

Techno-Extractivism and Settler Circuits in Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the technological divide between Indigenous communities and metropolitan centers in Canada reflects underlying settler colonial assumptions about value, visibility, and futurity. National discourses that position Canada as a leader in green and technologically advanced development often rely on extractive systems (digital, ecological, and social). Corporate narratives of innovation and inclusion, particularly those centered on *bridging the digital divide*, tend to reproduce familiar hierarchies even as they promise connection and progress, revealing the unsustainable entanglement between settler identity and technological domination. Within this context, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Anishinaabe author Waubgeshig Rice offers a speculative space for rethinking technology, sustainability, and community. The novel's depiction of grid collapse and systemic failure invites reflection on the dependencies embedded within Western infrastructures while highlighting Indigenous practices of kinship, land-based knowledge, and adaptability as what I call forms of world-making. This paper considers how Rice's work suggests alternative ways of imagining futurity in the digital age.

Keywords

Digital Colonialism; Indigenous; Settler; Techno-Extractivism

1. Precarious Technologies and Canada's Green/Just Myth

Across Canada, stark disparities persist between metropolitan zones of technological abundance and the infrastructural precarity experienced by many Indigenous communities. While urban centres are marked by dense broadband coverage, grid modernization, and visible investments in renewable energy, numerous Indigenous communities remain off-grid or dependent on aging diesel generators and intermittent service. Despite Canada's professed commitment to decarbonization, approximately 292 northern rural and remote communities (170 of them Indigenous) continue to rely on diesel fuel for electricity (MacArthur et al. 2). This technological polarity exposes a fundamental dissonance between Canada's international self-presentation as a climate leader and the lived realities within its borders. Such dissonance invites a critical reassessment not only of what is framed as *sustainable*, but of whose lives and futures are prioritized within national narratives of green progress.

This contradiction is sustained by what might be described as a green mythos: the reification of Canada as "the world's most just, inclusive and hopeful society" (Breznitz), a reputation increasingly tied to renewable energy targets, climate commitments, and the promise of a green economic transition. Public-facing initiatives such as the *Pact for a Green New Deal* emphasize decarbonization alongside Indigenous reconciliation and equitable development through environmental stewardship and job creation (MacArthur et al. 1). Canada's green branding is further amplified by ambitions to position itself as a "global export leader" in green mining technologies (Breznitz), reinforcing an image of technological innovation aligned with sustainable use. This narrative coherence, however, depends on a selective visibility by foregrounding technological solutions and policy aspirations while backgrounding the material infrastructures and social relations that make such solutions possible.

What remains largely obscured in this discourse are the extractive infrastructures (ecological, technological, and social) that underwrite Canada's green transition. As Mohamad Issa and colleagues report, greenhouse gas emissions from Canadian mining "surged from 4.3 to 6.4 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent between 2015 and 2019," with further increases anticipated due to growing demand for raw materials essential to renewable and digital technologies (1). More broadly, despite Canada's abundance of renewable energy sources, over 80 percent of national greenhouse gas emissions remain energy-related, driven primarily by "export-oriented fossil fuel production and non-renewable electricity generation" (MacArthur et al. 2). These figures point to a troubling continuity: rather than marking a departure from extractive development, the green transition often reconfigures extraction in new technological forms.

The consequences of this continuity are geographically and socially concentrated in what are increasingly recognized as sacrifice zones—spaces and peoples rendered expendable in service of national prosperity. Chemical Valley, located near Sarnia, Ontario, exemplifies this dynamic. Situated downstream from Aamjiwnaang First Nation, the region has long borne the toxic burden of petrochemical production, revealing what Warren Cariou and Isabelle St-Amant describe as a “biopolitics of injustice” that stands in sharp contrast to Canada’s self-congratulatory environmental rhetoric (9). While some green recovery initiatives gesture toward justice and inclusion (Stewart 3; Thompson 1), critics have repeatedly noted that equity and reconciliation are often treated as secondary concerns, added rhetorically but structurally sidelined, in transition strategies that continue to prioritize profitability, scalability, and infrastructural expansion over Indigenous lived realities (MacArthur et al. 1).

Historically celebrated as “the industry that built Canada,” mining has long functioned as a central symbol of national prosperity, technological ingenuity, and economic sovereignty (Breznitz). In contemporary discourse, this symbolism has been reactivated through green-transition rhetoric that positions mining as a cornerstone of a sustainable future different from its extractive past. In an October 2024 *Globe and Mail* op-ed, Dan Breznitz calls for a renewed “vision of Canada” with “more Canada in it,” explicitly advocating for the revitalization of mining and mineral-processing technologies as key drivers of a “green and prosperous future.” This vision extends beyond domestic extraction to the global export of Canadian mining technologies and expertise. Indeed, the formulation risks tethering sustainability to technological development while leaving largely unexamined the extractive logics that structure both the production of technology and its unsustainable environmental and social effects.

