Uprooting and Re-Routing a Settled Sense of Place: Reading Settler Literary Cartographies of Northwestern British Columbia

by

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Abstract

The places of northwestern British Columbia, and the Indigenous and settler peoples who find work, build homes, establish communities, and sustain culture in these places, are often perceived as peripheral or overlooked, existing on the edge or outside of the notice, care, and understanding of the people and places seemingly at the centre of national or global significance. When attention is turned to northwestern British Columbia, it is often to report on issues related to the legacy and ongoing work of settler colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land, including missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, particularly along the infamous Highway of Tears; the successes and failures of the federal and provincial governments to respect Indigenous rights and title, such as in the landmark *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case; and First Nations' acts of resistance, like the Unist'ot'en Camp, to resource transportation or extraction projects on their territories that they have not consented to. In this project, I turn to the work of writers and poets in northwestern British Columbia who portray and examine in their writing what it means—and what it could mean—for both Indigenous and settler peoples to call the same land home. In particular, I argue that the poetry and literary nonfiction of settler poet, essayist, and cultural geographer Sarah de Leeuw constructs creative narrative maps that unsettle readers from the certainty they might have in the success of settler colonialism. Additionally, her creative representations of personal experiences in the distinct physical and cultural geographies of the region call for reorienting ourselves in the way we think about and move through northwestern British Columbia so that we might envision other ways—potentially decolonial ways that respect Indigenous rights and title and dismantle settler privilege—of living, working, profiting,

and building futures in these places. Each chapter in this dissertation takes up a significant theme in de Leeuw's collections of literary nonfiction, *Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16* (2004) and *Where It Hurts* (2017), and her long poem, *Skeena* (2015), and locates my critical close reading of the texts at the intersections of scholarly and public dialogues, especially as they are unfolding in British Columbia, related to reconciliation and decolonization, settler colonialism, and literary cartography as a form and methodology of creative writing and reading practice. As the literary writing and culture of northwestern British Columbia continues to flourish and to grow its readership, I hope this critical analysis of the work of one of its emerging authors meaningfully contributes to and highlights the ongoing opportunity for examining the ways in which settler stories about the places they call home can collaborate in the work of creating and sustaining a more just world.

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This dissertation was written in unceded Treaty 6 territory, land that was and continues to be a gathering place for the Cree, Métis, Blackfoot, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Anishinaabe, and Inuit. In particular, I acknowledge that I live and work in the territory of the Papaschase Cree, near the North Saskatchewan River in what we currently call Edmonton, but that Cree language instructor Dorothy Thunder taught me to call Amiskwacîwâskahikan as well.

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This project pauses at times to reflect on how my family's stories and home are intertwined and implicated in the settler colonial geographies of northwestern British Columbia. And so, I would like finally to acknowledge that the places this dissertation speaks from and to include the unceded and non-treaty territories of Gidimt'en (Bear Wolf) Clan and Likhsilyu (Small Frog) Clan, of the Witsuwit'en nation, that my family and the other residents of Smithers call home.

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Introduction

In the Bulkley Valley, in the northern interior of British Columbia, my hometown of Smithers is nestled at the base of a magnificent mountain with a prominent glacier. Hudson Bay Mountain is inseparable from the identity of this small town and from the sense of place that not only its residents experience, but that tourists and outdoor enthusiasts get a taste of when the mountain draws them to the town and that passers-through are indelibly marked by when the mountain greets them upon arrival. My mom, similar to many other local photographers, has an extensive portfolio of images of this mountain adorned in the various trappings of each season, or serving as a stunning backdrop to family photographs, wedding ceremonies, or backyard gatherings. When I meet someone who is unfamiliar with and interested in my hometown, I show them such photographs and feel both gratitude and pride when they comment that it must be nice to have lived in such a beautiful location. On one such occasion, however, a simple question that I did not know the answer to made this mountain strange to me: but why is it called Hudson Bay Mountain?

The answer to this question, not surprisingly, is that settler colonists named the mountain as such to mark their presence in this place and to orient their maps of this territory around their perspective and use of the land. But the seemingly fixed nature of this well-established place name is particularly absurd given the fleeting existence of its namesake site, and the remembered Witsuwit'en language names held by the Witsuwit'en, the Indigenous people in whose territory the mountain stands.[1] In a calendar

[1] Readers may be more familiar with the name of these people written as *Wet'suwet'en*. The name *Wet'suwet'en* was used during the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case and continues to be used by the Office of the Wet'suwet'en for the purpose of consistency in ongoing negotiations with the provincial and federal governments (Morin 11-12). Because the Office of the Wet'suwet'en is governed by the hereditary

created for the Smithers Centennial, with the support of the archives of the Bulkley Valley Historical and Museum Society, a photograph of Hudson Bay Mountain is captioned with the following account of the origins of its name:

> When Europeans arrived, the name Hudson's Bay Mountains (plural) appears on the earliest maps, even though the Hudson's Bay post was in Hazelton [approximately 70 kilometres away]. The name is attributed to the Hudson's Bay Ranch, which was established in 1899 (or 1890, or 1898, depending on the source) on the opposite side of the river, but the mountain appears to have had its name before then. Doesn't it seem a bit strange, anyway, that the mountain is named after a business, and after a huge bay that is three time zones away? (Widen)

Despite the fact that the road the school bus I rode on for over a decade had once been the route of the pack train between the communities of Burns Lake and Hazelton, alongside which the Hudson's Bay Company briefly maintained a ranch where they could winter horses (Morin 219), I was not aware of this historical site or its potential connection to the mountain's name. Nor did I see acknowledgement of the Witsuwit'en names—Dzilh Yez, for the mountain itself, or Ts'idek'iy, for the glacier (61)—or hear the story passed down to a Witsuwit'en Elder by her grandfather and recorded by ethnobiologist Leslie

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chiefs, who speak for their houses, clans, and territories on issues that often garner media attention, such as land claims and access to land and resources, this name is the one that the public is most likely to encounter. The Unist'ot'en Camp, for instance, uses the name *Wet'suwet'en*, so articles on their resistance work do as well. However, in 1993, the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and the Witsuwit'en Language Authority (WLA) accepted the Distinctly Witsuwit'en Orthography developed by linguist Sharon L. Hargus for use in education, because it uses an alphabet that better represents the sounds of the Witsuwit'en language than the English alphabet does (12). This writing system spells the name as *Witsuwit'en*. As "[b]oth spellings are considered correct, and are used depending on the situation" (12), I use both *Wet'suwet'en* and *Witsuwit'en* in this dissertation. In particular, I use the *Wet'suwet'en* spelling when I am writing about the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case or the Unist'ot'en Camp, or when I am quoting or paraphrasing a source that uses this spelling; in all other cases, I write the name as *Witsuwit'en.*

Main Johnson that if the glacier "disappeared, it would herald the end of the world" (Johnson 62). What is striking is not that the more commonly known English name of the mountain has colonial origins, but that the rootedness of the name is so readily accepted, yet so simply disrupted.

Recognizing that I knew neither the original names and Witsuwit'en stories of the mountain, nor the origin story of the English name I was familiar with, prompted my recall of the titular question of J. Edward Chamberlin's *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*. To begin his discussion of the way cultures and civilizations tell stories to make sense of who they are and to build a home for themselves, Chamberlin recounts a story passed along to him from the territory of the Gitxsan, the Indigenous people whose nation borders that of the Witsuwit'en and whose communities are neighbours to my own hometown. In this story, a government official working for the interests of the forestry sector "claimed the land [in northwestern British Columbia] for the government," surprising the Gitxsan participants in this meeting and leading to a question from one of the elders: "'If this is your land, . . . where are your stories?' He spoke in English, but then moved to Gitksan, the Tsimshian language of his people—and told a story" (Chamberlin 1).[2] Even though many people in the room could not literally understand the Gitxsan story, they did understand, Chamberlin asserts, "how stories give meaning and value to the places we call home; . . . how they hold us together and at the same time keep us apart" (1). Of course, the non-Indigenous government officials claiming the land, the men working the Hudson's Bay Company ranch, and my family celebrating milestone events in view of the mountain's peaks were creating stories

[2] During the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case, the name *Gitksan*, rather than *Gitxsan*, was used. This spelling of the name appears in a few quotations that I use from or about this case.

of belonging in this land. But such stories often ignore, exclude, diminish, misrepresent, are imposed on, or are irrelevant to the peoples, cultures, languages, and stories that are Indigenous to this place. The question that Chamberlin raises then is whether "one land [can] ever really be home to more than one people," such as "[t]o native and newcomer. . . ." He believes that it can, "[b]ut not until we have reimagined Them and Us" (4).

Gitxsan author, researcher, and consultant Neil J. Sterritt agrees that natives and newcomers can live together in what is currently called Canada,[3] but he dedicated much of his life to working to ensure that the territories, laws, stories, and ceremonies of the Gitxsan and other Indigenous peoples are recognized, respected, and sustained, even as Canadians inherit and craft stories of home that establish roots and belonging in, and make claims to, the same land. Receiving an honorary degree from the University of Victoria (UVic) in 2017, the twentieth anniversary of the Supreme Court of Canada's landmark *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* decision, Sterritt addressed university graduates: The *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* case "paved the way to the reconciliation road in Canadian society, and to shifting the colonial paradigm. What has emerged from the Supreme Court is that there is room for more than one people in the Constitution. Our country has different cultural narratives, world views, titles and jurisdictions co-existing and operating on the same landscape" (qtd. in "UVic Honorary Degree"). The previous year, Sterritt published *Mapping My Way Home: A Gitxsan History* (2016) in which he chronicles events from his people's history from time immemorial to the present day, in

[3] In writing and conversations about Indigenous land claims and right to self-determination, it is becoming common to use phrases like *in what is now known as Canada* or *in what is currently called Canada* in order to emphasize that Indigenous nations exercised sovereignty over land before Canada claimed it as its own and that this settler colonial project is ongoing, but neither complete nor the only possible future. I decided to use the word *currently* rather than *now* after reading tweets by Damien Lee, a scholar of Indigenous political and legal orders and member of Fort William First Nation, in which he writes that *currently* suggests an "impermanence" to a greater extent than *now* does and "open[s] possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state" (@damienlee et al.).

part narrating how the land question has shaped northwestern British Columbia, particularly for the peoples living in Gitxsan territory. *Mapping My Way Home* is comprised of personal stories intertwined with Indigenous and non-Indigenous historical accounts, and traces Sterritt's own many-branched family tree. In the book's introduction, Sterritt describes neighbouring villages that appear to be one community: "Although Gitanmaax and Hazelton seem to share the same land base and services, there are significant historic and cultural differences between them" (8). The latter site was surveyed by the colonial government in 1871; the former has been Gitxsan territory for millennia, with an Indian Reserve boundary imposed on it in the 1890s (8-9). A totem pole in Gitanmaax overlooks the Anglican church in Hazelton, symbolizing, in Sterritt's eyes, "very different histories, customs, values and beliefs" (9). Without diminishing the effects on First Nations of the dispossession of their land and of Canada's and British Columbia's failures to recognize and honour Indigenous rights and title, Sterritt's maps and histories make space for both to call the land home.

