"(listen to the women)": Rethinking Representations of Violence Against Indigenous Women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates contemporary representations of violence against Indigenous women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). I argue that sensationalist representations of violence against Indigenous women serve to distance readers from understanding their own implication in systems of colonial violence and sever individual acts of violence from their broader colonial context. Pushing back against such sensationalism, I turn in my first chapter to *Missing Sarah*, a memoir written by the sister of one of Vancouver's missing women. I argue that, although this text eschews the sensationalism that characterizes mainstream coverage of violence against Indigenous women in the DTES and seeks to humanize the victims of violence, its political potential is circumscribed by its unacknowledged Western cultural investments. In my second chapter, I take up the work of Mohawk/Tuscarora poet Janet Marie Rogers alongside first-hand narratives of women living and working in the DTES. Together, I suggest that these representations offer a more nuanced understanding of ongoing violence in Canada and, in the case of Rogers' work, a vision for a decolonial future that moves beyond this violence to reconnect Indigenous women to the land.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In the summer of 2014 I went to Vancouver to visit my brother, who works as a nurse at the Royal Columbian hospital in New Westminster. There, I took the opportunity to visit some of the spaces that I had been reading about for my thesis research, namely, the Downtown Eastside (DTES). It was a strange and uncomfortable experience. I was acutely aware of the voyeuristic tourism that many residents of the DTES condemn, and I felt a deep aversion to contributing to that in any way. Yet, to purposely avoid the spaces and people who have been ignored and overlooked by a broader public, as though this might somehow undo my own complicity in their marginalization, was also unacceptable. I felt there had to be a balance to be reached, a compromise between becoming a tourist in other people's lives and engaging in an act of witnessing that disallows oneself the comfort of turning away from the injustices that we might prefer not to see.

I also felt compelled to offer some form of respectful tribute to the women about whom I had been reading. In the company of my mother and brother, I headed in the direction of the memorial stone in CRAB Park. Next to this stone, which is surrounded by flowers, candles, photographs, and news bulletins, is a bench inscribed with a dedication: *In memory of L. Coombes, S. De Vries, M. Frey, J. Henry, H. Hallmark, A. Jardine, C. Knight, K. Koski, S. Lane, J. Murdock, D. Spence & all other women who are missing. With our love. May 12, 1999*. On the day that I visited, the bench was already occupied. An older, white-haired man sat there already clutching a Farley Mowat novel and eating from a jar of peanut butter. Noticing my interest in the inscription, he asked me if I had some connection to the women. I showed him the book I had

been carrying with me as I walked through the DTES that day – *Missing Sarah* by Maggie De Vries. The book had stayed with me, I told him, and I wanted to pay my respects at this public memorial. He nodded, replying that he had tried to read the book himself but found it too upsetting. He had spent many years of his life in the DTES and was certain he must have met many of the women who were murdered, although he could not name them. Now, he often came to sit on the bench, believing that the women to whom it is dedicated should not be forgotten; he was glad I was taking an interest. He then asked me if I had heard of *On the Farm*, the book from which he had gleaned most of what he knew about the case. He shook his head sorrowfully and repeated how hard it was to learn about these sad events.

We parted ways soon after, but what he shared about his reading of *Missing Sarah* and *On the Farm* stayed with me. I found it striking that someone who felt a close personal connection to the DTES community – who had lived there for years – still felt that his understanding of events came from two books written by people external to that community. What does it mean to understand such texts not just as particular perspectives on a story, but as cultural documents that influence the ways in which their readerly publics[1] are able or willing to engage with the human lives they represent? What other stories are displaced or forgotten when these texts become the dominant or familiar narratives? How do the representational politics of such texts frame the

[1] In this thesis, I draw primarily on Laurent Berlant's theorization of an "intimate public" and Mark Seltzer's "pathological public sphere" to understand how representations function to structure and influence the public climate within which they circulate. As Seltzer notes, "spectacular public representation […] has come to function as a way of imagining and situating […] the very idea of 'the public'" (35). Both Berlant and Seltzer point to the way in which a reading public forms around the appetite for and expectation of a particular affective experience, be it the sensationalism of spectacularized violence or the "sentimental saturation" (Berlant 20) of feminized genres of intimacy. Building on Seltzer's "wound culture" and Berlant's understanding of intimate publics as "affective spaces" (25), I use such terminology as *cultural*, *representational*, or *affective climate*, *public imaginary*, and *reading public* to signal these resonances between my analysis and Seltzer and Berlant's theories.

violence against Indigenous[2] women at the heart of this story and, crucially, what kind of engagement can follow from such a framing?

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Over the past two decades, the phrase "missing and murdered women" has become part of a public vocabulary in Canada; the growing interest in cases of violence against women has been sparked largely by the revelation of a serial murderer targeting women living and working in Vancouver's DTES. Violence against Indigenous women – who make up a disproportionately large number of the victims of violence in the DTES – has been epidemic and ongoing since colonization of Turtle Island[3] began in the late 15th century. Yet, despite the sweeping, quotidian violence that Indigenous women continue to experience across this country, the Canadian public has been largely uninterested; that is, with the exception of Vancouver's highly sensationalized serial murder case. The spectacular nature of the violence that came to light in the "Murdered Women's Trial"[4] – its gruesome nature, its status as the worst serial murder case in Canadian history, the unsavoury character of the killer – made the case a media sensation, the echoes of which continue to be heard in discussions of violence against Indigenous women across the country. But what are the ramifications of this sustained and narrow focus on the DTES and representations of the sensational violence enacted against the women there? What other forms of systemic violence are erased when the Murdered Women's Trial is represented as the central

[2] I use the term "Indigenous" throughout this paper to refer to Canada's diverse First Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. I use "Indigenous" rather than "Aboriginal," which, as a legal term applied to Indigenous peoples by the Canadian government, is for many people a fraught or contentious label. Following from Linda Tuhiwai Smith, I recognize the usefulness of the term "Indigenous" in enabling "the collective voices of colonized peoples to be expressed strategically in the international arena" while recognizing the "real differences between indigenous peoples" (7). See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, New York: Zed Books, 1999. Print.

[3] Also known as North America.

[4] Maryanne Pearce notes: "Advocates for the families of the missing and murdered women prefer to use the term 'Murdered Women's Trial' rather than the 'Robert Pickton Trial' to put the focus on the 33 women whose physical remains or DNA were found on the Pickton farm" (72). With this in mind, I attempt to use the phrase "Pickton Trial" sparingly and only in reference to materials that discuss the trial in these terms, as this is part of the public discourse around the case.

event in the public imaginary? What links between the spectacular and the systemic are obscured through this focus? And, perhaps the most pressing question: how can these familiar narratives be challenged? Moving beyond the focus on violence against women as a personal, domestic issue, this thesis is grounded by questions of representation and, by extension, of what political possibilities emerge when violence against Indigenous women is understood within a framework of decolonization and resurgence.

Vancouver's DTES, one of the city's oldest neighbourhoods, spans roughly twenty-one city blocks and its shifting borders are constantly being redefined by the ebb and flow of its residents and the pressures of external developers seeking to gentrify the area. As John Mikhail Asfour and Elee Kraljii Gardiner note, "there is no hard and fast definition of the area known as the DTES […]. By all accounts, the intersection of Hastings and Main forms the nexus of the DTES" (9). It is from this area of Vancouver that women began disappearing with increasing frequency from the late 1970s onward, with numbers jumping dramatically in the 1990s. During this time, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) largely dismissed friends' and family members' attempts to file missing persons reports, citing the perceived transient and high-risk nature of the women's lives. Eventually, in the face of rising media and public pressure, the police directed further resources to the investigation and soon discovered forensic evidence linking 33 of the missing women to the property of Robert Pickton. Pickton was subsequently charged with 27 counts of murder, making the case the largest serial murder investigation in Canadian history. On December 9, 2007, Pickton was convicted of six counts of second degree murder in the deaths of Sereena Abotsway, Mona Wilson, Andrea Joesbury, Brenda Wolfe, Georgina Papin, and Marnie Frey.

A decade after Pickton's arrest and subsequent incarceration and after a scathing report by the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry detailing the Vancouver Police Department's

mishandling of the case, however, violence against women in the DTES continues. According to Meg Pinto, "the levels of violence faced by Downtown Eastside residents have not changed since the Pickton trial. This grave problem is not characterized by the vagrancy of one individual but rather is characteristic of larger socioeconomic problems that place some women at greater risk" (5). In her 2009 doctoral dissertation, Amber Dean states that according to one activist working the DTES, there have been at least 29 further disappearances since Pickton's arrest ("Hauntings" 9). In 2001, just a year before Pickton was arrested, the police had 1500 "Priority 1" suspects in the missing women case (Pearce 417); in other words, the pool of persons of interest considered capable of targeting and murdering women working in the sex trade included one and a half thousand people. Clearly, Pickton is not exceptional in his targeting of women from the DTES. Many other women experience violence that, because it is not at the hands of a serial killer and, therefore, sensationalized in news headlines, goes unremarked. Why, then, do Robert Pickton and the acts of violence that he committed receive the degree of attention that they do? Why are members of the media, academia, and the artistic community drawn to this specific case and the crimes of one man when there are at least 1499 other people in the Vancouver area alone who are considered by law authorities as capable of committing such acts?

These questions become all the more urgent when we confront the reality of the quotidian, routinized violence against Indigenous women that is entrenched across this country. While Vancouver is often situated as the epicentre of any discussion about missing and murdered Indigenous women, violence continues rampant and unabated across North America and beyond. As Robertson and Culhane note, "the phenomenon of 'disappeared women' is not unique to [Vancouver]. Stories about large numbers of missing and murdered women – often marginalized, drug-addicted women involved in sex work – are being documented with alarming frequency around the world from northern British Columbia and Alberta to Mexico to Malaysia to Eastern

Europe" (14). Indigenous studies scholar Andrea Smith echoes these concerns and connects them to a colonial ideology that hinges on targeting Indigenous women's bodies for violence:

> The ideology of Native women's bodies as rapable is evident in the hundreds of missing indigenous women in Mexico and Canada. Since 1993, over 500 women have been murdered in Juarez, Mexico. [...] Similarly, in Canada, over 500 First Nations women have gone missing or have been murdered in the past 15 years, with little police investigation. Again, it seems that their cases have been neglected because many of the women were homeless or sex workers. [...] Within the United States, because of complex jurisdictional issues, perpetrators of sexual violence can usually commit crimes against Native women with impunity. (Smith 30-1)

These numbers have only continued to rise; according to an RCMP report released in 2014, there were 1017 Aboriginal female victims of homicide between the years of 1980 and 2012. The violence experienced by Indigenous women in the DTES becomes, in this analysis, part of a much broader social and historical system of colonization. Bluntly, violence against Indigenous women is colonial violence.

The connection between contemporary violence against Indigenous women and Canada's status as a settler colonial state is a foundational argument of this thesis and, although I address this connection in detail in my second chapter, I will also briefly introduce my grounding points here. Colonial interventions such as residential schools, the *Indian Act*, and ongoing land seizure and development have had severe consequences for all Indigenous peoples across Canada, but it is important to understand the ways in which these interventions and their impacts have been highly gendered in ways that continue into the present moment. As Amber Dean argues, "the state-sponsored system of terror known as colonialism is indelibly tied to the present-day, ongoing disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside. And while our Canadian

governments and many Canadians themselves prefer to locate colonialism in our nation's distant past, […] it is actively remade again and again in the present, belying its past-ness" ("Hauntings" 18). In Vancouver, which is built on unceded Coast Salish land – traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations – relationships between settler and Indigenous populations are under constant negotiation.[5] Recognizing the resilience of Indigenous peoples in these territories in the face of violent and disruptive colonial histories becomes part of understanding the continuing violence against Indigenous peoples living there in the present. Moreover, as I will argue, understanding these historical and contemporary relationships becomes necessary to unpacking the representational violence enacted against missing and murdered Indigenous women.

In *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Andrea Smith argues compellingly for the recognition of sexual violence as a colonial tool that marks certain people as "inherently 'rapable'" (3). Although her argument is situated in an American context, it translates across borders: "Colonizers view the subjugation of women of the Native nations as critical to the success of the economic, cultural, and political colonization. […] Symbolic and literal control over their bodies is important in the war against Native people" (15). Control over Indigenous women's bodies is, in the colonial project, the first step toward control of land and resources. As Anishnaabe/Haudenosaunee scholar Vanessa Watts notes, in many Indigenous cosmologies, an essential connection is made between the feminine and the land. This connection serves as an organizing principle for all life, human and non-human. "Colonialism," Watts argues, "is operationalized through dismantling the essential categories of other societies" (31). In the case

[5] Just one example of this is the number of Indigenous communities and organizations presently protesting the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline through the conservation land of Burnaby Mountain in Burnaby, British Columbia. See "Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline rejected by Tsleil-Waututh First Nation," *CBC News* 26 May 2015. Web. 18 June 2015, and "Chief Stewart Phillip arrested at Kinder Morgan protest," *CBC News* 27 November 2014. Web. 18 June 2015.

of the missing and murdered women, the connection between land and the feminine is targeted for eradication by making Indigenous women subject to socially sanctioned violence.

Sharon Venne (Cree) also recognizes the fundamental importance of the feminine connection to the land in Cree social structures and ways of living. In her detailed account of the Indigenous understanding of Treaty Six, Venne describes how European representatives ascribed their own patriarchal order to the Indigenous bands involved in the negotiations when, in fact, the men did not have any authority to cede the land. That authority belonged to the women alone because, in a Cree worldview, "women are linked to Mother Earth by their ability to bring forth life. […] Because of this spiritual connection with the Creator and Mother Earth, it is the women who own the land. Men can use the land, protect and guard it, but not own it" (191-92). European colonizers' deliberate ignorance of Indigenous social structures meant that they fundamentally misunderstood the terms of treaty-making – and in, the process, imposed Eurocentric gender relations upon Indigenous peoples.

The colonial rupturing of Indigenous women's traditional connection to the land continues to be essential to the seizure of Indigenous territories. Smith, working through Aimé Césaire, argues that "colonization = thingification. […] The project of colonial sexual violence establishes the ideology that Native bodies are inherently violable – and by extension, that Native lands are also inherently violable" (12). Vancouver's DTES is situated on traditional Coast Salish territory: territory where an estimated ninety to ninety-five percent of the Indigenous population was eradicated due to diseases brought by European colonizers (Robertson and Culhane 16). Today in the DTES, the threat of development and gentrification can be understood as a mechanism by which this colonial process of violation continues; as Pinto notes, "some Aboriginal residents [of the DTES] feel that those in power are still seeking to remove them from their traditional territory so that development can take place" (6). The DTES continues to be a

contested space and, as such, contemporary violence against the Indigenous women there emerges as a continuation of a long history of gendered violence and part of a larger colonial ideology of cultural genocide and acquisitive expansion.

While there are many entry points into a discussion of Vancouver's missing and murdered women – from the failed police investigation to the legal process and the plethora of reports that have emerged regarding both – my interest begins with how the disappeared women and their violent deaths are represented in familiar, widely-circulated narratives of these cases. Popular and media representation has been overwhelmingly taken up with the spectacular nature of the violence and the tragic deaths (and, we are to understand, lives) of the women victimized by serial murderer Robert Pickton. As Robertson and Culhane note of the media coverage of Vancouver's missing women:

> A global public has come to know the Downtown Eastside and the people who live here through journalistic sensationalism and the distancing language of academics, medical researchers, and law enforcement agencies. Two interconnected themes dominate public perceptions. The first focuses on exotic and shocking depictions of the illicit drug trade, commercial sex, and wanton violence and crime. The second focuses on promulgating implicit and explicit messages to the effect that the homeless […], drug addicts […], and survival sex workers […] are lazy, deviant, and individually to blame for the impoverished and often brutalizing conditions in which they live. (18)

The DTES becomes a "space of exception" (Pratt 1068) in the public imaginary where criminality, poverty, and degeneracy intersect and feed into one another. This is facilitated by juridical, academic, and journalistic discourses that mutually affirm this image, enabled by the "distancing language" that sets apart that particular geographical zone – and its inhabitants –from the rest of society. In writing this thesis and drawing further attention to an already hyper-visible

space, I am aware that I risk contributing further to this sensationalism. It is a risk I cautiously accept with the hopes that, together with other scholars, we will able to resituate the targeted violence against Indigenous women in the DTES within the broader historical and social context of settler-colonialism, thereby challenging the exceptional status ascribed to the DTES and shifting attention toward the ways in which all Canadians are implicated in ongoing colonial violence.[6] This begins through critically engaging with familiar narratives that focus on the exotic and shocking to understand how such narratives produce a degree of complacency and detachment from victims of systems of colonial violence – the very complacency and detachment on which these systems are premised.

The mobilization of shocking and distancing language is perhaps most readily identifiable in news coverage of cases of missing or murdered Indigenous women. At the peak of the media frenzy around the DTES case, coverage often centered on the actions the women themselves may have taken to put themselves at risk for violence – such as engaging in a "high-risk lifestyle" – rather than on details of their personal lives with which readers might identify. Lindsay Kines, the *Vancouver Sun* reporter credited with making the first sustained effort to investigate the rising numbers of disappearances, often grouped the women together according to socially marginalizing depictions of their lifestyles, even while covering the story sympathetically. Jiwani and Young note that, in Kines' eleven part series written with Kim Bolan and Lori Culbert, "the stories underscored stereotypical portrayals of the Downtown Eastside as an area of 'mean streets' and the women working in those streets as drug-addicted sex workers" (897). The missing

[6] This is not a unique aim in the sense that there are a number of scholars seeking to challenge the exceptionality of the DTES as a site of colonial violence; rather, I am drawing on and adding to an ongoing scholarly conversation working to recontextualize violence against women in the DTES within a broader context of systemic violences. See, for instance, Caitlin Janzen, Susan Strega, Leslie Brown, Jeannie Morgan and Jeannine Carriere, "'Nothing Short of a Horror Show': Triggering Abjection of Street Workers in Western Canadian Newspapers," *Hypatia* 28.1 (2013): 142-162; Dara Culhane, "Their Spirits Live within Us"; Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young, "Missing and Murdered Women"; Amber Dean, "Inheriting What Lives On"; Amber Dean, "Hauntings"; Yasmin Jiwani, "Bare Life"; Geraldine Pratt, "Abandoned Women and Spaces of the Exception."

persons poster that was issued by police, furthermore, included mug shots for many of the women that "reinforced the women's association with criminality" (Jiwani and Young 898). This pattern of representation in the media as the case unfolded had important ramifications for how both police and the public engaged with the story. Jiwani and Young explain:

> In the realm of representations, prostitution and Aboriginality mark these women as missing, but as naturally so—the stereotypical attributes ascribed to both these positions feed into and reproduce common-sense notions of itinerant and irresponsible behaviour, which is then seen as naturally inviting victimization. And of course, being located in zones of degeneracy makes these women all the more vulnerable to violence—a violence that is naturalized and divested of its structural underpinnings. (902)

The naturalized precarity of the women made violence against them unremarkable – until it became a sensational murder story. Families and friends of the missing women have since reported that police regularly responded to their concerns with the suggestion that the women led transient lifestyles and were therefore unlikely to be truly missing (Pearce 543). Newspaper coverage naturalizing the invisibility and violence experienced by women from the DTES works alongside this police response to both support it and to reassure the public that the victims of violence are on some level responsible for their own victimization.

The very presence or absence of news coverage focused on missing women is noteworthy. In her research comparing the news coverage of the disappearances of six women – three Indigenous women and three white women – Kristen Gilchrist concluded that the media reports differed, both qualitatively and quantitatively. She found that the white women were mentioned more than six times as often as the Indigenous women and that the articles about the missing white women were also much longer, with "a word count of more than four to one for the White women" (379). The articles' placement in newspapers also suggested that greater importance was

placed on the missing white women: “Thirty-seven percent of articles about the White women appeared on the front page versus 25 percent of articles about Aboriginal women. [...] Articles about the (as yet) unsolved disappearances/murders of Aboriginal women were relegated to the periphery of the page and, by extension, of reader’s [sic] consciousness” (380). Gilchrist’s research focuses on cases in Ontario, rather than in Vancouver, and the women in her study had no known connection to the sex trade; however, the trends indicated in Gilchrist’s research, taken alongside the type of coverage relating to the DTES, gesture toward a broader national narrative around the acceptability of violence against Indigenous women. Gilchrist demonstrates how certain racialized women become less recognizable to the public. The racialization of the missing women from the DTES, combined with other conditions such as sex work and addiction, serve to compound their marginalization in the public eye.

With the revelation of a serial murderer operating in the DTES and Robert Pickton’s arrest in 2002, however, the tone of the reporting changed. Coverage of the case, which, with the exception of the work of reporters such as Kines, Bolan, and Culbert, had previously been sparse, suddenly became prolific and focused heavily on the gruesome details of what was to become Canada’s largest ever serial murder investigation. After Pickton’s arrest, information about the forensic investigators’ search of the farm, the serial killer’s profile, and the suspicion that the women had been dismembered and their bodies disposed of in a rendering plant became central objects of public fascination. Particularly sensational was the possibility that the women’s bodies had been fed to the pigs on the farm and that the tainted pig meat had then been sold in the area. The apparent threat of a public health risk manifested as a national hysteria hinging on a concern for the self and a simultaneous discursive shift that recharacterized the women not as victims, but

as objects of horror. Some news outlets even began issuing graphic content warnings for their coverage.[7]

I suggest that the public's preoccupation with horrifying details regarding tainted meat and the violent spectacle of the pig farm can be read within the theoretical framing outlined by Mark Seltzer in his 1998 book, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*. Seltzer theorizes the allure of news coverage that focuses on shock and horror, detailing the development of the American public's fascination with serial killers and the social attraction to trauma that congeals to form what he terms a "wound culture." The "sociality of the wound" – the convergence of public attention on moments or events of pathologized violence, such as a serial murder case – contributes to a collective identity forged in response to sensationalized spectacles of bloody trauma: the "pathological public sphere" (8). The media's emphasis on the gruesome details of the violence committed against the murdered women of Vancouver's DTES, along with the public appetite for such details, functions to form the pathological public that Seltzer describes. Indeed, as Dara Culhane suggests, the public's impulse for voyeuristic consumption actively contributes to the proliferation of media documentation of the "photogenic spectacle of suffering" in the DTES (594). In this way, the pathological public sphere becomes self-affirming, forming both in response to the spectacles of violence and as a result of the public obsession with the woundedness symbolized by the DTES and its "missing and murdered." Moreover, as I go on to outline, such a wound culture hinges on the conjuring up of particular negative affects: specifically, the feelings of horror and disgust. Working with Adriana Cavarero's concept of "horrorism," I unpack how the affective climate of the pathological public sphere paralyzes the reader and forecloses any meaningful political or social engagement.

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[7] Yasmin Jiwani discusses this "sanitizing" of news coverage in her article, "'Bare Life': Disposable Bodies, Race, and Femicide in the Trial Coverage of Vancouver's Murdered 'Missing' Women." For an example of the types of content warnings used, see: "Murder allegations 'hogwash,' Pickton told Mountie," *CBC News*. 23 Jan. 2007.