This coupling of technology with progress is hardly accidental. Within dominant Western imaginaries, technology is routinely aligned with vocabularies of advancement, innovation, sophistication, and development. These terms carry a presumption of ethical neutrality or even moral good. At the same time, critical discourse often swings toward the opposite pole, casting technology as inherently alienating, destructive, or imperial, locked in a simplified nature-culture binary that equates technological mediation with domination. Neither characterization is sufficient. As the history of the concept itself makes clear, technology is not intrinsically extractive or emancipatory; rather, it is historically contingent, shaped by the epistemological, economic, and political formations in which it is embedded.

The term *technology* derives from the Greek *techne*, meaning art, craft, or skill, and when paired with *logos*, it denotes a form of knowledgeable making, a practice through which humans engage the world in ways that are at once material, symbolic, and relational. In this classical sense, *techne* does not

presuppose domination over nature but implies attentiveness, intentionality, and reciprocal shaping between maker and made. This relational orientation, however, was gradually displaced through a series of epistemic shifts beginning in the Renaissance and accelerating through the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. As Carolyn Merchant observes, “The Scientific Revolution sanctioned the exploitation of nature as a machine rather than a living organism,” effecting a profound transformation in how humans understood their relationship to the nonhuman world (2). Nature came to be conceived as a system to be measured, controlled, and optimized rather than as a network of relations.

By the nineteenth century, cultural and scientific practices had crystallized into what David Nye famously terms “the technological sublime,” a belief that industrial and scientific progress represented the apex of human achievement (10). The factories, railways, and telegraphs of the Industrial Revolution did more than transform material life; they generated a moral narrative in which technological advancement became synonymous with civilization itself. As Lewis Mumford critiques, modern humanity was increasingly rendered “a passive, purposeless, machine-conditioned animal,” whose functions were “fed into the machine or strictly limited and controlled for the benefit of de-personalized, collective organizations” (3). Enlightenment ideals of progress thus merged seamlessly with colonial expansion, naturalizing the exportation of European technologies as instruments of civilizational uplift.

It is within this historically specific entanglement of industrialization, technology and capitalism that extractivism in its rather broad sense emerges as a dominant logic that reconfigures *making* as resource capture. As Imre Szeman and Jennifer Wenzel argue, extractivism names more than the act of extraction; it refers to “an ideology and cultural logic that permeates social imaginaries,” where “nature become[s] figured as a resource” for use and accumulation by “imaginative, cognitive, economic, and other material operations” (505-08). With this logic, technology becomes a means of extending extractive relations across space and scale, reorganizing environments, bodies, and knowledge systems in service of growth.

Techno-extractivism, as I use the term here, names this convergence: the operation of extractive logic through technological systems that render land, life, and information legible, transferable, and monetizable. This does not imply that technology is inherently extractive, but that under colonial-capitalist conditions it is frequently mobilized to sustain extractivist ends. One contemporary manifestation of this dynamic appears in what scholars have termed digital colonialism. Shoshana Zuboff describes how digital infrastructures transform lived experience into “behavioral surplus,” the raw material of what she calls “surveillance capitalism” (127). Zuboff writes:

If Google is a search company, why is it investing in smart-home devices, wearables, and self-driving cars? If Facebook is a social network, why is it developing drones and augmented reality? This diversity sometimes confounds observers but is generally applauded as visionary investment: far-out bets on the future. In fact, activities that appear to be varied and even scattershot across a random selection of industries and projects are actually all the same activity guided by the same aim: behavioral surplus capture. Each is a slightly different configuration of hardware, software, algorithms, sensors, and connectivity designed to mimic a car, shirt, cell phone, book, video, robot, chip, drone, camera, cornea, tree, television, watch, nanobot, intestinal flora, or any online service, but they all share the same purpose: behavioral surplus capture. (127)

As written above, Zuboff espouses the whims of digital colonialism, where humans are datafied for resource capture. Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias similarly argue that digital colonialism entails “the appropriation of human life through data,” extending colonial relations into the immaterial domains of code, attention, and affect (337). When British mathematician Clive Humby declared in 2006 that “data is the new oil,” he meant that data, like oil, is not useful in its raw state. The phrase has since come to signify not only the extraction, refinement, and circulation of data for profit within global capitalist systems, but also the widespread perception that these processes are cleaner, immaterial, and environmentally benign in contrast to oil’s now widely acknowledged harms—harms long identified and resisted by Indigenous communities, even as states and corporations only more recently codified them into policy.

