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The "Colonial Anthropocene" Imaginary: Re-Imagining Climate Change in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018)

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ABSTRACT

Climate imaginaries – collectively held visions of future climate change – take shape in a variety of media and genres, from computer models to poetry. While some climate imaginaries have proven particularly enduring and have managed to attain a hegemonic status in climate change discourse – for example, the "techno-market" imaginary and the "climate apocalypse" imaginary – others remain marginalized. Drawing on Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018), this article theorizes the "colonial Anthropocene" imaginary as an alternative imaginary and examines its co-production at the intersection of academic discourses, activism, and literature. The "colonial Anthropocene" imaginary generally and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* specifically negotiate ideological tensions that have emerged in the discourse on the Anthropocene and forge a connection between the seemingly exceptional event of anthropogenic climate change and a historical sequence of colonial violence and forced displacement of Indigenous peoples. As one of this imaginary's manifestations in the literary domain, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018) embeds climate change into a longer story that begins with settler colonialism on the North American continent by drawing on an equally old genre: the Indian captivity narrative. Significantly, the "colonial Anthropocene" imaginary is a reaction to the impulse toward claims to universality resurfacing in the discourse on the Anthropocene, particularly in the notion of "the human."

KEYWORDS

Settler colonialism, social (in)justice, activism, universalism, speculative fiction

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Introduction

Panic sets in on a First Peoples' reservation in what is currently northern Canada in Anishinaabe author Waubgeshig Rice's novel *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018), when supplies from "the South" (3) fail to arrive, telecommunications collapse, and the infrastructure connecting the community to the power grid stops providing electricity. The Anishinaabe community must rely on Indigenous traditions, such as hunting, wood gathering, and rationing, to survive the winter. In particular, the community's young members perceive this breakdown – caused by climate change – as an unprecedented event. However, Aileen, the community's eldest member and spiritual guide, explains that the disruptions the community experiences are not new. They were always part of her world and, more importantly, the world of her ancestors:

> [W]hen young people come over . . . They say that this is the end of the world. The power's out and we've run out of gas and no one's come up from down south. They say the food is running out and that we're in danger. There's a word they say too – ah … pock … ah … Yes, apocalypse! What a silly word . . . Our world isn't ending. It already ended. It ended when the Zhaagnaash [white person] came into our original home down south on that bay and took it from us. (Rice 149)

Aileen makes it clear that the Indigenous community had already had such experiences due to their displacement and resettlement on the reservation. These disruptions have always had the same cause: the "Zhaagnaash," that is, the European settlers. Ultimately, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* frames climate change as a product of colonial exploitation and embeds it in a process that began with the oppression endured by previous generations when European settlers began displacing Anishinaabe First Nations. It is a cyclical process – as Aileen notes, "We've had that *over and over*" (Rice 150; my emphasis) – and yet developmental at the same time, as the crisis the community is now experiencing surpasses all previous ones. As the narrator notes, when Evan, the novel's protagonist, who lives on the reservation with his family, discovers the first dead body, "[e]ven in a place as familiar with tragedy as a northern reserve, it had reached levels he [Evan] had never experienced" (153). Thus, the novel establishes a trajectory leading directly from the arrival of the "Zhaagnash" to the "original home down south" of the First Nations peoples – that is, the south of what is currently Canada – to twenty-first-century climate change, representing it as what Potawatomi scholar and activist Kyle Powys Whyte refers to as an "intensified episode of colonialism" ("Indigenous Climate" 156).

By casting the colonial horrors committed against Indigenous peoples in apocalyptic terms, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* draws on and contributes to Indigenous studies discourses, which have long theorized the onset of colonization as apocalyptic for Indigenous communities and nations. "The hardships many nonIndigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured

already . . . : ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration," Whyte explains ("Indigenous Science" 226). Despite this, he emphasizes that Indigenous authors have strongly resisted "apocalypse" as a narrative framework (226–27).[1]

A similar understanding of climate change was articulated by the activists of the #NoDAPL protests. The Standing Rock Camp became the birthplace of a grassroots resistance movement. Tribal citizens of the Standing Rock Lakota Nation and other Lakota, Nakota and Dakota citizens established a spirit camp on April 1, 2016, alongside the planned route of the 1,172-mile Dakota Access Pipe Line (DAPL), which was intended to transport fracked oil from the Bakken and Three Forks oil fields to refineries in Illinois. This movement is just one of many social movements that have been at the forefront of the struggle against the destructive effects of extractive industries in recent years. It quickly gained significant media attention. Many supporters joined environmentalists and Lakota people to stop the construction of the pipeline, which risked affecting the main source of drinking water for a large portion of North Dakota, South Dakota, and tribal nations.[2]