To do this, I turn now to a text that I suggest is paradigmatic of the representational climate I have been tracing through Seltzer. Stevie Cameron's 2010 exposé *On the Farm: Robert William Pickton and the Tragic Story of Vancouver's Missing Women* takes up and amplifies the attention to shock and horror characteristic of much of the news coverage of the missing women case. It is also one of the two books mentioned to me by the man I met at the memorial bench that day in Vancouver. When he told me about it, I had not yet read the book, but the title stuck in my head; it seemed to be his major source of information on the case. More than the newspaper coverage – more, even, than the deeply personal writing of Maggie de Vries in *Missing Sarah*, the only other book he had read on the subject – Cameron's book was central for him. When I returned home and opened my copy of the book for the first time, it was without any clear idea of what to expect. What I found was a text that melded all of the sensationalism and graphic detail of the news stories covering the murdered women's trial with a novelistic structure and tone. *On the Farm* crosses lines of genre and style; offered up as an extended work of investigative journalism, the text aspires to biography, detailing the lives of the entire Pickton family, but reads throughout like a crime novel in the sensationalist tradition. Indeed, one review predicts that the book will remain "a classic for generations of crime readers to come" (Hughes n.p.). Even the subtitle – "Robert William Pickton and the Tragic Story of Vancouver's Missing Women" – points to the text's combination of biographical specificity and melodramatic tone.

As Maurizio Ascari notes in his discussion of the sensational in literature, journalism and sensation-fiction have always been closely tied: "The development of journalism fostered a first wave of sensationalism, which was indebted to criminal reports and marked by a morbid interest in catastrophe as well as the nightmarish aspects of modern urban life" (111). Appealing to the public's "morbid interest" in catastrophe, sensationalist fiction seems to have played a role in an earlier expression of Seltzer's pathological public sphere. Tracing the rise of the sensational to

mid- to late-19th century England and the United States, Ascari argues that such texts capitalized on "widespread fears and curiosity, uncannily combining gruesome details from the chronicles of crime and melodrama" (112). Indeed, many authors of sensationalist novels drew their inspiration from real criminal cases but magnified their "melodramatic potential" (Ascari 113). While Cameron's text cannot be said to be fiction – in an author's note preceding the prologue, she takes care to outline her exhaustive research process and to cite her sources: transcripts of police interviews, court testimony, and conversations with women from the DTES – she employs many of the same "magnifying" techniques of the sensationalist novel.

Primary among these techniques is Cameron's reliance on the shock value that comes with the inclusion of gruesome details. Such details function to highlight the "juxtaposition of everyday reality" and horror that Ascari identifies as an innovation of sensation fiction (114). In offering a biography of Pickton – and of the entire Pickton family – Cameron paints an image of the day-to-day realities of life "on the farm." While she emphasizes the eccentricity of the Picktons, the squalor of their home, and the slovenly personal hygiene habits of the two brothers, Cameron nevertheless establishes what Seltzer terms "an abnormal normalcy" (21): the routines of an unexceptional man from an unexceptional family. This normalcy heightens the sense of horror that results when ordinariness is considered alongside the violent acts Cameron discusses in forensic detail, violent acts that Pickton is later convicted of having committed; the very normalcy of his life makes the accompanying violence a shocking juxtaposition.

Particularly evocative of the sensationalist tradition is Cameron's attention to the locality of these crimes; she sustains a focus on the social and geographical proximity of Pickton and his property to the surrounding community. Cameron refers several times over the course of the text to the division and sale of parcels of farm property to real estate developers, driving home the fact that a number of homes, businesses, and even a school are built on the land where a serial killer

hid his victims' bodies. She also takes care early on to establish Pickton's position as a local butcher who was in the habit of selling or giving away meat within the community. In so doing, she capitalizes on the visceral disgust the reader may feel when it is revealed that this meat may have been tainted with human remains. As Ascari, drawing from H.L. Mansel, argues, "topicality is a fundamental attribute of sensation fiction. […] 'A tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting'" (115). For a reader who lived or spent time in the Vancouver or Port Coquitlam area where the farm is located, the possibility that they themselves may have consumed tainted meat is highly topical indeed.

The juxtaposition of the day-to-day normalcy of Pickton's life and the horror of the murders succeeds in ensuring that the reader's only possible question becomes: "What kind of person could *do* such a thing?" The inner workings of Pickton's mind are of central interest to Cameron's investigation, again aligning her with the sensationalist tradition which, as Ascari notes, "analyses the criminal's psychology" (119). He continues, quoting sensationalist novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon: "Over and over again, [villainous] characters are described on the ground of their family history […]. 'A man's family history is the man'" (Ascari 127). As one review of the book describes it, Cameron's main focus is "the grotesque figure of Pickton himself. Canada's – and perhaps North America's – most prolific serial killer is described as a classic backwoods bogeyman, a smelly, cretinous, somewhat feral-looking ogre with kitschy and insatiable sexual urges who fed his victims to his hogs (and, in some cases, to unsuspecting friends)" (Good n.p.). Cameron takes advantage, in this way, of an established cross-over between sensation fiction and sensational journalism to script her representation of Robert Pickton by drawing together disparate and contradictory accounts of the man from family, friends, and neighbours to create an inscrutable picture of a convicted serial killer: oddity, criminal

mastermind, gentle soul, uneducated underachiever, creep, and scapegoat. By attending to Pickton – his upbringing, his proclivities, his possible motives – Cameron works to both demystify and simultaneously mythologize him.

The deployment of gruesome details and reliance on shock value in *On the Farm* require that Cameron's focus be on Pickton, the police investigation of the property, the examination of forensic evidence, and the trial – anything but the lives of the women themselves. It is not until a third of the way through the seven-hundred-page book that the reader reaches "Part Two: The Missing Women," which, despite its name, has very little insight into the women's lives beyond physical identifiers and favourite hobbies. Instead, a typical description includes details such as the following:

> Sarah de Vries was exquisite. A mixture of several races – black, aboriginal, Mexican Indian and white – gave her caramel-coloured skin, high cheekbones and a wild, thick tangle of black curls that framed her face. Her large, wide-set, almond-shaped eyes were framed by thick lashes; her broad smile was warm and engaging. Sarah was slender and loved fashion and makeup; she liked to see heads turn as she walked by. And much of her beauty came from her intelligence – she was engaged with the world and with the people she met. (Cameron 193)

This description both racializes and exoticizes Sarah by focusing on her "caramel-coloured skin" and "almond-shaped eyes." It also implies that, as a woman eager for attention, she is – on some level – naturally vulnerable to the fate that befalls her. Such a description is about objectifying Sarah, reducing her to a collection of body parts; rather than identifying with her, the reader is encouraged to view her from a distance.

Dawn Crey, another of the women whose DNA was found at the Pickton farm, is the focus of a similar descriptive passage:

> Everyone knew Dawn, a sweet-natured woman whose face had been ravaged by acid thrown over her many years before. As a child she was famous for her gorgeous smile, bright, eager eyes and big dimples; now her face was twisted and scarred and in her eyes there was no hope left. There had been a time when she was beautiful. There had been a time when she was happy. But there had never been a time in her forty-three years on earth when her life was carefree. (Cameron 313)

Dawn's life is compressed here to its most tragic, most painfully evocative, characteristics. Her scarred face comes to stand in for her sad, turbulent life. Sarah, too, though not explicitly painted in the tragic terms used to characterize Dawn, is made a tragic figure through the juxtaposition of her happy disposition and her ultimate violent death. Her very presence in the book confirms her status as a victim, a murdered woman. In this way, Sarah and Dawn become wounded women, objects of pity and compassion, but also of fascination. Just as the bystander rushes to the scene of the accident (Seltzer 1), the reader becomes a bystander to their tragic lives, both horrified and compelled to read on as events unfold. As Seltzer argues, in the pathological public sphere, "addictive violence [becomes] collective spectacle" (255); as confirmed tragic figures, Sarah and Dawn are situated as the sites of this violent spectacle in Cameron's representation of Pickton and his crimes.

Drawing upon the language of addiction is significant in this context. For Seltzer, addiction is collective, a social preoccupation with affective excess; it is an addiction to woundedness scripted within an affective climate of horror and disgust and centered on the torn bodies of the victims of killers who are themselves embodiments of addictive violence – what he calls "the mass in person" (105). Yet, the wound around which Cameron's reading public gathers is situated in bodies that are physically and socially marked by addiction in a very different way. As Cameron makes clear, the typical profile of the missing women was that of "addict and […]

prostitute" (68). Addiction is embedded in the seams of intersecting social systems of oppression that delineate certain racialized, classed, and gendered bodies as wounded – and woundable – objects. And it serves, moreover, to make these bodies complicit in the violence they experience. The reading public, feeding its addiction to "bloody spectacle," is absolved and the responsibility for and trauma of violence is returned to its proper place: the bodies of women like Sarah and Dawn.

It is in the moments when she reduces Sarah, Dawn, and the other women murdered by Pickton to their damaged body parts that Cameron appeals to a pathological public sphere whose appetite is only for violence and woundedness. The sensationalism of *On the Farm*, preoccupied with the graphic details of a serial murder case, aligns in this way with a wound culture that solicits and perpetuates itself through exaggerated or heightened affective responses. Any sympathetic affect the reader may feel is inexorably redirected into one of horror and disgust that responds to the sight of the bloody spectacle, the disrupted body. But what is the effect of cultivating such an affective climate?

In her 2007 book, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, Adriana Cavarero traces the etymological and cultural roots of horror, describing how the Latin *horreo* and Greek *phrisso* "[denote] primarily a state of paralysis, reinforced by the feeling of growing stiff on the part of someone who is freezing" (7). Linguistically, horror calls up the sensation of immobility, of being incapable of response. Moreover, while fear is certainly a component of this, "horror has to do with repugnance" (Cavarero 7). To understand this connection, Cavarero turns to Greek mythology and the figure of Medusa, suggesting that it is her specific fate – being beheaded by Perseus – that makes Medusa, more than any other figure, the "incarnation of horror" (7). "What is unwatchable above all," Cavarero argues, "for the being that knows itself irremediably singular, is the spectacle of disfigurement, which the singular body cannot bear" (8). In other words, it is

more than the fear of death that instills horror; it is the affront of dismemberment to human singularity, the offence to the "ontological dignity that the human figure possesses" (Cavarero 9).

What, then, if we read Cameron's book within the framework Cavarero establishes of horror as a paralytic agent? How do the ontologically-ruptured bodies of Pickton's victims, picked over in forensic detail by Cameron, function? Cameron herself acknowledges the centrality of horror to her project. In an interview in 2010, Cameron pointed out that her goal was not to give the women voices but, rather, to "show the mounting horror of one death after another after another" (Polychronakos n.p.). Cavarero argues that we are all vulnerable subjects. Our unique singularity is perpetually at risk of destruction through bodily harm. However, she suggests that there exist "two poles of the essential alternative inscribed in the condition of vulnerability: *wounding* and *caring*. Inasmuch as vulnerable, exposed to the other, the singular body is irremediably open to both responses" (Cavarero 20, my emphasis). In other words, vulnerability does not inevitably lead to the perpetration of harm, but has the capacity to summon an entirely different response: that of care. Cameron, however, in focusing on the evisceration of the women's bodies, undercuts the possibility for care. Her portrayal is designed to repulse and paralyze her reader, reducing each woman to her component (torn) body parts and compounding the physical destruction of her singularity with the added symbolic destruction of objectification; readers, unable to empathically feel themselves into[8] a dismembered corpse, are discouraged from developing a caring response. As such, Cameron ensures that the reader, frozen, must either turn away or be paralyzed.

I have suggested that *On the Farm* is paradigmatic of a broader discourse that sensationalizes violence against the missing and murdered women of the DTES. It seems to me

[8] Here, I am drawing on Hartman, who explains how empathy is understood as "a projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other" (19), a sort of *feeling the self into the other*.

that the public's fascination with "torn and open bodies" (Seltzer 1) prescribes the conditions whereby the wound itself – the spectacle of violence – becomes the centre of any engagement with the issue of violence against women from the DTES and, as I will argue, Indigenous women more specifically. The sensationalist tropes of fiction bleed into ostensibly objective news coverage of the issue,[9] contributing to a cultural climate in which the violence enacted on certain bodies becomes the subject of fascination and horror, thereby placing those bodies beyond the sphere of recognition and, by extension, political mobilization. Cameron's book offers many things: a comprehensive overview of the police mishandling of the case, a picture of the actions of a serial killer, a play-by-play of the Murdered Women's Trial. What I suggest it may not offer is an opportunity for the reader to develop what Judith Butler calls a connection to the women as grievable subjects, nor does it seek to establish an understanding of the colonial context in which the violence against the majority of them took place. Like the broader media discourse around missing and murdered women in Vancouver, Cameron's text establishes a chronology of events that turns on the horror and sensationalism of the case rather than on the systemic failures that make certain lives disposable.

Notably, recent coverage of the issue of missing and murdered women has undergone a shift; with the development of a growing body of research on the systemic challenges facing Indigenous peoples in Canada, major news sources such as the CBC are beginning to take note of the broader implications of the high rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls. Resources such as "It Ends Here," an online blog series discussing colonial gender violence, and the growing number of citizen-run databases (for instance, "No More Silence" and missingpeople.net), as well as the building movement to draw attention to the issue through

[9] See "Farmer 'skinned victim on meat hook,'" *The Guardian*. 26 Jan. 2007; Suzanne Fournier, "Horrified stepmom learned Pickton victim stashed as 'ground meat,'" *The Province*. 5 Aug. 2010; "Pickton described how he killed women, former friend says," *CBC News*. 16 Jul. 2007.

protests and memorial marches, all work to make this a national issue. However, while the tone of coverage may have shifted, that does not necessarily herald a meaningful change in attitude in a social context where Indigenous women, some of whom live what are perceived to be precarious, high risk "lifestyles," are permissible targets of violence and disdain.

Looking at this broader picture of symbolic and material violence against Indigenous women across Canada, why engage with the case of Vancouver's missing women? This case has been obsessively detailed in the news and has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion and artistic representation.[10] Rather than rehashing arguments raised already, I am interested in what one might call the surplus of attention focused on Vancouver's missing and murdered women and what this tells us about how the case is framed in the public imagination as a singular, exceptional event. The sensationalistic framing and focus upon the women from the DTES obscures the absolutely unexceptional and systemic nature of violence against Indigenous women and the broader Canadian public's implication in this violence. I want to confront the "mistaken consolation" that comes from allowing ourselves to focus on the seeming exceptionality of a serial murder case (Granzow and Dean 111) and to counteract the erasure of complicity and responsibility that follows from the failure to attend to quotidian forms of violence that do not receive front-page coverage. I am choosing to look at the violence experienced by Indigenous women in Vancouver's DTES not to reaffirm the unusualness of that locale, but to resituate it as fundamentally linked to the contemporary entrenched and quotidian violences of settler-colonialism.

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[10] A few such artistic representations include Pamela Masik, *The Forgotten*, Vancouver Public Library, Jan. 2010; *Stolen Sisters: One-Hour Television Documentary*, Fahrenheit Films, 2007. Film; *Indigenous Women in Action: Voices from Vancouver*, dir. Gloria Alvernez Mulcahy, balance productions, 2007. Film; John Mikhail Asfour and Elee Kraljii Gardner, *V6A: Writing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012; Janis Cole, *Remember Their Names*, Trinity Square Video, Jul.-Aug. 2009; Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, Talking Stick Festival, Vancouver, 2002; Rebecca Belmore, *The Named and the Unnamed*, The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, 2002.

This thesis, therefore, turns to forms of representation that, I argue, offer a different response to the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and, as such, call upon the reader in different ways as well. Chapter One will take up Maggie de Vries's memoir *Missing Sarah*, working with Judith Butler's concept of grievability to unpack a representational politics that focuses on the value of the singular, irreplaceable life. Situating *Missing Sarah* in the tradition of the humanitarian, slave narrative, and sentimental genres, I will seek to demonstrate how de Vries works to compel her reader through invoking a sense of implication or complicity and shared grief for the loss of her sister and, by extension, the DTES's other disappeared women. Critically, however, I suggest that the "precariousness of empathy" (Hartman 4) limits de Vries's project; like Butler, de Vries attempts to build a connection on the basis of shared grief and empathic affect. She wants her reader to identify with Sarah and to mourn her loss as they would the loss of their own loved one. However, in failing to recognize the Western cultural investments inherent in her vision of what it means to expand the limits of grievability, de Vries's attempt risks becoming a colonizing gesture that obscures the experiences of the disappeared women. The reader is encouraged to identify with de Vries herself, rather than her sister, and, in this way, is able to maintain a comfortable distance from the realities of their own implication in the colonial violence that targets Indigenous women.

Chapter Two seeks to move beyond the individualizing and decontextualizing representational politics of *Missing Sarah* to what I understand as a representation of refusal. In her poetry collection, *Unearthed*, Janet Marie Rogers (Mohawk/Tuscarora) refuses to limit her critique to the discrete acts of violence perpetrated against individual Indigenous people. Instead, her writing addresses the violence enacted on Pickton's victims as it is connected to the ongoing colonial seizure of land and attempted elimination of Indigenous cultures and traditions through the direct targeting of Indigenous women. I read Rogers's poetry alongside a collection by

women living in the DTES, *In Plain Sight*, which makes room for the representation of refusal that Rogers makes explicit. Drawing from Leanne Simpson (Anishnaabe), Audra Simpson (Mohawk), and Glen Coulthard's (Dene) conceptions of an Indigenous politics of refusal and resurgence, I will work to critique narratives that treat the violence against women in Vancouver's DTES as exceptional and noteworthy, arguing that this is in fact precisely the goal of a colonial project that seeks to eliminate any Indigenous claim to land and life. Whereas de Vries seeks to prioritize the recognition of the other's grievability as a way of expanding the limits of the present settler-colonial system, Rogers and Robertson and Culhane represent a vision of Indigenous resurgence that moves beyond the limits of colonial concepts of recognition.

In the opening section of this introduction, I gestured to the question of complicity and how those of us not directly harmed by overt forms of colonial violence have the troubling privilege of denying or turning away from our own implication in these systems. The question of how we perpetuate and benefit from systems of dispossession and the violent erasure of Indigenous peoples is too seldomly posed. For me, an essential part of writing this thesis has been engaging with what this question means in my own life. It is not a clear or defined project, nor does it offer the promise of finality or closure; yet I find that the complexity and openness of the question of complicity is an important reminder that *relationality* is fundamentally at the heart of anti-colonial work. Those of us living in what is now known as Canada are necessarily involved in the relationships that make up the contemporary North American social and political landscape. How we choose to understand and act upon this relationality will determine what decolonial futures become possible.

Initially, what I thought was going to be a clear project of interrogating the representational politics at work in conversations around violence against Indigenous women has, instead, become an introduction into the much more complex and ongoing process of

understanding my own position within a web of relationships. As a person with both settler and Indigenous heritage, I find myself positioned at the intersection of living colonial histories that find their strength in the denial of these relationships. This denial is, according to Cree scholar Dwayne Donald, at the heart of colonialism (n.p.) and, as such, it seems essential for those of us committed to challenging the entrenched and accepted history of this place to look first to the relationships that form us, to acknowledge and take seriously the idea that these relationships matter in the present. The question of *who I come from* – of the particular relationships that ground my own experience – is something I consider explicitly elsewhere,[11] but it also guides my thinking in more subtle ways throughout this thesis. My family history embodies an expression of colonialism, from the legislative erasure of my paternal great-grandmother's Odawa identity to my maternal Irish-Canadian family's involvement in the religious and educational institutions responsible for the genocide of Indigenous cultures. Knowing these personal, overlapping histories demands that I think differently about my own place in the familiar narratives that enable contemporary representations of violence against Indigenous women to evacuate any awareness of five hundred years of colonial violence and the ongoing reliance of the Canadian state on the continued invisibility of this violence.

The challenge of this thesis is to resist the impulse to turn away from these uncomfortable histories and omnipresent violences and, instead, to meaningfully engage with the generative, generational obligations that ground Indigenous understandings of relationality. This means coming up against the limits of Western representations of relationality that are premised on affective identification or certain narrow conceptions of the human; it means requiring myself to consider who I am writing for, who I am accountable to. Only then can we begin to imagine the possibility of radically decolonizing political and social change. Amber Dean writes: "the

[11] Sylvie Vigneux, "In Consideration of Belly Buttons," *GUTS Canadian Feminist Magazine*, 4 (2015): n.p. Web.

strategy of imagining otherwise has much to offer for social and political life even if it cannot dictate clear directions or generate much in the way of definitive answers to some of the urgent questions of our times" ("Hauntings" 26). In keeping with this strategy of imagining otherwise, this thesis certainly does not dictate clear conclusions or simple answers to these questions; rather, it strives to follow and engage with the work of Indigenous scholars and activists who have long worked to imagine creative, resurgent ways to challenge the inevitability of violence against Indigenous women and the colonial systems underpinning it.

Chapter 1

"I want all of us to know them": Grievability and the Problem of Intimacy in Maggie de Vries's *Missing Sarah: A Memoir of Loss*

> *Several years ago, Betty [Kovacic] felt called to paint portraits of all the missing women. At that time there were fifty on the list. [T]hey hang together around the walls of each gallery, gazing out into the room at viewers and at fifty figures in shrouded black fabric that float above the floor wearing banners that proclaim in gold letters, "When I grow up I…," spelling out the dreams of girls in many languages.*
>
> *I have faced Sarah's death, yet I still feel her with me when I read her words. She is present in my life in so many ways. But I know what happened to her and I am not afraid. How powerful it is in the face of such knowledge to enter a room where Sarah stands with forty-nine other women, also lost to us! The extent of our loss hits home in that room full of missing women, but paradoxically, our pain is lightened by their presence.*
>
> *They are there together. They are beautiful. And we are with them.*
>
> *(de Vries, Missing Sarah, 277)*

I first encountered Maggie de Vries's memoir, *Missing Sarah*, as an undergraduate student at the University of Guelph. I read it as part of an English class that dealt with the ethics of memorialization in the face of violent trauma. Reading the book, I remember being saturated with an uncomfortable awareness of my own geographical proximity to the memory, at least, of Sarah: Sarah de Vries, one of Vancouver's Missing Women. At the time, I felt weighed down by the sense that, somehow, I was *connected* to this book in ways that other readers could not be. I lived in Guelph, the same city where Sarah had spent long periods of her childhood; I walked the same streets and shopped at the same stores. I could picture her perched on the edge of the fountain in the downtown square, waiting for a bus perhaps. I began to move through these spaces with a new attentiveness to how (I imagined) they brought me closer to her.

I finished my degree and moved away; *Missing Sarah* got packed up with my other books. Every now and then, though, some new connection would materialize and I would be reminded

of the book and the feelings it had evoked in me. I realized that *Missing Sarah* was not the only book I had read by Maggie de Vries: I had grown up reading one of her children's books, *Once Upon a Golden Apple*, which she co-wrote with her aunt, Jean Little. I learned, too, that the cottage that my Aunt Helen and my mum visit every summer was once owned by Jean Little and was the same cottage where Sarah used to spend her summers. However slight or tangential, these moments of crossover of my life with Sarah's felt significant. As my interest in the issue of violence against women and the politics of representation developed, I returned yet again to *Missing Sarah*. After I had started work on my thesis, my aunt mentioned to me that she is old friends with Jean Little and Pat de Vries, Sarah's aunt and mother respectively. My cousin Elizabeth, it turns out, grew up playing with Sarah's daughter Jeanie. These revelatory moments filled me each time with the thrill of recognition that I felt when I first read the book: it is the thrill of seeing myself projected into a story that is not my own. It is believing, as de Vries tells us, that "we are with them," that we are connected to a group of women even if we have never met them.