Crucially, digital colonialism is not synonymous with green technology, though the two frequently intersect. Smart grids, renewable energy monitoring systems, and digital infrastructures for climate governance are often promoted for sustainability (which arguably, they may in some contexts advance efficiencies, broaden energy access, or support participatory governance), yet they simultaneously reproduce extractive relations by centralizing control or commodifying data. As Julie L. MacArthur and colleagues caution, those “currently denied a place at the policymaking table or in well-paid energy sector jobs are not necessarily more likely to benefit from green technology than they did with fossil fuels” (1). Techno-extractivism, then, is best understood as an extractive logic that travels across domains, exceeding single sectors or technologies like green mining and digital infrastructure. It operates through epistemic and representational practices that make land, life, and futures intelligible to the settler state as objects of management and value. Mapping technologies offer one of the clearest examples through which this logic manifests in the contemporary settler colonial Canadian context.

In Canada, cartographic technologies, ranging from nineteenth-century survey maps to contemporary Geographic Information Systems (GIS), have been foundational to the organization of settler space. These technologies have historically facilitated treaty-making, land claims adjudication, and resource extraction by translating Indigenous territories into coordinates, parcels, and layers legible to state and corporate actors. As Cree scholar Dallas Hunt and settler scholar Shaun Stevenson observe, "The surveying of lands and the production of maps remain an integral mode of solidifying nationalist, and indeed, settler colonialist constructions of Canada's geography" (375). This process is particularly pronounced in what they describe as Canada's "resource-driven, so-called 'modern treaty era,'" where mapping underwrites extractive development while presenting itself as technical, rational, and consensual (375).

The relationship between mapping and extractivism is constitutive. As Penelope Edmonds and Tony Banivanua-Mar note in their introduction to the collection *Making Settler Colonial Space*, settler colonialism has produced "a profound and extensive rearrangement of physical spaces and peoples," resulting in "new meaning and social demography carved and asserted over existing and enduring Indigenous spaces" (1). Maps are central to this reterritorialization, often by reorienting colonial attention, value, and governance toward particular lands and resources while rendering others peripheral or invisible. Beyond representing space, they actively reorder it and transform Indigenous relationships with land into property relations that can be surveyed, owned, and exploited. The imposition of grids, borders, and coordinates privileges a settler ontology of land as static and divisible, as *terra nullius* or *empty land*. This displaces Indigenous spatialities that are built on kinship and relational ecology.

Hunt and Stevenson underscore that this dynamic of reterritorialization endures despite technological change. They argue that

whether through traditional topographic mapping, or increasingly advanced digital data-based mapping processes such as Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, geographical knowledge continues to be produced, acquired, and imposed as a fundamental technique of shoring up dominant conceptualizations of the Canadian landscape. (375)

In other words, digital mapping only intensifies the colonial practice of finer-grained surveillance, predictive modeling, and integration with extractive industries such as mining, hydroelectric development, and pipeline construction. At the same time, it is crucial to avoid collapsing mapping technologies into a monolithic instrument of domination. Indigenous nations have long possessed, and continue to practice, complex spatial technologies that predate and exceed Western cartography. Oral maps, craft and art works, story trails, place-based

naming practices, and ceremonial geographies function as sophisticated systems of navigation, governance, and knowledge transmission. Dismissing this would risk reproducing a reductive opposition between technology and tradition.

Instead, as Hunt and Stevenson argue, many Indigenous communities engage in what they call "hybridized technologies": the deliberate reappropriation of settler tools toward Indigenous ends. In "Decolonizing Geographies of Power," they note that Indigenous nations "utilize available technologies and work in collaboration to produce hybridized forms of maps, drawing on while subverting some of the techniques associated with European cartography" (378). This hybridity matters because it refuses purity politics. The question is not whether technology is used, but how and for whom. Contemporary Indigenous GIS projects offer concrete examples of this reconfiguration. Hunt and Stevenson highlight initiatives such as the Living Atlas and the Fort Albany First Nation's use of GIS mapping to "foster intergenerational knowledge transfer, using mapping techniques and tools to reconnect youth with the surrounding land" (379). Here, mapping enables a relational practice oriented toward care, continuity, and resurgence rather than extraction or control. These projects mobilize digital tools to strengthen land-based relationships, not to render land abstract or exploitable.

Nevertheless, these engagements remain negotiations within constraints. Indigenous GIS projects operate within broader infrastructural systems (satellites, databases, cloud servers) founded upon colonial extractive economies. The same satellite that enables land-based resurgence also enables surveillance; the same database that safeguards cultural knowledge can expose it to appropriation. As Joanne Barker and colleagues warn, neoliberal regimes frequently co-opt the language of care and inclusion while maintaining hierarchy, mobilizing "the values of democratic processes and the 'progress' that must surely follow" to legitimize ongoing control (34). In such cases, digital inclusion becomes another frontier of potential techno-extractivism.