I argue that *Moon of the Crusted Snow* has to be read against this background. The novel plays into wider discourses that are evident in theoretical discussions and in political activism for sovereignty and social justice on the ground. Together, these rest on the same premise: It is with the arrival of the settlers to the so-called "New World" that the Anthropocene begins, and it is the beginning of colonization that initiates a process that leads to twenty-first-century climate change. I propose to look beyond the level of the individual text and examine how *Moon of the Crusted Snow* participates in the co-production of an imaginary that emerges at the intersection of academic discourse, activism, and literature, which I coin the "colonial Anthropocene" imaginary. Climate imaginaries are collectively held visions of future climate change, and they are increasingly being acknowledged for their impact on shaping climate knowledge, either "fixing or unsettling" particular future visions (Davoudi and Machen 210). While some climate imaginaries, such as techno-market and climate apocalypse (Levy and Spicer; McQueen; Fagan), have attained a hegemonic status in climate change discourse, others remain marginalized.

In this article, I argue that the colonial Anthropocene imaginary generally and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* specifically allow for an imaginative shift in the

[1] Various Indigenous scholars have underlined the point that Western notions of the apocalypse differ from non-Indigenous conceptions. For instance, Grace Dillon states that "[it] is almost commonplace to think that the Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously has already taken place" (8). Lawrence Gross, too, argues that "along with many other Native American peoples, the Anishinaabe have seen the end of our world" (437).

[2] See Streeby (34–69) for a more detailed account of the #NoDAPL movement as well as other struggles over water, oil, and resource extraction.

understanding of the Anthropocene and decolonizing future imaginaries. The texts co-producing the colonial Anthropocene imaginary challenge two major premises on which the dominant discourse on the Anthropocene and its "most salient ecological manifestation, global climate change" (Heise, "Comparative" 22), rest – the assumption that climate change is entirely unprecedented and the notion that human beings, as an undifferentiated collective, are responsible for the rupture of the Earth system. My argument unfolds in two steps. I begin with a general discussion of the colonial Anthropocene imaginary, in which I elaborate on why the concept of "the imaginary" is useful for considering collectively held visions of future climate change that are co-produced by different cultural forms, and in different knowledge domains and sociopolitical fields. The imaginary has become a ubiquitous concept in contemporary thought; however, the everyday use of the term masks conflicting views on what the imaginary is and what it can do.[3] Although a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this article, in the first part, I offer some conceptual clarity regarding the debate about the imaginary. In the second part, I analyze *Moon of the Crusted Snow* as a literary manifestation of the colonial Anthropocene imaginary. *Moon of the Crusted Snow* embeds climate change into a longer story, which begins with settler colonialism on the North American continent, by drawing on an equally old genre: the Indian captivity narrative. By doing so, the novel problematizes the universalism implicated in the concept of the Anthropocene and contends that it is not "the human" but rather a specific kind of human – that is, the European colonizer – who is responsible for causing climate change.

The "Colonial Anthropocene" Imaginary

The Anthropocene is a powerful concept that has sparked countless controversies, not only in the humanities but also in the natural sciences. The close link between the current planetary crisis and colonialism has found wide resonance in the scholarly discourse, particularly in criticism of the Anthropocene for which scholars have posited various different start dates. The most prominent are the invention of the steam engine in 1784, proposed by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer ("The 'Anthropocene'"), and the mid-twentieth century, proposed by the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG), an interdisciplinary research group dedicated to the study of the Anthropocene as part of the geologic time scale. The start date is crucial in shaping the understanding of the Anthropocene as "[e]ach proposal for a starting date gives a different historical account, pointing to different criteria and kinds of

[3] See Arjun Appadurai, who argues that "[t]he image, the imagined, the imaginary . . . are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice" (31).

causality" (Bergthaller and Horn 25).[4] The start date associated with the beginning of European colonization is significant particularly for the production of the colonial Anthropocene imaginary.

In a 2015 article published in *Nature*, Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin proposed that the start date for the Anthropocene should be pushed back to the early seventeenth century and the advent of colonialism. The arrival of Europeans in the lands that would come to be known as the Americas "led to the largest human population replacement in the past 13,000 years, the first global trade networks linking Europe, China, Africa and the Americas, and the resultant mixing of previously separate biotas, known as the Columbian Exchange" (174). Similarly, Heather Davis and Zoe Todd argue that "the Anthropocene is not a new event, but is rather the continuation of practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with a literal transformation of the environment, that have been at work for the last five hundred years" (761). Whyte also suggests that climate change is "an intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism" and that "colonially induced environmental changes" have already "altered the ecological conditions that supported Indigenous peoples' cultures, health, economies, and political self-determination" before colonization ("Indigenous Climate" 153–54). In this sense, the Anthropocene is temporally analogous to settler colonialism. Notably, on July 13, 2023, the environmental scientist Erle Ellis announced his resignation from the Anthropocene Working Group. As he clarified in an open letter, his resignation was a direct result of the group's narrow definition of the Anthropocene, which sets the mid-twentieth century as the starting date, thus neglecting the longer history of colonial environmental exploitation ("Why I Resigned").