Yet, even while I cannot help but be struck by these connections – real or inflated – I have also become wary of them. Perhaps, more accurately, I have become wary of my own responses to them, the way I am tempted to understand them as a form of permission to insert myself into the narrative. I tend now toward a caution that I eschewed as a fledgling feminist whose politics hinged on acquisitive identification more than any nuanced understanding of intersectional experiences of systemic violence and oppression. My desire to imagine myself into proximity with Sarah is not unique, nor is it harmless. It is, I suspect, precisely the thrilling sensation of connection that readers of *Missing Sarah* are encouraged to feel that threatens to overwhelm Sarah's own experience; how and to what effect are the questions that drive this chapter.

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The convergence of what Mark Seltzer calls a pathological public sphere around the sensationalized spectacle of serial murder, the bloody wound, and suffering bodies grounds much of the media coverage and public discussion around the case of Vancouver's missing and murdered women. Yet, while a text such as Stevie Cameron's *On the Farm* engages with and feeds into that discussion, some responses to the violence against women in the DTES attempt to identify and actively resist the sensationalized consumption of pain. Maggie de Vries's *Missing Sarah* refuses to rest on the appeal of shock and trauma and denies notoriety to a convicted serial killer by resisting the impulse to engage with his motives. Instead, de Vries struggles to "bring near" (Hartman 18) the life of one murdered woman, her sister Sarah, in all of her particularity. Working through Judith Butler's concept of grievability, I suggest that, in replacing the affective scaffolding of horror and disgust constructed through sensationalist representations of violence with one rooted in grief and mourning, de Vries's memoir attempts to invoke a sense of ethical responsibility in her reader. In seeking to establish a "primary sociality" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 28) of humans through the shared affective experience of grief and loss, rather than pathologized violence or "wound," de Vries strives toward a representational politics that expands the definition of what counts as a grievable life and values the unique, singular "person-as-such" (Edkins ix).

De Vries's turn to grievability and the singular person is not without risk, however; the attempt to "bring near" the experiences of the other through empathic identification is "slippery" (Hartman 18), and risks flattening and obscuring unique experiences of violence through the "obliteration of the other" and the substitution of "the self for the other" (Hartman 7). Furthermore, there is the tendency, identified by Malini Johar Schueller, of universalizing appeals to empathic emotion to fail to recognize their own Western cultural investments and colonizing conceptions of community (Schueller 237); this is something we also see in Butler's theory of

grievability. I do not intend to dispute the deeply problematic nature of theorizing or literary representations that reinscribe the colonial power structures they aim to undermine. Rather, I am interested in understanding how the representational politics of *Missing Sarah* work against and alongside dominant discursive constructions of missing and murdered Indigenous women and what the political implications might be of the affective turn entailed by a framework of grievability and loss. Can tangible political change – the kind of change for which Indigenous peoples across this country advocate – follow from the intensified affective engagement that a text such as *Missing Sarah* seeks to spark? Can readers' experiences of grief and loss disrupt normalized violence against Indigenous women? Following from the recent work of Indigenous theorists and activists who seek to call into question the political function of recognition, I will argue that recognition – figured as the political aim of expanding an understanding of what counts as a grievable human life – is insufficient. Indeed, as I expand on in my next chapter, such an aim is counterproductive without attention to and respect for Indigenous understandings of relationality, connection to land, and the inherently gendered nature of colonial violence.

Maggie de Vries's 2003 memoir, *Missing Sarah: A Memoir of Loss*, traces the life of her sister Sarah from her adoption as an eleven-month-old baby into a white family in 1970[12] through her childhood and transition onto the streets of Vancouver and, ultimately, to her disappearance and murder. De Vries diligently documents the progress of the police investigation into the disappearance of her sister and the dozens of women from Vancouver's DTES, the subsequent media coverage and, in the 2008 edition of the text, the trial. Throughout, however, she works to foreground excerpts from Sarah's journals, correspondence, and poetry, highlighting Sarah's

[12] This places Sarah's adoption at the tail end of the 'sixties scoop,' a time when "large numbers of Native children were removed from their families and communities and placed in non-Native homes" (Lawrence 37). During this period, numbers of Indigenous children in care rose from "less than 1 percent to between one third and one-half of all children in care" (Lawrence 112). As Lawrence explains, this had "far-reaching and devastating consequences for whole generations of Native children, their families, and the communities at large" (37), from spending years in foster care to cultural and familial dislocation and isolation.

voice. She also writes about her own memories of growing up with Sarah, their family dynamics, and their relationship as adults. The drawing together of these intimate writings offers a sense of familiarity – of closeness – typically not present in media representations of the DTES's missing women. What, then, is the function of this sense of familiarity? How does de Vries mobilize the details of Sarah's life to impel her reader to a sense of ethical engagement and action?

The question of the relation between representation and action is at the centre of humanitarian representational politics and the affective work they attempt, a relation that I will argue remains alive in *Missing Sarah*. Unlike *On the Farm*, which seeks to engage readerly affect via titillation and horror – putting it in line with true crime or detective fiction genres – *Missing Sarah* attempts a particular kind of affective work grounded in capacious sentimentality and shared grief. In the following pages, I will briefly trace a connection to three foundational genres that I suggest lay the groundwork for de Vries to motivate action through engaging the reader's affect: the humanitarian narrative, the slave narrative, and sentimentalism. Though they do so in distinct ways, I suggest that each of these genres works to script readerly affect with the aim of spurring social change, a grounding tactic of *Missing Sarah*'s politics.

In his 1989 essay, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," Thomas Laqueur argues that the humanitarian narrative, which he tracks across eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, is distinct from earlier forms in how it attaches a moral imperative for intervention to representations of suffering bodies by way of inspiring the "sympathetic passions" (204) of readers. Laqueur argues that three things characterize this kind of narrative: first, the narrative relies on "detail as the sign of truth" (177); second, the "personal body" becomes the site of pain as well as of a common bond between sufferer and witness; and third, positive change – relief for the sufferer – is represented as "possible, effective, and therefore morally imperative" (178). In other words, the humanitarian narrative mobilizes detailed representations

of individual suffering bodies to spur social and political reform by attaching a moral requirement for action to readers' affective responses. The importance of specificity is of particular significance to Laqueur. He claims: "Great causes seem to spring from the power of *a* lacerated back, *a* diseased countenance, *a* premature death, to goad the moral imagination" (178, original emphasis). Interestingly, though, the lacerated back is not that of the writer; for humanitarian narratives, the suffering body of another, rather than the self, is the object of the narrative. This is clear in the type of writing he examines: inquiries, medical reports, and autopsies. All are written by external expert observers about the suffering of others; all are written at a distance. Importantly, Maggie de Vries, though she attempts to centre Sarah's narrative voice and is deeply personally invested in her subject, is nevertheless another such external observer; her voice is assigned a degree of authority through her position as an academic, a non-drug user, and an upper-middle class white woman. De Vries's seemingly liminal status as an internal and external observer is a distinction to which I return later.

While Laqueur's investigation of the humanitarian narrative focuses narrowly on the emergent genre of reports and inquiries, the practice of evoking certain readerly affects and linking them to a moral imperative is not limited to that genre but has been deployed in other forms of writing in the service of humanitarian politics. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, abolitionists offered an alternative model of the humanitarian narrative in the widely read and popular form of slave narratives. As Augusta Rohrbach notes, individualized "human suffering […] forms the central link between the 'humanitarian narrative' of the slave narratives and the humanitarian realism that is the genre's legacy" (137-38), mirroring the reliance on detail as the "sign of truth" foundational to the humanitarian genre. Of course, the goal of this impression of veracity was to arouse the (white) reader's sensibility by demonstrating the suffering of the enslaved; as Saidiya Hartman explains, it was logically understood that "by

bringing suffering near, the ties of sentiment are forged" (18) and the reader would be compelled to take up the abolitionist cause. Rohrbach suggests that, "locating the author as a physical body helps foster the reader empathy that the unfolding text requires. To be successful, these texts must identify the author as a subject whose suffering is not just plausible (as in the fictional setting) but *real*" (139, original emphasis). Chiou-rung Deng similarly identifies the centrality of readerly affect to the political function of slave narratives: "slave narratives have a strong desire to move the reader, to change the reader's mind from advocating slavery to abolishing slavery, or in a word, to arouse the reader's sympathy toward the sufferings under slavery" (117). As with Laqueur's theory, the other's "personal body" acts as the individual site of suffering and, consequently, as the bond between the sufferer as other and the reader. The reader, whose empathic affect is stirred in the face of this suffering, *cannot* but seek slavery's end.

Insofar as they both link the moral imperative for social change to a reader's affective response to representations of suffering, the slave narrative and humanitarian narrative are closely tied in their representational politics. One departure worth noting, however, is that slave narratives shift the narrative voice from that of an external observer to that of the slave, ostensibly humanizing the slave and reinforcing the veracity of their narrative as a result of its nature as personal, firsthand experience. As Hartman identifies, at first consideration this may seem to require the white reader to recognize the slave as human and, therefore, fundamentally deserving of the rights and freedoms they themselves enjoy; the affective resonances stemming from the realization that they "possess the same nature and feelings" as the slave enjoin the white reader to recognize their mutual humanity (Hartman 18). However, as will become important for my argument in this chapter, the slipperiness of the invoked empathic emotion encourages a troubling elision to occur between the witness (or spectator) of slavery and the enslaved. While pain may provide "the common language of humanity" (Hartman 18), it also enables the white

reader to substitute their imagined pain in place of the slave's, rendering a concern for the self rather than for the other uppermost in the affective circuit this genre is understood to activate.

From the representation of suffering in reports and inquiries to slave narratives, the political mobilization of affect was diversely employed in the 18th and 19th century public sphere, and perhaps nowhere was the emphasis on readerly affect more apparent than in the sentimental genre. As June Howard outlines, the sentimental genre has been widely and variously defined by scholars, but common across definitions is its association with emotion, whether figured as excessive and exaggerated or sincere and authentic (65). Linking sentimentalism to Enlightenment morality and values of justice and benevolence, Howard further argues for the connection of "sentiment [to a] modern moral identity" (Howard 70). While initially not an overtly gendered genre, a growing stigmatization of sentiment as encouraging excessive and self-indulgent emotionality contributed to a feminization and privatization of affect-driven literature such as sentimentalism, severing it, to an extent, from its overt moral or political affiliations. Howard, tracing the progress of sentimentalism from its eighteenth-century British origins, suggests that its key features – "its association with tears, with humanitarian reform, with convention and commodification" (74) – ensured its shift into the domestic, feminine domain. As such, "emotion [became] correlated with the private as opposed to the public, and with the feminine as opposed to the masculine" (Howard 73-4). Privatized, its humanitarian politics were obscured.

More recently, in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (2008), Lauren Berlant challenges gendered understandings of what counts as a "public," mapping the feminization of affect-oriented contemporary cultural production onto the creation of what she calls the "intimate public" sphere of femininity. According to Berlant, we continue to live with the unfinished business of sentimentality. The sphere of "women's culture,"

as she calls it, is organized through the mass consumption of "commodified genres of intimacy, such as Oprah-esque chat shows and 'chick lit'" (x), forms which continue to be devalued, as noted by Howard, for their association with commodification and femininity. This intimate public develops around the expectation of shared affective responses rooted in the assumed presence of a common worldview and emotional knowledge, even when a common experience or shared history do not exist.

How, then, does the continued confinement of sentimentalism to a feminized "intimate public" impact the moral imperative for social change essential to humanitarian narratives, which also persist today? Berlant writes: "intimate spheres *feel* like ethical places based on the sense of capacious emotional continuity they circulate, which seems to derive from an ongoing potential for relief from the hard, cold world" (6). In other words, the moral imperative to relieve suffering central to Laqueur's theorization of humanitarian narratives' function is translated in contemporary sentimental culture into a collective *feeling* that relief of the (presumed to be shared) painful experience of inequality and marginalization is possible. As Berlant argues, the sentimental genre "generate[s] an affective and intimate public sphere that seeks to harness the power of emotion to change what is structural in the world. [A] culture of 'true feeling' emerge[s] that sanctifies suffering as a relay to universality" (12). The circulation of feeling, Berlant argues, becomes part of a perceived collectivizing of experience, not in the political sphere but in the intimate public of feminine cultural production.

It is within this affect-oriented literary tradition and contemporary cultural production that I am reading Maggie de Vries's memoir, *Missing Sarah*. The book, first published in 2003, has met with public and critical success, winning several awards and becoming a finalist for the 2003 Governor General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction, as well as having a second edition printed in

2008. However, while the book has been widely read and reviewed,[13] it has been taken up relatively little within a scholarly context. When it is discussed, *Missing Sarah* is usually characterized as a memorial "counter-frame" to the dehumanizing portrayals of the murdered women typical of media coverage (Jiwani, "Bare Life" 101) or as an authoritative source of information on the sequence of events (Pratt 1058-1059).[14] The most often cited and discussed aspect of the book is Sarah's poetry and journal entries and how her writing might move readers to regard her in a new light (Dean, "Inheriting What Lives On" 174; Pratt 1071). However, there is a gap in how the memoir is taken up when it comes to engaging with its formal aspects and how these generic features might influence the book's politics. While I am interested in how *Missing Sarah* appears in stark contrast to the circulation of gruesome details common to news coverage, my inquiry extends to engage with the *form* that de Vries chooses – her language and rhetoric – and the risks that follow from that form. Drawing on Amber Dean's understanding of critique as "a practice of uncertainty" ("Ethics of Critique" 234), my aim is not to 'catch out' the author and position my own interpretation as somehow authoritative, but to articulate what I perceive to be troubling implications of the text and to take these up carefully and respectfully.[15]

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[13] See, for instance: Hainsworth, Jeremy. "Sarah, we hardly knew you," *The Globe and Mail* 26 Jul. 2003; Wolfwood, Theresa. "Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister," *Briar Patch* 34.2 (2005): 30; Rasbach, Noreen. "Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister," *Quill & Quire* 69.9 (2003): 43; Wiersema, Robert. "A sister's journey: From darkness to light," *The Globe and Mail* 21 Aug. 2003; Hughes, Kim. "A Sister of the Street," *Toronto Star* 31 Aug. 2003.

[14] See also: Amber Dean, "Can Names Implicate Us?"; Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young, "Missing and Murdered Women"; Laurie McNeill, "Death and the Maidens: Vancouver's Missing Women, the Montreal Massacre, and Commemoration's Blind Spots," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 38.3: 2008, 375-398; Shawna Ferris, *Street Sex Work and Canadian Cities: Resisting a Dangerous Order*, Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2015; Melora Koepke, *Corpus Delicti: Disappearance and bodily traces in Vancouver, 1978-2007*, MA thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, 2007.

[15] Is there a distinction, here, between de Vries's text and Cameron's? Is one more deserving of the respectful ethics of critique describes by Dean? I suggest that the differing tone and intentions of these texts invite distinct critiques. Dean discusses the difficulty of critiquing a work meant to memorialize or commemorate the victims of violence. But where *Missing Sarah* clearly expresses this memorial impulse, *On the Farm* aims to pick apart a serial killer's psychology, expose police ineptitude, and detail the brutal violence experienced by the victims. Cameron herself states that her aim is not to memorialize or give voice to the women, but to document (Polychronakos n.p.). This does not make Cameron's work exempt from ethical critique; rather, I suggest that, to account for the particular intentions and rhetorical strategies of the text, a different kind of critique is warranted.

Written by the sister of one of Vancouver's missing women, the memoir attempts to open up the reader to the specificities of one woman's life and, in so doing, to cultivate a sense of affective identification leading to an imperative for social change. In her prologue, de Vries gestures to her hope of spurring readers to action by making her sister's death recognizable to them:

> I am writing this book to make it real for myself, to gather all that has passed in the last four years and pin it to the page. I am getting to know Sarah better now that she is dead than I did when she was alive. I am also writing this book to make it real for you, the reader. Many Vancouver women are missing. At least fifteen of them have been murdered. They are gone, but I want all of us to know them, to know what and who we have lost. If we can start to leave the gritty image of the sex worker behind and begin to see real people, real women, to look them in the eye and smile at them and want to know who they really are, I think we can begin to make our world a better place for them and for us, for everyone. (xv)

When de Vries writes that she wants her reader *to know* her sister, *to know* the story of Vancouver's missing women, ostensibly she is telling us that she wants to educate her readers about violence against women in the DTES and, in so doing, to spur them on to the kind of political action that can make the world a better place "for everyone." Here, writing becomes situated as a window onto the "real." De Vries suggests that there is a way in which her representation of events concerning her sister can allow us to know the "real women" and compel us into action. "Pinning" Sarah de Vries to the page situates her as what Laqueur calls the cause's "personal body"; details of her life are offered up as the "sign of truth."

Yet, although this passage explicitly turns on knowledge and a consciousness-raising impulse, I suggest that, formally, it comes together through a series of affective tropes: de Vries wants us to shed the "gritty image of the sex worker" and instead to look the women "in the eye,"

to get to know "who they really are." Just as a swelling cinematic soundtrack is intended to mirror and produce particular affective responses in viewers, such tropes are designed to cultivate warm attachments between the women and the reader. Written into these tropes is a narrative progression that turns from the pity and shame attached to the "gritty" image of sex workers toward empathy and familiarity, a recognition of the women's humanity and the possibility of grieving their loss. These linguistic cues appeal to what Berlant calls the "attachments of affect and the normative transactions of emotionality [that] shape women's psychic and social lives and their responsibility to other people's lives" (Berlant 170). Implied through the affective tropes structuring this passage from *Missing Sarah* is the assumption that learning requires proper affective attachment and identification.[16] De Vries's direct address to the reader seeks to draw them[17] into the narrative, interpellating them as part of an intimate public that cares about the loss of her sister. We are drawn into a "we" that is invested in ameliorating the lives of Vancouver's marginalized women. In this passage and throughout the book, knowledge – *knowing* Sarah and the missing women – is made to look like intimacy – a familiarity that brings "them" and "us" together. In this way, de Vries offers the kind of familiar affective experience that produces and

[16] I pause here to draw an important distinction between the text's presumed or intended identificatory function as it operates through sentimental and humanitarian conventions and how readers may (or may not) come to identify with the text. In her work on feminist pedagogy, Susanne Luhmann writes that early Women's Studies courses were premised on the assumption that learning requires (female) students to identify affectively and textually both with the material and each other. *Missing Sarah* seems to be premised on a similar assumption: namely, that in order for a reader to learn the "truth" about Sarah and the other missing women, they must get to know them as people – as *women* – and to bridge the gap between "them" and "us." But, as Luhmann cautions, identificatory processes are highly unstable and unpredictable and this reliance on identification as a pedagogical mechanism continues to pose problems in Women's Studies classrooms. The issue that Luhmann raises – namely, that one cannot predict how a student (or, in this case, reader) will respond to and identify with new knowledge, is certainly relevant to the outcome of de Vries's humanitarian project. Such a critique of *Missing Sarah*'s representational politics strikes me as requiring further consideration and, therefore, I find it necessary to mark the scope my engagement with this question in the present chapter. What I am interested in querying here is how considering the text's form and mechanics offers insight into its humanitarian function, and the limits of this as a representational politics. So, when I engage here with questions about the empathic identification encouraged or required by the text, I am specifically interrogating the responses implicitly or explicitly envisioned by a text that adheres to a particular model of humanitarian politics and the implications of this imagined "porous, affective scene of identification" (Berlant viii).

[17] Throughout my thesis I refer to the reader using the gender-neutral pronoun "they/them," a practice which leaves open the gender of the reader as well as being less jarring than the unnecessarily gender specific binary pronoun "s/he."

circulates within an intimate public, eliding the social and historical differences between its members.

We are given many of these affective cues designed to acquaint us with Sarah. Even before reaching the table of contents, the reader is confronted with a poem written by Sarah and recorded, we learn later, in one of the many notebooks that she kept over the years. As Amber Dean notes, these fragments of poetry feel like a "terrible gift" that haunts us ("Inheriting What Lives On" 178). Sarah calls upon the reader to "Look deep into my windows, / […] Now look, look harder. / […] If you can, what do you see?" (de Vries n.p.). From the very beginning, we are urged to get to know the "real" Sarah, the implication being that this might be possible if we only learn enough about her. We learn about her love of animals, her troubles in school, her feelings about adoption and racism. We see further samples of her poetry and artwork, as well as photographs of her with her siblings, her parents, and her two children. The first several chapters are peppered with letters sent between de Vries and Sarah, transcribed verbatim and ordered chronologically; reading them is like trying to trace the frayed threads of Sarah's life, following each one and finding a person at the other end: her sister, her mother, teachers, friends.

With these details, de Vries attempts to impress upon the reader the depth and breadth of these relationships; demonstrating the connections Sarah had to the people in her life – what she meant to them – shows the impact of losing her. This is seen even in the chapter titles for *Missing Sarah*: at first glance, Chapter 9, entitled "Missing," seems to refer to Sarah's status as one of "Vancouver's Missing Women." Yet, when paired with Chapter 10, "Remembering," the term takes on new meaning, an echo of the title itself. It is no longer a passive adjective describing Sarah but an action, a sustained feeling of loss experienced by de Vries and the rest of the people who cared for Sarah. For Sarah to be missing, someone must miss her, go on missing her. As Jenny Edkins writes in *Missing: Persons and Politics*, "who people are is very much bound up

with who they are in relation to others" (viii). She goes on: "When someone goes missing the threads that connect our stories and our lives are strained, even broken. The loss of someone we love shows us something about who we are, and how closely we are bound to each other. Indeed, it shows us that who we are comes in large part from our ties to others" (Edkins 9). By gathering up the threads of Sarah's life, de Vries attempts to weave together a picture of who Sarah was and, in this way, bring home for the reader all that it means for her to be missing, to be missed.

Moreover, it seems to me that part of de Vries's project here is to expand the reach of those connective threads. Returning for a moment to the prologue, we can see that de Vries's language is suggestive: "I want all of *us* […] to know what and who *we* have lost" (xv, my emphasis). In identifying with Maggie's relationship with her sister, we, too, are meant to feel Sarah's loss. From the beginning, there is an emphasis placed on the possibility for a collectivity built around shared loss. "We" is not intended to function as a selective category – anyone who reads the book is ostensibly included as a member in a circle of mourning. As such, everyone has lost Sarah and that generality is framed as the common bond between us. Edkins provokes a similar understanding when she asks: "Do not the ties through which we find ourselves extend indefinitely around us without any obvious endpoint?" (10). This question is provocative because it dares us to determine an endpoint for our caring, to delineate, with an uncomfortable finality, who we are willing to care about. When, inevitably, we cannot, the claim that we are connected through shared loss becomes difficult to resist.

Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life*, theorizes that the experiences of loss and grief offer a unique basis for political community. We are all, she suggests, exposed to and complicit in the violence that accompanies fundamental interdependency and, as such, we are all vulnerable to loss. "My guess," she offers, "is that it is possible to appeal to a 'we,' for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all. And if we

have lost, then it follows that we have had, that we have desired and loved, that we have struggled to find the conditions for our desire" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 20). The resonances here with de Vries are apparent. Just as de Vries attempts to instill in her readership a sense of the common loss that follows from Sarah's death, Butler theorizes that our connection comes from an acknowledgment that we are all vulnerable, all tied up with each other's fates and the loss of the other. For both, the common experiences of loss and grief move beyond the insular bounds of privacy and extend outward indefinitely, encompassing and invoking a broader sociality of humans.