Federal broadband programs such as Canada's Universal Broadband Fund are frequently considered as advancing reconciliation by extending high-speed internet to Indigenous communities, yet they often reinforce digital redlining by consolidating infrastructural and data control in the hands of external telecommunications firms rather than community-governed networks. Under the banner of access and innovation, these initiatives fold Indigenous territories more tightly into extractive data economies, where connectivity is conduit for surveillance, commodification, and governance by proxy. This risk intensifies as Canada accelerates its investment in artificial intelligence. As Natiea Vinson, CEO of First Nations Technology Council notes, Canada's proposed \$2.4 billion investment in AI is frequently justified through projections of economic growth, potentially boosting the economy by \$230 billion, yet such figures obscure a

more pressing question: “Who will truly benefit from AI advancements, and who risks being left behind?” For Vinson, the danger lies in the reproduction of digital colonialism through systems “built on Western frameworks that do not necessarily reflect or serve Indigenous community needs,” thereby continuing “the erasure of Indigenous knowledge, values, and governance models.”

Margaret Yun Pu-Tu also cautions that “for Indigenous communities around the world, AI is not merely a technological development. It is a potential new form of colonization—one that risks marginalizing their languages, cultures and agency unless meaningful safeguards are established.” Her insistence that Indigenous peoples must be recognized not as “mere beneficiaries of digital policy, but also as rightful leaders in shaping it” underscores how inclusion without sovereignty reproduces colonial hierarchies rather than dismantling them. AI systems trained on Indigenous languages, health data, or cultural knowledge without robust governance frameworks such as OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) risk repeating older extractive patterns: collecting, abstracting, and monetizing Indigenous life without free, prior, and informed consent. It is within this tension that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s call for an “ethic of incommensurability” becomes critical: an ethic that “recognizes what is distinct and what is sovereign for project(s) of decolonization” and resists collapsing Indigenous futures into settler substructures of accessibility and control (1). Techno-extractivism facilitates such a collapse, extending settler logics across multiple spheres of innovation while cloaking extractive violence in the rhetoric of sustainability and progress.

This paper, therefore, asks a two-fold question. First, how does *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Anishinaabe author Waubgeshig Rice expose and resist the settler colonial logics embedded in the technological imaginary? And second, in what ways does the novel challenge the dominant myth of a green and just Canada by reimagining Indigenous technologies of world-making. Following the discussion above which contrasts Canada’s green and just myth with the realities of settler techno-logic, Section Two considers how Canada’s ongoing settler colonial structures shape law, policy, and technology in ways that sustain and reproduce extractive control. In Section Three, I offer a literary analysis of Waubgeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow* to show settler dependency and the difference in the Indigenous methods of world-making. I conclude by positioning the text within broader conversations on decolonial refusals.

2. Settler Colonial Logics Of Extraction

Settler colonialism in Canada operates as an ongoing structure that continues to shape political, technological, and ecological life. Patrick Wolfe’s

oft-cited formulation that “settler invasion is a structure not an event” directs attention away from moments of conquest toward the contemporary institutions, policies, and infrastructures through which territorial power is continually reorganized (388). From this perspective, law, policy, and technology cannot be read with neutrality as mere instruments of progress; they function instead as ambivalent mechanisms that may gesture toward repair while remaining embedded in the very architecture of dispossession they purport to redress. This section traces that ambivalence, showing how legal recognition and reform coexist with, and often facilitate, new iterations of extractive control.

At the core of settler colonialism, Wolfe identifies a territorial logic that exceeds racial animus or episodic violence. “The primary motive for elimination is not race,” he argues, “but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (388). What follows from this insight is that legal and administrative regimes are fundamentally concerned with regulating land, authority, and futurity. Lorenzo Veracini extends this analysis by describing settler colonialism’s reliance on what he calls a “non-encounter”: a recurring epistemic maneuver that disavows Indigenous presence in order to naturalize settler occupation and governance (2). Together, these frameworks clarify how reforms can appear to acknowledge Indigenous rights while leaving intact the deeper logics through which land remains available for extraction, management, and development.

This tension is evident in the Supreme Court of Canada’s landmark decision in *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia* (2014). The Court affirms that “Aboriginal” title includes “the exclusive right to decide how the land is used” and “the right to benefit from those uses,” including “the economic benefits of the land” (73). On its face, the ruling marks a significant shift in Canadian jurisprudence, recognizing Indigenous authority over land use and stewardship in ways that challenge earlier doctrines of terra nullius. However, the Court simultaneously preserves the Crown’s ability to infringe upon the title where it can be justified in the name of broader public interests, including economic development. In practice, then, Indigenous authority is recognized only insofar as it remains compatible with a constitutional order structured by Crown sovereignty. The land is newly legible as Indigenous, but it remains extractable under state-defined conditions. Legal recognition is thus simply a recalibration of how extraction is authorized.

