Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Leanne Betasamosake Simpson<sup>5</sup>. Largely credited as one of the most compelling Indigenous artists and activists of recent decades, her work serves as a major backbone to what is referred to as Indigenous Resurgence, a movement that arose at the dawn of the 2000s in the North American continent, founded on the principles of decolonizing knowledge in order to regenerate the bonds of Native peoples to their land. Involving a range of practices that translate into tangible form in activities such as revitalizing languages and ceremonies, reappropriating homelands, and restoring kinships between humans, nonhumans, and nature, the movement strives to “reattach (...) minds, bodies, and spirits to the web of relationships and ethical practices to generate grounded normativity” (Simpson 2017, 44). Simpson recalls how both binarism and gender-based abuse are a byproduct of a white colonial strategy that lures straight and cisgender Indigenous men into a system of violence with the promise of inclusion in Western male leaderships. Indigenous Resurgence additionally aims to “critically interrogate the hierarchies of heteropatriarchy in all its forms, to stop replicating it” (Simpson 2017, 51) and actively explore it in any aspect of individual and collective spheres of life as it is excluded from “the political and theoretical realm and positioned in the margins” (Simpson 2017, 31). The critique of white settler enforcement of patriarchal structures was championed decades earlier by Sto:lo<sup>6</sup> Nation writer and activist Lee Maracle who brought the term “rematriation” into widespread use through her seminal 1998 essay “I Am Woman.” Maracle emphasizes the urgency of a return to matrilineal values as opposed to colonial ones whose byproduct is gendered violence and the removal of women from the political arena. For this reason, the term is countered by “repatriation,” which in Latin consists of the prefix *re* implying a return to a previous state and the noun *patria* meaning “homeland” yet stemming from *pater* meaning “father.” According to this view, applicable to all fields, it is imperative for women, mothers in the broad sense, to be handed back the land with its resources generating Indigenous prosperity and empowerment, along with the traditional cultural knowledge passed down through storytelling. Such gendered forms of violence introduced chiefly by white settlers go hand in hand with the imbuing of a sense of shame “[...] for being Indigenous. This shame leads us to disconnect from the practices that give us meaning” (Simpson 2017, 187), falling more often than not into addictions that, once more, elicit shame, in a vicious cycle which never fails to position Natives “on the losing end of colonial violence. Shame cages resurgence in a very basic way because it prevents us from acting” (Simpson 2017, 188). The participatory and dynamic nature of the Indigenous women in this story contrasts with the passivity and vice-prone male attitude,

especially with regard to alcohol. Although they are not employed as predominant characters, the intangible presence of the protagonist's grandmother and mother are such pillars in this story that, upon leaving, they generate an apocalypse:

I knew the apocalypse had started before he said her name.

"Dorothy."

"What? What did she do now?"

Grandma threw her cards on the table. It sounded like an open palm slap. She was standing, her voice beginning to shake. I knew then that she knew, too, she could read the obituary listed in Travis' eyes. (Dimaline 2016, 32)

The premature death of the young protagonist's mother is thus an apocalypse within an apocalypse, a familial meltdown within the global meltdown that will be disclosed only later, spawning a conjunction of events leading to the introduction of a new character. Dorothy's best friend is "an eight-foot Cree I used to call Auntie Dave" (Dimaline 2016, 32) with "manicured hands" and "elongated eyelashes" sporting "a champagne-colored dress, long unbraided hair, wavy in the back like a dark gown" and looking "like a mad queen in her [...] crown" (Dimaline 2016, 35). It is Dave who takes the place of his late mother, a queer man with no blood ties to the protagonist's family of origin, who rightfully enters his life not only as a parental figure but also as a mentor and thus beginning to weave the kinship fabric of *wâhkôhtowin*.

By undertaking the responsibility of raising Semaa, Auntie Dave takes care of him through the application of heterogeneous rituals, a practice that cements the building of kinship. In this sense, for instance, references to Catholicism are numerous and scattered throughout the text; all along colonial times, one of the means employed to instill European standards of living was the coerced enrollment of Native children in residential schools, Christian institutions whose survivors ended up internalizing homophobia and transphobia while, at the same time, often embracing the religion of white settlers.