Macarena Gómez-Barris was the first to explicity use the term "colonial Anthropocene" to critique the inadequacy of "the nomenclature of the Anthropocene," arguing that it both "universalize[s] its effects" and obscures the "ongoing consequences of colonialism" (2). She advocates for understanding planetary climate change and environmental destruction within a framework that "spans more than five centuries of colonial domination" (2). Gómez-Barris grounds her argument in decolonial theorizations that emphasize coloniality such as Sylvia Wynter's "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" (2003) and Anibal Quijano's classic essay "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000). She also points to Kathryn Yusoff's terminology of *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, which "offers an explosion of the singular and names the racial logic that underpins planetary crises" (9). Gómez-Barris's notion of the "colonial Anthropocene" has a similar goal, "namely

[4] For a detailed discussion of the possible start dates, see James (1–24) and Bergthaller and Horn (19–34).

to destabilize how knowledge about ecological crisis is temporalized, spatialized, and already locked within a regime of what Anibal Quijano first termed the coloniality of power" (9).

What all of these scholars have in common, despite representing different academic disciplines, is that they, like Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* or the #NoDAPL activists, co-produce the same climate imaginary. Hence, whereas Gómez-Barris's theorization provides a useful starting point for thinking about the continuities of climate change and colonization, this article's primary aim is not to intervene in the same debate as Gómez-Barris, Yusoff, and the other scholars mentioned above. Nor is it to debate which term is more appropriate to name the current epoch. Instead, this article examines how multiple texts, understood in the broadest sense, participate in the co-production of collectively held visions of future climate change.

As my introduction shows, the idea of a link between climate change and colonialism, as well as questioning the universal "we," has not only entered specialized academic discourses but also taken hold in other more public forms of writing, such as fiction. Novels such as Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), Rita Indiana's *Tentacle* (2018), Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* (2018), and Darcie Little Badger's *A Snake Falls to Earth* (2021) mobilize the genre of speculative fiction to gesture toward the significance of Indigenous resurgence in finding an alternative to the devastating effects of settler colonialism. These texts have gained a broad readership and some are even considered for screen adaptations. According to *New York Times* critic Alexandra Alter, writing about the growing popularity and publicity of genre fiction published by Indigenous writers, these "authors are gaining recognition in a corner of the literary world that has traditionally been white, male and Eurocentric, rooted in Western mythology." Dimaline and Roanhorse even "signed multi-book deals with major publishing houses" ("We've Already Survived an Apocalypse"). Sequels to Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* and Roanhorse's *The Trail of Lightning* have already been published, and Rice's *Moon of the Turning Leaves*, the sequel to *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, was only recently released in October 2023.

In a similar vein, Amitav Ghosh's environmental non-fiction work *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021) reframes climate changes as the result of a "war of terraforming" waged by settlers against Indigenous peoples.[5] Mi'gmaw director Jeff Barnaby's zombie horror film *Blood Quantum* (2019) and Métis director Danis Goulet's dystopian film *Night Raiders* (2021) are just two examples that showcase how the medium of film links climate change to long histories of colonial

[5] See my discussion of *The Marrow Thieves*, *Tentacle*, and *The Nutmeg's Curse* as manifestations of the colonial Anthropocene imaginary.

environmental exploitation. Moreover, Indigenous activists have produced numerous cultural forms linking past and ongoing operations of settler colonialism to current environmental struggles. For instance, the eight-minute documentary *Mni Wiconi: The Stand at Standing Rock* (2016) focuses on the battle by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, emphasizing Standing Rock's deep historical roots in settler colonialism. The broad variety of digital media through which movements such as #NoDAPL co-produce the colonial Anthropocene imaginary is particularly noteworthy, including TikToks, podcasts, manifestos, photography, and film, disseminated through the internet and social media, allowing less privileged producers to reach a broad audience.