Reading and learning from *Mapping My Way Home* prompts me to consider whether narratives that I have read of northwestern British Columbia created by non-Indigenous residents similarly recognize and respond to the entangled histories, the need to resolve competing claims to the land, and the complex feelings of home and belonging in places invested in the success of settler colonialism. The writing of Sarah de Leeuw strives, and I would argue succeeds, to mark the presence and meaning of people, places, and landscapes in northern British Columbia that are often overlooked, or that exist on the edge of recognition, respect, and certainty of finding home and belonging: pass-through towns; unemployed, seasonally employed, and homeless people; Indigenous

women and girls who go missing or are found murdered; industry men who watch their camps and towns be dismantled; First Nations who cannot access the same services as neighbouring municipalities; youth who cannot envision a future for themselves. Her work also lays bare the uncomfortable reality that while the experiences of the overlooked and their movements through this region on the edge are intertwined, they are not equal. Readers must both bear witness to such inequalities and confront their own potential complicity in such hurt that exists in the lives and places that have inspired de Leeuw's literary representations of them.

De Leeuw is a settler poet, essayist, and cultural geographer who has written two collections of creative nonfiction essays—*Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16* (2004) and *Where It Hurts* (2017)—three books of poetry—*Geographies of a Lover* (2012), *Skeena* (2015), and *Outside, America* (2019)—and biographical vignettes of healthcare workers in *Front Lines: Portraits of Caregivers in Northern British Columbia* (2011), alongside the work of photographer Tim Swanky. Her poems and creative essays have also appeared in magazines and literary journals. With an MA in English and Geography, a PhD in Geography, and working as a professor in the Northern Medical Program at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) in Prince George, de Leeuw has also published extensively in academic journals and essay collections as a writer and editor on the topics and intersections of poetics, geography, colonialism, and healthcare in rural and Indigenous communities. I first happened upon *Unmarked* in a local bookstore in 2012 and read it with no knowledge of de Leeuw or her other work. But as this essay collection captured my interest as a potential primary text for my doctoral research, de Leeuw's literary publications and recognition grew. For example,

two essays that would become part of *Where It Hurts* were published in Air Canada's *enRoute* magazine as winners of CBC Literary Awards in 2008 and 2009; *Geographies of a Lover* won the 2013 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize; and *Where It Hurts* was nominated for the 2017 Governor General's Literary Award for English-language non-fiction and the 2018 Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize.

This literary writing has been reviewed in newspapers and literary journals across the country, where readers remark on de Leeuw's evocative northern British Columbia landscapes (Smith 108), and the nuanced attention the author pays to the "nothing towns" that so many Canadians are familiar with (Ens). In such towns, writes Joel Yanofsky, de Leeuw "lingers" with "a writerly instinct to attend to those things that so often go unattended." What strikes most readers of *Where It Hurts* is the harm and tragedy that the essays portray—the sources and places of hurt to which the collection's title directs readers' contemplation. For *Northword Magazine*, an independent culture and lifestyle publication focused on northern British Columbia, Emily Bulmer describes the text as "a kind of guide book, something like '11 new routes you've never stopped to explore,' where the reader can use the book as a touchstone to understand their own experiences of living and witnessing difficult truths." Reviewing this essay collection for *Canadian Literature*, Susie DeCoste writes that *Where It Hurts* "suggests that physical, geographical places and the human cultures that develop in them are inextricably linked" (145). Such reviews align with my own experiences of reading de Leeuw's creative writing. But I was also reading de Leeuw while learning about Indigenous land claims and treaties, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG), and protests, blockades, and Idle No More,

through taking courses at the University of Alberta (U of A) and benefitting from the research community at and visiting this institution. Therefore, I felt compelled not only to consider the language and themes that reviewers similarly remarked on, but to tease out and explicate the connections between these literary texts and how non-Indigenous peoples are, could, and should be building relationships with the Indigenous peoples on the lands currently known as Canada.

In this project, I argue that de Leeuw's literary writing constructs narratives and literary cartographies that can unsettle readers from their certainty in British Columbia's claim to, and use of, unceded Indigenous territories in the province. Focusing specifically on the literary essays from *Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16* and *Where It Hurts* that write the physical and cultural geographies of communities in northwestern British Columbia, and *Skeena*, a long poem that maps the storied route of the Skeena River, my literary analysis asserts that the maps and landscapes de Leeuw represents in these texts lay groundwork for envisioning other ways of living, working, profiting, and building futures in these places—ways of being in these places that recognize Indigenous rights and title and that express settler belonging without claiming or appropriating Indigeneity. My analysis of these works does not frame them as a response to Sterritt's *Mapping My Way Home*, but as the kinds of stories that his maps and histories of the Gitxsan make space for as settlers represent who they are and how they are at home on the same lands as his people. In particular, I read her works as literary maps that mark the presence and meaning of places, and represent the layered and multiple perspectives and experiences of how to live in and share space in northern British Columbia. De Leeuw is not creating neocolonial maps and narratives to further entrench dispossession, erase or

diminish Indigenous presence on and use of their territories, or obscure the maps of First Nations, like those Sterritt was instrumental in creating to support the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en land claims. Rather, de Leeuw's narrative maps, I maintain, situate and orient readers to view and move through the places of northern British Columbia as home to multiple nations, cultures, and worldviews. To support this argument, this project presents a close reading of the language and form that de Leeuw uses, and provides historical and sociocultural context for the references that she marks on her maps. I also situate these analyses within the discussions that scholars, authors, and activists are engaging in fields of study related to decolonization and reconciliation, settler colonialism, and literary cartographies. De Leeuw is not the only settler author who writes from and about northern British Columbia in a way that productively orients readers to understanding the role of these communities and landscapes in the province's settler colonial project. But while she is a voice who is being read and heard, her poetry and creative essays have not yet been the focus of an extended scholarly, critical analysis.

Reading *Unmarked* was the precipitant for shifting the object of my study to writing from and about northwestern British Columbia, a place where I was born and raised, but where the burgeoning and vibrant literary culture had escaped my notice. While studying across the Rocky Mountains in Edmonton at the U of A, I paid attention to the writing that was coming out of and circulating around the northern rural communities of the neighbouring province via blogs, updates from local publishers, and arts and culture periodicals. But I always looked forward to my visits home, in anticipation of encountering new written narratives that would shape my evolving sense of the cultural and physical landscapes of the places that influence how I view the world,

but that had not seemed to be the stuff of stories that make it to bookstore shelves. As my family learned about my research interests, they became participants in forming the direction of this project through passing along their own chance encounters with stories that narrate and map the relationships that settler and Indigenous peoples had and are cultivating today with the land, with each other, and with their own sense of belonging in the places they call home. When I was researching and writing, it was rewarding to be able to report back what I was learning about the connections and contradictions I was uncovering and constructing between the stories. It became clear to me that I was writing analyses of de Leeuw's literary cartographies with the residents and readers of northwestern British Columbia in mind. I hope that I might share my readings of the texts with the people whose communities and landscapes are represented in these narratives—people who have similarly been delighted or unsettled to find their home places as the heart of evocative literature, who perhaps do not have the privilege or desire to study such literature at length, but who are interested in its relevance alongside their knowledge and experience of the events and worldviews they see in local newspapers, overhear in coffee shops, read on neighbours' anti-pipeline yard signs, witness in protests and blockades, or tune into during Carolina de Ryk's *Daybreak North* CBC radio program.

Decolonization, Reconciliation, and the Role of Literature

Each time I visit my hometown, I make sure to peruse the shelves of the local bookstores whose support of authors from the area initially led me to stumble upon the texts that became the focus of this project. During one such visit, it struck me to find de Leeuw's literary essays on the "B.C. History" shelf prominently displayed facing the

store's entrance, and Sterritt's *Mapping My Way Home* in the "Native Issues" section of the shelves further back in the store. Sterritt's book has an indisputable claim to a spot on the "B.C. History" shelf. In addition to the history that the text recounts of the Gitxsan people and of the arrival and subsequent impact of the settlement of non-Indigenous peoples in northwestern British Columbia, it was published by Smithers' Creekstone Press, which acknowledges that it is located on the territory of Wah Tah K'eght/Henry Alfred, who, before his death in September 2018, "was the last of the Witsuwit'en plaintiffs in the landmark *Delgamuukw-Gisday wa* court case" (Peters, "Wah Tah K'eght").[4] Sterritt and plaintiffs for the case submitted their statement of claim in 1984 at the Smithers Provincial Court—two blocks away from the bookstore. Perhaps copies of Sterritt's book had not only been relegated to the "Native Issues" section, but during that moment when I was in the bookstore, the categorization of the texts seemed symbolic of an idea that the way residents of and visitors to the area experience and move through its landscapes and communities is separate from the unresolved land claims that Sterritt's maps and stories narrate. Moreover, the designation of Sterritt's book as focused on "Native Issues" suggests that the lack of treaties in British Columbia and the ongoing dispossession of First Nations from their land is not one of the most pressing issues for everyone who calls these lands home.

Both Sterritt and de Leeuw use mapping and personal narratives to offer stories of place that make space for other people to also call the land home. These stories also expect that readers can respond with actions that restore justice and dignity for those people who have been excluded from or overlooked in these places. *Mapping My Way*

[4] Here Peters uses the spelling of the chiefly name *Wah Tah K'eght* as it was used during the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case. In Distinctly Witsuwit'en Orthography, the name is spelled *Ut'akhgit* (Morin 340).

Home is, as the subtitle states, *A Gitxsan History*, not *the* definitive comprehensive record of the nation's history. It is a well-researched and detailed account of persistent and continual Gitxsan claims to their territory in the face of colonial settlement, with the text culminating with the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* case. Sterritt himself served as the research director (1977-81) and then the president (1981-87) of the Gitxsan-Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council,[5] working with Gitxsan elders and chiefs, and representatives from bordering First Nations, to create a detailed map of the external and internal boundaries of Gitxsan territory. In a review of the book, Rob Budde, author and professor at UNBC, writes that Sterritt created "a counter-colonial map," which "is an assertion of what has been erased, what has been oppressed and what social justice would rightfully restore." De Leeuw similarly views her own work as concerned with justice. Speaking about *Where It Hurts*, she says, "I confess that a lot of my writing is produced with a capital 'P' political intent. . . . The essays that I write, the work that I hope they do in the world, illuminate those injustices. I hope they motivate people to think about landscapes and people and places and geographies that I think are too often overlooked" (qtd. in van Koeverden). The intent of my project is not to present de Leeuw as *the* non-Indigenous literary voice for northern British Columbia, but as a voice that is intentional in writing to both honour the lives of people who have built communities in "nowhere" places and to desire that more respectful and reciprocal relations be created to sustain them.[6]

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[5] When Sterritt first began working with the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en in preparation for their land claim, the council was called the Gitksan-Carrier Tribal Council (N. Sterritt 187).