This dynamic exemplifies what Dene scholar Glen Coulthard critiques as the “politics of recognition,” in which Indigenous rights are acknowledged primarily on terms that remain legible to, and governed by, settler sovereignty (3). Recognition, on this ground, does not dismantle colonial power but reorganizes it, allowing the state to appear responsive while retaining authority over territory and development. Seen through this lens, Canada’s self-representation

as a postcolonial or reconciled nation becomes increasingly fragile. As Veracini notes, “references to a postcolonial condition appear hollow as soon as indigenous disadvantage is taken into account” (3). Settler colonial studies insist on this point by showing that the colonizers never left; rather, they adapted. This is especially visible in what Shuswap leader George Manuel termed the “Fourth World,” referring to Indigenous nations rendered structurally invisible within modern nation-states, even as their lands remain indispensable to national economies.

In its most positive iterations, the turn to green energy and digital inclusion can be genuinely corrective to the ecological devastation of fossil capitalism. Community-led renewable energy initiatives such as Sacred Earth Solar which is “operating across multiple tribal lands in the U.S. and Canada,” works in close collaboration with “Native communities to co-design and install solar microgrids to replace diesel reliance and empower local leadership” (“Empowering”). What distinguishes this initiative is its governance. As Katarina Savic and Christina Hoicka observe in the Canadian context, Indigenous communities consistently emphasize that “ownership of a project is more beneficial than [impact and benefit agreements],” which they describe as “short lived,” because ownership “denotes control over a project” and aligns more closely with Indigenous self-determination (1).

The project of techno-extractivism functions in tandem with what Renata Avila Pinto describes as “a continuation of former colonial relationships, this time through technology” (2). In this model, lives are not simply at the margins of infrastructure; they are reimagined as raw material, datafied, surveilled, and scripted into techno-futures. Morgan Margulies poses a critical question when examining the global link between environmentalism and nationalism: “What are the underlying elements of ethnic and civic nationalism that make environmentalist sentiments so appealing?” (1). Indeed, the appeal lies in the ability to perform progress while upholding settler colonial ideals. The emergence of green nationalism, as marketed through energy transitions and climate resilience, disguises the extractive imperatives behind connectivity and renewable infrastructure. Canada’s eco-nationalist ambitions are therefore inseparable from its desire to become a global leader in Big Tech, by which I refer to large-scale digital platforms, data-driven infrastructure, artificial intelligence systems, and the global technology firms that supply or partner with them.

As Alana Lajoie O’Malley outlines, technoscientific infrastructures such as pipelines “physically rearrange[] lands and people in ways that help settler colonial states secure and maintain control over land,” and as my earlier discussion of mapping technologies have shown, they operate within such sociotechnical imaginaries that perform desired futures (8-9). These digital layers including GIS, remote sensing, satellite imagery and web-mapped land registries,

translate Indigenous territories into datasets that are legible to state and corporate agents. The standardization of such cartographic regimes rest on "the doctrine of discovery and its related concept of *terra nullius*," wherein "land [is] an empty space to be appropriated, commodified, and exploited" (Cariou and St. Amand 10). This signification of land very much negates the Indigenous understanding of it. In her "Technological Colonialism and the Politics of Water," Barri Cohen analyzes the James Bay hydroelectric project in Quebec, demonstrating how the Cree and Inuit resistance to Hydro-Québec's flooding of 350,000 square kilometres "unravelling a complex braid of conflict between radically different knowledge systems and representations about land and territory, progress and survivability" (33). For the state, the hydroelectric grid symbolized green modernity and national development with flowing water producing low carbon power and a means towards enabling global decarbonization for lower operating costs; for the Cree and Inuit, it enacted dispossession and ecological devastation.

The RCMP raids on Wet'suwet'en territory in 2020 further demonstrate that green rebranding does not diminish extractive projects' reliance on coercive territorial control. Rather, they exemplify what Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim describe as "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures" that sustain "certain forms of social life while working to eliminate others" (4). Like the Canadian Pacific Railway once imagined as "the spine of the nation," Coastal Gas Link (CGL) operates as a national symbol of energy security and sovereignty (O'Malley 63), revealing how extractive infrastructure remains central to settler futurity.

Within settler futurity, connectivity is often presented as a civilizational benchmark. Canada's off-grid northern communities, many of them Indigenous, are frequently seen as *disconnected* and in need of technological salvation. As Avila Pinto observes, global tech companies increasingly ordain themselves as "new envoys" of connectivity, offering what she describes as "shiny but ultimately extractive" arrangements that result in "the silent privatisation of the digital infrastructure of entire nations" (5). Pinto points explicitly to initiatives such as Facebook's *Free Basics* program and Google-backed connectivity projects, which promise free or low-cost Internet access while tightly enclosing users within proprietary platforms that harvest data, limit informational autonomy, and entrench corporate control over communications infrastructure. In these models, access is conditional, partial, and surveilled, transforming connectivity itself into an extractive relation.