The concept of the imaginary is well-suited to conceptualizing how these different texts forge a similar connection and how they shape ideas about climate change. Winfried Fluck's concept of the "cultural imaginary," which refers to the images, affects, and desires projected by a particular culture at a specific historical moment, is useful for considering shared visions of future climate change. I consider the colonial Anthropocene imaginary as part of a more general cultural imaginary. However, unlike Fluck, I conceive of climate imaginaries as abstractions of assemblages of texts in the broadest sense, which do not exist outside representation, are co-produced by different media, and circulated between different knowledge domains and social fields.[6] Hence, important to this process of co-production is the positioning of speculative fiction not just as a literary genre in the narrow sense but as a critical mode of envisioning futures at the intersection of science, activism, literature, and the arts. What ultimately allows the colonial Anthropocene imaginary to manifest in different cultural forms and reach broad audiences is its dependence on an adapted form of the template of "the declensionist narrative" (Heise, *Imagining* 7). This template attributes the environmental crisis to the settlers' disruption of Indigenous relationships with their lands and advocates for the protection of ecosystems from the colonizers' interference where possible. By simplifying intricate processes into a simpler storyline, the template facilitates transferability across different media, knowledge domains, and social fields.

There are at least three major constituents of the colonial Anthropocene imaginary. First, the texts co-producing the colonial Anthropocene imaginary link the onset of the Anthropocene with colonization. According to Zoltán B. Simon, there is no question that the Anthropocene "*is perceived* and *conceptually* captured as radical novelty" in certain discourses, and specifically in its formulation in Earth system science (501; original emphasis). The concept of the Anthropocene was proposed within

[6] I build on research on the relationship between the imaginary and the medium in Media and Communication Studies and Science and Technology Studies. For more information on the approach to co-production, see Jasanoff. See also Simin Davoudi and Ruth Machen for a discussion of the relationship between climate imaginaries and different media.

Earth system science as a "conceptual effort to capture radical novelty," as it envisions the crossing of thresholds and planetary boundaries that would mean escaping the state of the Earth system in which human societies have evolved (502, 510). By contrast, the colonial Anthropocene imaginary participates in the "historical approach" to the Anthropocene, framing what is perceived as "radical novelty" (512) in certain discourses as a product of past and ongoing colonial exploitation and the ideologies that fuel it.

Second, the colonial Anthropocene imaginary emerged as a response to the impulse to universality resurfacing in the discourse on the Anthropocene, specifically in the notion of "the human." Numerous critics have called for the concept's interrogation and questioned whether this history of transformation applies equally to all humans. The Anthropocene "pose[s] a new task of negotiating the study of differences with the postulation of human universals" (Heise, "Comparative" 22). Indeed, long before the question of the human gained centrality within the Anthropocene discourse, Wynter has drawn attention to how the West has constituted humans throughout history. Wynter's work, as Katherine McKittrick aptly puts it, "patiently attends to the ways in which our specific conception of the human, Man, curtails alternative models of being, the fullness of our interrelated human realization, and a new science of human discourse" (2). For many scholars in the humanities, the *anthropos* represents the return of Enlightenment Man. Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that the global challenge of climate change requires a reevaluation of human differences. He proposes distinguishing between the human as *homo* and as *anthropos*. Accordingly, *homo* designates "humanity as a divided political subject" (173), that is, as Hannes Bergthaller and Eva Horn further explain, "differentiated by culture, gender, race, and economic situation" (70). Conversely, *anthropos* refers to the human as "a geological force, as a species, as a part of the history of life on this planet" (Chakrabarty 174). "The real challenge of thinking about the human in the Anthropocene," according to Bergthaller and Horn's summary of Chakrabarty's work, "consists precisely in the 'collision' of different conceptions of the human" (78). Rejecting the notion of the *anthropos* as a universal geologic agent, the colonial Anthropocene imaginary emphasizes that humanity is not universally implicated in the current climate crisis.

Finally, whereas the colonial Anthropocene imaginary mourns the severing of Indigenous peoples from their lands and relatives at the hands of settlers, portraying it as devastating not only to Indigenous peoples but also to the environment, this mourning is not seen as the sign of an end but as an opening for a new beginning. The texts co-producing the imaginary, particularly those emerging in the fictional and socio-political realms, envision the end of Euro-Western colonial ideology and instead

foreground Indigenous futurity, thereby gesturing toward the significance of Indigenous resurgence for finding alternatives to the devastating effects of the ongoing operations of settler colonialism.

Revamped Genre – The Captivity Narrative in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018)

Zooming in on one of its manifestations in the fictional domain, Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* is an example of how the genre of the novel co-produces the colonial Anthropocene imaginary. The novel creates productive frames for considering how ecological vulnerability is experienced unequally and links climate change to long histories of colonial environmental exploitation. Although the novel never explicitly references climate change, there are several hints that allow for the novel's "apocalyptic" event – the energy blackout and subsequent resource depletion – to be read in the broader context of an environmental crisis including the change in migratory behavior of birds addressed in the opening of the novel, as well as the harsh winter. Set in what is currently northern Canada, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* revolves around the life of a rural Anishinaabe First Nation that was forced to leave its homeland generations ago and settle on a reservation. The Anishinaabeg consist of several First Nations whose ancestral homeland is in what is currently Southern Canada near the Great Lakes. In the seventeenth century, European settlers displaced the community, which then escaped to the remote areas of northern Canada, near the Arctic Circle. On the one hand, the novel establishes continuity between climate change and the colonial past by having Aileen, as the elder of the community, articulate the community's cultural memory. On the other hand, it establishes continuity through its genre. The novel locates the beginning of the Anthropocene at the beginning of colonization, specifically the settlement of the Puritans on the North American continent. This is achieved by drawing upon the genre of the Indian captivity narrative.

