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Métis Canadian writer Cherie Dimaline's novel set in a dystopian future titled *The Marrow Thieves* presents a society plagued by troubled sleep. This article examines Dimaline's work in the context of a "sleep crisis", which scholar Diletta de Cristofaro defines as "the notion that our modern society chronically struggles with a lack of sleep" (de Cristofaro). In *The Marrow Thieves*, settlers have lost the ability to dream due to their treatment of nature and the environment; the land is sick and incapacitated due the constant demands imposed on it. The text presents humanity caught in lingering sadness after floods and earthquakes, as sickness has become rampant, and people find that they could no longer dream (Dimaline 29). Indigenous people are hunted in the novel for their bone marrows, where dreams are located. The Recruiters, who are government officials responsible for capturing Indigenous people and extracting their bone marrow, believe that this

would restore the capacity to dream among settlers. In the novel, dreaming is closely tied to health, wellness, and survival itself, which depends on the capacity to dream.

Dimaline begins the novel with an epigraph from the writer William S. Burroughs – “The way to kill a man or a nation is to cut off his dreams, the way the whites are taking care of the Indians: killing their dreams, their magic, their familiar spirits” (qtd in Dimaline). The use of this epigraph makes it explicit that Dimaline views dreaming as a political act, one of resistance and decolonization in the context of Indigenous nations and their claims to sovereignty. In the novel, the protagonist Frenchie is a teenager on the run from Recruiters, with a group of people who are headed to the North where they expect to find answers. Frenchie and his found family often gather around a fire and listen to the head of the group, Miigwans, as he tells them Story. “We needed to remember Story. It was his job to set the memory in perpetuity” (Dimaline 25). Dimaline uses Story with a capitalized ‘S’ in each instance, and without the definite article ‘the’, drawing the reader’s attention to the centrality of Story but also its capacity to embody multiple stories within. Miigwans tells Story to the members in the family old enough to be able to receive and carry within them the darkest bits of history. Here, Story, like the dreams, are carried within the members of the family, the collective memory of the community passed on and transmitted through the act of receiving.

The text offers us one of the fundamental tenets of a way of living, proffering hope, dreams, and the act of dreaming itself as a form of resistance to violence. In the telling of Story, there is also a legacy received by the youngest members, who haven’t lived through Story, but carry it within them nonetheless through the act of listening. In *Dancing on our Turtle’s Back*, scholar Leanne Simpson explains Gdi-nweninaa: “Listening to the sound of our voice means that we need to listen to our full bodies – our hearts, our minds, and our physicality. It requires a full presence of being” (61). The listeners in the circle listen “with every cell” (Dimaline 19) as Miigwans tells the Story, fully present with their whole selves to receive the meanings that are most essential to survival, while also gathering the will to move forward in their arduous journey. The legacy of transmitting knowledge and experience continues amidst all the forces of colonization, even when the Indigenous people in the novel are being hunted. Collective listening, remembering, and dreaming are acts of resistance that inform the process of resurgence in the novel.

Dimaline’s speculative fiction proposal for a society that struggles with sleep is the concept of collective dreaming and its significance for hope and resistance. Studies have determined symbolic resonances and cultural contexts that are present in experiences of different sleep phenomena within the same culture or community. Dimaline’s novel, however, draws a relationship between a dream that is a function of sleep and the capacity to dream itself as one that is significant and essential to being human. Dimaline exemplifies the concept of dreaming as tied to the life-world around us, and that exploitation and loss of the sustaining aspects of the land and the environment can have catastrophic effects on the human mind.

In an instance demonstrated in the text that insightfully and powerfully brings together life-forms and dreaming, we see that the protagonist Frenchie finds himself in front of a moose, whom he contemplates killing so that his family would have enough meat for a week. He thinks: “It was like

he was a hundred years old, like he had watched all of this happen. Imagine being here through it all – the wars, the sickness, the earthquakes, the schools – only to come to this?” (Dimaline 49). The moose has a history which transcends his immediate purpose, and Frenchie’s dilemma and his decision to lower his rifle comes from the imagination of that story. The following chapter opens with the line, “In a way, I got that moose. He visited me in my dreams” (Dimaline 52). The choice made by the protagonist in the novel offers an engagement with life-forms that moves beyond consumption, and suggests that there is more than one way to gain and absorb the different resources around us. Frenchie dreams of the moose, thus making peace with his choice to refrain from killing an animal that would serve as sufficient food for over a week’s time. Dreams also function as a form of resolution and affirmation in the text, a space where the mind grapples with ethical life choices.

Dimaline’s novel suggests that a strong relationship can exist between dreaming and collective memory. Dreaming is only possible when one is connected to life-forms and the environment in sustainable and engaged ways that perceive utility as a process of sharing and exchange rather than one of taking limitlessly without any accountability. Imagining the ability to dream as a form of biopower opens up a way of rethinking the crisis of sleep in modern society as self-induced, but also as interconnected with humanity’s relationship to the land and other life-forms. As much as the novel is about the strength, survival and hope of Indigenous youth, it also invites readers to consider Indigenous science, stories, and philosophies as pathways to healing.

Works Cited

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