But the central question Butler poses is: Who do we count as a grievable human? Whose lives matter? To be included in the realm of the human, one must have a life that is socially legible and coherent, that is valuable. For Butler, "if a life is not grievable, it is not a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburiable" (*Precarious Life* 34). Representation – how life is portrayed and perceived – is essential in Butler's formulation of the norms of qualification and the subsequent differential allocation of grievability. Specifically, she takes up the American narrative of the "war on terror," outlining the ways in which the American response to the "terror attacks" of September 11 required the public characterization of the "enemy" as somehow less human than the innocent Americans killed in the attacks. Tracing the American narrative of events, starting with the attack on the Twin Towers, Butler unpacks how American violence becomes justified as righteous retaliation against evil and never as an act of terror in its own right. It is through the normalization of this representation, Butler suggests, that an entire population of people becomes subject to torture and death, barred from the social frame that is built on a mutual recognition of life.

To consider how such a frame of recognition is negotiated, Butler turns to Levinas's conception of the face, a move which I suggest is particularly evocative when explored in the

context of a conversation about Vancouver's missing and murdered women. Briefly, for Levinas, the face encodes a double signification: both "its sensible appearance in the world and its ethical expression of infinite obligation" (Ziarek 70). The face is the site that both provokes aggression against the other and prohibits it, demanding responsibility and non-violence in the face of the other's vulnerability (which is always, as Butler suggests, a shared vulnerability). The ethical significance of the face is translated for Butler, once again, into a discussion of representation – how the face of the other is represented is paramount to its capacity to invoke an ethical injunction against violence. In particular, Butler is interested in the impact of media representations on the inconsistent recognition of the injurability and precarity of the other. She explains:

> The Levinasian face is not precisely or exclusively a human face, although it communicates what is human, what is precarious, what is injurable. The media representations of the faces of the 'enemy' efface what is most human about the 'face' for Levinas. Through a cultural transposition of his philosophy, it is possible to see how dominant forms of representation can and must be disrupted for something about the precariousness of life to be apprehended. This has implications, once again, for the boundaries that constitute what will and will not appear within public life, the limits of a publicly acknowledged field of appearance. Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed. (*Precarious Life* xviii)

I focus on this excerpt because, as I suggest above, the face as a site of ethical responsibility holds particular significance in reference to the media coverage of Vancouver's missing and murdered women, as well as the response *Missing Sarah* offers to that coverage. The circulation and reproduction of the photographs used in the VPD's Missing Persons poster – many of them

mug shots – fixed the women in the public imagination as, at best, a collection of individually-forgettable, stamp-sized portraits and, at worst, as deviant, criminal subjects (Jiwani 93; Pratt 1060). Even ostensibly sympathetic portrayals focusing on the women's faces, such as Pamela Masik's portrait project, "The Forgotten," have been critiqued as reinscribing criminality onto the women. As Gloria Larocque comments on Masik's project, which involves a 69-portrait series of large paintings depicting the bruised and battered faces of the women, "[Masik] actually reinforces stereotypes. If she's painting from mugshots, and these are the only pictures that she's painting from, then she's reinforcing their criminality, she's reinforcing their murdered state" (Parkatti).[18] As Butler suggests, such representations of the women's faces "authorize us to become senseless" to their loss, to reject them from our field of consideration.

Missing Sarah confronts such dehumanizing images with an alternative collection of portraits of Sarah. De Vries includes over a dozen glossy images of Sarah, from the age of two up to the year before she was murdered. The photographs are nestled in the centre of the book – they are given no introduction or explanation and, in fact, interrupt the narrative mid-sentence, forcing the reader to flip through four pages of images before they can finish their train of thought. We are interrupted by visceral, visual evidence of Sarah's aliveness: Sarah playing at the beach, Sarah grinning in her school photo, Sarah reading to her daughter, Sarah hugging her sister. De Vries literally puts a face to the name of one missing woman and, in making Sarah's face familiar to us, attempts to invoke the ethical obligation theorized by Levinas and Butler.

De Vries's efforts to humanize Sarah are part of a project of expanding who is conceptualized within the limits of a recognized "we." Such inclusions and exclusions are constantly being re-negotiated and, as Butler argues, representations of the faceless other in

[18] For more in-depth overview and critique of Masik's project, see Meg Pinto, "Pamela Masik and 'The Forgotten' Exhibition" and Laura Moss "Is Canada Post-Colonial? Re-Asking through 'The Forgotten' Project," *Topia* 27 (2012): 47-65.

contradistinction to a "we" that is included within the "publicly acknowledged field of appearance" become a nation-building project, a project of self-affirmation (34). This project is inconsistent, however, insofar as the boundaries of public life are constantly shifting, expanding and contracting according to the needs of the nation, of the public, of the self. As Butler states in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009), her follow-up to *Precarious Life*, "the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated" (1). In other words, "we" is always a contingent category, dependant on patterns of domination and oppression. So what nation-building project is *Missing Sarah* invested in?

Missing Sarah aims to disrupt dominant forms of representation of Vancouver's missing and murdered women and, in so doing, to expand the boundaries of public life to include Sarah and women like her. While she recognizes the complex role of the media – acknowledging, for instance, the important part the investigative journalists at the *Vancouver Sun* played in spurring on a sluggish police investigation (243) – de Vries often alludes to the pain she experienced when confronted with the dehumanizing rhetoric characteristic of news coverage. "I […] could not grasp that my life had become one of the stories that I barely glanced at in the papers, a sensationalistic story that feeds on people's misery to feed other people's insatiable appetite for that misery, especially when it involves sex and violence. Well, the story was now my life, the misery mine and my family's" (de Vries 189). De Vries is pointing, here, to the convergence of a pathological public sphere around representations of the addictive violence of serial murder, a social wound at the centre of which is her family's pain. The sensationalizing of violence – as deployed, for example, by Stevie Cameron in *On the Farm* – compounds that pain. In offering an account of her own experiences, de Vries aims to "break" the sensational framing of the story – to

call into question a certain "taken-for-granted reality" (Butler, *Frames* 9) – and insert a new interpretation of what has been lost; she wants recognition that Sarah's was a life worth grieving.

De Vries's project is not limited to recognizing Sarah as grievable, however; she is also seeking a tangible political shift in response to the systems that enabled her sister's death to take place and pass unnoticed. Butler proves helpful once again here, particularly the distinction she draws between recognition and apprehension, as well as her discussion of the conditions of a live-able life. It is these conditions that de Vries interrogates. For Butler, apprehension precedes recognition, acting as a form of knowing "bound up with sensing and perceiving, but in ways that are not always – or not yet – conceptual forms of knowledge" (*Frames* 5). Importantly, though, while apprehension must precede recognition, recognition does not always follow from a moment of apprehension; in this way, there can be a registering of life, what Butler calls "a remainder of 'life' – suspended and spectral" (*Frames* 7) without full cognition of what that life signifies. This is shaped and conditioned by historical "schemas of intelligibility" (*Frames* 7) that determine the conditions whereby a life becomes recognizable. For Butler, recognition, drawing on the Hegelian sense of the term, is a reciprocal action between individuals, an acknowledgment of personhood based on norms of recognizability; it is the act of cognition that affirms the apprehension of life as a life. It is precisely such an act of cognition that de Vries hopes to spark when she implores her reader "to know" (xv) her sister.

Not only does de Vries demand a shift from the apprehension of Sarah's life to its recognition, she calls for a critical investigation of her conditions of vulnerability. Speaking of Sarah's experience as a sex worker, de Vries explains: "Because our society has deemed sex work unacceptable, it does not occur to us to consult with sex workers" (96). However, she argues, "we must not try to figure out the answers without talking to the people who are most affected, the people who know what will work for them and what will not" (96). She argues for

the necessity of providing "safe places where all women who work as prostitutes can do so safely [and] to find long-term solutions that work for everyone" (99-100). In this sense, de Vries rehearses the question, outlined by Butler, of how to transform the conditions of vulnerability in an ethical way. As Butler explains, "the problem is not merely how to include more people within existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate recognition differentially. What new norms are possible, and how are they wrought? What might be done to produce a more egalitarian set of conditions for recognizability?" (*Frames* 6). It is essential that new frames of recognition be created but also, crucially, that the frames of exclusion themselves come under questioning. In other words, recognition of what counts as a life is not de Vries's horizon; rather, it is a matter of addressing the conditions of recognizability and, therefore, of liveability. In Butler's words, the question is "whether the social conditions of persistence and flourishing are or are not possible" (*Frames* 20). Our ethical and political obligations arise, in Butler's estimation, in response to the presence or absence of these "sustaining conditions" (*Frames* 23), a central preoccupation for de Vries.

This is where representation, action, and affect become knitted together in *Missing Sarah*; in the tradition of the humanitarian narrative, de Vries's project with this memoir is to demonstrate that the sustaining conditions of life were absent for her sister, to elicit the reader's affective responses of loss and grief, and, in so doing, to make them *feel* a deep ethical obligation to relieve the suffering she describes – if not for her sister, then for someone else, someone like her. She attempts, as Butler suggests, to expose "the orchestrating designs of authority who [seek] to control the frame" (*Frames* 12) that excluded her sister. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Chapter 5, where de Vries outlines the policies on sex work in Vancouver that make it impossible for women engaged in sex work to live and work safely, legislating them into the darkest corners of society.

Discussing the shifting cultural and legal landscape in Canada in the latter half of the twentieth century, de Vries pinpoints a number of factors that contributed to increasingly unsafe conditions for women working in the sex trade. She describes the municipal efforts to "clean up" the city and the implementation of "no go zones" for sex workers (89), policies that controlled where women could travel in the city. From the closure of particular clubs in Vancouver, resulting in a flood of women working on the street, to vagrancy laws and bans against soliciting in public, she argues that sex workers have been left to maneuver in the cracks of the law and of society. "To this day," de Vries laments, "prostitutes are pushed from one neighbourhood to the next, with little changing in the grand scheme of things, except for the most important thing of all: street prostitution in Vancouver has grown more and more dangerous. An increasing number of prostitutes have ended up dead" (95). By tracing the recent history of the specific site from which her sister disappeared, de Vries sets up a causal narrative in which culpability is shifted from the individual choices of women working in the sex trade to the institutions, policies, laws, and attitudes that ensure their precarity.

Further complicating any simplistic notions of personal responsibility to which her readers might want to hold the missing women, de Vries takes care to outline a definition of "survival sex," which refers to "prostitution with limited choice, to situations where people sell sex because if they don't they will not be able to eat, keep a roof over their head or get the drugs they need to feed their addiction" (98). Sarah, she reminds us, was engaged in survival sex: "Her choices were limited as long as she could not see a way out of that life. She was locked tight inside her addiction. But she had dignity" (102). She insists, even as she acknowledges the hold of Sarah's addiction, that she had a right to live as she did and that she did so with a dignity not commonly associated in the public imagination with drug use and sex work. By affirming the

simultaneity of these conditions of coercion and dignity, de Vries disarms facile readings of Sarah's decisions and attempts to encourage a more complex understanding of her experience.

For de Vries, creating space for the acknowledgment of this complexity is crucial to the generation of new schemas of intelligibility. As with the humanitarian or slave narrative, affect and recognition are bound up with each other – in feeling the pain or loss of another, we come to recognize their common humanity and the injustice of their conditions of living. The presumed effect is that, if we can make intelligible the lives of women like Sarah, then we can begin to understand ourselves as existing together within a relationship of ethical obligation. Until this occurs, de Vries recognizes that these women will continue to be excluded from what Butler calls the public "field of appearance" (Butler, *Precarious Life* xviii) that determines whose lives are seen as grievable. As de Vries states, "We are unwilling to acknowledge sex workers as a legitimate part of our workforce. Thus they are not protected by the structures that protect others. As a society, we almost believe that violence is just part of their job. I don't think most people feel the same horror when they hear that a sex worker has been badly beaten that they feel if exactly the same thing happens to a nurse or a lawyer or a cashier" (104). She goes on: "On the Vancouver Police Department's website, I found two lists on opposite sides of the screen of the missing persons page. Missing persons were listed on the right, missing sex workers on the left. Sex workers were excluded from the 'persons' category" (104). This exclusion is, de Vries protests, untenable in the face of our recognition that the conditions of flourishing have been systematically denied to women like her sister. In other words, the recognition of humanity in the form, quite literally, of Sarah's face – of her story – impels us to acknowledge that she has been unjustly excluded from the category of person; as a person, she necessarily invokes in us a responsibility to her in all her human vulnerability.

Examining the component parts of *Missing Sarah* – from the inclusion of Sarah's writing and photographs of her happily alive, to anecdotes of her life and didactic critiques of anti-sex worker policies – we see de Vries attempting to share with her readers the specificity of her sister's life, the grievability of her death and, by extension, the necessity for a complete shift in the schemas of intelligibility that have allowed that life to be excluded, unmourned, and denied the conditions of liveability. However, what are the implications of remembering that this is not, as de Vries herself would wish, "a collaboration between two sisters" (268), but a representation of one murdered woman's life mediated through the voice of her sister? What might it mean to think critically about the rhetorical strategies employed by de Vries in her attempt to ameliorate the "sustaining conditions" of life for women like Sarah (and, for that matter, what it means to instrumentalize the particularities of one life as a reflection on the lives of "women like Sarah")? I would suggest that *Missing Sarah*, although eschewing the sensationalism that appeals to the appetite of the pathological public sphere, offers a different kind of wound around which a public can cohere, one based on grief, loss, and the generalized affective connection that such emotions affirm in an intimate public such as Lauren Berlant describes.

To unpack these implications, I would like to turn once more to the prologue, to an excerpt immediately preceding the one discussed at the beginning of this chapter:

> In the spring of 2002, soon after the search began [of Pickton's farm], a reporter phoned me to inquire if the police had asked my family about Sarah's dental records. [...] Oh, I thought, they've got teeth. I have had a number of such revelations during conversations with members of the press, the police, or while reading, watching or listening to the news. Oh, I think each time. And I wish that I could go and vomit. I wish that I could purge all that information and what it means. Bits of my guts should come flying out of my mouth. Bleeding stigmata should appear on my skin. But none of that happens. The horror of

> imagining that my sister's teeth are in a lab somewhere, which leads to the horror of imagining where they were before and how they got there, is marked only by a prickling in the back of my throat as I write these words. The reality comes in the ink flowing onto the page in the solitude of the crowded Swartz Bay/Tsawwassen ferry where I am writing this. (xiv-xv)

The resonances here with Cavarero's theorization of the function of horror, discussed in my introduction, are striking. The "manifestation of the physics of horror" (Cavarero 7) – revulsion and disgust – that de Vries feels at the thought of her sister's scattered, ontologically-disrupted body are overwhelming; she describes the sensations as though it is her own body that is torn apart, her own skin and flesh that is rent. Yet her only tangible embodied response is a prickling at the back of her throat, the "bristling sensation" that marks the paralysis of horror (Cavarero 7). According to Cavarero, when "gripped by revulsion in the face of a form of violence that appears more inadmissible than death, the body reacts as if nailed to the spot, hairs standing on end" (8). De Vries is stuck, immobilized by her visceral responses to and unable to move beyond the knowledge of her sister's dismemberment, an offence to what Cavarero would term Sarah's "ontological dignity" (9).

Later in the text, de Vries explains how, for years, she attempted to shut out all conversation or thought of the violence done to Sarah's body: "whatever happened to Sarah's body after she was dead ha[d] more to do with her murderer than with her or with us [her family]" (271). Yet, in maintaining this compartmentalized view, de Vries denies part of her own grief, a realization that comes crashing upon her during the trial: "I realized that I had been trying to protect myself, to […] pack away the horror of Sarah's death, keep from facing it fully by focusing on her life" (272). It is the incomprehensibility of Sarah's death – and de Vries's need to shield herself from those details – that I suggest contribute to de Vries's sense of immobilizing

stuck-ness in the passage above. Her curious response of simultaneous devastation and complete immobility flows from the ontological wound to Sarah's person that forecloses de Vries's capacity to mourn her sister properly. Her inability to mourn her sister as a result of both the manner of Sarah's death and representations of her after her death, then, serves as a driving motivation for writing the memoir. De Vries asserts: "when Sarah's murderer killed her, he committed a heinous act against us, against everyone who loved her. And when he disposed of her body in such a way that we would never see it, never be able to confirm her death through her body, and never be able to bury her or scatter her ashes or place an urn containing her ashes in our family plot, he committed another heinous act. He dishonoured her *and* took something infinitely precious from us" (272). This language is suggestive; for de Vries and her family, the violence of Sarah's death goes beyond the horror of what Sarah suffered – it is a crime against "us," against de Vries herself. The heinous nature of Sarah's murder and the disappearance of her body denies the family the closure that comes with seeing her body in its "figural unity, that human likeness already extinguished yet still visible, watchable, for a period before incineration or inhumation" (Cavarero 8). Without her body, de Vries realizes she cannot properly mourn her sister.

Yet, even as de Vries laments that she cannot mourn Sarah because of the physical and ontological scattering caused by her murder, her language attempts to recover Sarah. When de Vries states that "[her murderer] dishonoured her" (272), she separates Sarah from her torn and scattered body and insists that some form of figural whole, albeit not a physical one, has been dishonoured. Sarah's intelligibility is reasserted even as the violence against her bodily integrity is affirmed. Where de Vries is unable to confirm Sarah's death "through her body," she confirms it linguistically, on the page and in how she speaks about her sister: "When I speak publicly, I am able to inhabit my relationship with Sarah fully, to honour her with each word, and reach deep

inside myself to ensure that what I say is true. Each time I am drained, but I receive something precious all the same. I receive Sarah back again, Sarah at her strongest and most loving" (269). In the face of the horror saturating the events of Sarah's death and subsequent representations that "freeze" Sarah (254) – as sex worker, as drug addict, as victim – de Vries's language insists upon Sarah's complex individuality and humanity and her own grief at Sarah's death.

In this way, de Vries seems to present *Missing Sarah* as standing in for Sarah's body, an attempt to gather up the threads of her relationships and experience and shape them into something approximating her life. De Vries understands this as an act of re-membering through representation: "Sarah is gone. Her body, I presume, has been dismembered, taken apart. Even her bones may be ground to dust. When she is included in a documentary or a newspaper article, she is re-membered. Remembrance is a powerful act, but it must be done right" (254). Where sensationalist media representations have failed, magnifying the horror of violent death, de Vries attempts to manage the affective trajectory of Sarah's story to re-member and mourn her sister properly, consciously avoiding the "gruesome side" and minimizing sensationalism (Raoul 68-9). According to Jonathan Elmer, who draws a connection between the affective intensities of the sensational and the sentimental, whereas sensationalism "lingers at the place of the wound […] rather than allowing for a healing closure," sentimentalism seeks "to control the affect, to modulate grief into mourning" (96). Thought this way, de Vries is working toward this healing closure, seeking to disentangle the "horrorism" associated with Vancouver's missing and murdered women in order to recover the "figural unity" (Cavarero 8) of her sister and enable her to be mourned.[19]

[19] As I gesture here toward the notion of "proper mourning" and the foreclosure of the grieving process, I recognize that I am placing myself within the borders of a rich scholarly conversation around the function of mourning. Foundationally, Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" takes up the distinct experiences of *mourning*, which he describes as a "normal affect" occurring in response to a loss – for instance, of a loved one – and *melancholia*, which is socially perceived, contrastingly, as a pathologized, depressive condition which, unlike mourning, involves intense

This is, understandably, an important personal project for de Vries. However, while an unsurprising desire to recuperate Sarah's memory through proper re-membering may be at the heart of de Vries's writing, I believe that it is necessary to complicate any simple gestures toward personal closure that we may be tempted to make here. In particular, I wish to interrogate how de Vries's own desire for closure through mourning may enable the reader to lapse into a position of empathetic passivity, removing any sense that a tangible political and social shift is both necessary and urgent. *Missing Sarah* is, at every turn, mediated through de Vries's voice and experience. Even the title, we recall, is an allusion to her own ongoing act of missing Sarah. She is at the narrative centre and Sarah is, inevitably, the object of the wound around which de Vries gathers her reading public. She is always already missing, murdered. Thinking again of the above excerpt from the prologue, what becomes particularly pronounced is the way in which it is rooted in – or routed through – de Vries's own physical and emotional responses. It is a reminder that, whatever the intentions of the author, this book cannot give us the "real Sarah." Whatever "reality comes in the ink flowing onto the page," it is de Vries's reality; de Vries is set up as the point of

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self-reproach (243-44). Whereas the work of mourning can be completed, melancholia has no endpoint. In *Frames of War*, Butler turns to Freud in relation to her own theory of grievability: "In 'Mourning and Melancholia' Freud traced the super-ego's function to the internalization and transformation of the lost other as a recriminating voice, a voice that spoke precisely what the ego would have spoken to the other had the other remained alive to hear the admonitions of the one who was left. The criticisms and recriminations addressed to the absent other are deflected and transformed into an internal voice directed against the self. Recrimination that remains unspeakable against the other becomes finally speakable only against the self, which ends up being a way of saving the other, even in death, from one's own accusatory voice" (174). While there are clear and potentially generative resonances between theorizations of personal mourning and de Vries's representation of her grieving – for instance, can we read *Missing Sarah* as caught in a melancholic feedback loop of sorts? What recriminations against Sarah are transferred back to de Vries herself and what is the effect of this internalization? – I have chosen only to gesture to them here. My reasoning is that, while the work of de Vries's personal mourning process arguably undergirds her writing of the memoir, to attend too narrowly to her individual experience of mourning risks distracting from the broader implications which are the focus of the present analysis. My interest lies, rather, in how the reader of the memoir takes on de Vries's mourning – and the desire for closure it signals – as their own. In other words, how is the reader's sense of systemic implication and political mobilization blunted by their ability to project themselves into the narrative in de Vries's place, to mourn in her stead? In this sense, I shift away from existing scholarship that makes use of a trauma or memorialization lens to discuss Vancouver's missing and murdered women. See, for instance, The Cultural Memory Group, *Remembering Women Murdered by Men: Memorials Across Canada*, Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006. Print; Amber Dean, "Hauntings: Representations of Vancouver's Disappeared Women," Diss. University of Alberta, 2009.

identification for the reader and, as such, the distance between Sarah and the reader is both occluded and reinforced. The empathic identification and generalized sense of collective feeling promised through the cohering of an intimate public around the private details of a memoir is cultivated in relation to de Vries, not to Sarah; our feelings are meant to go to those left behind, rather than to the one who was lost.

This is where the distinction, drawn earlier, between the humanitarian narrative and slave narrative becomes salient. In the former, the author of the narrative offers an external, expert voice, commenting on particular social ills from a distance; in the latter, the narrative voice is that of the sufferer, a firsthand account of their experiences that affirms the veracity of their story and, therefore, their authoritativeness. *Missing Sarah* troubles this distinction. De Vries is the sister of one of the murdered women; she is intimately connected to her and, as such, we come to the text believing that we, too, will gain access to this intimate connection. Yet, de Vries is a middle-class, educated, white woman; she is not homeless, she does not work in the sex trade, or experience racism. She is, regardless of her connection to Sarah, an outsider to the DTES community and to many aspects of Sarah's life. In identifying with de Vries, we can become "emotionally correct spectator[s]" (Festa 9), able to maintain the comfort of our external position while nonetheless feeling close to the pain at the centre of the wound – we are allowed to hurt just enough. It is a pleasure akin to the "pleasure of flinching" (Sontag 41) that comes with the spectacle of violence in *On the Farm*, but this pleasure is our comfort in the sense of shared grief to which we gain access; in Berlant's terms, it is "the pleasure of encountering what [we] expected" (4).