[6] This project is also not suggesting that de Leeuw's literary writing in the texts that I have chosen directly responds to Sterritt's work in general, or to *Mapping My Way Home* in particular. I have not come across de Leeuw referencing Sterritt in any materials related to her poetry or creative nonfiction. De Leeuw does, however, cite Sterritt et al.'s *Tribal Boundaries in the Nass Watershed* in both her MA thesis and PhD dissertation. In the former, de Leeuw points to how the Gitxsan use stories to convey geographic

Even without addressing land claims in any explicit or extended way, de Leeuw's creative writing is, I assert, an example of work that settlers need to do and engage with to become active and effective participants in their responsibility to recognize and respect Indigenous rights and title. In *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-up Call*, Secwepemc leader and Indigenous rights activist Arthur Manuel states unequivocally that recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and of their title to their territories "is where we are now heading. We invite all Canadians to join us to help move the final obstacles together. We can accomplish this as friends and partners as we have at times in the past. Or we can do it as adversaries, in anguish. Our path toward decolonization is clear. It is up to Canadians to choose theirs" (Manuel and Derrickson 227). For those Canadians who want a more precise idea of what this path entails, Manuel offers "The Six-Step Program to Decolonization" in *The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy*. Canadians have work to do to demand that their government implement and honour [1] the renunciation of the doctrines of discovery and terra nullius as justification for settler colonialism, [2] the recognition of Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and of the necessity of nation-to-nation negotiation, and [3] the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (Manuel 275-76). It is not until step four that "we can finally sit down together for the long, grown-up talk about who we are and what we need, and who you are and what you need, and we can then begin to sort out the complicated questions about access to lands and sharing the benefits" (276). Alongside this ongoing conversation, Canadians must continue the work of [5] ensuring that jurisdictional

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knowledge and to map land ownership (*Along* 41), and in the latter she identifies Sterritt's documentation of pre-contact First Nations legal systems as support for understanding British Columbia's territorial history from an earlier starting point than the arrival of Euro-Canadian law (*Artful Places* 40).

authority over agreed upon access and benefits is "based on the standard of free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples" and involves decision making in accordance with their laws, and [6] making the Constitution comply with, and striking down colonial laws that prevent, "the Indigenous right to freely determine our own political status and freely pursue our economic, social and cultural development" (277). I view stories like the ones de Leeuw tells of non-Indigenous peoples striving for, and sometimes struggling to achieve, a sense of meaning and relationship in northern British Columbia as stories of coming terms with who we are and who we could be in these places. In other words, de Leeuw's narrative maps of the highways, trails, and rivers in unceded Indigenous territories chart a course to better partnership at the negotiating table.

The network of relations created by the First Nations peoples of this particular region, and the connections between these specific cultures and the settlers who chose this place, cannot be discussed without recognizing the colonial theft of Indigenous territory. And the continuing refusal of settler peoples and governments to acknowledge, accept responsibility for, and offer redress for this theft is at the core of Indigenous calls for reconciliation. I maintain, therefore, that the literary texts I have chosen incite productive dialogue through the ways in which they portray Indigenous and settler connections to land.

In his poem "Canada's Secret," Gitxsan writer Michael D. Blackstock juxtaposes the national myths that Canada proudly displays for the world, with the colonial agenda that it tries to keep quiet. The penultimate stanza offers the speaker's suggestion for how the country can move forward with the truth about its record of abuse and racism against Indigenous peoples:

Canada, as a nation, must turn to the closet
open it for all our children to see
discuss it, cry over it, reconcile it, and get upset.
Then we can move as one, in unity. (Blackstock 34)

These lines describe reconciliation. The government and its citizens (presumably both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) must acknowledge and own any complicity in colonialism, dialogue about it, engage emotionally with it, and then look to a future unity. However, there are many people, myself included, who would question aspects of the kind of reconciliation toward which the poem gestures. Is reconciliation something that can be achieved and moved beyond? Is unity the goal of reconciliation? Should Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination be part of the process? Who shoulders the responsibility for a productive discussion of colonialism? What about compensation? Who gets to be angry, to forgive, and to forget?

These questions and many more have been fuelling dialogues and debates about reconciliation in Canada for decades. In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly apologized to the former students of these schools. The topic of reconciliation was at the forefront of the national consciousness. Since then, numerous books and articles have been published, conference papers given, community hearings and commemorations held, and promises made. And rightly so. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices in Canada agree that the federal government and the settler citizens it represents can no longer ignore or downplay the history of colonialism in this country, its lasting and ongoing impact on Indigenous

peoples, and the colonial attitudes that persist to this day. Yet, we have not reached a consensus regarding what reconciliation entails and how it might be achieved.

Many critical discussions about reconciliation question whether *reconciliation* is even the right, or best, word to describe the process of achieving an improved relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada. Citing various dictionary definitions, both Inuit politician and political rights advocate John Amagoalik and Métis artist and writer David Garneau point out that *to reconcile* means to restore a friendly or harmonious relationship. Amagoalik argues that because "there has never really been a harmonious relationship between the new arrivals and the original inhabitants of North America," there are no friendly relations to restore. He maintains that *conciliation*—mediating between disputing groups, overcoming distrust and hostility, making compatible, or bringing into harmony—is the necessary starting point (93). Garneau agrees, positing that conciliation acknowledges pre-contact Indigenous sovereignty, whereas reconciliation implies that the discussion begins with post-contact harmony that was disrupted. He furthermore contends that because reconciliation "in its religious context . . . is 'the reunion of a person to a church,'" the term hints at "the ongoing assimilationist strategy of the Canadian empire" (35). Whereas reconciliation can therefore be imagined as an individual restoring their relationship with an institution (with the institution, church or state, likely defining the parameters of the relationship), the essence of conciliation is perpetual "individual transformation . . ." (38). Matthew Dorrell picks up on this idea of continuous commitment to improving Indigenous–settler relations in his own critique of the word *reconciliation*. He proposes "a conceptual move from reconciliation to reconciling, from a finalizing process seeking closure to one which

privileges open-ended, ongoing dialogue between and amongst individuals and communities" (30). Each of these critics recognize that the language we use, laden with connotations and context, shapes how we conceive of Canada's colonial past and present and what we believe is expected of us in order to effect change in Indigenous–settler relations.

During the discussion following a panel on the TRC at the 2013 Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference, Pauline Wakeham suggested that any word chosen to replace *reconciliation* would also be a site of contestation (Wakeham). Moreover, much of what critics who challenge the appropriateness of the term call for in the name of conciliation or reconciling—such as acknowledging colonialism and its effects, and engaging in dialogue with honesty and respect—is what writers and scholars who use the term willingly want to see in the process of reconciliation. Examination of the language we use to talk about reconciliation is at the centre of a number of critical readings of Prime Minister Harper's 2008 apology. As several scholars, including Dorrell and Garneau, make clear, this apology focuses on the residential school system, thereby portraying Canadian colonialism as an historical, rather than contemporary, reality and residential schools as an isolated example from this past. Wakeham and Jennifer Henderson, in a special issue of *English Studies in Canada* focusing on Aboriginal redress, express their concern that the Canadian discussion of reconciliation will remain framed within the language of putting the past—the legacy of the residential schools—behind us, instead of within a dialogue on justice and social change that extends to include the colonial attitudes and actions that continue to this day (Henderson and Wakeham 14-15).

Examining the larger scope of colonialism in Canada for which Canadians and their government need to seek reconciliation is particularly relevant to my project. In contrast to many other regions in Canada, northwestern British Columbia had relatively few residential schools; there were three schools in the area, namely, Kitimaat (1908-1941), Lejac (1910-1976), and Port Simpson (1879-1950). Moreover, with British Columbia's unique situation of not having entered into treaties with First Nations and its drawn-out process for modern treaty negotiations, attempts at reconciliation that fail to address the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land and the sense of settler entitlement to the land and its resources will undoubtedly fail to improve Indigenous–settler relations. My intention is not to diminish the impact of the residential school system on the Indigenous peoples of this region, but to emphasize the necessity of looking beyond this aspect of Canada's colonial history in order to explore more fully what reconciliation could look like for the people and communities of this area. Concerning what needs to happen following the government's "formal recognition . . . that moral wrongs have been committed," Paulette Regan writes that "ethical reconciliation requires more than words of regret. Such words must be spoken in conjunction with monetary and cultural reparations that support Indigenous self-determination along with a demythification of settler history—a questioning of the moral foundation of settler societies" (58).

Cree scholar Gregory Younging also claims that Canadians need to address their colonial cooperation before they can engage in the broader discussion of reconciliation:

> Apart from their relationship with Indigenous peoples, Canadians first need to undergo a type of micro-reconciliation within themselves. In so doing, the present

> generation of Canadians need to face up to what has been done in their name, and they must own it as being part of who they are. Canadians need to play catch-up in the big reconciliation game, because Indigenous people have already done that. (327)

As Garneau puts it, only settlers who shed their colonial attitudes, those who come "not to repair Indians but to heal themselves," might find transformation in conciliation (38). Sophie McCall, too, emphasizes that settlers need to come to terms with how they have benefitted from colonialism and to be wary of constructing reconciliation as a process that suits their own needs: "Can reconciliation mean more than an absolution of guilt for those who have benefited from social inequalities and an enforced forgetting for those who have paid a high cost for those privileges?" (109-10). Regan, who explores what it means "for the settler majority to shoulder the collective burden of the history and legacy of the residential school system," suggests that their role in reconciliation is to find ways to help themselves recover from this legacy that they have inherited, while asking, "How will we do so in ways that speak to truth, repair broken trust, and set us on a transformative decolonizing pathway toward more just and peaceful relations with Indigenous people?" (2).

Literary works offer a means for writers and readers to question provincial and national myths that sustain colonial attitudes, revise the histories that inform understanding of contemporary Indigenous–settler relations, commemorate injustices, and imagine what a decolonized Canada could look like beyond what politicians and citizens may be prepared to consider. Although other genres, such as news reports, inquiries, and court proceedings, have the potential to accomplish these things as well,

literature is less constrained by facts and form, and therefore can renew the decolonization conversation, inciting readers and listeners to contemplate and question long-held perspectives on the issues of Indigenous–settler relations. As Jonathan Dewar, who is descended from Huron-Wendat, Scottish- and French-Canadian grandparents, and Ayumi Goto, who has situated herself as a Japanese diasporic woman, write in the introduction to *Reconcile This!*, "The artistic imaginary is ever expansive; the meaning of reconciliation much greater than the terms set by truth commissions and policy-makers" (9). Moreover, literary genres often embrace complexity and resist tidy conclusions, which make them ideal means for rethinking reconciliation and coming to understand it not as a resolution of disputes between Indigenous and settler peoples, but as Dewar and Goto describe it, "a work-in-progress" (5) for expanding our conception of what it means to decolonize this relationship. I turn here to Smithers author Sheila Peters for an example of a settler who has employed creative nonfiction to transgress the boundary between the settler colonial past and present of a particular territory that she calls home. Peters, co-founder of Creekstone Press and publisher of Sterritt's *Mapping My Way Home,* wrote and published *Canyon Creek: a script*, a narrative of European settlers evicting a Wet'suwet'en family from their home and the subsequent erasure of this history from the tales of settlement. Peters writes this history in the form of a screenplay for a film about the Wet'suwet'en who, eighty years earlier, lived along the gravel road down which she was now riding a bike. The last line of this text explicitly flouts readers' search for resolution by asking them to visualize an unresolved story: "I'm still sitting in the darkened movie theatre waiting for the narrator's voice, reassuring, authoritative, to explain it all" (Peters, *Canyon Creek* 43). But the aim of the text is not to provide this

authoritative, explanatory conclusion to an historical event. Rather, the audience is asked to take this unfinished story of settler colonial land theft into their lives as people who have benefitted from or been dispossessed by such events and to do the work of living together in ways that do not accept that a settler colonial past means a foregone settler colonial future.