The Indian captivity narrative is commonly known and credited by many critics as the first genuinely American genre that originated from the early colonies of the seventeenth century. According to Lisa M. Logan, Amy Shrager Lang, Nancy Armstrong, and Leonard Tennenhouse, among others, have argued that the Indian captivity narrative constitutes America's first unique literary form (465). This claim has been contested by Linda Colley, who argues that, "[l]ike much American exceptionalism," this claim "badly needs qualifying" (201). The genre was

> exported to North America, along with so much else, by seventeenth century English emigrants . . . [who] brought with them a knowledge of the abundant literature and sermonising that surrounded men and women captured at sea by Barbary corsairs and enslaved in North Africa. (201)

I read Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* as a twenty-first-century Indigenous rewriting of the captivity narrative. The novel draws upon the form of its seventeenth-century Puritan precursor, in which Indigenous people were often cast as cannibals supposedly doing the devil's work. Instead, it casts settlers as cannibals and follows the common pattern of the captivity narrative, which typically begins with freedom, followed by captivity, and ends with freedom, to dramatize the multi-generational experience of the capture of Indigenous people. By doing so, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* connects European, particularly British, colonization of the American continent to anthropogenic climate change.

The novel not only establishes continuity between colonialism and climate change through its form but also opens a dialogue with a much older genre, thus calling for an interrogation of this genre and its role in harming the planet's well-being. In this sense, the novel is what Lena Linne refers to as a "metageneric text," a

> passage or an entire text which, either implicitly or explicitly, comments on the genre of another text; as an instance of genre A (meta-level) which reflects upon genre B (object-level), it requires the simultaneous presence of two different genres in a single text. (58)

Moon of the Crusted Snow subversively comments on the genre of the Indian captivity narrative, exposing it as complicit in fostering Euro-Western colonial ideology, such as colonial conquest, cultural hierarchy, and supremacy, which have contributed to the emergence of the colonial Anthropocene.

The novel does not revolve around captivity in a literal sense, as in the traditional Indian captivity narrative, in which an individual (usually female) is abducted and forced to live in an Indigenous community. However, I suggest that the forced resettlement of the community to a reservation represents a metaphorical form of captivity. According to Pauline Turner Strong, captivity in abstract terms is "the assertion of power over a person or group resulting in dislocation, physical confinement, and social transformation" (339). Therefore, forced removal and relocation to a reservation are tantamount to captivity. Even if the community is not physically forced to remain on the reservation, the possibility of settling elsewhere is non-existent, as relocation off the reservation would mean giving up Indigenous sovereignty.

Moon of the Crusted Snow extends the scope of captivity found in the traditional narrative. The captivity that the Indigenous community endures spans several generations, beginning with the first encounter with colonizers centuries ago. "They made us come all the way up here. This is not our homeland!" (Rice 149) Aileen tells Evan, the novel's protagonist. She holds a special place in the community, as she is the only one who speaks Ojibwe fluently, and she passes on ancestral knowledge to the younger generations.

> When the ancestors of these Anishinaabe people were forced to settle in this unfamiliar land, distant from their traditional home near the Great Lakes, their culture withered under the pressure of the incomers' Christianity. The white authorities displaced them far to the north to make way for towns and cities. (53)

Aileen evokes the broader, real-world historical context of the seventeenth-century displacement and genocide of the First Nations people. Moreover, Aileen makes it clear that while they have sovereignty as an Indigenous community on the reservation, they do not consider the reservation their home. Being unable to return home because they are confined to the reservation makes them effectively captives.