In this culture of sentimentality, *feeling with* de Vries becomes an end in itself. As Hartman suggests, "empathy is a projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other" (19); yet, she argues, this very projection conditions the ways in which one is able to identify with the other. Empathic emotion becomes redirected toward the self "rather than

[toward] those whom this exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach […failing] to expand the space of the other but merely [placing] the self in its stead" (19-20). In other words, by centering on de Vries's pain, the text implicitly invites readers to imagine themselves into her experience of visceral grief, while Sarah is pushed out of the picture altogether. Moreover, as with the slave narratives discussed at the opening of this chapter, through this empathic slipperiness, we risk coming to focus on our own grief; the closure of mourning that de Vries so desperately needs, and which can only come with the deeply felt recognition of Sarah's humanity, can become our own goal. The relief of our discomfort can become the centre of our engagement.

We are tempted into believing that, as an intimate public founded on (ostensibly) collective feeling, we are all in this together, that it is our pain as well as de Vries's and, as such, that the closure of mourning should be ours as well. As Lauren Berlant articulates, participation in an intimate public allows us to "cultivate fantasies of vague belonging as an alleviation of what is hard to manage in the lived real – social antagonisms, exploitation, compromised intimacies, the attrition of life" (5). We become part of a comforting (comforted) readerly public that even includes the very women we are reading about; as we learn in the Epilogue to the 2008 edition, de Vries helped to found a book club for women residents of the DTES. The first book that they read together was *Missing Sarah*. Describing this experience, de Vries says:

> I was struck by the generosity of the women in the room, their care for others' comfort as woman after woman shared a bit of her story with me, with all of us. Some of them had known Sarah. They shared their memories. Some told about what parts of Sarah's story they found most compelling, most like their own. Some responded to me, to my story, to my connection, however difficult, with my sister. […] I tried to respond openly and honestly to each woman, to keep my heart wide and to take in what all of this meant, the connectedness that I was experiencing that I had never felt when Sarah was alive. (267)

De Vries sets up a scene in which the women like Sarah – the women whose lives she has sought to make recognizable through Sarah – share the same affective connection to the text that we ourselves are invited to experience while reading it. There is, in this moment, a sense of thrilling reciprocity. *They are reading the same book I have just finished reading!* We live in the same country, perhaps even the same city, and we can feel close to them – their stories seem tied to our own. This was certainly my experience of reading the book as an undergraduate student in Guelph – I was *connected* to Sarah: by geography, by family, by sentiment. Reading this, we are made to feel unified, collective. There exists "a felt condition of general belonging and an aspirational site of rest and recognition" (Berlant 5) that we are allowed and encouraged to experience.

And this, I suggest, is precisely where the tangible social structures of colonialism, racism, and economic disparity fall out of the frame and we lose sight of the lived conditions that separate us out into "us" and "them" (a division de Vries herself rhetorically affirms, even when she is calling on us to make the world a better place "for everyone") (xv). By implicitly routing affective identification through de Vries – her bodily responses, her emotions, her political affiliations – the text is preoccupied with her felt pain (and, through readers' empathic impulse, our own pain) in ways that keep certain other realities comfortably distant. As noted earlier, in spite of her close connection to Sarah and, through her, to the DTES, de Vries is herself an outsider to that community. More to the point, in her desire to re-member Sarah and give her death a certain significance, de Vries projects a very specific diagnosis of the social harms at stake and the solutions she envisions, all of which bear the mark of a colonizing universalism, also espoused in Judith Butler's theory of grievability. Two denials follow from de Vries's self-projection: first, she instrumentalizes Sarah in ways that deny both her individuality and her position within the web of ongoing colonial violence in Canada and, second, she affirms a settler-

colonial "move to innocence" of equivocation (Tuck and Yang 17) by separating violence against Indigenous women's bodies from its deeply rooted connection to stolen land.

The first denial is, seemingly, contradictory: how can I suggest that de Vries denies both Sarah's individuality as well as her position within a broader social context? Surely, in her attention to the particularities of Sarah's life and her centering of Sarah's voice through her writing and sketches, de Vries unquestionably offers a highly specific glimpse of one of Vancouver's missing and murdered. But what are the implications of remembering, as I have highlighted in the recent pages, that it is, in fact, de Vries who is at the narrative centre of *Missing Sarah*? How does the text's circulation within what Berlant highlights as a "coercive" intimate public (6) and our own cultivated affective connection to the text flatten the lived differences in Sarah's experience? What does it mean to consider that, as we saw in the passage about the book club quoted above, de Vries feels a connection to Sarah after her death that she "never felt when Sarah was alive"? (267). Though this may seem shocking, it becomes clear that the complexity of de Vries's feelings toward her sister is allowed to be simplified through her posthumous reinterpretation of her own relationship with Sarah. Intentionally or not, de Vries moulds Sarah's life in certain ways in order to enable her to develop a commentary on the social and political conditions at work in the case of Vancouver's missing women. She acknowledges this form of instrumentalization herself when she concedes, with some consternation:

> I find that I am more motivated to make a difference now that Sarah is gone, without the complications of worrying about and trying to help an actual human being. I was not motivated when she was alive the way I am now. And I think that's true for many of us. It's much harder to help a flesh-and-blood family member than it is to write about memories, to theorize about possibilities, to raise money and to raise hope. It's easier to help strangers.

> It's more generic. If it doesn't work with one, perhaps it will with another, and in a brutal way it won't matter which. (248-49)

Sarah, in all her willful or unwilled deviations from the norms of intelligibility, was too difficult, too noncompliant, in life; after death, however, she can be made into the face of a cause, the particularities of her life a reflection of a generalized experience. I argue that de Vries's uncomfortable admission is a manifestation of what Berlant terms the "soft supremacy" of the intimate public sphere, a form of "compassion and coercive identification [that] wants to dissolve all that structure through the work of good intentionality, while busily exoticizing and diminishing the inconvenient and the noncompliant" (6). De Vries's humanitarianism is driven, of course, by good intentions; she wishes to ameliorate the conditions of other women's lives, to ensure that Sarah's death is given meaning. But the outcome of mobilizing the details of Sarah's life in such a way is a fantasy of interiority (Berlant 6), not a connection to Sarah herself. The text is still focalized through de Vries, a middle-class white woman, and her experiences of grief and pain, rather than through Sarah, her vulnerable, racialized sister. In this way, de Vries still presents the opportunity for readers to satisfy their appetite for a *safe* experience of affective identification and the unconflicted world of the sentimental without risking the discomfort that comes with all the messiness of a "flesh-and-blood" human being.

So Sarah's experience becomes flattened, reshaped in the service of a larger social commentary. Would this not suggest, then, that perhaps de Vries is too reductive in how she contextualizes Sarah within the social systems that devalued her life? If we have lost sight of Sarah's individuality, it must be as a result of an over-generalization, a shift away from *Sarah* to *women-like-Sarah*. Certainly, de Vries attempts to gesture toward the complexity of the systemic violences woven into Sarah's life. One of the first things that we learn about Sarah is that she was

adopted into a white family after spending time in foster care (de Vries 1).[20] De Vries references the over-representation of Indigenous children in the foster care system and acknowledges the devastating effects of this enforced dispersal of families on Indigenous cultures. We learn that several people close to Sarah were touched in some way by the foster care system, residential school, and the cycle of abuse that followed, from Sarah's birth father (3), her close friends Anne (38) and Jackie (125), to Charlie (120), the father of Sarah's first child. Sarah herself writes about these experiences in her diary, saying: "Man, I don't understand how the adoption agency could let a couple that are both of the opposite colour as the child become this child's legal guardians. I understand that they were not as strict as they are today on things of race, gender and traditions. But, come on, did they honestly think that it would have absolutely no effect […]?" (69). De Vries grapples with the weight of damage inflicted by these policies and experiences on her sister; however, her ability to contextualize Sarah's position within the web of colonial violence is limited by her own cultural investments, leaving us with an incomplete picture of both Sarah's individual experience and her broader social context.

By this I mean that, while de Vries acknowledges colonial violence as a factor in Sarah's vulnerability, her solution – a turn to a politics of recognizing the unique "person-as-such" (Edkins ix) – is marked by a colonizing universalism that fails to recognize de Vries's own investment as settler subject in ongoing colonial systems of dispossession: systems which include violence against the bodies of Indigenous women. I have suggested that *Missing Sarah*, in its humanitarian project of re-membering Sarah and reframing her death as a grievable loss shared by "everyone," can be read effectively through Butler's theoretical lens of grievability; both

[20] It is worth noting that the way in which Sarah is racialized shifts, both within *Missing Sarah* and across secondary sources. In some cases, she is referred to as black, while in others she is Indigenous; like her physical body, Sarah's Indigeneity can be made to disappear (de Vries 1, 9, 69; Jiwani, "Bare Life" 128; Jiwani and Young, "Reproducing Marginality" 911; Kim Hughes, "A Sister of the Street," *Toronto Star* 31 Aug. 2003; Patrick Moores, *(Re)Covering the Missing Women: News Media Reporting on Vancouver's 'Disappeared,'* MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2006, 24).

subscribe to a universalizing humanism rooted in an understanding of shared vulnerability, both seek to alter the frames that exclude some lives and not others. But what happens when such a lens is critiqued? What happens when these frames themselves are questioned? In "Decolonizing Global Theories Today: Hardt and Negri, Agamben, Butler," Malini Johar Schueller identifies Butler's problematic colonizing universalism as stemming from unexamined Western cultural investments. Namely, Schueller critiques Butler's reliance on a Hegelian understanding of recognition that, she suggests, erases racial "unevenness" (248). In Butler's formulation, building a community on the basis of a 'common human vulnerability' requires mutual recognition between subjects but, according to Schueller, this ignores that the mutual dependence for recognition in Hegel's master-slave relationship is inherently unequal. Instead, following Fanon, Schueller argues that, for a racialized minority, "an apprehension of vulnerability and loss leads not to an empathetic subjectivity, but rather to an objecthood" (248). As such, Butler's attempt to create community around the universal experience of loss and vulnerability fails to account for the perspective of the racialized, colonized Other.

Furthermore, Schueller is concerned that Butler's theory does not adequately address the colonial reality that "some vulnerabilities are more vulnerable than others" (249). As she aptly phrases it, "vulnerability shouldn't become a competitive sport, but it cannot simply be an equalizer either" (249). Schueller does not conclude that there is no usefulness whatsoever in working with the notion of human community; rather, she insists that any theorizing must exercise a vigilance about the imperial tendencies of building a global community wherein a supposedly mutual recognition of humanity is rooted in Western ideals and understandings. As she explains, "Recognition […] is necessarily caught within the logic of appropriation and there is no reason to think that a recognition based on vulnerability would simply sidestep appropriation" (249). Butler's notion of a politically energizing recognition of universal

vulnerability and, therefore, of a shared humanity, fails to acknowledge and examine this imperializing tendency.

Adapting Schueller's critique of Butler's latent imperalism to a specifically settler-colonial context, I suggest that *Missing Sarah* betrays a similarly problematic universalism in its assumption that if Canadian society can only learn to recognize and value the lives of Indigenous women, women like Sarah, then the impacts of colonial violence will be mitigated. It assumes that such a form of recognition is both desirable and applicable in the case of violence against Indigenous women, without ever addressing the unique nature of gendered colonial violence. This leads us to de Vries's second denial: the separation of violence against Indigenous women from the issue of stolen land. I suggest that this is what Tuck and Yang term a settler "move to innocence" rooted in equivocation, one of six such moves they outline and unpack. In "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," Tuck and Yang write that colonial equivocation is "the vague equating of colonialisms that erases the sweeping scope of land as the basis of wealth, power, [and] law in settler nation-states" (19). In other words, equivocation collapses the unique experience of violence in a settler-colonial context into a homogenizing category of "colonization," equating it to diverse oppressions. In so doing, " anti-oppression work" becomes conflated with "anti-colonial work," and the attainment of equal rights and full participation, rather than Indigenous sovereignty and the redistribution of land, becomes the shared goal. However, Tuck and Yang remind us, "the attainment of equal legal and cultural entitlements is actually an investment in settler colonialism" (18), enabling settler culture to further entrench and reproduce itself.

De Vries identifies the deep scars of colonialism on Indigenous cultures, returning repeatedly to pick at questions of how Sarah's experiences of adoption, racism, and violence impacted the course of her life; yet, in failing to meaningfully connect these experiences to their

root in colonial dispossession of land and, consequently, to take up a decolonizing framework as her response (Tuck and Yang 19), de Vries can only offer solutions that reassert a nation-building project of settler systems of governance and authority to determine who and what counts as a grievable life. Her proposed future is a settler future. De Vries insists that we come to "know" Sarah as she herself knew her, "glowing with beauty and love of life" (268), and to share de Vries's grief and outrage that her life was lost in such a meaningless way. However, what happens if we choose not to discount the circumstances of Sarah's murder as a meaningless act of violence, but to understand her death within the broader context of a nation that continues to be invested in and benefit from the linked dispossession of Indigenous lands and evisceration of Indigenous women's bodies? What would it mean to critically reflect on the Western cultural investments inherent in a framework that can only recognize (certain) human lives, but not the land itself, as grievable? How would *Missing Sarah* change if de Vries's humanitarian politics were rooted in a decolonizing framework? And, crucially, what might happen if we shift away from a representational politics that relies on universalist notions of generalized affect and turn instead, as I do in my next chapter, to texts that complicate and contextualize systemic violence against Indigenous women?

I ask these questions, not to disparage or dismiss *Missing Sarah* or de Vries's hope for helping to create a better future in writing this memoir, but to explore the limits of an individualizing, affect-driven humanitarian politics and seek out other possible frameworks. As Amber Dean notes, "support and critique need not be positioned as antithetical" ("Ethics of Critique" 235); rather, "critique *can* be a way of caring for, or enriching, or expressing concern for one's subject" (236). It is with such an understanding of supportive critique that I come to *Missing Sarah*; I value de Vries's work in writing this book and her reasons for doing so. De Vries's desire to re-member and mourn her sister, I have suggested, conditions how she chooses

to represent the circumstances of Sarah's life and death; her loss is deep and personal and it is important that, for her, the memoir become a memorial of sorts, taken up with the work of mourning. She attempts to use *Missing Sarah* to open up new schemas of intelligibility enabling others to recognize her sister and, by extension, women in similar circumstances, as valuable, human lives worth grieving. For de Vries, the aim is to improve the conditions of liveability for women like Sarah.

However, what *Missing Sarah* actually offers us is, I argue, a social wound formed in grief and loss, rather than sensationalism, around which to gather in a too-comfortable intimate public. The comfort of this intimate reading experience is important to note; there is a reason for this memoir's popular reception amongst a Canadian reading public, a reason it feels both painful and pleasurably familiar. There is a reason the book resonated with me when I first read it, a reason I keep coming back to it. De Vries demands little of us beyond our empathetic engagement because she is operating in a field of sentimentality which, as a site of "belonging, […] rest and recognition" (Berlant viii), places *our* affective responses at the centre. Berlant explains: "As when a refrigerator is opened by a person hungry for something other than food, the turn to sentimental rhetoric at moments of social anxiety constitutes a generic wish for an unconflicted world, one wherein structural inequities, not emotions and intimacies, are epiphenomenal" (21). *Missing Sarah* promises to fulfill a social craving for grief and mourning and the closure they bring, channeled through de Vries, who mediates a safe degree of access to her racialized and othered sister, Sarah. All the while, we are able to put off a deeper interrogation of our own continued implication and investment in the systems of colonial violence that require the disappearance of Indigenous women's bodies.

Chapter 2

"drums are sounding / the women are coming": Refusal and Resurgence in Janet Marie Rogers's *Unearthed* and Robertson and Culhane's *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver*

> *WCS: What book do you think will change Canada? How might it accomplish this?*
> *JMR: Change it how? Who cares?*
>
> *Genevieve, n.p.*

> *What happens when we refuse what all (presumably) 'sensible' people perceive as good things? What does this refusal do to politics, to sense, to reason? When we add Indigenous peoples to this question, the assumptions and the* ***histories*** *that structure what is perceived to be 'good' (and utilitarian goods themselves) shift and stand in stark relief. The positions assumed by people who refuse 'gifts' may seem reasoned, sensible and in fact deeply correct. Indeed, from this perspective, we see that a good is not a good for everyone.*
>
> *Audra Simpson, Mohawk Interruptus, 1*

This chapter seeks to take up the uncomfortable interrogation of settler-colonial implication that I identified as absent from the political horizons of *Missing Sarah*'s humanitarianism and the universalizing conceptions of the human from which Maggie de Vries's writing emerges. I open with the above epigraphs, one from an interview with Mohawk/Tuscarora poet Janet Marie Rogers, the other from Audra Simpson's 2014 book, *Mohawk Interruptus*, to signal my parallel commitments in this chapter: first, to question the "assumptions and histories," rooted in Western philosophical traditions, that enable the idea of a universal "good [for] everyone," and, second, to follow the work of Indigenous scholars and activists whose theories emerge from within the context of their own resurgent communities. These writers and scholars, such as Audra Simpson (Mohawk), Leanne Simpson (Anishnaabe), and Glen Coulthard (Dene), while drawing selectively from Western theories and scholarship, intentionally turn away from

affirmations of settler futurities (*"What about Canada" "Who cares?"*). Instead, they are concerned with opening up spaces to confront the reality of ongoing colonial violence and consider the possibilities for resistance that follow from Indigenous cultures and "lifeways" (L. Simpson 18).

The humanitarian representational politics of *Missing Sarah*, addressed in the previous chapter, rest upon certain problematic foundations: first, Sarah is always already lost, a woman whose life, body, and voice can only ever be approximated, never recuperated – she is an open wound around which to gather; second, the author of the memoir is a white woman external to the DTES community, affirming the divide between the reader and Sarah, as the ostensible subject of the text; third, following from that divide, the impulse for empathic identification built in to the text is focalized through and centered on Maggie de Vries, rather than on her racialized sister or other Indigenous women who have been murdered in Canada; and, finally, the affective identification the text attempts to establish feeds into the formation of a familiar, comfortable intimate public whose ultimate goal is a sense of shared grief and closure. This comfort comes at the expense of more complex representations of the ways in which the violence directed toward Indigenous women in Vancouver's DTES is not exceptional but is, rather, an expression of colonial violence that is sanctioned at state, social, and personal levels across Turtle Island in the present moment.

For this reason, I turn in this chapter to two texts which, when read together, begin to address the gaps left by familiar, widely read narratives such as *Missing Sarah*. Primarily, I look at the work of Mohawk/Tuscarora poet and spoken word artist, Janet Marie Rogers. Though not from the DTES, Rogers has lived in Coast Salish territory for much of her life and, in her poetry, she directly addresses the colonial structures that enable – and require – the perpetration of violence against Indigenous women. Before turning to Roger's 2011 book, *Unearthed*, however, I

begin by looking briefly at a collection emerging from the DTES, *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (2005), edited by Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane. In my reading of these texts, I discourage the assumption of a simple distinction between theory and literature; rather, these stories and poems work in conversation with existing theories of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization and, similarly, many of the Indigenous scholars I take up draw on traditional stories to ground their theories. Leanne Simpson explicitly states that her scholarly work "is not rooted solely in the intellectual; it is rooted in [her] spiritual and emotional life, as well as [her] body" (19). Elsewhere, she explains: "theory is collectivized through the telling of our stories and the performance of our ceremonies" (43). The relationship between theory and story is a thread that runs throughout this chapter, manifesting in the multiple voices of writers and scholars whose work draws on the traditional knowledge systems of their ancestors. In this way, my primary texts work alongside theories of Indigenous relationality and resurgence to complicate dominant characterizations of Vancouver's missing and murdered women, gesturing at once to the unique experiences of living in Vancouver's DTES and to the broader structural context within which these experiences are formed.

By working away from Western formulations of grievability and recognition premised on readerly affect through a reading of these texts – one by an Indigenous woman poet, one by a collection of writers and storytellers living within the geographical and social context of the DTES – I take up the question posed by Alexander G. Weheliye in his 2014 book, *Habeas Viscus*. He asks: "What different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from this domain?" (8). How do these writers understand and represent their lived experiences as precariously located subjects and, most importantly, how do they envision working toward a future lived in a good way – a future that respects Indigenous

principles of balance and relationality, a future in which their lives are not disposable? For myself, I must ask: what are my obligations to acknowledge and examine my own implication in the systems of power and oppression that these texts critique and resist? As my aunt, settler scholar Helen Hoy, asks in her book of the same name, "How should I read these?"

To begin, I believe that any reading of these texts must set aside the assumption that "all humans have been granted equal access to western humanity and that this is, indeed, what we all want to overcome" (Weheliye 10). In other words, we must take seriously the notion that, first, Indigenous peoples in Canada continue to experience subtle and overt expressions of colonial violence in the form of racism, discrimination, and social and physical precarity and, second, to question any presumption that the solution to this colonial violence is a liberal formulation of decolonization or inclusion. Rather, by considering these texts in conversation with the grounded theories of Indigenous scholars who interrogate liberal conceptions of recognition, I hope to move toward a model of reading rooted in a "politics of accountability" (Hoy 200) that is focused on the voices of Indigenous writers "imagining themselves, their communities, and the world creatively, […] altering as well the political, social, ecological, economic, and legal realities that are so enmeshed with representations" (Hoy 200). This concentration on the theories and representations of Indigenous writers and scholars, as well as my own position in relation to the politics of Indigenous resurgence that they explore, necessarily informs my reading practice in this chapter.

I begin with a reading of Robertson and Culhane's collection *In Plain Sight*. While, in many ways, this collection rehearses a similar humanitarian political alignment as *Missing Sarah*, I suggest that it also departs in subtle but important ways from this politics, gesturing to the possible "new modalities" of life to which Weheliye refers. In this sense, it begins to open up the discursive spaces of resistance and refusal that *Unearthed* inhabits and that are the focus of this

chapter. However, while it opens up the space for the imagined resurgent future that *Unearthed* projects and, in so doing, attempts to shift away from the problematic representational constraints of de Vries's memoir, *In Plain Sight* does not venture fully into those spaces itself. I suggest, then, that the collection can be read obliquely as inhabiting a space of contradiction: it both rejects and desires the recognition of the mainstream; it is told in the voices of the women, yet is mediated by its non-Indigenous editors; it communicates the possibility and necessity for different futurities but fails to construct a vision for them. As such, it seems to fall somewhere between the outright refusal expressed by Janet Marie Rogers and the expansionary Western humanism advocated by Maggie de Vries. I suggest that reading for this tension sets up a clearer understanding of the stakes of Rogers's altogether more radical representational politics, while still keeping us rooted in the particular space of the DTES.

Published in 2005, the collection is made up of edited transcripts of interviews conducted by Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane over the course of several years with seven women living in the DTES. These "narrators" (8) – Pawz, Laurie, Black Widow, Anne, Sara, Dee, and Tamara – offer their own accounts of their lives, highlighting the disjunction between the sensationalized external representations of life in the DTES familiar to the public and their own understanding of the factors and circumstances affecting them. As such, the book eschews "journalistic sensationalism and the distancing language of academics" (Robertson and Culhane 18) and unsettles the comforting narrative of exceptionality that situates the DTES as a space of unique or unusual violence. Instead, the narrators and editors gesture toward a richer, more complex understanding of the specificities of living in the DTES and the heteropatriarchal, racist, colonial structures that are obscured and entrenched by logics of individual responsibility.