Literature, however, can only be a part of responding to the complex web of meanings and expectations associated with reconciliation and decolonization. As Regan cautions, reading and listening to stories that challenge settler myths can lead to inaction if it is not accompanied by engaging other facets of Indigenous–settler relations: "settlers may respond to injustice with empathy, but lacking strategies for taking personal and political action, they simply intellectualize and compartmentalize their newfound knowledge and do nothing" (64-65), and risk abstracting reconciliation, until it becomes perhaps only an individual change in attitude, without a subsequent change in personal and societal action. Literary interactions are not a replacement for being in relation with Indigenous peoples, accepting responsibility to respond to the colonial past, and working for social transformation. Garneau stresses that art—and I would include literature here—should not be "mistaken for experience," but that it can express and open us up to experiences: "Art is not healing in itself, but it can be in relation. . . . Sharing in a discourse about histories, responsibility, and transformation among artworks and with other human beings is a corrective to the colonial desire for settlement" (38). At its best, literature will be a catalyst for taking new perspectives to discussions of restitution, reparations, and social and political reforms.

It is worth taking a moment here to think through Sarah de Leeuw's choice of poetry and creative nonfiction when she turns to literary genres to orient herself and her readers, through literary mapping, in real places shaped by colonial violence and primed for decolonial reimaginings. When speaking to or with readers of, and potential audiences for, *Unmarked* and *Where It Hurts*, de Leeuw often states her preference for, and the joy she derives from, writing literary nonfiction. She conceives the genre of literary or creative nonfiction as writing that "uses literary craft . . . to present *nonfiction*—factually accurate prose about real people and events—in compelling, vivid, and affecting manners" ("Novel Poetic Protest" 59). In other words, such writing "deliberately . . . seeks in a literarily-attuned way to innovate language, and, through that innovation, seeks to *evoke* rather than strictly *convey*" (59). In terms of how de Leeuw seeks to innovate in her own essays, to move beyond conveying facts of events that she has researched, witnessed or experienced, she focuses on how creative nonfiction, because it is "a balancing of multiple worlds with different expectations and constraints and conventions" ("5 Questions"), allows her to draw from traditions in literature and poetics, and play with lyricism, rhythm, punctuation, spacing, word combinations, and figurative language, in "service of enlivening an event" rather than simply retelling it (Interview 00:21:48-22:22). Moreover, de Leeuw seeks to illuminate the people and places that she believes are often overlooked and does so by examining what she personally has seen of and heard from these seeming outsiders; she refers to the essays in *Where It Hurts* as biographic memoir literary nonfiction (00:02:29-45). Lynne Van Luven, in her introduction to a special issue of *The Malahat Review* focused on creative nonfiction in Canada, presents as a definition or distinction of the genre that it "steps outside of reportage in that it

presents situations and ideas through a personal lens, using a particular voice. [Creative nonfiction] allows the personal—in fact, is nothing without a subjective take" (6). She also notes that just two decades ago creative nonfiction was "deemed to fall outside of hallowed 'literary' ground" and was "always being overlooked" (7). De Leeuw agrees that literary nonfiction has held a kind of "outsider" position, but as such, "[t]he genre itself is thus especially well-suited, in [her] mind, to documenting people and places on the margins, those with marginal status in circuits of power" ("5 Questions").

De Leeuw employs literary nonfiction's accommodation of disruptions, uncertainty, and digressions to narrate her memories and experiences of living in and moving through northwestern British Columbia's physical and cultural geographies, which she marks with the detritus and scars of colonial violence and the routes and signposts of community-building, intertwined with extended metaphors of loss, dislocation, or belonging. The resulting literary maps guide readers into places they may have never experienced, or do not know in the way de Leeuw knows them, without providing clearly navigated paths to leave these stories behind. In other words, de Leeuw uses literary nonfiction to evoke what it means to live in often overlooked places that have been shaped by settler colonialism in British Columbia, with the goal of resisting attempts to then move on from rather than to address the price paid by First Nations to support settler privilege and to question the validity and sustainability of settlers benefitting from Indigenous dispossession. The form of the essay, writes poet, essayist, and scholar Joan Retallack in her book *The Poethical Wager*, is an "urgent and aesthetically aware thought experiment" that mixes "logics, dislogics, intuition, revulsion, wonder"—the resulting mixed genre is "the best way [she] know[s] to make

sense of the kind of world in which we live" (4). Such re-forming of the way we write about living with the legacy and presence of Canadian colonialism propels de Leeuw's interest in new ways of writing to reorient ourselves to the world in which we live: "If reconciliation requires 'action to address the ongoing legacies of colonialism,' then it also needs languages to articulate that action—mechanisms and forms (or re/form/ations) of language, for instance, that can seize settler-subject attention and direct it toward unsettling the taken-for-granted colonial violence" (de Leeuw, "Writing as Righting" 311). De Leeuw also writes poetry, and infuses her literary nonfiction with the poetic, because the focus of these genres on language down to the "scale of letters and words and lines," means that the author can write about complex, wide-reaching social issues, but offer to readers such issues "distilled to small, but deeply impactful and powerful, digestible contemplations" (de Leeuw, "Place and Poetics"). In terms of readers opening themselves to such poetic offerings—distilled and concise, but unresolved and potentially radical—I like Retallack's conceptualization of the act of reading as "liv[ing] with the text over the real time of everyday life so it can enter into conversation with other life projects" (48). Literary genres that transgress boundaries "maintain an irritating presence, pleasurable or not, as radically unfinished thought. They give the reader real work to do. If the essay is a worthwhile wager, it is about startling the mind into action when much is at stake and intelligibility is poor" (48). For readers and writers of creative works like de Leeuw's *Unmarked, Where It Hurts*, and *Skeena*, what is often unintelligible is the precarity of the settler colonial project and what is at stake is a decolonial future in which Indigenous and settler peoples can live in respectful and sustainable relationships with each other and the land.

Settler Colonialism

Like many Canadians, my family can tell its story of coming to Canada without explicitly mentioning colonialism. Yet, we are part of Canada's history of using immigrants to grow and establish its reach in what the country views as the remote, resource-rich lands that it has sovereignty over. And we have benefitted as a result of acquiring land that was neither ceded nor sold to the nation that we are citizens of. At university, I had learned that the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* land claim was brought forward, in part, by the Witsuwit'en Nation on whose lands I grew up, but I had not considered how directly and materially implicated my hometown, and my family, might be. Similar to the query about the name of Hudson Bay Mountain, a relatively simple question, and a slight shift in orientation, led to a significant change in the foundation of my sense of this place.

In October 1984, thirteen hereditary chiefs from the Wet'suwet'en Nation and thirty-five from the neighbouring Gitxsan Nation filed a Statement of Claim against the Province of British Columbia, asserting ownership of and jurisdiction over[7] 58,000 square kilometres of land in northwestern British Columbia—including the 900 acres that comprise my family's farm—on behalf of themselves, the hereditary house groups they represent, and their nations. The case takes its name from Delgamuukw, the hereditary chief name held by Albert Tait,[8] the lead plaintiff for the Gitxsan when they first filed the claim together with the Wet'suwet'en, whose lead plaintiff was Gisdaywa/Alfred Joseph.

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[7] This assertion of ownership and jurisdiction was amended when the case went to the Supreme Court of Canada on appeal, where the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en claimed Aboriginal title and the right of self-government (UBCIC 33).

[8] Three different chiefs held the name Delgamuukw throughout the court proceedings. When Albert Tait died in 1987, Ken Muldoe was named Delgamuukw and fulfilled the responsibilities of this name in the court case. Earl Muldon received the name and the role in 1990 when Muldoe died (N. Sterritt 313-14).

Anthropologist Antonia Mills, who served as an expert witness during the case and provided court reporters with spellings of Witsuwit'en words when Johnny David gave commission evidence (Mills 4), notes that the Witsuwit'en "refer to the court case as the *Gisday Wa–Delgamuukw* case to emphasize that the Witsuwit'en are equal participants" (444).[9] This claim would eventually go to trial in the British Columbia Supreme Court in May 1987 and then to the British Columbia Court of Appeal, before receiving the Supreme Court of Canada judgement in 1997 that would render *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* a landmark legal case in Canada regarding Aboriginal title and rights. In its *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* decision, the Supreme Court states that Aboriginal title is a collective proprietary right to the land itself and to exclusive occupation of it, and that this title had not been extinguished in British Columbia before the province entered confederation and could not now be extinguished by either British Columbia or Canada without First Nations consent because Aboriginal title is protected by Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* (*Stolen Lands* 33-34).

Between 1938 and 1952, my maternal great-grandparents and my paternal grandparents emigrated from the Netherlands to the Bulkley Valley to build new lives for themselves in a place that largely escaped the material and economic ravages of World War II. Stories about my family clearing land, helping to establish a Christian Reformed

[9] I follow a similar naming practice in this dissertation to recognize the role of the Witsuwit'en in this court case and the knowledge that Witsuwit'en chiefs and elders shared in preparation for and during its proceedings. So I refer to the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* land claims trial, except where I quote a source or use the Canadian judicial system's name for the court case: *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*. I also use the name *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* as part of phrases to refer to the case in order to maintain the distinction between the hereditary chiefly names and the people who hold them, and the judicial system's use of the names for its case name. Within documents related to the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case, the Witsuwit'en chiefly name appears as *Gisday Wa*. Outside of quoted material, I use the spelling *Gisdaywa*, which is in line with the work of the WLA in *Niwhts'ide'nï Hibi'it'ën: The Ways of Our Ancestors*. This textbook, created with Witsuwit'en elders and community members, also explains that, outside of the nation's ongoing legal negotiations with the settler colonial government, the spelling of the chiefly name now uses Distinctly Witsuwit'en Orthography: *Gisdewe* (Morin v, 340).

church and school, and starting a logging company and a dairy farm nicely align with the pervasive Canadian narrative of settling a mostly uninhabited land ripe for transplanting and cultivating Euro-Canadian culture. As I learn how these family histories are intertwined with the histories of others who have shaped this region, my sense of this place that my family has called home for over half a century, and our position in it becomes more complex and unsettled. My parents still live in my childhood home in an area called Glentanna, which was also my dad's childhood home, a squared-timber house built in the late 1930s by the Tugnums, a Swiss immigrant family who previously owned and farmed the land. They built this house to replace the roadhouse erected on this location in 1904 that served prospectors, telegraph linesmen, and railroad construction workers journeying through the region (Shervill and Tugnum), making this settlement in Glentanna older than the town of Smithers, a community founded in 1913 that now is the regional services centre for the Bulkley Valley.