Furthermore, captivity is closely tied to modernity, symbolized in the novel by "the South" (Rice 3). The reader is given only vague information about the South. However, the community relies entirely on the infrastructure provided by the South, which supplies it with energy and running water, technologies, such as cars, the Internet, and cellular services, and the food produced industrially and supplied by the supermarket, which makes hunting, gathering, and fishing obsolete. As such, captivity not only entails territorial restrictions, legally preventing the community from settling elsewhere, but it is also compounded by the community's overall dependence on the "modern systems" (212). The settlers' interference with the Anishinaabe, as *Moon of the Crusted Snow* highlights, forced the community into a state of almost total dependence on "the South." More specifically, according to Reuben Martens, it is a total dependence on "a petromodern/petrocultural supply chain" (205–06), which further reinforces the Anishinaabe's state of captivity. Martens explains that "free movement, even within this rather confined community, is linked to access and availability of petroleum," because its members move around primarily by snowmobiles and automobiles (201). "Like people in many other northern reserves, they would be isolated by the long, unforgiving season, confined to a small radius around the village that extended only as far as a snowmobile's half tank of gas" (Rice 11). While Martens focuses primarily on the energopolitical violence of settler colonialism in the novel, I consider the community's dependence on diesel supply as fundamental to its captivity. Petroleum is obtained exclusively from the South. Once the connection to the South is cut, the community suffers, particularly due to its dependence. The Anishinaabe have gradually moved further away from its traditional way of living and become more reliant on the "modern systems," leading to a total dependence on the South, which is now well established (212).

In addition to negotiating the community's state of captivity, the novel draws on a number of other generic conventions that suggest reading it as a twenty-first-century re-rewriting of the Indian captivity narrative. Whereas *Moon of the Crusted Snow* enters into a dialogue with the genre more generally, I draw specifically on one of the most famous captivity narratives, Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness*

of God (1682) (also known as *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*), to exemplify how the novel draws upon the genre of the traditional Indian captivity narrative. Rowlandson's autobiographical account of nearly twelve weeks of imprisonment attracted a wide readership and is the first full-length prose text published in North America by a female author and the first example of the Indian captivity narrative (Hornung 1213).

While many critics agree that "the cultural work of captivity tales has not been simple or uniform" (Ebersole 2), one of its functions was to justify colonization under the moniker of a divine mission. *Moon of the Crusted Snow* offers a subversive take on the genre, as it draws on it to argue that colonial ideology has caused the climate crisis. Colonization was justified, among others, by casting Indigenous people as savages and inferior to the colonizers. Rowlandson begins her text by describing an attack by the Algonquian alliance on her house, which killed several occupants. The opening paragraph begins with the murder of a "[m]other and a sucking [c]hild . . . knockt [sic] on the head" and describes those shot down, "stript [sic] naked, and split open" (68). Featuring a portrayal of a vulnerable female captive "attempts to establish the validity (even the inevitability) of the conquest, even as it inverts the power relations at work. The powerless figure of the female captive, signifying the national body [which] belies the fact of colonial aggression" (Huhndorf 171). Moreover, Rowlandson describes the Algonquians as villainous, using terms such as "Barbarous Creatures," "Infidels," and "merciless Heathens" (69–70). As Rafia Zafar points out, this language "de-personalized and de-humanized the 'enemy,'" enabling the justification of colonial attacks, and reinforcing the "split between 'His people' and a 'hellish' unbelieving enemy – a dichotomy that would pave the way for generations of certainty in Native American inferiority" (24).

Like Rowlandson, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* uses the same dichotomized language, reversing a clear us-versus-them binary. The novel, like the traditional captivity narrative, establishes a moral dichotomy between the Anishinaabe and the settlers. This moral dichotomy is particularly reinforced through the character of Justin Scott, a non-Native Southerner, who represents all the tropes of colonial oppression, such as conquering the land, exploiting the community's resources, and introducing alcohol into the community. From the first moment Scott is introduced, he represents a threat to the community. When Evan hears the "buzz of a snowmobile" (98), which he recognizes as not belonging to the community, he feels "butterflies in his gut" (98) and immediately associates the stranger's arrival with danger. Before Scott even comes to a stop and takes off his helmet, Evan feels "the driver's eyes on him through the helmet's visor" and thinks, "He's coming right for me" (99). Scott's casting as the ultimate villain is reinforced by his clothing and equipment. "Everything was black –

the snowmobile, the self, the boots, the suit, and the helmet" (99). In Western tradition, the color black evokes notions of villainy, evil, and death, echoing Rowlandson's description of Native Americans as "black creatures" (71).

Moreover, the novel goes a step further than Rowlandson's narrative, using another long-serving tool in the Western process of othering – cannibalism, which may not feature in Rowlandson but in the genre of the captivity narrative. However, in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, it is not the Native American but the settler who is cast as a cannibal. Scott turns into a cannibal once resources become scarce. Some members of the community die despite all efforts to keep all community members alive, and their bodies are kept in a makeshift morgue, where, at the height of the winter crisis, "twenty-one bodies [are] lined neatly in three rows" (155). Regardless of the fact that the corpses were friends and relatives of the community, Scott eats one in order to survive, using the dead body solely as a means of survival. *Moon of the Crusted Snow* thus reverses the cannibalism discourse by casting Scott as a cannibal. While Indigenous captors are represented as the "other" in the traditional captivity narrative, the settlers, in turn, become the "other" in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*.