The collection seems to diverge from *Missing Sarah* in that it works toward a different form of representation: the women's stories are voiced in their own words, they control which

details are published, and they are able to justify and explain their reasons for sharing their experiences. Describing the collection's methodology, Robertson and Culhane write: "As part of the creative process, researchers collaborated with each narrator to re-work their many interviews into a single, chronological account […]. During the first general edit, the narrators defined grammatical changes that would set the tone of their accounts. Some women wanted slang phrases and words removed; however, most of the narrators were adamant that their story should appear exactly as it was told. […] The editing took place over several months during which the editors and narrators read and reread the stories together, adding and deleting as we worked" (8-9). The editors of the collection are highly concerned with reducing the impact of their own mediation on the stories, explaining that, while they include brief introductions and conclusions to each section, the stories are otherwise told completely in the women's own words: "Believing strongly that [the narrators] should have as much editorial control as possible, we recorded a concluding interview after each woman had approved the final form of her story. We chose to place transcriptions of these interviews as afterwords in order to be as true as possible to the process" (10). As one narrator, Sara, describes, the opportunity to present your life on your own terms without being required to adjust or edit to conform to the expectations of a reading public is profound. When asked why she wanted to publish her story, she explained:

> I have a whole bunch of reasons for publishing this. For once, I get to say my piece. I've done a lot of interviews on this and that around my life, around things from downtown like the missing women. A lot of stuff that I said was taken out of context or wasn't portrayed properly, and in the end it looked like non-truths. So this is finally my chance to say something and for it to be accurate. If it helps people who are in my situation, or who have somebody in my situation, or if it just helps them to understand a little better about people

> in general, without misconceptions and stereotypes, then I've accomplished something. But my main thing is if it's going to be said, it's going to be true. (125)

Unlike *Missing Sarah*, this narrative ostensibly has not been filtered through an appropriate or socially legible mouthpiece. The text is posited as a space where the women are able to rectify "non-truths" and inscribe their own lived realities. However, insofar as this is a collection edited by two non-Indigenous academics, it seems important to identify the built-in limits and contradictions of the text: What are the implications of reading these "truths" in the form of a published book? How does the intelligibility of these stories depend on this familiar form? And what incommensurability exists between what the narrators – at least three of whom identify as Indigenous or non-white – describe and the interpretive framework the editors provide? So, although the text pushes back against the authorial constraints that we see in *Missing Sarah* and invites its readers to critically interrogate these constraints, it also remains subject to them in ways that are important to acknowledge.

Despite this formal limitation, however, I suggest that the text offers two interesting departures from *Missing Sarah*'s straightforward humanitarian politics of inclusion, and that these departures might attune us as readers to the more radical refusal at the core of *Unearthed*. First, whereas Sarah's status as always already missing means that de Vries's only aim can be expanding the limits of grievability to include her sister, a number of *In Plain Sight*'s narrators express profound ambivalence about this project. Their desire to be included by mainstream society is not straightforward. Robertson and Culhane point to this ambivalence in the introduction, saying: "While they are only too aware of the myriad ways in which they are excluded and marginalized by the mainstream […] the women who tell their stories here include themselves within that public" (10). The editors indicate their own hope that "this volume will contribute in some small way to our – narrators'/editors'/readers' – humanity" (14). The use of

language pitched around conceptualizations of humanity and marginalization seems to indicate that this collection is engaged in a humanitarian project not so very different from *Missing Sarah*: to expand the dominant frames of intelligibility to include marginalized women. However, unlike Sarah, these women are not gone, but continue to live against the grain, adjacent to the mainstream. This does not result in a clear rejection of social recognition as a desirable aim; rather, there remains a productive tension between inclusion and exclusion, recognition and refusal.

This ambivalence can often be seen contained within the same narrator's story, sometimes even on the same page. One narrator, a Cree woman named Laurie, asserts: "[My family] still wonder why I live down here. Everything I need and want is here; I've got my partner, I've got my doctors, I've got my pills. I like where I am right now" (50). She is adamant in asserting her agency – it is her decision to live in the DTES and she stands by it. Yet, in the very next paragraph, she muses, "Sometimes I wonder if coming to Vancouver was the best choice" (50). She confesses uncertainty about the course her life has taken, even as she defends her choices. Another narrator, Black Widow, expresses similar ambivalence: "I've led my life the way I've led my life… I don't know if I've made all the right decisions, but I really don't think that I'm that bad a person. […] Maybe when I'm gone, maybe somebody can read something about me" (7). Embedded in such comments is both a rejection of external judgment and a simultaneous desire to be heard and understood, to be recognized. These narrators expose the limitations of a humanitarian politics that can only include them by glossing over aspects of their experience, even as they subscribe to the notion of inclusion and recognition as desirable.

Second, the text embeds references to the presence in some of the women's lives of distinct Indigenous values and practices. Though such references are sparse and could easily pass unnoticed, they are present. One narrator, in particular, Dee, explicitly draws attention to the

different orientation toward healing and living in a good way that she experienced in her home on the reserve: "I go back home and this is my best clean time – three years. […] I did a river bath every morning when I got up. You go into the water and under the water to pray to the Creator for something you need within yourself, like courage to face another day, or guidance, or hope" (132). As I will explore later, this idea of living in a good way is foundational to the representational politics of *Unearthed*; moreover, in their commitment to Indigenous traditional practices as normative, Dee's comments are at odds with the Western humanitarian affiliations of *Missing Sarah*. Elsewhere, Dee explains how choosing to engage in the traditional practices of her people is an "all or nothing" decision: "With traditional, you've got to go with the Creator's guidance or you ain't cutting it, you're still on the Black Road. They call it the Red Road when you follow the Creator" (136). The metaphor of two separate roads, representing the decision to adhere to or discard Indigenous traditions and lifeways, suggests an awareness of the profound disjuncture between these systems. Tellingly, Dee sees greater potential for her own healing on the "Red Road," a modality of life that exists and thrives outside of Western understandings of the human. Laurie, too, gestures to this incommensurability when she describes her frustration with the lack of Indigenous counsellors in the DTES:

> Every counsellor that an Aboriginal person had to deal with was white! 'Why should I be talking to you? You don't know what it's like being me! You haven't walked in my moccasins, so how can you tell me you know how I feel?' You can't tell a black guy, 'Okay, I know what it's like to be a slave,' I seriously can't. Or the Japanese people, when they got stuck in those little camps, you can't say you know what they felt like! You can probably try, but you don't know what it's like, and so everything has basically been sent on from generation to generation to generation. We've got our grandfathers' burdens; each one of us. (56)

Laurie resists the universalizing impulse that drives *Missing Sarah*, demanding that the specificity of her experience as an Indigenous woman be respected. She refuses to accept her identity as fungible or easily conflated with other marginalized identities. In these passing moments, *In Plain Sight* offers glimpses of different modalities of life and ways of being that are fundamentally distinct from those of mainstream Canadian society.

Yet, while *In Plain Sight* articulates the untenable tension between dominant society's requirements for legibility and the diverse modalities of humanity that its narrators embody, I suggest that it does not go beyond this. The text calls into question the inevitability of present conditions and opens up space for new imagined futures, but it does not do the work of envisioning them. This is where I turn to Janet Marie Rogers and the decolonial future that she presents in *Unearthed*. Not only does Rogers reject the restrictions of intelligibility that we see *In Plain Sight*'s narrators grapple with, but she replaces them with an epistemological framework grounded in Indigenous traditions and lifeways. These imagined futures and the politics of refusal on which they are founded form the focus of the rest of this chapter.

In pursuing the driving questions of this chapter – that is, what different modalities of life emerge in *Unearthed* and how do they reframe the issue of violence against Indigenous women? – I map out a series of central themes. I begin and end my reading of *Unearthed* by exploring how the gendered connection to land in Indigenous epistemologies informs a practice and ethic of living in a good way; this marks a shift away from Western theorizations of relational responsibility rooted in affect outlined in the previous chapter toward a more comprehensive Indigenous understanding of relationality. This reconceptualization of relationality enables a reading of Rogers's poetry that begins with the understanding that *violence against Indigenous women is colonial violence* and that, as people living in Indigenous territory, we all share collective responsibility for this violence. This is complicated by the fact that *Unearthed*

incorporates layered, embedded meanings: it makes room for both Indigenous and settler readers, but demands different responses of them. My discussion of these multiple significances across readerships leads into a reading of how Rogers's collection expresses a resistant temporality that compels her Indigenous readers toward a resurgent future while pointedly refusing to take up and address the concerns of her settler readership even as she includes settlers in her address. The concluding section of the chapter further unpacks this representation of refusal and considers what new orientations and imagined futures emerge as a result.

In her 2011 collection of poetry, *Unearthed*, Janet Marie Rogers draws out the complexities of living as an Indigenous person on colonized land. Although the collection is divided, somewhat heavy-handedly, into three distinct sections – Love, Politics, and Identity – the themes of connection to land, relationality, and resurgence span across the poems, pushing back against narrow or prescriptive representations of Indigeneity. The primacy of land, in particular, grounds the collection. In "Descendant," the poetic speaker refers to her "love affair with the land," a relationship that "extends beyond flesh / generations and creation" (19). In "Physical Reflections," the speaker again affirms her connectivity to place, stating: "I am not a tourist / NYC is me and my people […] / the rock beneath the sidewalk […] / welcomed me home" (24). Rogers' insistence on the importance of a grounded connection to physical place and space, even in an urban context, resonates with the writings of Indigenous scholars such as Vanessa Watts and Sharon Venne, discussed in the introduction, and Leanne Simpson, among others. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Simpson discusses the particular connection women share with the land. Quoting Elder Edna Manitowabi, Simpson writes: "Through these teachings [young women] will then come to understand the Earth as their Mother. Through these teachings, they will then come to understand the Earth as themselves. […] We need to help our young people maintain this relationship and these teachings, because that connection is the umbilical

bond to all of Creation" (36-7). The land takes on a maternal kinship position, reflecting Indigenous women's own position as teachers and life-givers.

Connection to land is central to Rogers' understanding of Indigenous identity, a relationship she establishes and continually reaffirms in *Unearthed*. In Western thinking, this connectivity has been romanticized and simplified, but, as I have come to understand it, connection to the land fundamentally grounds complex Indigenous ethical, legal, and cultural principles; it is an essential source of teachings for how to live in a good way. In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Glen Coulthard (Dene) teases out this relationship of what he calls "grounded normativity" (13). Indigenous relationship to land finds its antithesis, according to Coulthard, in capitalist conceptions of property and ownership; rather, living *in relationship with* the land offers a framework for the renewal of traditional Indigenous practices and a model of resistance to settler-driven environmental and social destruction. Notably, Coulthard frames this model of ethical relationality as normative and Western capitalism as alternative or peripheral; from the first moment, he places Indigenous lifeways and norms at the centre of his theory. Grounded normativity becomes a normative model and practice of living in a good way that is rooted in Indigenous legal, ethical, and spiritual conceptions of relationality and balance that emerge from a connection to the land and all life, human and non-human.

How to live in a good way is a lifelong, embodied practice and, as a person newly engaging with these ideas, I cannot pretend to offer a full explanation. However, as I understand it from conversations with Elders and from reading the work of various Indigenous scholars, what I would like to emphasize here is the fluid, living nature of this concept. As Leanne Simpson suggests, living in a good way is a process, an action of living out one's identity as an Indigenous person: in Simpson's case, as a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg woman. She explains: "In order to have a positive identity we have to be living in ways that illuminate that identity, and that propel

us towards mino bimaadiziwin,[21] the good life" (13). Discussing the concept of *mino bimaadiziwin*, Scott Richard Lyons (Ojibwe) elaborates that this embodied practice of good living is inextricably bound up with the land: "This flowing sense of living in rhythm with others, of going along with the ebb and flow of nature, never swimming upstream or cutting against the grain, suggests that *anishinaabeg* are to live and move in concert with the rhythms of the natural world" (88). Rogers, in quietly inscribing the centrality of land to her understanding of Indigenous identity even as she describes the pain of having one's connection to the land severed, offers a vision of resurgence rooted in this idea of living in a good way according to Indigenous principles. In the face of continuing colonial violence, she signals her rejection of a Western capitalist epistemology and her turn to a practice of grounded normativity. Yet, importantly, not all readers of *Unearthed* will pick up on these and other signals – the text holds different potential significances for Indigenous and settler readers – a point I will explore in more depth later in this chapter.

The notion of living in relationship with the land does not translate easily into a Western theoretical framework. While theorists such as Judith Butler or Jenny Edkins attempt to draw out new understandings of relationality, they are, in fact, retreading ground that Indigenous thinkers and knowledge-holders have covered centuries ago. Weheliye notes this irony, commenting that "theoretical formulations by white European thinkers are granted a conceptual carte blanche, while those uttered from the purview of minority discourse that speak to the same questions are almost exclusively relegated to the jurisdiction of ethnographic locality. […] If I didn't know any better, I would suppose that scholars not working in minority discourse seem thrilled that they no

[21] Both Simpson and Scott Richard Lyons cite Winona LaDuke's translation of the Nishnaabemowin word *mino bimaadiziwin* as "continuous rebirth." In her use of the word, Simpson highlights the importance of maintaining the original sense of *mino bimaadiziwin* as a verb (26, footnote 9). In other words, to live in a good way is always a process, an action.

longer have to consult the scholarship of nonwhite thinkers now that European master subjects have deigned to weigh in on these topics" (6). While speaking primarily in reference to Black studies in an American context, Weheliye's point seems highly relevant to the, at best, un-self-conscious and unacknowledged and, at worst, appropriative development of theories of relationality and interconnectedness by Western scholars. Furthermore, Western conceptions of relationality are typically restricted to human-to-human relationships, whereas, crucially – as exemplified in Elder Manitowabi's framing – Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous theories conceptualize the land and non-human life as essential parts of a web of relationality. As such, violence against the land and violence against women are intimately tied; *violence against Indigenous women is colonial violence*.

Rogers makes the violence of this violated connection explicit in her poem "Smack," when she sardonically states:

> my paper membership
> puts me in territory of Salish
> I have been cut
> that's my blood
> that stains your land
> and flows thick in the rivers,
> feeds the fish you feed
> your children
>
> how does it taste? (52)

Her acknowledgment of Salish territory, paired with her pointed question (*"how does it taste?"*), directed in this moment to her imagined settler readership – settlers who have claimed the land as

their own – highlights the continued colonial inhabitation of Indigenous territories. The question, clearly rhetorical, zeroes sharply in on settler subjects' implication in colonial violence and leaves no room for responses or justification. The imagery of blood staining the land and waters calls up memories of both historical massacres of Indigenous peoples and of environmental pollution, direct forms of colonial violence against both peoples and land. The bitter reference to "paper membership" further highlights the legislative violence of these systems, as the colonial government disregards Indigenous determinations of identity and kinship in favour of the bureaucratic membership systems scripted into the *Indian Act*. In the colonial eye, paper replaces blood in determining relationships and belonging, a deep cut to the kinship systems of Indigenous peoples. This rupturing of relationship to kin and land is compounded through the symbolic significance of the very paper on which this legislation is recorded – paper comes to stand in for the original treaty signing process and the instrumentalizing of natural resources, an appropriative and acquisitive practice fundamentally at odds with the conception of living in a good way.

I suggest, however, that we might also read in this passage an allusion to the particular event and experience of violence against Indigenous women. While it cannot be said with complete certainty that the poetic speaker is a woman – and, indeed, Rogers is outspoken in her frustration with the Western gender binary (Genevieve, n.p.) – she does riff on the Madonna/whore trap specifically used to characterize Indigenous women (Pearce 67; Jiwani 92, 98; Gilchrist 375-76) in the preceding stanza. The speaker gloats: "as revenge I seduce your men / and leave them / broken-hearted, ineffective" (Rogers 52). She takes up the spiteful language used to condemn Indigenous women only to spit it back at the colonizer. If we accept this gendered reading, it becomes clear that it is the women, in their connection to Mother Earth, whose blood clogs the rivers and on whose bodies triumphant colonizers build their settlements. In centering this essential relationship, Rogers clarifies what is at stake, as I will go on to explore

in more detail later: she knows that Indigenous women's bodies are the necessary and perpetual targets of colonial violence because, without their destruction, the colonial seizure of land and resources cannot succeed.

This focused concern with violence against Indigenous women and how it is represented is made more explicit in the poem immediately following "Smack." In "Insult to Injury," Rogers addresses the murders of Indigenous women in Vancouver's DTES directly, working to situate this violence within the broader social and historical context she established in the previous poem. In the first three lines, Rogers demarcates the scope of her analysis: "racism / colonialism / christie blatchford journalism" (53). The unpunctuated abruptness of these lines reads like a bullet-point list of offenses, each one playing a part in compounding physical injuries with discursive ones, material with symbolic violence. The poem continues:

does not fail
to drive the last nail
of insult into the graves
of pickton's victims
by calling them
drug addicts
accurate?
or sensationalist?
she, herself, stands
on the corner
not bothering to venture further down
the colonial
road for reasons

that got them

there (Rogers 53)

Christie Blatchford, a successful, nationally-recognized journalist who has been criticized for her sensationalist reporting and particular commitment to undermining Indigenous resistance efforts,[22] wrote a response to the Missing Women's Inquiry that sparked the outrage of Indigenous and ally activists in the DTES and across the country (Walia, n.p.). Her incendiary piece pinpointed the "pathologically ill" nature of Indigenous cultures as the main culprit in the deaths of the murdered women (Blatchford, n.p.). In "Insult to Injury," Rogers decries Blatchford's brand of journalism that paints Indigenous peoples as "burdens of the nation" (Rogers 54), rather than resilient people belonging to sovereign nations in their own right. For the women murdered by Robert Pickton, this refrain becomes especially damaging in how it redirects attention and, ultimately, responsibility away from the colonial context in which they lived and squarely back onto their own (we are to understand) culpable actions.

Meanwhile, "she, herself, stands / on the corner," watching it all unfold (Rogers 53). This line, referring it seems to Blatchford, is intriguing in its apparent reference to street level sex work. The image of "the corner" is an evocative one when paired with the specific locale of the DTES, with its reputation as a "space of exception" in which sex workers come to be understood as disposable (Pratt 1068; Jiwani 90). Standing on the corner to sell sexual services is, in Blatchford's eyes and, by extension, in the eyes of a broad swathe of the Canadian public, a freely-made choice with natural consequences; for her, these consequences might include being raped and murdered. Yet, such risks do not seem to concern Blatchford as she herself stands on

[22] Blatchford's position on Indigenous peoples' land rights is conveniently summarized in her 2010 book, *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy, and How the Law Failed All of Us*, Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2010. Print. For a review, see Timothy C. Winegard, rev. of *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy, and How the Law Failed All of Us*, in *Native Studies Review* 20.1 (2011): 117-119. Print.

the corner, observing and documenting the "broken state of Aboriginal culture" (Blatchford, n.p.). There is no question that, as a white settler subject, she is safe from the violence that Indigenous women should know to expect. Certainly, as a woman, Blatchford is vulnerable to the threat of violence, but her racialization as white protects her from the degree of threat faced by Indigenous women. Relocating Blatchford's critical voice to the sensationalized space of the gritty street corner, Rogers highlights the hypocrisy of condemning Indigenous women for the violence committed against them in a context in which some people's security is assured, while others' is always already precarious.

In shifting the conversation about Vancouver's missing and murdered women to an historical scale, Rogers is able – like the narrators of *In Plain Sight* – to call into question the easy logic that dismisses the violence against women from the DTES as the anomalous actions of one man. "Murderer," the speaker muses, "who cares?" (Rogers 53). The sensationalism centering on a preoccupation with a serial killer's psychology, his actions and behavioural eccentricities, as modelled in *On the Farm*, is of no interest to Rogers. Rather, such details distract from the collective responsibility of a settler population that continues to perpetrate and benefit from colonial violence against Indigenous bodies. To Rogers, Robert Pickton is "just another / sick immigrant," no more or less culpable than other "canadians / enjoying their / canadian lives" (54). And, with that, Rogers troubles the familiar comfort of an intimate readerly public that is able to set itself at a distance from the exceptional events upon which Christie Blatchford or Stevie Cameron and even, as I suggested in my previous chapter, Maggie de Vries focus. Rogers rejects an understanding of these events as exceptional and, in so doing, forecloses their exculpatory significance for a broader Canadian public.

Indeed, Rogers's undermining of Canada itself as a nation state by way of her insistence on lower-case lettering for all references to Canada aligns other settler Canadians with her

designation of Pickton as a "sick immigrant," someone who has distorted the proper guest-host relationship central to good relations between different peoples. An essential part of living in a good way is this respect for the responsibilities of relationality. According to Sylvia McAdam, the relationship between Indigenous nations and settler people was codified in treaties as a kinship relation: "In *nêhiyaw* law, the treaties were adoptions of one nation by another. During the Treaty 6 making process, the *nêhiyawak* understood it was adoption of the Queen and her descendants, binding the two nations together for all time. We became relatives" (41). As such, kinship relationships are the basis for settlers' presence in that territory. Elsewhere in the collection, Rogers alludes to the obligations of this relationship: "permission to enter / comes with restrictions" (78); by failing to respect these restrictions, Canadians have fractured their relationship as guests in a new territory. By placing the ordinary Canadian citizen on the same plane as Pickton, the extraordinary serial killer, Rogers makes explicit the structural critique that we see undergirding *In Plain Sight* and undermines the comforting protection of specificity and exceptionality that settler readers may have otherwise relied upon, as with the distancing sensationalism of *On the Farm* or the individualizing intimacy of *Missing Sarah*. Unlike these texts, *Unearthed* removes any possibility for settler readers to misunderstand their own responsibility for the damaged relationship Rogers critiques. It demands a different kind of responsibility, interpellating the reader as a node in a relational web that necessarily hinges on more than simple affective identification and shared loss. Rather, the responsibility grounding *Unearthed* is one of historical origin and present relational obligation and, as such, all readers – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – are part of this relationship. The text does not allow for reading at a safe distance.

In keeping with this commitment to a relational conception of obligation, throughout *Unearthed* – and often within a single poem – Rogers makes room for both an Indigenous and

non-Indigenous readership. This bears significance for the questions of responsibility, implication, and living in a good way that have so far occupied this chapter. If all of Rogers's readers are bound up in a relationship of responsibility, how does this manifest differently for settler or Indigenous readers? I want to spend some time now considering the implications of this heterogeneous readership addressed in *Unearthed*; specifically, I want to return to the idea that there are different meanings embedded in these texts for an Indigenous versus a settler readership. I suggested earlier in this chapter that, in her inscription of connection to land at the core of her poetry, Rogers signals a particular commitment to an Indigenous framework of "grounded normativity," as theorized by Glen Coulthard. While formal aspects of her poetry, such as this thematic repetition, may be readily read and discussed within a Western literary and poetic tradition, it cannot be assumed that to do so will enable a reader to fully engage with the richness and depth of the collection. As Hoy, drawing from Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) and Lee Maracle (Stó:lō), argues in her reading of Armstrong's novel, *Slash*, writing that emerges from within an Indigenous tradition can be "inaccessible for many Western readers" and requires an "intrinsic approach, [what] Michelle Cliff calls 'reading from the inside out'" (Hoy 34). This entails attending to the limitations of Western literary criticism, following the readings of Indigenous scholars and authors, and – crucially – recognizing that, even then, this writing may not be fully available to a settler reader. The specific thematic and formal characteristics affiliated with particular Indigenous cultural and epistemological traditions may signal certain things to readers within those traditions and radically different things to those from without. As a student of Hoy's noted in her reading of *Slash*, "How can you listen if you don't know how to hear?" (Hoy 35). How do you read if you don't know what you're reading for?