The dynamics traced here extend the concerns raised earlier through Shoshana Zuboff's analysis of digital colonialism. As she writes, "Google is a shape-shifter, but each shape harbors the same aim: to hunt and capture raw material," whether through phones, maps, wearables, or platforms that appear

distinct but together form “the continuous expansion of the extraction architecture” (127). What is extracted is behavioral data converted into “prediction products” sold to advertisers, such that “customer satisfaction” ultimately refers not to users, but to the markets that profit from their monitored lives (127). Within Indigenous and remote communities, this architecture equally reframes everyday digital participation from communication to navigation and language use for value capture.

Pinto further warns that these connectivity “programmes act with urgency to connect as many people as possible,” while routinely neglecting consent, long-term sustainability, and basic literacy around privacy and security (18). She characterizes this expansion as a “race to connect the next billion people to their ‘walled garden,’” in which control over critical infrastructure functions as a neocolonial strategy (1). What this reveals is a mutation in settler colonial territoriality: the objective is no longer land alone, but infrastructure. As Pinto puts it, the imperative is to “get their hands on the missing datasets of the global poor” and convert them into value through data extraction and surveillance capitalism (1).

Yet, as Jason Young reminds us, Indigenous peoples are not passive recipients of these techno-colonial incursions. Rather, they are “actively using the Internet to push back against some of the discursive tactics being deployed to responsabilize them for their own adaptation and resilience” (237). Young argues that Inuit are “engaging in digital forms of politics that re-scale Inuit vulnerability, highlight dimensions of Arctic resilience beyond the ‘traditional,’ and call on qallunaat to take responsibility for their role in the colonial processes that produce environmental vulnerability” (237). In this light, there is a complexity undergirding these technological infrastructures and their broader use beyond being a neoliberal burden.

To further interrogate these dynamics, this paper turns to Indigenous literary production for reflection. Indigenous speculative fiction, in particular, offers engagements with technology, sovereignty, and futurity that complicate dominant notions of progress. Within this field, Waubgeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow* provides a rich framework through which to examine how settler colonial logics structure the technological imaginary. I argue that Indigenous literature operates as a decolonial analytic, illuminating how even ostensibly *hybrid* or reconciliatory technological forms remain embedded within settler colonial regimes of value and extraction. By staging infrastructural collapse and its aftermath, Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow* demonstrates that the problem is not simply technological exclusion but the colonial logics that organize technology itself. In response, I introduce the concept of Indigenous techne: technologies of world-making grounded in care, continuity, and ecological reciprocity that exceed and refuse settler techno-modernity.

3. Collapse And Contagion In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*

Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018) follows the onset of winter in a northern Anishinaabe community. With gradual power failure, phones stop working, deliveries cease, and contact with the southern cities vanishes. What begins as a slow and disorienting breakdown of infrastructure spirals into full social collapse as settlers from the South arrive at the rez, bringing with them fear, violence, and eventually, cannibalism. At the heart of the novel is the protagonist, Evan Whitesky, a young father learning to survive in this uncertain world. But survival in Rice's novel soon morphs into a collective practice of memory, language, and cultural resurgence. The novel interrogates the relations of dependence, control, and extraction through which particular technologies are embedded.

Scholars have rightly positioned *Moon of the Crusted Snow* within discourses of decoloniality, ecological violence, and energy transition. Reuben Martens, for instance, reads the novel as a critique of "petromelancholia," a psychic and infrastructural grief induced by settler colonial dependence on hydrocarbons. For Martens, Rice's work "forms the ideal setting to explore how settler colonial energopolitical violence forces and triggers petromelancholia through infrastructure" (198). Martens emphasizes how the Ojibwe community's dependence on southern power systems, imposed during mid-20th century electrification, becomes a condition of literal and symbolic precarity. Similarly, Marina Pingler situates the novel in what she terms the "Colonial Anthropocene Imaginary." Although *Moon of the Crusted Snow* never directly references climate change, Pingler argues that it "creates productive frames for considering how ecological vulnerability is experienced unequally and links climate change to long histories of colonial environmental exploitation" (150). She points to subtle signs such as altered migratory bird patterns and unpredictable weather that register planetary crisis within a specific colonial context.

Other scholars probe the novel as part of a broader decolonial canon. Do-ina Ciochina reads *Moon of the Crusted Snow* alongside Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, highlighting both novels' concern with residential school trauma, cultural erasure, and Indigenous futurity. Ciochina foregrounds the intergenerational struggle to reclaim language and cultural practices suppressed through "church-run schools that had imprisoned stolen children" (60). In Rice's novel, this reclaiming is material: Evan and Nicole vow to raise their children in Ojibwe, choosing Anishinaabemowin names (Maiingan and Nangohns) that "link their offspring to both the natural world and the cosmology" of their people (61).