Madeline Alfred weaves another narrative thread into my understanding of the history of Glentanna, recounting how her family would live in tents in this hunting and meeting place in the early twentieth century: "We camped there [Glentanna] two or three days at a time when my brother Peter and his son they would go out to Tedeltl'ets and wait there for him and when they come back we go back to our home" (British Columbia, "1988-01-13" 2660.31-34). To find out what remains of her family's hunting camp, we must follow Alfred's story a step further:

> Q All right. Okay. Now, can you go to camp at Dee' ts'il yee or Glentanna today in order to take animals from your territory?

A How would we be able to camp there when there's all – it's people living there and there's farmers all around that area?

Q Who are the farmers that are there? Do you know any of them?

A No.

Q Are these non-Wet'suwet'en farmers?

A It's white men. (2661.18-28)

This exchange took place between Dz'eeh/Madeline Alfred and Stuart Rush, chief counsel for the plaintiffs, during her testimony on behalf of the Wet'suwet'en during *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*. While the court recognized the words of Madeline Alfred, alongside the thousands of pages of testimony, as grounds for existing Aboriginal title, it did not acknowledge Wet'suwet'en title to the specific territory in which my family lives. Although much of the evidence and testimony that Wet'suwet'en plaintiffs and witnesses provided during the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* land claims trial refers to the time before my relatives arrived in the Bulkley Valley, it is disingenuous not to recognize and accept the legacy we have inherited as settlers. Yes, the white farmers who were working the land when Alfred's family stopped camping in Glentanna was a different family, but she provided this evidence in 1988, when we were the white settlers farming here, living in the same house.[10]

Throughout this project I will be using the term *settler* to refer to people living in Canada who do not belong to a First Nations, Inuit, or Métis community and whose

[10] There are, moreover, a couple instances where branches of my family are directly referred to in trial testimonies. Witnesses for the Wet'suwet'en plaintiffs twice refer to D. Groot Logging (British Columbia, "Florence Hall" 150.42-44; "1988-02-15" 3571.39-43), the company that my maternal grandfather worked for, which was owned by his brother. And, in her commission evidence, Gguhe'/Lucy Bazil-Verigin details her family tree, mentioning that her daughter Charlotte was once married to the "non-Indian" Bill Euverman (British Columbia, "Lucy Bazil" 176.25-28), who was one of my maternal great-uncles.

presence here is at the pleasure and authority of a settler colonial state that depends on and benefits from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. As Métis writer and scholar Chelsea Vowel writes, *settler* is a functional term for referring to "the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority," particularly in discussions of past and present relationships between the various groups of peoples in Canada, and the differences in their lived experiences in this place (16). It is a term that identifies a structural and relational identity in that anyone who requests and receives the right to be on this land grounded in Canada's claim of sovereignty, becomes, intentionally or not, complicit in this nation-state's perpetuation of its political, legal, and economic institutions, which dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land, profit from it, and create systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples through assimilation, marginalization, and racialized hierarchies. Vowel points out that referring to people who continue to move to Canada as settlers helpfully underscores that settler colonialism is an ongoing process, but that doing so obscures how non-European peoples, especially those displaced by colonialism or wars in their homelands, "do not have the power to bring with them their laws and customs, which they then apply to the rest of the peoples living in Canada." So, although they "are enfolded into the settlement process when they arrive here . . . they are often denied equal social privileges." She also unequivocally asserts that *settler* does not apply to the descendants of enslaved African peoples: "Black people, removed and cut off from their own indigenous lands—literally stripped of their humanity and redefined legally as property—could not be agents of settlement" (17). Regardless whether Euro-Canadians, especially those who were born here and who can map generations of ancestors on this land, view themselves as settlers,

they "are the political descendants of Settler colonists. . . . They have inherited settler colonialism as a relation that involves them whether they know it or not" (Veracini, "Cost of Reconciliation" 81). The colonial government uses its citizens to fortify its settlement of this place, which subsequently frames settlers' relationships to Indigenous peoples, since the former become part of distancing the latter from their lands, communities, self-governance, and cultures.

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson also speaks of settler colonialism in terms of relationship, in that its structures determine how the state engages with Indigenous peoples, which in turn affects relationships within and between Indigenous and settler communities and polities. Canada is predicated on the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples and their relationships to the land, their cultures, their bodies, and each other. In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Simpson articulates the expansiveness of this dispossession that frames every interaction between the settler state and the Indigenous peoples on whose land it currently exists: "The removal of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg bodies from the land, from the present, and from all of the relationships that are meaningful to us, politically and otherwise, is the meta-relationship my Ancestors and I have with Canada" (41). This settler colonial relationship is a violent and normalized structure that is rooted in and supported by "capitalism, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness" (10). Simpson writes that her experience of settler colonialism is of "a *series of complex and overlapping processes* that work together as a cohort to maintain the structure" (45). Moreover, these processes shift and adapt in service of settler colonialism's unchanging goal, namely, "to maintain dispossession by continually attacking Indigenous bodies and

destroying Indigenous families"; while the structure sometimes appears to change, it is instead only "shifting to further consolidate its power, to neutralize our resistance, to ultimately fuel extractivism" (46). My project aligns itself with Simpson's understanding of settler colonialism as a social formation and mode of domination, and examines how its processes are unseen, ignored and perpetuated, or named, interrogated and disrupted in literary texts by settler authors who acknowledge the existence and power of settler colonialism and how they are implicated in it.

Indeed, Simpson's explanation of settler colonialism is a productive framework for understanding the relationship in British Columbia between First Nations and government, which was and is shaping the existence, politics, economies, and characters of the communities from and about which the literary texts I will be discussing in this project are written. To give an example of the contemporary relationship, the current federal and British Columbia provincial governments (governed by the Liberal Party and New Democratic Party [NDP], respectively) were both elected with party platforms that promised the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP),[11] which includes both the rights of Indigenous peoples to "not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories" (UN General Assembly art. 10) and "to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands" (32.1).[12] It would seem, then, that a change, maybe even a weakening, in the

[11] Moreover, British Columbia's NDP cited the Supreme Court of Canada's 2014 *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia* decision that this First Nation has title to a specific disputed territory and that British Columbia failed in its duty to consult regarding its use of land in this territory. Regarding its position on reconciliation, the party's campaign website says, in bold print, "The message was clear: Aboriginal Title and Rights are a matter of law and justice" ("Reconciliation").

[12] To implement UNDRIP, the federal and provincial governments would have to respect and uphold Indigenous peoples' right to determine development, by fulfilling their responsibility to consult and receive consent, as outlined by the Declaration: "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and

settler colonial structure is taking place and that the government is presenting a new process through which to engage with First Nations. Such a shift, writes Simpson, can incite hope, because "when the practices of settler colonialism appear to shift, it can appear to present an opportunity to do things differently, to change our relationship to the state." And yet, the repetition of "appear" here is significant, emphasizing Simpson's suspicion and rejection of "kinder and gentler" processes that still support "the structure that is at the root of all our problems" (*As We Have* 46). Unsurprisingly, then, both governments have since moved forward with major construction projects—the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion (federal decision) and the Site C dam (provincial)—that will significantly impact the territories of several First Nations in British Columbia and their access to this land, without receiving consent for such development from all First Nations in the affected areas. Different promises made to get different governments elected, who pursue the same projects that run roughshod over Indigenous rights.

Simpson's argument that settler colonialism requires and enacts the removal of Indigenous bodies from territories to erase both connection to the land and physical resistance on it in order to strengthen its claim of sovereignty over the land has also been exemplified again in the morass of rights infringement and political posturing created in the wake of these construction projects. In July 2018, BC Parks, with the help of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), evicted from North Thompson Provincial Park a group of land defenders who, using mobile tiny houses, had "reoccupied a former Secwepemc village inside the park" to protest the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, to assert title to unceded territory, and to bring life to Secwepemc traditions; Secwepemc

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informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources" (UN Art. 32.2).

Ktunaxa activist Kanahus Manuel was arrested during this act of resistance (Brake). The settler colonial project needs not only to move the physical obstacle that such a protest creates, but also the political and cultural strength that it embodies. According to Simpson, the removal of Indigenous bodies from land—the bodies of people like Manuel and the Tiny House Warriors—maintains Canadian sovereignty because it "erases the political orders and relationships housed within Indigenous bodies that attach our bodies to our land" (*As We Have* 42). Moreover, Simpson includes control over Indigenous responses in a list of ways that settler colonialism is "an overwhelmingly dominating force": "[Colonialism] tries very hard to get me to think in a particular way. It tries very hard to get me to resist in a particular way" (44). So, not only was the government's supposed shift in attitude a source of false hope, but its subsequent actions also further embed the settler colonial status quo and make it difficult to deny that Canada remains a settler colonial place.

A recent surge of interest in defining and theorizing settler colonialism "as a distinct and enduring mode of domination" has engendered the emergent interdisciplinary scholarly field of settler colonial studies (Ishiguro 5). In his introduction to the inaugural issue of the *Settler Colonial Studies* journal, founding editor-in-chief Lorenzo Veracini proposes that a goal of the field is "to develop dedicated interpretive tools capable of sustaining an approach to the decolonisation of settler colonial formations" ("Introducing" 1). He suggests that colonialism and settler colonialism are similar for the reason that in both cases colonizers "move across space, and . . . establish their ascendancy in specific locales" (1), but he argues that essentially each system demands something different of the people it seeks to colonize: whereas colonizers seek the

perpetual subordination of a population that it can exploit to provide labour for the metropole, settler colonizers desire the disappearance of any existing Indigenous peoples so that they can establish a new state independent from the metropole (2-3). Settler colonialism, according to Veracini, is a structure that pursues and expects its own extinguishment—the settler colony seeks not to develop a permanent relationship with Indigenous peoples, but to fulfill "a recurring need to disavow the presence of indigenous 'others'" through processes of elimination, displacement, and assimilation (2), so that it can ultimately establish an independent nation that "effectively repress[es], co-opt[s] and extinguish[es] indigenous alterities . . ." (2-3). This theorization of settler colonialism as a structure that continually works towards its own obsolescence by achieving the disappearance of Indigenous peoples is echoed in Simpson's description of "being out on the land in [her] territory" as primarily an experience of "continual dispossession"—the construction of sites, structures, and transportation that support settlers' jobs and vacations and "the settler erasure and surveillance . . . reminds [her], according to them, [she] is not supposed to be here" (*As We Have* 40). But Simpson and Indigenous peoples across what is currently Canada are here. She credits the enduring resistance of her ancestors for her existence and for Nishnaabeg survival and commits to continuing this responsibility to future generations through radical Indigenous resurgence, resistance, and refusal of settler colonialism. Indeed, Veracini emphasizes that although settler colonial studies explores this structure's "drive toward [the] elimination" of Indigenous resistance and presence, the field does not maintain that such elimination has been successful nor that it is inevitable ("Decolonizing Settler Colonialism" 4-5). Rather, scholars of settler colonial studies are indebted to and building on the work of Indigenous studies and

resistance movements to create a parallel focus on drawing attention to what settlers do to maintain settler colonialism and on "developing a cultural pedagogy that turns [settlers] into agents for decolonization . . ." (2-3).