As such, Scott is an allegory of settler colonialism conquering and exploiting the land. Indeed, one can read *Moon of the Crusted Snow* as a replay of historical terrors in a speculative future. However, I propose to consider his appearance not merely as an allegory but as a continuation of colonial violence that results from a process that started with the arrival of the first settlers. As noted above, the colonial Anthropocene imaginary is characterized by embedding climate change into a longer historical process that started with colonialism. *Moon of the Crusted Snow* places the singular events of the story world – that is, the disruptions that the community endures due to climate change, such as the blackout and Scott's arrival – into a longer history of violence that spans from the real world's past into the speculative future. The injustices that Scott commits – and, more importantly, the disruption that the community experiences due to the climate crisis – are framed as a continuation of colonial violence and not uncoupled from real-world Canada, as an allegorical reading would suggest.

Moon of the Crusted Snow, as a manifestation of the colonial Anthropocene imaginary, is characterized by moving the onset of the Anthropocene to the arrival of settlers on the North American continent. In doing so, it holds the settlers responsible for causing climate change, criticizing the notion of the *anthropos* as a universal agent equally implicated in the environmental crisis. Yet, the colonial Anthropocene imaginary offers a hopeful outlook toward the future. As with many other texts that co-produce this imaginary, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* promotes Indigenous ancestral knowledge and Indigenous traditions as a way out of the current conundrum. The

novel reverses the trajectory of modernity by casting what, in Western discourse, is considered nonmodern, i.e., Indigenous relationships to the land that affirm ancestral knowledges – as the key to the future and only way to survive. According to Mario Blaser, as "modernity becomes equated with the present, radical difference is (again) mapped out against a temporal grid, for if something is said to be nonmodern, its logical location is in the past" (549). By contrast, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* centers on the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge and traditions, suggesting that the traditions that are termed "nonmodern" in Western discourse better equip communities to survive the climate crisis.

As the "white man's modern systems" break down (Rice 212), relying on Indigenous traditions such as hunting, collecting wood, and rationing, is represented as the only way for the community to survive the winter. However, this proves difficult, as most of the younger generation in the community do not have the skills to survive on their own. As becomes clear through Aileen's character, much has already been lost in the process of cultural assimilation.

> Aileen was the last of the generation raised speaking Anishinaabemowin, with little English at all . . . She remembered the old ways and a lot of the important ceremonies. She had more knowledge than everyone else about the traditional lives of the Anishinaabeg. (146)

Moreover, many of the younger generation are reluctant to learn "the old ways." Some young community members, such as Kevin, Nick, and Evan, have "grown up in families that believed in teaching their kids how to live on the land and they kn[o]w how to hunt, fish, and trap" (78) and value learning from the older generation. For others, however, such as Evan's brother Cam, closeness to the white man's culture has resulted in a disconnection from culturally inherent knowledge and traditions. "When Evan had been out on the land learning real survival skills with his father and uncles as a teenager, . . . Cam had chosen to stay behind, learning simulated ones in video games" (34).

Thus, the novel also negotiates questions that have been central to the captivity narrative since its emergence: How close does the captive come to the captors, and as the captives are forced to live in another culture, are they able to retain their own cultural identity? Therefore, captivity triggers a process of reflection on one's own cultural identity. The captivity narrative, in its traditional form, required the captive to ward off the threat of another culture by preserving ties to modernity. Rice's novel poses similar questions; however, in this context, modernity is represented as the threat. In the genre's function of negotiating such tension, the subversive potential of rewriting the genre of the captivity narrative becomes particularly evident. The novel reflects a constant tension between assimilation to modern culture and

awareness of lost Indigenous culture. Wai Chee Dimock, who analyzes several passages of Rowlandson's narrative, shows how the "racial binary of us versus them remains in effect no longer with uniform strength" (18) and can become blurry. Furthermore, Dimock notes that Rowlandson was capable of "code switch[ing] so flexibly among Indians" (33). Similar to Rowlandson's narrative, the line between Indigenous and modern culture becomes blurry in Rice's novel as the younger generation has lost much of the traditional knowledge and practices.

Ultimately, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* stages a ruptured relationship between members of the community and the land, their elders, and their children through the hand of the settlers. What Nishnaabeg poet, critic, and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes for the Nishnaabeg holds true also for the novel's community:

> A great deal of the colonizer's energy has gone into breaking the intimate connection of Nishnaabeg bodies (and minds and spirits) to each other and to the practices and associated knowledges that connect us to land, because this is the base of our power. (41).

The community's disconnection from Indigenous knowledge and traditions is clearly presented in the novel as a result of what Evan describes as "the pull of the negative influences around [them]" (Rice 5), meaning the modern world. Modernity has held the community captive since the first resettlement in the reservation, forcing the community to assimilate to the "other" culture. The only way to deal with the collapse of the "modern systems" (212) and climate crisis, according to *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, is to resort to Indigenous traditions.