I am forced to return again and again to this question when I read *Unearthed*, certain that I am *missing* something – the point, perhaps – even as I am struck, in other moments, by the

seeming bluntness of Rogers's style. I have been trained to read in highly specific ways – critically, academically – just as I have been raised within a family that, despite our Indigenous heritage, enjoyed the privileges of a relatively uncomplicated identification with white, Euro-Canadian culture. Emerging from this personal and academic context, I must confront the ways in which *how* I am able to read Rogers's collection is coloured by this training. I must consider, too, the ways in which this collection is not *for me*. In some moments, Rogers alludes to a "we" or an "us" that definitively does not include settler-Canadians: "*we* create deep tracks / for anthropologists / to make fiction of *our* past" (17, my emphasis). She normalizes her own subject position as an Indigenous person, affirming that "concepts of minority / are actually the majority" (17) and the importance of "[living] by our own codes" (18). Clearly, such moments of inclusion – those implicitly included in her "we" – also enact exclusion and a refusal to prioritize either the epistemological norms or readerly comfort of settler audiences.

In other moments, her "you" becomes an outward pointing finger, a call to attention very much intended for a settler reader, but one that nonetheless serves more to affirm her commitments to an Indigenous community than to compromise it. In "Conflicted Loyalties," she states:

> I don't wear feathers
> to please you
> and I have not learned to clean fish
> or keep silent
>
> I know that love has a price
> and I'll pay, whatever the cost
> to love and keep loving

my skin, my imperfect people (28)

In these stanzas, the poetic speaker challenges the tropes of authenticity that have been imposed on her as an Indigenous woman. She does not know how to clean fish, nor does she perform a romanticized, passive Indigenous femininity. Rather, she engages with her Indigeneity on her own terms and without reference to settler expectations or desires. Later in the poem, she laments that she does not speak her traditional language, but affirms that she is "loyal to the idea of it" (Rogers 28); as with the fish, she has not learned this traditional practice, but in spite of these losses – and we are left in no doubt who is responsible for them – she is loyal to their cultural significance. Furthermore, not only does the speaker insist that her feathers are not intended to please or placate the settler gaze, but she is not concerned with offering explanations; what they signify to her and to her people is, she seems to be saying, no one else's business and, more importantly, it will not hold the same meaning for a settler-colonial outsider. There is an epistemological limit between her and her settler reader that she is unwilling or unable to broach.

In the face of Rogers's disinterest in offering simple explanations or speaking within a framework easily accessible to Western readers, I find myself asking, once again, *how can I listen if I don't know how to hear? How can I read if I don't know what I am reading for?* I suspect that I simply do not know what I do not know, so to speak. Sensing the presence of the ethical codes to which Rogers alludes embedded in her writing but unable to identify them, I become all the more painfully aware of my own limitations as a reader. For this reason, even as I draw out certain connections in *Unearthed*, I do so cautiously and with an awareness of these limitations to what I am able to hear. As I understand it, the traditions and practices of different Indigenous nations are highly intentional and specific, and teachings are shared only in adherence to proper protocols. In *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nêhiyaw Legal Systems*, *nêhiyaw* (Cree) legal scholar and activist Sylvia McAdam opens her preface by reminding her reader of the importance

of these protocols: "When seeking knowledge from *nêhiyawak*, a protocol is used. […] This protocol is integral and important when retrieving *nêhiyaw* knowledge, teachings, and history. The accepted general protocol is to offer tobacco, a cloth […], and a gift" (10). Teachings can only be properly shared and received once protocol has been followed. Following protocol demonstrates respect for the teachings and the land. In Nishnaabeg tradition, as for the Cree, it is understood that these teachings emerge from the land and are reflected in the language of the Anishnaabe people; to learn how to hear them comes over the course of a lifetime.

In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Leanne Simpson beautifully demonstrates these complexities:

> Ethically, it is my emphatic belief that the land, reflected in Nishnaabeg thought and philosophy, compels us towards resurgence in virtually every aspect. Walking through the bush last spring with my children, the visual landscape reminded me of this. We saw Lady Slippers, and I was reminded of our name for the flower and the story that goes with it, and then moss, and then butterflies. Then we saw a woodpecker and I thought of a similar story. Finally, we walked through a birch stand and I thought of Nanabush, Niimkiig and birch bark. Our Nishnaabeg landscape flourishes with our stories of resistance and resurgence, yet through colonial eyes, the stories are interpreted as quaint anecdotes with "rules" of engagement and consequence. Interpreted within our cultural web of non-authoritarian leadership, non-hierarchical ways of being, non-interference and non-essentialism, the stories explain the resistance of my Ancestors and the seeds of resurgence they so carefully saved and planted. (18)

Each living thing – the Lady Slippers, butterflies, woodpecker, and birch bark – is carefully footnoted and indexed by Simpson to direct her reader to where they might learn more about the stories associated with these characters. She does not pause to simplify or explain their

significance, however; rather, she indicates the way in which they speak to her of a complex ethical, legal relationship and, in so doing, she affirms a particular way of hearing or reading. She embodies, in this passage, a Nishnaabeg way of engaging with the land around her.

At first glance, this passage may seem to be directed at a settler readership; Simpson seems to offer a set of tools for settler readers to better understand Nishnaabeg culture. However, taken in the context of her book, it becomes clear that this passage is in fact designed to serve a pedagogical function *within* Simpson's own community. Her stated goal is for her nation "to rebuild our culturally inherent philosophical contexts for governance, education, healthcare, and economy. We need to be able to articulate in a clear manner our visions for the future, for living as *Indigenous Peoples* in contemporary times. To do so, we need to engage in *Indigenous* processes" (17, original emphasis). Her priorities lie within her community, without reference to settler people. When Simpson directs her readers to learn more about particular stories of the land, or when McAdam offers instruction on proper protocol, they are actively engaged in this act of rebuilding through the transmission of cultural knowledge to their Anishnaabe or Cree readers.

Reading Simpson's passage about walking through the bush, as well as McAdam's comments on the importance of protocol to the proper sharing of teachings, I am reminded that the same story told within different "cultural webs" – colonial or Indigenous – can be heard in very different ways. And so, as I read *Unearthed*, I recognize the need to proceed cautiously. For me to impose my own interpretations of particular aspects of stories or ethical codes haphazardly and without confirmation from traditional knowledge keepers would be a troubling colonial incursion. This does not mean that it would be better for me not to engage with the text at all; rather, it reminds me that my own cultural investments – the cultural web in which I operate – affect what I am able to hear in Rogers's poetry. Returning to Weheliye's suggestion that we become attentive to the "different modalities of the human [that] come to light if we do not take

the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject" (8), I suggest that Rogers's poetry may represent one such modality, even as I recognize that my own reading of it is constrained in certain ways.

Rogers herself gestures to these layered modalities in her writing. In her poem "Are You Listening?" Rogers cautions her reader: "just remember… / awake-ness is not the same as awareness" (57). The contrast here between "awake-ness" and "awareness" parallels the distinction between listening and hearing that so preoccupied Hoy's student during their discussion of *Slash*. Just as you can listen without hearing, you might be awake without being aware. Like Leanne Simpson, Rogers is devoted to envisioning and working toward a resurgent Indigenous future, addressing herself to an Indigenous readership that is both awake and aware. However, whereas Simpson focuses her energy primarily inward toward her own community, Rogers simultaneously addresses her settler and Indigenous readers. The poetic speaker in "Are You Listening," in particular, seems bent on both rallying her Indigenous sisters and jolting a settler readership into an awareness of the imminent resurgence of Indigenous peoples. At certain points, she seems to address only her settler readers:

> I could care less
> when asked how you fit in
> through impatience I embrace
> accelerated methods of communication (57)

However, the complexity of embedded meanings begins to manifest further on in the poem when the speaker's warning to settler-Canadians becomes simultaneously a rallying cry directed at her Indigenous kin. She continues:

> drums are sounding
> the women are coming

and we're not asking

we're telling

our place on the land

is in front

on our feet leading

our time is now (58)

The dual function of communication emerges in these lines, hinting at the starkly divergent significance for settler and Indigenous readers present in Rogers's work. The poetic speaker situates herself as one member of a group of resurgent Indigenous women whose place is on the land, leading their nations into a new future. However, unlike the slow practice of walking the land that Simpson embodies when she directs her reader to the stories of the Lady Slipper or woodpecker, the pace of Rogers's poem is accelerated. The speaker will not wait patiently for those less "aware" readers to catch up with her. The quickening pace of the lines, each one surging into the next, reflects the speaker's relentless motion, what Simpson calls the "transformative movement" of resurgence (24). There is no time to prepare or make comfortable the settler people who will be impacted by the inexorable forward movement of Indigenous feet; they are coming, whether or not settler-Canadians are listening, whether or not they are ready.

Like Simpson, in this poem Rogers employs language that is future-oriented, drawing on past tradition to envision future flourishing. In affirming that "our time is now," the speaker rejects a static, Western temporality that locates Indigenous peoples solely in the past; rather, the passage of time becomes part of the steady, inevitable motion of resurgence. Embedded in this language of relentless motion and futurity is an idea of resistant temporality that threads throughout the collection, as I will discuss further in this chapter. Notably, the speaker is not concerned with opening up her vision of a resurgent Indigenous future to include settler people.

"I could care less / when asked how you fit in." This assertion, echoing Rogers's comments quoted in this chapter's epigraph (*"Who cares?"*), is yet another reminder that this collection, as a call for Indigenous resurgence and pride, is not concerned with finding solutions that fit easily within a settler framework.

I have dedicated a good deal of space here to a consideration of the complexities that emerge from the different embedded meanings available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers of *Unearthed*. I do so because the ways in which Rogers's text resists being read easily within a Western frame – expressed in its multi-valent, layered meanings – is fundamentally tied to the question that grounds this chapter: namely, how does this resistant representation of the causes and context of contemporary violence against Indigenous women enable and demand different orientations toward the future? Working through Weheliye, at the beginning of this chapter I asked what it would mean to engage with the representations and imagined futures of subjects typically excluded from the liberal humanist domain. I now want to turn my attention to the possibilities that emerge when this question is mapped onto *Unearthed*.

I suggest that reading with this question in mind encourages an awareness of the ways in which *Unearthed* diverges from and actively resists the familiar humanitarian narrative employed by Maggie de Vries in *Missing Sarah* and, to an extent, by Robertson and Culhane in *In Plain Sight*. As I argued in my previous chapter, de Vries is concerned with expanding the definition of what counts as a grievable human life. She seeks to make her sister Sarah intelligible to her readership through the affective responses of grief, mourning, and empathy and, in so doing, to invoke a sense of ethical responsibility to Sarah and women like her. However, de Vries's project of expanding the norms of intelligibility is rooted in a particular framework that fails to apprehend its own Western cultural investments, enabling these investments to be normalized and made invisible. Within this framework, it becomes necessary for Sarah – a racialized, drug-

addicted woman working in the sex trade – to be recuperated as a subject worthy of mourning through her white sister's voice. In making Sarah more palatable to her reading public, de Vries accepts and shores up the constraints of a capitalist, heteropatriarchal settler society that has no room for "different modalities of the human" (Weheliye 8). Similarly, though the narrators of *In Plain Sight* tell their own stories and express ambivalence toward the norms of dominant society, the text nevertheless seeks to humanize – to make grievable – the narrators to an imagined Western reader. *Unearthed,* on the other hand, rejects the constraints of these liberal notions of recognition and chooses, instead, to centre its attention on Indigenous modalities of being without reference to settler futurities. My interest here lies in unpacking how Rogers's text enacts a representation of refusal: a refusal of the familiar humanist frame and a turn, instead, to a politics of Indigenous resurgence.

Drawing through the threads of rejection and resistant self-inscription that we saw, however subtly, in Robertson and Culhane's collection, we read Rogers mark the presence of Indigenous peoples within an oppressive colonial context, not in order to seek recognition within that context, but to affirm the distinct lifeways of her people independent from a colonial system designed to erase and forget them. As such, *Unearthed* is in keeping with Jo-Ann Episkenew's description of Indigenous literature. She suggests that Indigenous literature "not only [responds] to and critique[s] the policies of the Government of Canada; it also functions as 'medicine' to help cure the colonial contagion by healing the communities that these policies have injured. It accomplishes this by challenging the 'master narrative,' that is, the stories that embody the settlers' 'socially shared understanding'" (Episkenew 2). With her scathing lines about "money-measured apologies" (Rogers 47) and the way Indigenous peoples are forced to "bend, beg and pretend [for] crumbs" (Rogers 93), it is apparent that Rogers is all too aware of the dangers that come with attempting to work cooperatively with a colonial government and society that, in spite

of its own self-image as "a liberal, inclusive, and multicultural nation founded on peaceful negotiation" (Episkenew 6), is premised on the destruction of Indigenous peoples and cultures.

To unpack this, we must return to the connection, drawn at the beginning of this chapter, between violence against Indigenous women and violence against the land. This connection is foundational to understanding the ways in which violence against Indigenous women is colonial violence. The centrality of women's connection to the land and the impact of the colonial disruption of this connection is laid out by Vanessa Watts in her discussion of "Place-Thought," a belief in the living, agential nature of the land that is bound up with the essential connection of the feminine and the land. "Place-Thought," Watts explains, "is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts" (21). Contrasting Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee "Place-Thought" to Euro-Western epistemological-ontological frameworks, Watts argues that Indigenous cosmologies are not just stories but are, rather, histories of events that truly happened. As such, the connection between the feminine and the land that is emphasized in such stories as Sky Woman, a traditional Haudenosaunee story, and First Woman, a traditional Anishnaabe story, should be taken as a factual, organizing principle for all life, human and non-human.

In her discussion of women's essential connection to the land, Watts is careful to separate an Indigenous conceptualization of "essentialism" from Western understandings of this word and it is worth noting this careful parsing of her terminology because it marks yet another point of departure from the universalizing Western frameworks that we see theorists and writers such as Judith Butler or Maggie de Vries employ. Specifically, Watts argues that Western critiques of "essentialism" as inherently dangerous or backwards emerge from an attempt to "remedy historical mistakes of biological essentialism," but that Indigenous cosmologies should not be measured against these harmful forms of essentialism (31-2). Rather, within an Indigenous

framework, women's essential connection to the land becomes a source of power and knowledge for how to live in a good way and yet another articulation of a practice of grounded normativity; to critique this connection as "essentialist" in the Western sense is to fundamentally misunderstand how this connection functions. Watts's challenge to a Western understanding of Indigenous traditions can be seen as part of an insurgent Indigenous feminist discourse that strives to rethink certain traditional practices outside the context of the oppressive colonial and patriarchal connotations ascribed to them. As Lyons asserts, unlike Western notions of culture as "discrete, timeless, [and] bounded" (100), Indigenous languages – in his case, Ojibwemowin – typically frame culture as a verb, a process; as such, when Indigenous feminists question, adapt, or embody certain traditional practices, it is in keeping with an understanding of culture as fluid and living.[23] So, when Watts discusses women's essential connection to the land, it is not somehow inherently unfeminist or uncritical; rather, it becomes part of a nuanced conversation about Indigenous lifeways and practices as they exist separate from Western patriarchal systems.

According to Watts, in understanding Indigenous stories purely on a symbolic order, Euro-Western epistemologies undermine the essential principle of Place-Thought and facilitate the disruption of Indigenous connection to the land. Watts argues:

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[23] To illustrate, Lyons offers the example of Sweetgrass Road, an all-woman drum group from Winnipeg that challenged the ban on women performers at a powwow in Minnesota in 2001. Lyons argues that, although the women were challenging what was deemed a "traditional" practice, they were in fact embodying Ojibwe culture: "By seating themselves at a drum usually reserved for men and singing traditional songs, Sweetgrass Road engaged in a custom (*izhitwaa*) requiring a tremendous amount of know-how […]. In so doing, they respected the original god-given gifts of the past (*gaaminigoowisieng, gaanakowinid*) by keeping them alive" (93-4, original emphasis). Leanne Simpson offers a personal perspective on her own discomfort with the long skirt traditionally worn by women to ceremonies. She explains: "I have always felt conflicted about this issue. At times I have worn my skirt to demonstrate respect to the Elders and knowledge of those teachings [but] there have been many times when the idea that I was *required* to wear a skirt frustrated and angered me. […] I thought about why I felt so irritated about the skirt in the first place. I thought about how in colonial society, the skirt carries meaning that maintains the rigid boundaries in a two-gendered system. My understanding of gender within my own culture is one that was much more fluid. […] I thought that Gzhwe Mnidoo cared about who I was, not what I was wearing" (L. Simpson 60-1). In resisting conceptions of tradition as static and immutable, the women in these anecdotes embody the fluid, active nature of "culture" as it is understood in a Nishnaabeg framework.

> The epistemology-ontology divide diverts agency away from land and other non-human beings. In this framing, the dominant society in North America points to disproportionately high numbers of Indigenous women in prisons, as sex workers, the victims of physical and sexual violence. At the same time, land is increasingly being excavated, re-designed, torn apart. Is this merely a coincidence? Of course not. The feminine and land is fundamental to our extensions as people. So, in an attempt to conquer such people, where would you start? Our land and our women, disabling communication with Place-Thought, and implementing a bounded agency where women are sub-human/non-human. (31)

In undermining and weakening Indigenous epistemologies that value and affirm women's connection to the land, Canadian settler-colonial society is able to insert its own interpretative frameworks that target Indigenous women and shift responsibility for social and physical violence back onto Indigenous communities. In the process, the ways in which settler people exact and materially benefit from this cultural rupture are obscured.

Like Watts, Leanne Simpson affirms the essential connection between women and the land in Nishnaabeg culture. It is from the land that Indigenous legal and ethical principles flow and, as Simpson states, "women [carry] the responsibility for first sharing these teachings" (106). McAdam similarly describes the centrality of women in Cree culture as the source of the *nêhiyaw* legal system (24). These and other scholars outline how the colonial project of dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their traditional lands in order to allow settlement and development requires that the keepers of laws and traditions be targeted first. As Andrea Smith notes, within the colonial hetero-patriarchal imagination, "Native women are bearers of a counter-imperial order and pose a supreme threat to the dominant culture. Symbolic and literal control over their bodies is important in the war against Native people" (15). In other words, Indigenous women

become a site of struggle in an ongoing colonial conflict; the fact of their bodies represents a threat to the colonial order.

In Canada, the threat posed by Indigenous women is managed by way of multiple, overlapping mechanisms, some overtly violent and others more insidious. Legislation such as the *Indian Act*, implemented in 1876, is a prime example of how Indigenous women have been targeted for erasure, not through physical violence but through their legislation into non-existence.[24] Through the particularly gendered nature of the *Indian Act*, Indigenous women who "married out" – who married non-status or non-Indigenous men – would lose their Indian status and, with it, any right to live on their reserves and access band resources, whereas Indigenous men who "married out" would retain their status (and, indeed, their wives would be granted status, even if they had no Indigenous heritage). Children born to women who had lost their status through marriage would similarly lose any claim to Indian status.[25] In *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (2004), Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) discusses the impacts of this legislation and the way its echoes continue to be felt into the present:

> [The] "bleeding off" of Native women and their children from their communities was in place for 116 years. […] If one takes into account the fact that for every individual who lost status and had to leave her community, all of her descendants (many of them the products of nonstatus Indian fathers and Indian mothers) also lost status and for the most part were permanently alienated from Native culture, the numbers of individuals who ultimately were

[24] The present discussion of the legislative erasure of Indigenous women draws from my recent article, "In Consideration of Belly Buttons," *GUTS Canadian Feminist Magazine*, 4 (2015): n.p. Web.

[25] Compare this to the racialization of African American people in the United States and the "one drop rule," whereby any person with African heritage was considered black and, therefore, accorded slave status. In a social context where labour power was the necessary commodity, it became expedient to designate mixed-race children as black. Conversely, in Canada, where land was the desired commodity, it became necessary to assimilate mixed-race Indigenous children – at least nominally – into white society in order to justify the seizure of traditional Indigenous lands.

> removed from Indian status and lost to their nations may, at the most conservative estimates, number between one and two million. (55-6)

This cultural genocide operates specifically through the systematic targeting of Indigenous women, hinging on their dislocation from their communities and, ultimately, their erasure *as Indigenous women*.

In 1985, the Canadian government passed Bill C-31 in an effort to redress the gendered discrimination enshrined in the *Act*; the bill enabled women and their children who had lost status through marriage to reapply. Later, Bill C-3 extended this right to grandchildren as well. However, these bills merely serve to delay the loss of status by a generation and, more to the point, they do not acknowledge or address the troubling ways in which Indigenous identity is constrained and produced by a government "whose claims to the land depend on the ongoing obliteration of Indigenous presence" (Lawrence 12). It becomes much easier to legitimize a claim to land and resources if the original inhabitants of that land can be deemed to have died out or disappeared. Rogers' frustration with her "paper membership" (52) becomes all the more compelling in the face of this legislative history. As Smith argues, the imagined absence of Indigenous peoples "reinforces at every turn the conviction that Native peoples are indeed vanishing and that the conquest of Native lands is justified" (9). Furthermore, the continued interference of the Canadian government in bands' right to determine their own membership brings with it a host of fresh difficulties arising from concerns around scarcity of resources and the preservation of traditional knowledge and lifeways.

The gendered nature of the *Indian Act* offers one example of how the Canadian state has pointedly targeted Indigenous women through bureaucratic, rather than militaristic, means. However, for a colonial system whose own legitimacy requires the disappearance of Indigenous peoples, legislative violence finds its necessary counterpart in the threat and perpetration of

physical violence. Smith breaks down the various forms of such violence in her book, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and the American Indian Genocide*, which is perhaps the most comprehensive study of colonial sexual violence against Indigenous women in North America. In it, Smith outlines how the sexual violence prevalent in early colonial incursions has continued into the present day in various iterations, through boarding schools,[26] control of Indigenous women's reproductive healthcare, and the high rates of unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Although Smith's book speaks primarily within an American context, and there are certainly important distinctions between the colonial histories of Canada and the United States, many Indigenous nations' experiences of violent oppression straddle this border. In Canada, the intergenerational impacts of interlocking systems of violence in the form of residential schools, the foster system, and police violence continue to play out today.

Crucially, what must be understood about these intersecting forms of violence is their *intentionality*. They do not represent a breakdown of the system but, rather, the system's successful performance of its required function. Though the government may have offered an official apology for the harms caused by residential schools; though there may have been a commission to investigate the Vancouver Police Department and RCMP's handling of the missing women's case; though there may be public outcry each time a new headline appears about yet another Indigenous woman found murdered – *this is the intended outcome of these systems*. Nishnaabeg writer Naomi Sayer points to this intentionality in her recent post regarding the death of Edmonton resident, Cindy Gladue:[27]

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[26] "Boarding schools" were akin to Canada's "Indian residential school" system.