My project adds to the examination of settler colonialism in northwestern British Columbia, particularly attending to how settler authors grapple with it in their writing, and enters into dialogue with scholars whose work sees the settler colonial project in the province as ongoing—but very much incomplete and threatened by First Nations' past and present resistance. The work of such authors embraces the possibility of, and responsibility to build, newly imagined relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. In a special issue of the *BC Studies* journal with the theme "Histories of Settler Colonialism," guest editor Laura Ishiguro writes that the articles share "the conviction that settler colonialism has played a powerful and often violent role in shaping British Columbia, even as it has been a profoundly vulnerable, contingent, and aspirational project that has never entirely contained the identities, experiences, and relations of power in this place" (7). Ishiguro supports examining settler colonialism, but cautions researchers against taking for granted its "ascendency," which might obscure other ways of understanding past and present relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in British Columbia (7). My intent in examining literary texts by settler authors and how they represent their place on this land in northwestern British Columbia is not to re-centre settler voices by presenting their naming and challenging of the legacy and pervasive power of settler colonialism as innovative, or by focusing solely on how settler colonialism affects them and how they propose to dismantle it. Since early Euro-Canadian settlement in this region, First Nations have enacted jurisdiction over their

territories and offered these uninvited guests relationships and use of land in accordance with Indigenous laws, thereby refusing and resisting the colonial future that many settlers, past and present, are unaware of or choose to ignore that they were and are building. Rather, the work of these settler authors and of this project is, I propose, a belated and partial response to First Nations' initial and ongoing assertion that settler colonialism is not and cannot be the only way for non-Indigenous peoples to be in this place. The drive to imagine and establish a present and future for Indigenous and settler peoples outside of the structure of settler colonialism is not new and is not the product of settler enlightenment. Therefore, I am going to frame this project's discussion of settler literary texts as building on the work of First Nations' resistance movements in the region and as parallel and complementary disrupting of the logic of settler colonialism.

In *Mapping My Way Home: A Gitxsan History*, Neil J. Sterritt does not use, let alone define or theorize, the term *settler colonialism*. Yet, the author does not need to do so for this text to be aligned with Indigenous voices who identify settler colonialism as the reason their nations have been dispossessed of land, and who call for Canada to return the land, and to recognize Indigenous sovereignty and self-government. *Mapping My Way Home* is, in part, the story of the arrival of settler colonialism in northwestern British Columbia and a refusal to let it be the only story moving forward for Gitxsan and non-Gitxsan peoples living in shared territories. Sterritt locates the Gitxsan people within the Skeena watershed from time immemorial; briefly explains the Gitxsan hereditary clan system through which the nation's laws, governance, and land tenure system are practiced to this day; presents a chronology of the first non-Indigenous people—often working for King or company—to navigate, map, travel through, and live in Gitxsan

territory; narrates individual and community Gitxsan stories of clashes with and adaptation to land surveyors and pre-emptors, road-building crews, Christian missions, colonial law enforcement, day and residential schools, Indian agents, and land claims commissioners; and relates recurring cases of the Gitxsan compelling the provincial and federal settler colonial governments to resolve the land question, with his narrative culminating in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia.* Sterritt's text rejects both the primacy of settler colonialism as the analytic for understanding Indigenous–settler relations in the region and the idea that the settler colonial project has reached or is near completion; the text does not, however, deny or downplay the reality of settler colonial processes at work in this place, nor release settlers of their responsibility to identify, accept, and undo their complicity in the unresolved issues of Aboriginal title and rights in the places they call home.

Sterritt presents the Gitxsan stories he records as sufficient in themselves, but also capable of engaging with Western methods of knowledge creation and preservation. For example, Sterritt shares an oral history of how the Madiik, supernatural grizzly of the waters, wreaked havoc on the ancestral village of Temlaham by creating a torrent of water, trees, and boulders that swept through the village when its people began to forget their ancient laws (28). Then, in a footnote, Sterritt mentions that in preparation for the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case, the Gitxsan had scientists survey and test the sediment of a lake near where this village had been; discovery and carbon dating of buried trees along this lake "reveal that a major landslide had occurred 3500 years BP [Before the Present, i.e., before 1950]" (29n1). Sterritt focuses on the Gitxsan oral history to tell the history of a site that was both an ancestral home for his people and a personal

home to his own family for thirty-five years. Sterritt's footnoting of the corroborating knowledge gathered via Western scientific methods signals that this knowledge is neither a new discovery nor essential to understanding the history of this place, but that the Gitxsan recognize the work that needs to be done to educate settler peoples unwilling or ill-prepared to understand Indigenous knowledges as equal to their own. In fact, we can see this example of how Sterritt conveys two different tellings of the same truth as a model for the relationship between Indigenous and settler colonial studies. Settler colonial studies is not a replacement for or nullification of Indigenous studies and the work of Indigenous activists. The field can aid in—if not take responsibility for—catching up Canadians to the truth of what Indigenous peoples have been saying about the illegitimacy of Canada's claim to land and sovereignty and its past and present of violence, and doing the work of confronting settlers with their complicity in this and transforming them into co-resisters of settler colonial dispossession and domination.

Sterritt locates his work as a researcher, which led to him writing this book, within the tradition of his family's stories and within his role as a recorder of the knowledge of Gitxsan chiefs and elders about their history and territories. *Mapping My Way Home* is primarily a narrative history of a family and nation, not a response to settler colonizers and their institutions—the latter are part of the story, but not the reason for it. It is also not a foray into the academic dialogues happening among scholars in law or the humanities in fields like decolonization, Indigenous, or settler colonial studies. This distinction is not to say that the Gitxsan knowledge in this text has no place in such discussions; rather, many of the stories that Sterritt includes indicate understanding of colonial institutions and knowledge, but intentionally foreground Gitxsan perspectives as

a means of emphasizing the relatively short history of settler colonialism in the region as compared to Gitxsan culture and law, and of bringing uncertainty to the future of settler colonial systems here.

Sterritt takes his cue from past and present Gitxsan leaders who do not question the precedence of their claim to the land and of the Gitxsan legal orders that support this claim, but who also adeptly wield the tools of colonial institutions when necessary and helpful for confronting the refusal of the government, its courts, and its citizens to recognize this claim. The Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en, alongside neighbouring First Nations, have variously used blockades, delegations, uprisings, petitions, land claims, and disruptions of settler activities to assert their ownership of and jurisdiction over the land in the face of settlement and have pressed colonial governments, at both the provincial and federal levels, on the issue of Aboriginal title since British Columbia joined Canada in 1871.[13]

For instance, Sterritt twice includes a petition that Wiilaxhaa/Charles Martin composed in 1910 on behalf of forty-three Gitxsan chiefs—"The Committee of Skeena River"—that cited the Royal Proclamation of 1763 alongside the chiefs' rejection of reserves and their assertion "that each family or tribe should still hold possession of the land which is theirs by inheritance" (qtd. in Sterritt 179, 291). Issued by King George III, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 articulates the principles governing the relationship between the British Crown and Indigenous peoples in what would become Canada and the United States. The Proclamation recognizes Aboriginal title (the Supreme Court of

[13] In their publication *Stolen Lands, Broken Promises: Researching the Indian Land Question in British Columbia* (2nd edition), the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) offers a timeline of significant events in the history of Indigenous–settler relations in British Columbia from 1763-2005. Many First Nations in the northern part of the province, including the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en, feature prominently in this overview, especially given their relatively short post-contact histories.

Canada's *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* decision reaffirms this) and states that any land that the Crown has not acquired through treaty or purchase is Aboriginal land. Moreover, it prevents any settlers from taking or acquiring land that has not first been ceded or sold to the Crown: "And, We do further strictly enjoin and require all Persons whatever who have either wilfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any Lands within the Countries above described, or upon any other Lands which, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are still reserved to the said Indians as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such Settlements" ("Royal Proclamation" 34-35). Therefore, Charles Martin, on behalf of the Gitxsan chiefs, was appealing to the Crown's honour to address and resolve illegal settlement on Gitxsan land: "Also we are pleased to know that King George's Act, which ordained on October 7th 1763, has not been changed" (qtd. in Sterritt 179). The Gitxsan were aware of this Proclamation as the foundation for Canada gaining assent to settle on Aboriginal land. When British Columbia joined confederation in 1871, the federal government was under the incorrect impression that this British colony had been applying the Proclamation, when in fact, outside of Vancouver Island, British Columbia had not negotiated treaties and where it had laid out reserves, they were markedly smaller than the policy Canada followed in the numbered treaties (ten acres per family in British Columbia, compared with 160-640 acres per family in treaty territories) (UBCIC 17-18; Hanson). By referring to the Proclamation, the Gitxsan chiefs declared that they wanted resolution of the land issue with the Crown, as nation-to-nation, not with the province. Five years later, with the petition unanswered by Ottawa, the chiefs in the village of Gitanmaax refused to respond to questions from government representatives regarding their satisfaction with the condition and size of the reserve lands allocated to

them, because to do so would be to accept the government's lack of response. Speaking for Chief Edward Spookxw, William Holland stated, "We could give you all kinds of answers if we made our petition that way, but we did not make our petition for reservations at all. . . . We are not mistaken when we ask for our own . . . we were born here and we own this land and we want to get it back" (qtd. in Sterritt 295). The Gitxsan leaders understood the role and intent of the commissioners but refused to let the focus on reserve lands distract from the primary land question that the Gitxsan wanted the government to address. In 1920, Naalaxha/Abel Oakes was prescient in his view of the trajectory that the Gitxsan demand for resolution of conflicts over land and resources would take: "So we quit all the Indian Agent [sic] and the church too. . . . Suppose there is trouble between Indians or white men we get lawyer go court [sic] to fix it right like anybody else" (qtd. in Sterritt 285). Oakes, writes Sterritt, "[K]new that the members of the House of xGwoimtxw owned their territories collectively. This wasn't wishful thinking" (286). Certain in their own laws, the Gitxsan did not acquiesce to settler colonialism as the new social order. But this history also demonstrates that the Gitxsan did not underestimate settler colonists' desire and drive to claim the land and impose their laws; there would be no disrupting this project without using the tools of settler colonialism against itself when possible, and without exposing settlers to an alternate, Indigenous way of sharing this land and sustaining the expectation that settlers will recognize and adhere to Gitxsan law and culture as it pertains to them.