As with Rowlandson's narrative, Rice's novel ends on a hopeful note regarding the future. In the end, the community manages to revive lost knowledge and traditions. Although the death toll rises steadily, communal sense strengthens, and ties to ancestral knowledge and practices are revived. Indeed, as the novel affirms, "people like Aileen, her parents, and a few others had kept the old ways alive in secret," ensuring the future of the community (53).

> The skills they needed to preserve in this northern terrain, far from their original homeland farther south, were proud knowledge held close through the decades of imposed adversity. They were handed down to those in the next generation willing to learn. (48)

Although the novel clearly stresses the importance of preserving traditional relationships with the land, the Ojibwe language, and the relationship between younger members of the community and elders like Aileen, it is important to note that it does not advocate a return to the past. Laura Maria De Vos's theorization of the "spiralic resurgence of cultural traditions and ancestral knowledges" (2) is useful for thinking about the novel's relationship between past, present, and future. Disrupting the teleological progression from past to future, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* "emphasizes the

relationship across time between related, transformed experiences and allows for a dynamic return and rebirth of the past into the future" (5-6). Accordingly, this relationship is not "merely one of repeating a sterile past, but one of an unstoppable continuation of peoplehoods, transformed in and for each moment, always with an eye on creating a thriving future for Indigenous peoples" (5). Alternatively, as Simpson puts it by drawing on the Nishnaabeg word *biidaaban*, "the present . . . is a colliding of the past and the future. Everyday embodiment is therefore a mechanism for ancient beginnings" (193).

This understanding of time and the possibility for a new beginning then comes particularly to the fore in the final chapter of the novel. The surviving characters walk into the forest and away from the settlers' captivity. "[T]hey refused to wither completely, and a core of dedicated people had worked tirelessly to create their own settlement away from [the] town" (212), capturing the determination of this Anishinaabe First Nation people to survive and keep their culture alive. "They reached a clearing that led to a path through the bush. They stepped onto the trail, one by one, to begin this new life nestled deep in the heart of Anishinaabe territory" (213). The path symbolizes a new beginning and the way to a hopeful future away from modernity. This hope is underlined by the novel's epilogue, entitled "Ziigwaan" ("Spring"). It is only then that the novel suggests that the captivity has ended. The survivors "decided to take control of their own destiny" (212). Indigenous traditions have saved the community the first time they were removed and have had to adapt to their new circumstances. Similarly, their self-sufficiency and close relationship to their ancestral knowledge will save the community in the novel's present.

With this ending, where the old infrastructure is left behind for a new beginning, the novel gestures toward the end of Euro-Western colonial ideology. By dramatizing the collapse of the "modern systems," (212) the novel exposes the failure of modernity's "imaginary of progress to produce any kind of a future that remotely resembles a livable world" (Smith and Young 13). Instead, the novel foregrounds Indigenous futurity. *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, by rewriting the Indian captivity narrative, imaginatively stages the repatriation of those once captured and the end of a captivity that, according to the novel, began hundreds of years ago, persists to this day, and has been justified by texts such as Rowlandson's work. Although the Anishinaabe community does not return to its homeland, it is able to leave the reservation and, as is suggested in the novel, the confinements of modernity, as it no longer relies on the South. The novel follows the pattern of a traditional captivity narrative, beginning with freedom, followed by captivity, and ultimately ending with freedom. Hope for the future lies specifically with the generation that is able to relearn the ancestral traditions and practices and, more importantly, will be able to carry that knowledge

forward into the future, cherishing a dynamic relationship between ancestors and those who are still to be born.

Conclusion

According to Helmuth Trischler, the Anthropocene “involves more than just an exchange of scientific ideas”; rather, “it is a site where fundamental ethical positions are being renegotiated” (321). As I have shown, these ethical positions manifest particularly in the questions of how to understand the human and are negotiated not only in the scholarly realms but also in the sociopolitical and fictional realms. The colonial Anthropocene imaginary generally, and *Moon of the Crusted Snow* specifically, reject the notion of the *anthropos* as geological agent universally implicated in climate crisis and highlight that marginalized communities suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change. Accordingly, the texts co-producing the colonial Anthropocene imaginary perform the cultural work of shifting the focus in the debate on climate change from the Earth system and universalization of the human species to social injustices resulting from the history of settler colonialism. Moreover, the colonial Anthropocene imaginary is an example of how climate imaginaries are co-produced by different media at the intersection of academic discourses, activism, and literature. As with Indigenous studies discourses and the #NoDAPL movement, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* suggests an understanding of the climate crisis as long-term and cumulative, originating in the colonial period and intensifying over time.

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