While these perspectives offer insights into the novel's intersection with energy and colonial tactics, few have yet to explore how *Moon of the Crusted*

Snow critiques technological dependency and digital colonialism within the larger architecture of settler collapse. I extend current conversations by examining how the novel presents settler infrastructures (power grids, communications networks, surveillance systems, and governance) as fragile and parasitic systems that collapse under their own weight. I propose that Rice's novel unveils a key feature of techno-extractivism: the entanglement between settler identity and technological domination.

Preceding Rice's text is a long history of Indigenous activism articulated through literary, artistic, and cultural production. Indigenous artists have consistently mobilized aesthetic practice as a means to "counter the normalization and the acceptance of destruction and desecration in their multiple and changing guises" (Cariou and St-Amand 13). Poetry, film, storytelling, and the novel function here as modes of making that intervene in colonial epistemologies and reconfigure how land, memory, and responsibility are understood. This genealogy is perhaps most succinctly theorized through Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's concept of *survivance*. Vizenor explicitly rejects readings of Indigenous existence that position Native peoples as passive victims suspended between life and death. He critiques this position in part by reversing Jacques Derrida's use of *survivance* as an indeterminate condition devoid of agency.

In *Survivance* and subsequent work, Vizenor redefines *survivance* as "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; it is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent" (1). *Survivance*, for Vizenor, names a creative and generative practice rather than a condition of endurance. What distinguishes *survivance* from survival is precisely its emphasis on agency, making, and narrative continuity. Vizenor makes clear that the shift from *-al* to *-ance* signals a refusal of colonial narratives of victimry and a commitment to what he calls "narrative resistance to absence, literary tragedy, nihilism, and victimry" (*Native Liberty* 1). *Survivance* functions as a form of Indigenous *techne*: a situated practice of worldmaking that sustains life by shaping relationships between people, land, language, and history outside the extractive logics of settler modernity.

It is within this lineage that Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* can be situated. The novel follows what Cree scholar Neil McLeod describes as a "body poetic," as he conceptualizes Indigenous poetics as a form of epistemological resurgence, one that "connects our living bodies to the living Earth around us" (89). Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* opens with the image of a successful hunt and the ritual that follows, where Evan kneels to offer tobacco to the land, establishing the relational and reciprocal nature of the Anishinaabeg. The narrator tells us, "He whispered a prayer and placed the tobacco on the ground in front of the moose. It was the Anishinaabe way, as he understood

it" (8). The simple act of offering introduces the "body poetic" of world-making, subsisting in care, ecology, and spiritual obligation.

In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, technology is not figured as an external imposition that Indigenous communities either accept or refuse. Instead, Rice traces how settler infrastructures are incrementally integrated into everyday life, normalized as progress, and ultimately exposed as structurally unsustainable. Prior to the collapse, the reserve is deeply enmeshed in modern energy and transport systems. As the narrator explains:

The old diesel generators that had run their lightbulbs and appliances for decades were still around, but they didn't need them anymore. They remained for backup... The hydro lines had also opened up a permanent service road that ran some three hundred kilometres south and connected to the main highway... now had the freedom to drive out on their own, theoretically. The weather and lack of maintenance often played havoc with that fine thought, though. (19)

This passage registers the conditionality of settler technology. The generators are relegated to contingency status within a system that presumes uninterrupted access to the grid, the service road, and southern supply chains. Mobility and autonomy are promised only *theoretically*, while their material realization remains dependent on maintenance regimes that are inconsistent and largely external to local control.

The fragility of this arrangement becomes explicit when the grid fails. Addressing the community, Terry explains that the diesel reserves are limited and that new supplies are expected only once winter roads allow transport trucks to reach the community (Rice 57). Diesel, food, and maintenance equipment are all synchronized around the anticipated return of the grid; survival is organized through the expectation that the system will resume. When someone from the crowd interrupts Terry, asking whether they must simply "wait around and hope this shit returns to normal?" (57), the irony of this "normalcy," structured by technological dependence on the settler state, comes sharply into view. The anxiety here is not caused by the absence of electricity alone but by the recognition that agency has been displaced outward, deferred to systems that may never return.

Rice complicates this dependency by revealing a parallel infrastructural logic already in place, one oriented toward communal preservation rather than external supply chains. The reserve maintains a hidden emergency cache:

Stored in a bunker below the garage at the water treatment plant was a massive cache of non-perishable food... Thousands upon thousands of cans and boxes had been stored there for nearly two decades... goods that could keep upwards of five hundred people fed for at least two years. (90)

This reserve infrastructure reflects Vizenor's *survivance*: an active, anticipatory mode of presence that refuses to anchor survival to settler systems alone. The novel therefore does not narrate the end of the world so much as the end of one world and the continuity of another. The breakdown of Western infrastructure, from mobile phones to energy grids and televisions, is treated less as tragedy than as inevitability. No explanation ever arrives for the collapse, and the state remains conspicuously absent. What persists are the rhythms and relationships the community had preserved despite the long reach of colonialism. As Aileen later tells Evan, "Our world isn't ending. It already ended... But we always survived. We're still here" (Rice 140).