Sterritt situates his narrative within the knowledge tradition of elders and chiefs who are first and foremost concerned with their responsibilities to their territories and houses. Resistance to settler colonialism becomes an expression of this responsibility, but

the text repudiates any claim that settler colonialism is irrevocably established in the region and the sole interpretive framework of the narrative he tells. *Mapping My Way Home* presents the Gitxsan response to the establishment of a settler colonial government in British Columbia and to the subsequent increasing settler incursion on Gitxsan land as a current iteration of their nation's long history of asserting jurisdiction over territories that other peoples claim as their own or request to use. Notably, in a section of his Gitxsan history where Sterritt writes of "intruders" and the consequent migration of Gitxsan families away from a village on the boundary of their territories, he is recounting not the arrival of Euro-Canadian settlers, but of Tsetsaut, a general name for various Athapaskan peoples who lived around the headwaters of the Nass, Skeena, and Stikine Rivers and into the Alaskan Panhandle (Sterritt 54-55; Sterritt et. al 19).[14] The movement of these "displaced tribes" (Sterritt 56) onto Gitxsan land was a "domino effect [that] arose from the westward progression of the fur trade" (55), and conflict erupted because the Tsetsaut resorted to killing Gitxsan hunting parties rather than receiving permission to hunt and trap on Gitxsan territories. Peace was reached when the Gitxsan gave a feast for the Tsetsaut, during which they showed "how far the Gitxsan territory went. And this was mapped in Indian paint on some moose skins. And a potlatch was held. The map was kept." During this settlement, the Tsetsaut also "joined their crests" with those of several Gitxsan clans and "became relatives" (qtd. in Sterritt 62). This initially violent land dispute was resolved through Gitxsan ceremony, clearly mapped boundaries, and

[14] *Tribal Boundaries in the Nass Watershed* offers a more detailed history of how the Gitxsan were repeatedly successful in defending, and sometimes expanding, their territories in the face of Tsetsaut migration and attacks. This report, originally created to negotiate and resolve territory disputes in preparation for the Nisga'a Nation's treaty negotiations with the federal and provincial governments, presents extensive oral, written, and cartographic evidence, validated by "the requirements of indigenous law," regarding the location of boundaries between First Nations in the Nass watershed (Sterritt et al. 243).

relationships made through Gitxsan kinship systems; without erasing or ignoring that laws had been broken, a new relationship was forged. Sterritt's recounting of this history affirms the presence, jurisdiction, and vitality of Gitxsan law and protocols between nations. Building on this affirmation, from the perspective of settler colonial studies, the failure of Euro-Canadians to similarly engage in and sustain, at the level of settler communities or nation-to-nation, a political and cultural relationship rooted in Gitxsan law is an example of settler colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples. By assuming that there is no established and prevailing Gitxsan law, or refusing to acknowledge its precedence, settlers work to empty this place of its political order and impose their own.

By focusing on how the Gitxsan negotiate land use agreements with strangers and neighbours while maintaining sovereignty over their territories, Sterritt's text implies that settlers cannot work in a vacuum to discover or invent protocol to replace settler colonialism. Systems that are rooted in territories already exist and are able to adapt to govern relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. This project strives to be mindful of this in its focus on what settler literary texts can offer to reimagining this relationship. For instance, settlers need to interrogate the systems and narratives that perpetuate the erasure of a potential future in which First Nations are self-governing and have jurisdiction over settler activity in their territories and that reassure Canadians that their place in this land is grounded in Canada having acquired legal title and civilized supposedly empty territory. Settler colonial studies is well-positioned to address the question of why settlers in Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en territory are ignorant of or unwilling to entertain the possibility of living in relationship like that embodied in the village of Hagwilget. Along another territorial boundary, the Gitxsan established a reciprocal

relationship with Indigenous neighbours who wanted to fish in their territory. Due to a rockslide in 1824 that dammed Widzin Kwah (known today as the Bulkley River) in a way that prevented salmon from swimming far enough upriver to reach their main village at Witset, the Wet'suwet'en travelled to the Gitxsan village of Gitanmaax with gifts and "to get permission to fish in the canyon below the rock fall" (N. Sterritt 65). The Wet'suwet'en received permission to move to one side of the canyon and share in the abundant salmon stocks there, but the Gitxsan chiefs and houses retained their rights to this land and the fish (66).[15] Arthur Mowatt, who spent summers with his grandfather fishing at the canyon, told Sterritt what his grandfather had taught him, including how the people would split the river in half using fish traps: "What fish was caught on this side, the people that lived on the same side took the catch. The fish caught on the other side [the people there] took the catch. . . . This is what my grandfather told me. They [Hagwilget people] only use [sic] to come there to fish, then they made their home there now. They really did not own Hagwilget. It belongs to Gitanmaax" (qtd. in Sterritt 66). The stories of this house territory and of the families who had permission to use it affirm the agreement that the Gitxsan made to share, but not cede, this land with people who came to know it as their home as well. Sterritt dedicates an entire chapter (albeit a brief one) to discussing the establishment of this Wet'suwet'en village on Gitxsan territory, recounting what his father remembers of fishing in this place with his own parents:

> We always called them [Wet'suwet'en fishing in the canyon] *hagwilget* because *hagwil* means 'good' or 'gentle' people who never broke the law. The

[15] In *Niwhts'ide'nï Hibi'it'ën: The Ways of Our Ancestors*, a textbook of history and culture created in partnership between Witsuwit'en community members and the local provincial school district, the Witsuwit'en account of the founding of Tsë Cakh (Hagwilget) tells the same story that Sterritt gives in his narrative, including the detail that the Gitxsan chiefs whose house territories include this river canyon "continued to fish on the east bank, where our people [the Witsuwit'en] had settled" (Morin 159-60).

> opposite of *hagwilget* is *lax wilget*, a person who's suffered a real hardship and doesn't seem to observe the laws.
>
> They used to go out to their own territories and bring in dried moose meat and other food that we didn't have. Then they put up a feast and invited the people from Gitanmaax. This was their way of thanking the Gitxsan for being on their land and at their fishery. (qtd. in Sterritt 67-68)

The peaceful relations between the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en have allowed members of the latter nation to fish or live at Hagwilget, that is, on Gitxsan territory, for almost two centuries (65).[16]

The colonial reserve system, however, did bring conflict into this relationship. Between 1891 and 1901, Indian Reserve Commissioners Peter O'Reilly (until 1898) and Arthur Wellesley Vowell oversaw the laying out of reserves in Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en territories. O'Reilly included the village of Tsë Cakh/Hagwilget in a reserve called Tsitsk (or Rocher Deboule, the French name used for Hagwilget and a nearby mountain range) and allotted it to the Gitanmaax Band (of the Gitxsan Nation). The Indian Agent at Hagwilget, Richard Loring, told the Witsuwit'en they would have to fish at sites on their own reserve lands (Sterritt 157-58; Morin 272). Following the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for British Columbia, 1913-1916 (commonly referred to as the McKenna–McBride Commission), almost two-thirds of the Tsitsk reserve was reallocated in 1924 to the Hagwilget Band (of the Witsuwit'en Nation) as the Hagwilget reserve (Morin 272; Canada, and British Columbia 211). During the proceedings of *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, Queen's Counsel for Canada J.A. Macaulay used a 1909 report from Loring

[16] The Witsuwit'en name for Hagwilget is *Tsë Cakh*, meaning "base of the rock." Witsuwit'en history agrees with the date and reason for the settlement of this "modern village" that "is the only Witsuwit'en village situated in Gitxsan territory" (Morin 85).

about disputes over this reserve land to make a point about a lack of united front at the time between the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en (British Columbia, "1990-06-14" 28569-70). Currently, the Gitanmaax Band has been in negotiations with Canada for over a decade regarding these reserve lands. They submitted a specific claim to the federal government that "alleges that the reallocation of a portion of Tsitsk IR #3 to the Hagwilget Band was illegal and done without the consent of the Band" (Canada). Despite the Witsuwit'en presence on and use of this territory for a longer period than there has been permanent non-Indigenous settlement in the area, for the Gitxsan, this place is not disputed territory in terms of which houses and chiefs are responsible for and have rights to it. The Witsuwit'en do not claim to have sole, or primary, use and occupancy of the territory where this village has become a meeting place and a site where the Witsuwit'en have built feast halls and smokehouses, raised totem poles, and buried their dead.[17] While it fits with the mostly chronological structure of *Mapping My Way Home* to relay the stories of Gitxsan relations with the Tsetsaut and the Hagwilget Witsuwit'en before discussing their history with settlers, this narrative structure also puts into perspective that disputing and sharing territory belonging to the Gitxsan people is not new, and that it is settler

[17] In her role as counsel for the plaintiffs in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, Aboriginal rights lawyer Louise Mandell spoke in court on the issue of land ownership, including Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en legal frameworks for granting access rights and transferring territory. Hagwilget served as an example of how granting another house or nation access to a territory does not entail transferring or ceding ownership of it: "There are a number of areas within both the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en House territories that are seen as common property to others of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en nations to access. And the – what we are here demonstrating is that it's another kind of access right. It doesn't derogate from the right of the owner and, in fact, overall, the right of the owner maintains jurisdiction with respect to the areas which are part of the common property rights." Concerning Hagwilget in particular, Mandell explained that "[t]he evidence which was before you was that Hagwilget is located in the territory of Spookw [a Gitxsan House]. Because of the historical circumstances leading to the creation of that village, it's understood that this territory is not lost to the Gitksan – it's not lost by the Gitksan to the Wet'suwet'en. And you heard evidence that everyone understood that Hagwilget is in Spookw's territory, even though there is a village there which is primarily populated by now Wet'suwet'en people" (British Columbia, "1990-04-24" 25105.7-15, 28-37).

colonialism that refused and erased this possible relationship as the foundation of Euro-Canadian settlement here.

Indeed, Sterritt's work presents a history of mutually beneficial and respectful relationships between peoples and nations in this place when Gitxsan territories and laws are adhered to, and of conflict, which sometimes provokes physical violence, when Gitxsan jurisdiction and protocols are ignored. Both ways of being in this place, of shaping the stories and maps of this land, are available to settlers as well. As Sterritt's brief history of Gitxsan relations with neighbouring First Nations moves into stories of the region's earliest Euro-Canadian inhabitants, he demonstrates the tension between the Gitxsan who had no reason to believe their relationship to and jurisdiction over their territories changed with the arrival of Euro-Canadians, and settlers who assumed full implementation of colonial law in the region. For instance, in 1874, trader and store merchant Thomas Hankin was the first settler to apply to the provincial government to pre-empt land along the upper Skeena River. Records of Gitxsan histories note, however, that Hankin farmed that land with the permission of the territory's chief, not on the government's authority: "It would have been difficult for Hankin to stake land without the permission or knowledge of the Gitxsan who owned it. According to Woosimlaxha/ Jimmy Williams, 'He never bought that place. Old Robinson [a former Woosimlaxha, ca. 1841-1923] is the one who placed . . . the Hankins there'" (N. Sterritt 138). Sterritt conveys this history by providing a copy of the archival record of Hankin's pre-emption application, which includes a rudimentary description and map of the location of this land not yet surveyed by the government, and juxtaposing it with an oral record of how Hankin ended up farming (but not purchasing or receiving title to) those acres along the

river. Indeed, Sterritt re-routes Hankin's claim to land through the Gitxsan histories and roots it in the authority of the house responsible for that territory. He does not even include in this chapter the government's response to Hankin's application; from the perspective in *Mapping My Way Home*, Hankin's place in this historical narrative map affirms the jurisdiction of Gitxsan house territories, not of the colonial government. It is not until twenty pages later, in a description of settler land pre-emption and early censuses of Gitxsan reserves, that Sterritt comments that it seems that the Hankin family did not receive government-granted title to the land until decades after Thomas Hankin died (159). Sterritt portrays the relationship between Hankin and the First Nations people he lived and worked alongside as friendly, but he also complicates Hankin's legacy.[18] When Hankin felt that "the Indians of this place" were threatening his business endeavours, he signed a petition, which Sterritt replicates in the text, that five settlers sent to the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia in 1878, requesting resident law enforcement that would uphold colonial law in the region and empower settlers to prevent "the Indians" from "building their houses on land owned by us"; in the settlers' view, the presence of an authority was necessary to support them as taxpaying residents of a remote government townsite and to avoid "future trouble and expense" by corralling