[27] On March 18, 2015, Bradley Barton was acquitted of first-degree murder and manslaughter in the 2011 death of Cindy Gladue, an Edmonton woman who was found dead in his hotel room. She had bled to death from a laceration to her vagina that he claimed was the result of rough sex. During the trial, her preserved pelvis was brought into the courtroom to show to the jury. The Crown had appealed the verdict as of the writing of this thesis.

> Some people say the Crown and the police failed [Gladue]. But the system is doing what it was always designed to do… get rid of the Indian problem. […] The violence that she experienced does not exist in isolation from all the other systems policing her life as an Indigenous woman and as sex worker [sic]. The system is violent. (n.p.)

As Sayers pinpoints here, state systems are not in place to protect Indigenous women from violence. Rather, the colonial state has a vested interest in seeing Indigenous peoples disappear in order to shore up its own claim to resources and land once occupied by Indigenous nations. A necessary step to achieving this aim is to break the connection between Indigenous women and the land.

I have taken the time here to explore the theoretical and epistemological connections between women, the land, and colonial violence in detail because I believe that Janet Marie Rogers's writing emerges from within a resurgent tradition of Indigenous thought that is premised on these concepts. Drawing together the major strands of my discussion of *Unearthed*, I suggest that what emerges is a picture of Indigenous women's connection to the land and a critique of gendered violence as a form of colonial violence built on the disruption of that connection. Furthermore, as I suggested previously, Rogers is highly suspicious of attempts to redress this violence within a colonial system and, even, to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Canadian state. This is in clear contrast to the political orientations at the core of *Missing Sarah* and, even, *In Plain Sight*, which are premised on assumptions of settler futurity and the potential for positive change within the colonial systems of Canadian society. Rather, Rogers promotes a vision of Indigenous resurgence that necessarily emerges from and develops outside of colonial systems, a vision that is always oriented toward an Indigenous future *after colonialism*. These thematic threads overlap compellingly in her poem, "Women's Work," which I reproduce here in its entirety:

the bounty of earth teaches us

obedience

we know what to do in changing seasons

the earth moves with us

surviving fierce summers

respectful relations

yield self-determined nations

clans co-habit collectively

politics and management

overseen by the mothers

listening to grandmothers

who sit and watch the earth turn

we learn

there is only good

and twisted versions of good

separate from things

that bring us closer to identities

of who we are not

out of balance with natural rhythms

having to grasp at unsure answers

realizing your connection
to your national identity
has nothing to do with “canadian”
their short-comings will be
forgiven but never forget
the apology or adoption

we share a good soup
and gather in good health

women relay lessons given
through supernatural communications
to reunite a troubled couple
calm expectant mothers
teach the children with patience
and instruct the men
who can rule (92)

“Women’s Work” is structured by the complex temporality to which I gestured earlier, a temporality that combines past and present in order to project a resurgent vision of the future. Structurally, the poem reflects the progression from first contact and colonization to settler colonialism and, turning to the future, a resurgent Indigeneity, mapping out a chronology of Indigenous peoples’ relationship with European colonizers. Written entirely in the present tense, the poem foregrounds the way in which the past inevitably informs the present and future; they cannot be disentangled. This temporal structure is consistent with Cree scholar Dwayne Donald’s

understanding of the importance of historical consciousness; drawing on the work of Leroy Little Bear (Blackfoot), Donald argues for "the importance of amalgamating the past, the present, and the future [and of tracing] out the lineages that brought the current conditions into being" (n.p.). Within an Indigenous epistemology, temporality is not and cannot be simply a linear progression. Rather, past, present, and future inform and influence each other.

In keeping with this non-linear understanding, the temporalities of past, present, and future come together to ground the poem. The opening third of the poem describes the social and political structure of Indigenous nations prior to contact, co-habiting collectively under the guidance of the mothers and grandmothers whose knowledge is gleaned from the land that sustains them. However, this balance is altered in the middle section of the poem, when the tone shifts markedly to reflect the arrival of European colonizers who bring with them "twisted versions of good" (Rogers 92). Here, the poetic speaker critiques imposed definitions of nationhood, arguing that "national identity / has nothing to do with 'canadian'" (Rogers 92). This distinction unsettles the assumption that settler society's imprint on this land is indelible, that the Canadian state is here to stay. As the speaker asserts, the shortcomings of settler people may be forgiven, but the violence perpetrated by the state should not be forgotten. With this injunction – "never forget" – the poem's temporality shifts yet again: the colonial present, marked by the Canadian government's apology and the failures of social work systems that adopt Indigenous children out of their communities, so different from Indigenous nations' adoption of European settlers through treaty, becomes framed as merely a disruption to a regenerative cycle of Indigenous life. In this imagined future, nations gather "in good health" and balance is restored. Women's roles are once again given prominence as they teach, instruct, and reassure, reinvigorating the customs and traditions of their nations. Colonial interventions are resituated as

an interruption – rather than an endpoint – to Indigenous life cycles, and lines of descent, kinship structures, and relationship to the land are reaffirmed.

In this reading, the radically resurgent nature of "Women's Work" springs from its vision for the future. Rogers begins and ends by foregrounding women's relationship to the land as the teachers of land-based principles, foregrounding a circular, rather than linear, temporality. The implication of this structuring of the poem seems to be that the re-emergence of traditional Indigenous principles and lifeways is not only possible, but also imminent, and hinges on restoring of women's roles as valued interpreters and keepers of the law. Inherent in this vision for the future is a rejection of the assumption that any meaningful change can come for Indigenous peoples by working within a colonial system. Rather than turning to the Canadian state for recognition of their identities, Indigenous peoples can find this within themselves through their connection to land-based traditions.

With her rejection of the state's and settler society's recognition as a desirable end, Rogers aligns herself with theorists such as Glen Coulthard (Dene), Audra Simpson (Mohawk), and Leanne Simpson (Anishnaabe) who form part of an Indigenous sovereignty movement that has been gathering strength for decades. As Audra Simpson argues, "there is a political alternative to 'recognition,' the much sought-after and presumed 'good' of multicultural politics. This alternative is 'refusal' […] as a political and ethical stance […]. Refusal comes with the requirement of having one's *political* sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing" (11, original emphasis). Such refusal serves to de-familiarize accepted (colonial) political and social modalities, turning instead to sovereign Indigenous politics and epistemologies as normative. Rogers, in challenging the legitimacy of the settler state, encoded in her use of language such as the lower-case "canada," calls into question the assumption that the present systems of colonial

dominance can ever protect or respect Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, *on their own terms*. In the face of statistics about hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women, of the government's disinterest in conducting an official inquiry, of court cases where Indigenous women's bodies can be publicly dissected as evidence while their killers are acquitted, Rogers rejects the false promise of security and recognition that comes from colonial government that premises itself on ahistorical understandings of inclusion, multiculturalism, and tolerance of difference.

What follows, however, from such a sustained position of refusal? What emerges to fill the gaps that accompany "the impetus to 'turn away from the oppressor, to avert one's gaze and refuse the recognition itself" (A. Simpson 24)? I suggest that Rogers embeds her own terms of recognition all along – terms that emerge from and reflect the Indigenous ethical and legal ways of being which ground her own life. In "Women's Work," we see her document the need to listen to the grandmothers, whose job it is to "sit and watch the earth turn" and relay its messages. Indeed, terms – or teachings – such as these emerge throughout the collection. In "Physical Reflections," she reminds her reader that "we are all connected / to the earth's heart / […] a symbiotic balance of / physical, spiritual, emotional" (Rogers 24). She insists on becoming "reattached to land / together floating on oceans / riding the turtle's back / realizing our relation to astronomy" (Rogers 25). Elsewhere, after the damage of "the adoption of the newcomers' / processes," she offers this directive: "(listen to the women)" (Rogers 42). Still later, she celebrates the knowledge that "traditions live in more / than one realm / sung in harmonies / overlapping memories" (Rogers 73). They are not lost, but continue to guide and inform her as she works toward a resurgent future. Together, these references and instructions model alternate modes of living on the land in a good way and embodying respect for Indigenous epistemologies.

Rogers' insertion of Indigenous lifeways as both necessary and normative in the face of undesirable colonial systems of recognition enacts precisely the resurgent politics Audra Simpson envisions as following from a position of refusal. According to Simpson, "This moment of turning away [from the oppressor] can turn us toward Haudenosaunee assertions […]. Perhaps here we see a willingness to assert a greater principle and, in the assertion of this principle, to assert and be free *whether this is apprehended as such or not*. So in the Haudenosaunee political context it can mean recognition by another authoritative nexus (one's own?) and thereby call the other's into question. This negates the authority of the other's gaze" (A. Simpson 24, my emphasis). In such a formulation, settler society becomes the other and Indigenous principles are made central. Note, too, the warning that this shift will take place "whether this is apprehended or not." The resonances with Rogers' poem, "Are You Listening?" are apparent: "the women are coming / and we're not asking / we're telling" (58). Rogers' focus, like Simpson's, is on moving toward a future built on and understood in Indigenous terms. Settler concerns have no place in this future.

This is not a comfortable or palatable stance for *Unearthed*'s settler readership to confront. It does not fit with the familiar understanding in the Canadian imaginary of the nation's relationship with Indigenous peoples as one of tolerance and reconciliation. It certainly complicates the narrative that has emerged around violence against Indigenous women. The connection between violence against the land and violence against women – all part of the ongoing experience of settler colonialism – means that the very presence of settler society causally contributes to this violence. What is the role of Canadians, then, if Indigenous people such as Rogers are not interested in our understanding, help or, even, our opinion? What can Rogers's settler readers, eager to distance themselves from the ugly image of oppressive colonizer, do if she seems to address us only to require our attentive silence? She does not seem

concerned with spurring Canadians on to any particular kind of political action; indeed her collection speaks to a settler audience only to tell those of us who are settlers that she "could care less" how we fit in to this picture (Rogers 57). In refusing to center the experiences and concerns of settler readers even as she directly addresses them in her poetry, Rogers marks out an unfamiliar directive for settler people: to listen rather than to lead. This is a decided shift away from the desire to increase readers' comprehension of the narrators' humanity articulated by the editors of *In Plain Sight* and, similarly, from our experience of reading *Missing Sarah*, where the author's main goal is to reach out to a reading public and make Sarah and women like her intelligible to us, to make us care about her safety and to act on that affective engagement.

Rogers bypasses completely this concern with affective engagement as a route to political action, focusing entirely on reframing the experiences of Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, in a way that celebrates and engages with their traditional knowledge and lifeways. This does not mean that she shies away from representing the harms of ongoing colonial violence. Rather, she envisions different solutions to it, solutions that necessarily exist outside of the colonial government and society's systems of recognition and reconciliation. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang argue, "Reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future. Reconciliation is concerned with questions of *what will decolonization look like? […] What will be the consequences of decolonization for the settler?* Incommensurability acknowledges that these questions need not, and perhaps cannot, be answered in order for decolonization to exist as a framework" (35, original emphasis). Working through settler readers' affective engagement with a text is always on some level about answering these questions and prioritizing concerns about settler futures. This is the limit constraining the imagined futures of *In Plain Sight* and *Missing Sarah*. In refusing to address these questions, *Unearthed* becomes incommensurable with a settler politics and a model of representation that

prioritizes engaging settler affect to adapt colonial systems, rather than turning away from them altogether.

In the opening epigraph of this chapter, Rogers responds to the question of how her book might change Canada: "Change it how? Who cares?" (Genevieve, n.p.). In this moment, she refuses to share in the goals of what "all (presumably) 'sensible' people perceive as good" (A. Simpson 1). She sees no future for herself in the vision of a reformed Canada. Indigenous women will not be made safe with a public inquiry; men like Robert Pickton will continue to target Indigenous women for violence; the justice system will continue to fail Indigenous people; Indigenous children will still make up the majority of kids in foster care; police will continue to abuse Indigenous men and women; the treaties will still be disregarded and resource extraction will carry on as usual. These things will not change in Canada. But where *In Plain Sight* leaves open up the space to critique these systems but not to depart from them, Rogers proposes an alternative to this future: a resurgent future that centers on Indigenous principles and lifeways, that respects women as teachers and caretakers of the land, and that understands the relationality of all living things. These are the "new modalities of the human" (Weheliye 8) that come to light; this is the future Rogers articulates for Turtle Island in *Unearthed* and, crucially, this representation does not hinge on whether her settler readers are moved or compelled by it. Because, as she reminds us, "drums are sounding / the women are coming / and we're not asking / we're telling" (Rogers 58).

Conclusion

In *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, Cree/Métis writer and educator Kim Anderson underscores the necessity for Indigenous women to reclaim their identities in positive and generative ways. Discussing the project of Indigenous resurgence and resistance to colonial systems, she states: "The work that remains is to develop alternatives to what we have to resist. […] 'We have developed what we might call an aesthetics of opposition. But now we need to develop an aesthetics of simply who we are'" (152). Implicit in this statement is a question: what might a decolonial future look like for Indigenous peoples? For a thesis taken up with the pressing issue of violence against Indigenous women, opposition and resistance may necessarily appear to be essential, central components of any potential response. Indigenous women are the focal targets of ongoing violent colonial processes of erasure and acquisitive expansion; it is undeniable that ending this violence will require fierce opposition, resistance, and pushback. Yet, Anderson's comments remind us that something more is needed as well: a vision for a flourishing, resurgent Indigenous future.

The Indigenous thinkers and writers whose work guides this thesis offer such a vision. Their approaches may not align seamlessly; they may disagree on the particulars and the traditional knowledge grounding their theories may be different, but what they share in common is the conviction that ending violence against Indigenous women and the movement for Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence are fundamentally entwined. In other words, there can be no solution to gendered colonial violence without the re-emergence and guidance of Indigenous lifeways and, equally, Indigenous women must be at the forefront of any resurgence movement,

leading their nations as they move beyond an aesthetics and politics of opposition toward an aesthetics of being.

Centrally, this thesis is concerned with understanding how representations of the particular experience of violence against Indigenous women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside influence the development of this new aesthetics and politics of resurgent being. Familiar narratives characterizing the DTES as a space of exception and the incidences of violence there as somehow unique to that space deny the historical scope of the violence and, in so doing, limit possible imagined futures without that violence. From Stevie Cameron's *On the Farm* and the sensationalism of newspaper headlines covering the Murdered Women's Trial to the affectively laden language of Maggie de Vries's *Missing Sarah*, the representational politics of these texts matter to how a Canadian public is able to confront and understand its own complex implication in ongoing violence against Indigenous women more broadly. Though *On the Farm* and *Missing Sarah* are dissimilar in many respects, what they share is that both revolve around a wound – one, the physical, torn bodies of the murdered women, the other, the emotional hole left behind in one woman's absence – and both turn implicitly to colonial systems to heal that wound.

As such, the universalizing humanitarianism espoused in such narratives is by no means apolitical; rather, it is premised on problematic assumptions of the certainty of a settler future and the fundamental legitimacy of the Canadian state. These assumptions, which become invisible through their very ubiquity, further enable the "encroachments of power that take place through notions of reform, consent, and protection" (Hartman 5). As Hartman explains, language that hinges on "the recognition of humanity, licensed by the invocation of rights, and justified on the grounds of liberty and freedom" (6) is in fact bound up with and reinforces the very systems that prescribe the limits of the human in the first place. As such, the humanitarian representational politics of *Missing Sarah* and similar narratives – including *In Plain Sight* – that turn on personal

loss and a more expansionary definition of the human become tinged with assimilationist overtones that foreclose more radical departures from Western humanitarianism.

What Anderson and others call for is the necessity of moving beyond representational models that are premised on these Western assumptions in order to open up new possibilities for Indigenous futures. It is in shifting away from the concerns of the colonial present – in refusing to engage with the universalist orientations and purported solutions of current Western systems – and toward a politics of Indigenous resurgence rooted in respect for relationality and living on the land in a good way that *Unearthed* offers a new representational model. It her poetry, Rogers attempts to do the radical political work of imagining an Indigenous aesthetics of being that is fundamentally distinct from present Western frameworks. Specifically, she roots herself in the feminine connection to land that, for centuries, has been understood as a threat to the colonial order. Yet, while this is decidedly an expression of Rogers's anti-colonial resistance, it also signals her prioritization of an Indigenous principle that existed before colonialism and continues to be an essential component of any resurgent Indigenous movement. Her poetry demonstrates not only resistance and opposition; it also represents a practice of internal flourishing and Indigenous pride.

Within such a framework, the violence experienced by Indigenous women in Vancouver's DTES is cast in an altogether different light. This framework shifts from being centered on an individualized criminological perspective toward a socio-historical view that understands both the colonial genesis of the violence and the need for radical decolonization before there can be an end to that violence. The specific experience of the DTES becomes represented as part of a broader whole, and that distinction is essential to the question of how to go forward from this point. Importantly, the path forward may not be the same across Indigenous nations. Just as the stories told by the Dene, Cree, Anishnaabe or Haudenosaunee are not the same, neither will be their

solutions to gendered violence. Unlike the homogenizing universalism discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, visions for a resurgent Indigenous future are necessarily specific and particular to the nations from which they emerge. What seems clear, however, is the way in which any path forward will necessarily entail a departure from present colonial systems.

At the heart of Indigenous analyses of violence against Indigenous women is the understanding that contemporary colonial structures can never be adequately reformed in the ways needed for Indigenous women to flourish. Premised as they are on the severing of Indigenous women's ties to the land and the destruction of Indigenous lifeways, such systems are inevitably at odds with any reclamation of a positive Indigenous identity and an end to colonial gender violence. Anderson explains: "Identity recovery for our people inevitably involves the reclaiming of tradition, the picking up of those things that were left scattered along the path of colonization. This process is significant towards our recovery because it involves reclaiming those things that were wrongfully taken, but also because many of our ancestral traditions, customs and lifeways are better for us than the western practices that were thrust upon us in their place. Certainly for Native women, reclaiming tradition is the means by which we can determine a feminine identity that moves us away from the western patriarchal model" (157). A shift toward Indigenous lifeways and practices that value women's identities as the keepers of legal and cultural practices becomes, in this way, an anti-violence strategy and the resurgence of Indigenous culture a necessary part of healing from gendered violence.

As I have explored over the course of this thesis, an integral aspect of the resurgence of Indigenous lifeways and practices is the renewal of a particular conceptualization of relationality. Countering violence against Indigenous women is dependent on acknowledging and valuing the relationships that were damaged through interruptive colonial practices, from the relationships between men and women to those between humans and the land. As Anderson reminds us,

restoring women's identities within this web of relationality is crucial: "[So] much of our world is defined by the relationships we create. Diane Hill, a Mohawk educator and healer, acknowledges women's roles and responsibilities: 'Women are teachers of how to build relationships. We are the holders of this knowledge. We teach people about the relationships that they have with each other and with all things within Creation" (167). In such a view, Indigenous women are not victims; they are a source of cultural knowledge and a binding force within their communities.

Such representations of Indigenous women are a far cry from those discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Familiar narratives associating Indigeneity with criminality, addiction, and transience naturalized the violence experienced by Indigenous women in Vancouver's DTES. In challenging this characterization of what it means to be an Indigenous woman – in emphasizing the respected role Indigenous women play in their communities and their nations and in recontextualizing the present traumas they experience – *Unearthed* lays bare the profound unnaturalness of this violence. Moreover, in pinpointing the source of this violence in the colonial systems on which Canada is founded, Rogers aligns herself with other initiatives across Turtle Island that are working to call into question taken-for-granted Western "solutions" to the problem of missing and murdered Indigenous women and to reassert Indigenous principles in their place.

Based in Coast Salish territory, the Accessing Justice and Reconciliation Project (AJR Project), led by Saulteau legal scholar Val Napoleon, is one example of a recent formal initiative that worked to return to and take seriously Indigenous legal principles. The project worked to identify and articulate the legal principles grounding traditional stories across various Indigenous nations in order that these legal principles could be applied contemporarily within those communities. As Leanne Simpson asserts, Indigenous stories are not "quaint anecdotes" (18); they communicate a system of ethics and laws. Respect for this principle was at the heart of the AJR Project's practice; in their final report, researchers explained: "Our approach to researching

and working with Indigenous law is to treat Indigenous laws seriously as *laws*" (Indigenous Law Research Unit 7, original emphasis). This is not a simple process: "We know that Indigenous legal traditions have not gone anywhere but they have been undermined by recent colonial history. The ground is uneven. We cannot assume there are fully functioning Indigenous laws around us that will spring to life by mere recognition. Instead what is required is rebuilding Indigenous legal traditions" (Indigenous Law Research Unit 8). This project, like Sylvia McAdam's work documenting Cree legal traditions, is a powerful affirmation of Indigenous lifeways and, importantly, it offers an altogether different set of tools for addressing the issue of violence against Indigenous women.

Another contemporary initiative working to reassert Indigenous principles in the place of colonial systems is the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning. Located in Dene territory, Dechinta is a program dedicated to a land-based pedagogy that enables young people to earn a university credit while living in a northern community. Students spend their time on the land learning from Indigenous Elders, professors, and community volunteers; they are able to hunt and fish, discuss Indigenous legal and political theory and land claims issues, gather traditional medicines, and learn about the history of the land where they are living. This practice of land-based pedagogy reaffirms the centrality of connection to the land in a Dene epistemology and challenges the extractive, capitalist logics of settler-colonial systems. Like the AJR Project, Dechinta takes seriously Indigenous stories and practices as fundamentally distinct from Western systems and recognizes the necessity of reasserting these systems.

These are only two initiatives of many working toward a resurgence of Indigenous lifeways and practices. The truth is that there has been Indigenous resistance to colonialism for as long as colonialism has existed in this place and, though the AJR Project and Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning may have received more critical attention and support than other similar

initiatives, what they are doing is not new. Rather, they are carrying forward the work that Indigenous activists and Elders have been doing for centuries. Critically, in rejecting hegemonic colonial systems in favour of Indigenous land-based legal and ethical traditions, these projects embody a potential future that has no place for gendered violence. The process of reaffirming connection to land and demonstrating respect for the principles that ground traditional stories requires an end to violence against Indigenous women; Indigenous resurgence cannot be successful without it.

Jo-Ann Episkenew argues that "contemporary Indigenous literature cannot be divorced from its contextual framework." It both shapes, and is shaped by, the "history, politics, and public policy" from which it emerges (Episkenew 187). It seems to me, then, that texts such as *Unearthed*, which reject colonial hegemony and seek to envision new possible futures for Indigenous peoples, can be read in this way. Whether they are directed toward an Indigenous or a settler readership, these representations work to make room for the importance of reconnecting with the land and the legal systems it grounds and, as such, they begin to reshape their own contextual framework. This shift is integral to how the violence against Indigenous women in Vancouver's DTES and elsewhere in Canada can be understood and addressed. What I hope to clarify with these concluding remarks is that if, as Episkenew suggests, literature can function as healing medicine, then how a text represents its imagined future *matters*. The limits of imagination that constrain *On the Farm*, *Missing Sarah*, and *In Plain Sight* matter. The violence experienced by Indigenous women will not end if the solution rests upon the reform of present colonial systems. An imagined future limited to reform and reconciliation is not enough. Rather, the difficult work of moving past an aesthetics of resistance toward an aesthetics of resurgent being demands representations of imagined futures lived according to Indigenous lifeways. This is the work of living a future that rejects the inevitability of gendered colonial violence and

embodies, instead, a practice of relationality and living in a good way; this is the vision that becomes possible.

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