Métis spirituality is decidedly varied in that some communities are Catholic or Protestant, while others practice spiritual syncretism by blending Christianity with traditional Native customs, and Métis children are and were often told stories that interweave Indigenous narratives with Catholicism (see, among other sources: *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*). In syncretic practice, rituals are specific and strictly observed, such as with respect to the deceased. Death is followed by a four-day mourning period punctuated by prayers, offerings, or retreat, as occurs upon Dorothy's passing: "Dave let me be for the first three days, but then he started waking me up to eat on the fourth" (Dimaline 2016, 34). Dave's house itself is located, not coincidentally, "on the hill behind St. Anne, where my mother was buried" (Dimaline 2016, 33); the saint is, in fact, revered by many Catholic Indigenous Canadians. Through her, they honor Elders, in particular grandmothers who, like St. Anne, are seen as healers, "a more than human relative, like ancestors, earth or water" (McFarlan Miller 2022, n.p.). After allowing room for the young boy to

recover, and more specifically on his seventh birthday, the inflection point of the tale unravels through an act of storytelling. This is the juncture at which the time of the narrative is disclosed to the reader, as the events leading up to Semaa's birthday could undoubtedly fit a narrative genre that is not necessarily futuristic or speculative. Such a choice to reveal the time frame in the concluding part of the story, thus, makes its entire account more universally applicable, similar to the lack of specificity in the protagonist's identity. Native apocalypse makes its way between the lines at a slow yet ineradicable pace through the vicissitudes of the characters who, as observed, trace the issues consequential to colonization in a past, present and, future that lie on the same reading plane. And it is in the final story told by Dave that these temporal layers are projected into a future of reclamation:

He took a deep breath and we started our walk. As we walked, he told me a story. "The generation before last were the final people to live on Old Earth. The water had flooded the lands and was poisoned by the work of man." It was the migration story of how we came to New Earth a hundred years ago. I'd heard it many times in my youth. All kids do. Indigenous people, we were hit pretty hard. Not only did we lose our land, but we were the last to be evacuated to New Earth. A last priority. (Dimaline 2016, 35)

Historical events and their narration constitute the cornerstone of *wâhkôhtowin* in that they not only offer practical instances of ethical community life but also chart the field of individual responsibility within it. As suggested by the etymological analysis previously offered, walking is a strategy aimed at the dual task of reconstructing and practicing IK (Indigenous Knowledge) through the dissemination of information and caring for ancestral territories in their holistic dimensions of landscape, ecology and life forms abused by colonial extractivism (Dickson-Hoyle et al. 2022). For this reason, it is not always possible to draw a line between Indigenous knowledge and its storytelling; both are means of guidance and discovery towards past and future history. At the same time, the very act of storytelling is tightly bound up with that of listening, turning the two practices into an active exercise of kinship-building, in which storytellers have extensive room to tailor their stories. In this narrative cycle, the personal becomes collective and vice versa (Kovach 2009). Thus, the ceremony of storytelling becomes an act of 'survivance,' a term coined by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor to indicate the merging of survival and endurance in a dynamic practice of production and dissemination of Native stories. Two features of this concept should be noted. On the one hand, the distancing from the mere state of survival commonly associated with feelings of victimhood and passivity in favor of a notion of "active presence" (Vizenor 2008, vii), which the author considers, among other things, the foundation of contemporary Native literature. On the other hand, the deliberately imprecise and inventive nature of the word sabotages linguistic rules in a reappropriated and *mestizo* English, serving as a decolonizing endeavor. Survivance is a teaching that Dave shares with Semaa through the act of walking and storytelling, introducing an important theme in the constitution of such extended kinship in its queer sense:

Two-Spirits [...] met and decided on a few necessities for our people's wellbeing. And we decided on families to carry out the task of keeping them safe for the next seven generations. My family was one of them [...] Dorothy left us all a great gift when she had my name put on your birth certificate [...]. It meant that if anything happened, you would come to me, thank the Jesus. It also meant, that on paper and in spirit, I had a son. (Dimaline 2016, 36)

Paper and spirit embody the bond of this kinship of response-ability, resolved by an individual's willingness and formalized by Indigenous law. The projection of a scenario where Two-Spirit communities play a key role in the Native societal fabric serves as one of the strategies that Indigenous futurists may apply as a form of identity recovery within the framework of Resurgence since, as Simpson remarks,

[...] creating life comes in many forms, not just from the womb, and it creates a space where all genders can have valuable, ethical, consensual, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships with all aspects of creation [...] (Simpson 2017, 121)