This disavowal of apocalypse redefines what crisis means for a lot of Indigenous peoples and within *Moon of the Crusted Snow*. Aileen tells Evan, "Yes, apocalypse! What a silly word. I can tell you there's no word like that in Ojibwe. Well, I never heard a word like that from my elders anyway" (139). The community has already endured what settlers would call apocalyptic events: forced displacement, residential schooling, and environmental dispossession. For them, the end of the world has occurred many times over. The apocalypse, therefore, is an ongoing condition produced by colonialism. From a Western perspective, however, the end of the world happens through technological collapse and the disruption of routines dependent on settler infrastructures. Colonial modernity relies on the uninterrupted operation of these sociotechnical systems, which are designed to extract labor, resources, and compliance. Francoise Vergès' question, "Who cleans the world?" (vi) resonates here, as Rice's characters inherit the consequences of technological failure while never having accrued its promised benefits, revealing the entanglement between settler identity and technological systems.

In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Scott arrives at the rez after the collapse. When asked why he has come, he replies: "I'm here for the same reason everyone else is: to breathe the fresh northern air. I also want to taste the finest moose meat... And I hear the hospitality of the Ojibwe is unrivalled" (Rice 97). Scott's language already lays bare his motive for extraction. His view of the community is transactional: a place to take from, not to belong to. The community's values of sharing and kinship are not only alien to him but something he considers for exploitation. His arrival at the rez hospital, which is supposed to be a space of care and vulnerability is symbolically significant. In times of crisis, hospitals are often double-edged: on the one hand proposing healing and on the other, contagion. Scott embodies this duality. Initially tolerated for his apparent usefulness. Terry convinces the other men that Scott "could pull more weight than a lot of the deadbeats in this goddamn rez" (Rice 103). However, Scott's presence soon proves toxic.

Scott as a villainous character emerges as a figure of contagion, a human virus whose arrogance mirrors the ideological strain of settler colonialism.

His behavior is dismissive, domineering, and ultimately cannibalistic. He tells Evan and Isaiah, "When I got here, you people barely had your shit together. There was no plan. People were going hungry already" (Rice 190). His strategy is that of settler saviorism: having caused the crisis, he now positions himself as its solution. Yet this rhetoric collapses under its own weight, revealing the unsustainability of settler masculinity, which equates dominance with survival and suppresses interdependence in favor of control.

Scott's obsession with productivity, with trapping and providing and measuring worth by individual output, reveals a larger capitalist logic incompatible with the community's ethics. His descent into cannibalism is certainly allegorical. As Scott boasts of "experimenting" with human remains, he openly ridicules Indigenous ceremony and tradition: "I know how you people have all kinds of ceremonies and voodoo and shit about your dead" (Rice 190). While his words carry the sting of colonial derision, they also reveal fear. Scott senses the limits of his dominance in this space and reacts by amplifying violence. In doing so, he embodies what Doina Ciochina describes as the ongoing trauma of settler intervention: a force that "breaks down traditional Indigenous ways of life" and reintroduces rupture under the guise of order (58).

His eventual execution and the expulsion of his body functions as a form of relational and spiritual cleansing. The rez, threatened by his presence, restores its balance by removing the settler virus that had destabilized the community. Scott, a symbol of winter, stagnation, and death, must be cleared for renewal to take hold: "The collapse of the white man's modern systems further withered the Anishinaabeg here. But they refused to wither completely" (Rice 198). The novel here enacts *survivance*: "an active sense of presence over absence" (1). This is established through the continuation of Anishinaabe life, memory, and agency beyond colonial destruction.

4. Conclusion

In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the settler logic of extraction is laid bare. Rice's text unmask the structural precarity of Western systems which ensure dependency. The collapse of settler infrastructures, and the ensuing violence, reveals the coercive mechanisms through which the settler state has historically asserted control. Against this backdrop, however, the novel centers Indigenous world-making, what Diné writer Lou Cornum describes as "living" practices of care, continuity, and relational stewardship. These practices enact decolonial refusals by foregrounding Indigenous modes of knowledge that assert alternative futures. Taken together, this work unsettles Canada's national myth of green/just modernity and benevolent progress. To center Indigenous

practices of world-making in our broader visions of the future demands a structural reorientation of how relations to land, technology, and one another are organized. It demands that we not only critique settler circuits but begin to live otherwise: to tell stories, build systems, and manage relations that prioritize reciprocity over ownership and continuity over collapse.

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