If kinship and governance patterns within many First Nations were historically built on gender-balanced systems, thereby standing as a hindrance to the implementation of European domination, colonial heteropatriarchal nuclear family units disrupted not only such Native systems by naturalizing men's dominance over women but also over queer and Two-Spirit individuals. Cree writer and academic Billy-Ray Belcourt argues that “[t]o be queer and native and alive is to repeatedly bear witness to worlds being destroyed, over and over again” (Belcourt 2016, n.p.) and recalls that the term “Two-Spirit” came to be officially introduced in 1990 to denote the coexistence of a male and female identity within the same person (Belcourt 2016, 28). Belcourt himself, however, moving away from the cisnormative frame, has voiced his own preference towards the designation of “queer indigeneity” as “[it] does things that two-spiritness cannot: it is a floating signifier without referent and without any agreed upon meaning; it refuses to attach to any one history, biology, or geography” (Belcourt 2016, 29). Dimaline employs the terms “gay” and “Two-Spirit” rather than “queer” as synonyms through the narrator's perspective: “[my mom] was always keen on me spending time with Auntie Dave. Clearly she knew I was gay before I knew what that even meant” (Dimaline 2016, 32); “I knew about Two-Spirited people: the people who held both male and female genders” (Dimaline 2016, 36). The author takes a clear stance on the importance of queer representation in Indigenous stories by imagining a future in which the Two Spirits community is responsible for the buffalo, the most valuable resource the earth can offer Native peoples:

“Do you know about the White Buffalo prophecy? [...] Did you also know that the White Buffalo holds a special place for us? They say that if you see a White Buffalo in a dream then you are truly Two-Spirited.”

[...] Out of the trees came two huge buffalo, so pale they looked constructed of cloud and chalk. [...] “We are the keepers of the White Buffalo on New Earth. I was the last before your mother took that snowmobile to heaven.” (Dimaline 2016, 37)

For almost all Indigenous Nations of the North American continent, ‘buffalo’ does not simply represent Native animals, but a symbol of wholeness: “You can’t understand about nature, about the feeling we have toward it, unless you understand how close we were to the buffalo” (Lame Deer 1972, 130). Furthermore, the legend of the White Buffalo is strongly rooted in most Indigenous oral traditions throughout the continent. *Ptesáŋwiŋ*, or White Buffalo Woman, is a Lakota<sup>7</sup> sacred figure whose prophecies brought prosperity to the community; especially *hun̄kalowan̄pi*, the rite of kin generation, a practice that fostered peace among different communities through face painting that symbolized a rebirth toward new responsibilities and relationships (Epes Brown 1953). The importance of this animal is reflected in many facets of Indigenous culture, as Chelsea Vowel recalls in explaining that the motto “Education is the new buffalo” once indicated the crucial role of the study of past traditions for Canada’s Indigenous peoples in order to ensure “our survival and ability to support ourselves, as once Plains nations supported ourselves as buffalo peoples” (Vowel 2022, 12). The Métis scholar argues, however, that this view subscribes to the acceptance of the disappearance of pre-contact ways of life. Instead, she promotes the notion that *Buffalo is the new Buffalo*, the apt title of her 2022 anthology, in whose introduction she clarifies that such a perspective is actually based on a willingness to

[...] work in wâhkôhtowin (expanded kinship) to restore our reciprocal obligations to our human and nonhuman kin. Instead of accepting that the buffalo and our ancestral ways will never come back, what if we simply ensure that they do? (Vowel 2022, 13)

## Conclusion

Western science fiction often and willingly projects colonial dynamics into post-apocalyptic futures, employing a totalizing perspective that never seems keen to probe the depths and responsibilities entangled with environmental disaster (Yuen 2012). This anthropocentric narrative is not customarily focused on elaborating ways of life that are accountable for the current climate emergency, and it seldom adopts an Indigenous stance whereby the relationship between the earth and living beings is traditionally rooted in a kinship of responsibility. Indigenous futurism, with its reinvention and overlapping of past and future, brings racial disparities to light by rewriting TEK – Traditional Ecological Knowledge – as an ancient antidote in a contemporary language against the backdrop of utopian visions of hope and salvific cultural reappropriation. The fact that legends are not born but can be made, as Dimaline argues, unsurprisingly warns that stories may be shaped, told, internalized, and transmitted to subvert catastrophic fate and ultimately shape ‘kinscapes’ in which all living beings are interconnected and responsible for one another. The last lines of the story are the beginning of a future glimpse of possibility: “I walked into the clearing with a weight much different than the one left by my mother’s death; a weight that balanced out the ache and made the ordinary extraordinary” (Dimaline 2016, 3).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Peculiar to the North American Native peoples mainly settled in the territory that is now Canada.
- <sup>2</sup> The term Métis is used to refer to people of mixed Euro-American and Indigenous descent that in Canada designates one of the three main legally recognized Aboriginal communities, along with First Nations and Inuit.
- <sup>3</sup> Holders of ancestral knowledge mainly disseminated through oral storytelling.
- <sup>4</sup> Indigenous populations settled in the Great Lakes region of Canada and the U.S..
- <sup>5</sup> Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg are the coastal people of the territory comprising present-day southern and central Ontario, Canada.
- <sup>6</sup> Literally “the people of the river,” First Nations of the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, Canada.
- <sup>7</sup> Plains Nation of what is now the northern U.S.

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