[18] Sterritt often uses the recorded and translated interviews of Gitxsan people conducted by ethnologists like Marius Barbeau. In the case of Thomas Hankin's story, Sterritt points out the potential bias in comments like those of Gamayan/Charles Mark (whose grandfather and Hankin "called themselves brothers" [qtd. in Sterritt 137]) who said Hankin "never once all the time he was here, had to fight or to row with the Indians" (qtd. in Sterritt 139). Sterritt notes, however, that Constance Cox, one of Hankin's daughters, often translated for Barbeau, and that her presence "may have influenced the narrative" (139). Sterritt's decision to end the chapter about Thomas Hankin with the settler petition to bring colonial law enforcement to Hazelton affirms Sterritt's own view of Hankin's story that "his days among the Gitxsan were not exactly as Charles Mark described" (139). So, although Hankin and his wife, Margaret MacAulay, were the first mixed-race couple to live in Hazelton (MacAulay's mother is believed to have been Tlingit from Alaska) (125, 131) and raised their children with Gitxsan culture and language, Hankin was also one of the settler founders of Hazelton, a colonial community whose churches, schools, Indian agents, and RCMP detachment (2-3) maintain "very different histories, customs, values, and beliefs" (9) than those of the Gitxsan community of Gitanmaax that borders it.

the Indians under colonial control (qtd. in Sterritt 140). This early settler, despite working and living with and learning from First Nations people, followed the processes and adhered to the narrative that Euro-Canadian civilization was supplanting any culture he encountered, and would continue to do so. The question that Sterritt's telling of this part of Hankin's story raises in terms of my project is how settler authors might disrupt the narrative that persuaded settlers like Hankin, and those who follow him, that making this place their home is not dependent on respecting the laws and relationality that are Indigenous to this place. Sterritt's text engages in the work of foreclosing the possibility of settler colonialism achieving its end goal to displace Indigenous bodies, to dispossess their territories, and to erase their laws, histories, and rights. It is the aim of this project to respond by examining how texts written by settler authors begin to map a pathway out of the structure of settler colonialism, particularly for those inhabitants of this region, and of Canada more broadly, who might not yet understand their complicity in it or how they are affected by it—and have not yet begun to imagine other possibilities for being in this place.

Literary Cartography

A simple direction in an essay in Sarah de Leeuw's *Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16* led me and my sister to take a short detour during a summer road trip along the northern British Columbian highway, to a site we had never given much thought to before, often focused instead on counting down the kilometres to our destination. De Leeuw writes, "A thin but militaristically straight road intersects Highway 16; driving east you turn left off the highway, right where the road ends, and before you, opened up

and stretched taut, a field encircled by twelve tall crosses" (*Unmarked* 104). This field is the site of the now disappeared Lejac Indian Residential School; with the school's structures no longer standing, our gaze, when not focused on the highway, was drawn to Fraser Lake, on whose shores the field rests. On this occasion, though, my sister read the essay "To Preserve the Invisible: Lejac" aloud as we drove to the location, and we used the markers that de Leeuw includes in her narrative map—a decaying water silo, a white picket fence, a crucifix—to look for and acknowledge the traces of this settler colonial place, walking through a field that itself is the creation of Indigenous children's labour.

De Leeuw's creative representations of northwestern British Columbia have compelled me to respond to them as calls and guides to (re)visit, both in my mind and in the physical world, these often overlooked places and events that de Leeuw has enlivened in her writing. The literary essays, in particular, extend an invitation to readers to explore rather than reach a destination or conclusion about the landscapes and communities that de Leeuw knows and creates as places of hurt and loss, but also of hope and relationship. De Leeuw's view that readers who "generously" engage with her writing are "instantly in conversation" with the work (Interview 00:12:30-39), calls to mind the way Retallack describes the collaboration between creative forms and audiences: "Since a genre lives first in its composition and then in its realization by those who 'perform' it (I take writing and reading to be equally performative acts), the essay text, like the poem, like the musical score, is nothing other than notations for performance" (49). De Leeuw's composition of *Unmarked, Skeena,* and *Where It Hurts*, and my reading of these creative, narrative works, are informed by cartography—the study, reading, and creation of maps. Literary cartography, or creative narrative mapping, comes together with creative

nonfiction in de Leeuw's texts: "It is this sense of geographically rooted narratives linked inextricably with personal narratives, and the end result being more vivid, which is the motivating force behind my production of geographic narratives" (de Leeuw, "Poetic Place" 26). In her writing of northwestern British Columbia's places, de Leeuw attends to facts, terminology, and representations that are the purview of geographers seeking to understand or create physical and cultural landscapes, but then she uses literary language and forms to interrupt or disrupt their intelligibility by playing with scale, linearity, figurative language, and rhetorical uncertainty. As a result, de Leeuw creates literary maps that convey knowledge about northwestern British Columbia; evoke a sense of this place as vibrant, complex, and meaningful; and resist tidily wrapped up understandings of this place that a reader can easily move on from. As Sarah Krotz writes in a study of the relationship between literature and maps in Canada's literary history, "[W]riting itself becomes a form of cartography when the landscapes and spatial experiences that writers describe engender mental or cognitive maps in the reader" (133). That maps have played an integral role in the work of settler colonialism, and thus are a tool for the work of decolonization as well, raises the stakes of turning to literary cartography as both a form and method in de Leeuw's creative work, and as a framework for my analysis of it.

My reading of de Leeuw's literary landscapes and geographies focuses on how de Leeuw uses writing to mediate the world and to orient both personas and readers in place. In other words, the questions that drive my inquiry here include how she writes about a place, attributes meaning to a place, describes belonging to a place, and portrays residents of this region thinking about themselves in connection to this place. With these questions, I find myself tackling—on a smaller, more regionally-specific scale—an inquiry that

William H. New outlines in the introduction to *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing*. He asks, "Why and in what ways do [people] consider [the land] theirs? When do they identify with a particular land . . . ? How, moreover, do they communicate their degree of identification?" (5) De Leeuw's poetry and literary nonfiction address these questions and, while not providing conclusive answers, they encourage productive dialogue that recognizes the presence and power of a colonial narrative, respects Indigenous rights and title, and acknowledges both Indigenous and settler connections to the land. These texts emerge out of a specific cultural, political, and geographical context, and their exploration of Indigenous–settler relationships in the midst of land claims and reconciliation processes offer insights into the role of literature in shaping the future of these relationships. Sheila Peters writes in the introduction to her poetry collection *the weather from the west* that "[t]he layered trails of cows, prospectors and mountain goats hooked [her]" following her move to the Bulkley Valley, but that decades of learning about and from the Indigenous peoples whose traditional lands she settled in is what gives her a richer appreciation for what it means to relate to a place and for the significance of her presence there. A goal of my project is to draw readers' attention to—and invite them to be unsettled by—the reflections, arguments, and stories of authors, like de Leeuw, who have been confronted by and wrestled with questions concerning their role and responsibilities as inheritors of a history of colonial dispossession and settler privilege.

Although my work is not a formal study of theories of place and space, it necessarily begins with a consideration of what constitutes place and differentiates it from space. A life's work could be spent unraveling the complexity of the concept of

place and its role in various critical traditions. There is, however, "broad agreement . . . that place has an intimacy and 'known-ness' that the concept of space can lack" (de Leeuw, "Intimate Colonialisms" 342). Yi-Fu Tuan, in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, presents space and place as ideas that one can only define in relation to one another. Space is freedom, longing, openness; place is security, attachment, stability (3, 6). Space, which Tuan argues is abstract, becomes place, which is concrete, "as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (6). For cultural geographer Jon Anderson this getting to know a place and endowing it with value is a continuous process. He maintains that places are "dynamic entities," constantly in flux as various traces—the material and non-material "marks, residues or remnants left in place by cultural life"—are produced and interact with each other to influence the meaning culture constructs for a location (5). I similarly ground my study in a conception of place as dynamic and changeable, and also knowable on an intimate level. I am interested in how de Leeuw portrays both intimate knowledge of a place, as well as awareness of the constructed and fluctuating nature of place. Peters, again from the introduction to *the weather from the west*, writes that what she wants to capture in her work is "the way the land responds to the pressure of our feet upon it and changes us as well" (5). This belief in the reciprocally constructed relationship between person and place is a thematic thread throughout the literary texts that this project discusses.

I also consider how the texts present mobility, or routes, as an inextricable part of cultivating a sense of belonging, or roots, within this particular region. As social theorist Per Gustafson explains, there is a long tradition in the West of using the roots metaphor to describe a particular location that is regarded "as a source of place attachment,

emotional bonds, and community," with the most importance given to "one's 'home place'" (672). With increasing globalism, however, the routes metaphor has been taken up to describe "the relationship between place, people, and culture" that focuses on mobility as a source of "personal development and freedom" through new encounters and exchanges (670, 673). There is a tendency, Gustafson writes, to juxtapose these two relationships to place, in response to which people often identify one or the other as a more desirable way of being in the world. Citing the work of James Clifford and Paul Gilroy, Gustafson emphasizes "the complementarity of roots and routes" and postulates that challenging the idea that roots and routes are opposed to one another, or are mutually exclusive, opens up new and more complex ways of understanding one's relationship to place (670). If we conceive that neither a long history of nomadic movement along traplines, berry-laden pathways, and trade routes, nor a recent history of immigration and movement from one resource-based community to the next, preclude rootedness in northwestern British Columbia, then we can share our narratives of mobility without fear of diminishing our feeling of belonging. If all peoples who call this region home see both routes and roots as essential to their knowledge of this place, perhaps we can walk along routes together, sharing stories of one's roots and looking for moments of common ground in learning to live on, move through, and connect with this land.

I would like to connect the breaking down of the routes–roots dichotomy with J. Edward Chamberlin's disruption of the Western conception of nomadic cultures. He draws readers' attention to the contradiction of referring to colonial peoples wandering the world to establish outposts and farms as settlers, and Indigenous peoples living as hunter-gatherers in their traditional homelands as nomads (30). Rebecca Weaver-

Hightower notes how switching the labels was common in nineteenth-century literature for the purpose of justifying and naturalizing colonial settlement by "presenting the colonial town as natural and rooted and the indigenous people as nomadic with transient settlements" (133-34). By questioning who is settled—rooted—in a given place, together with considering that the routes of seemingly nomadic people are actually evidence of a deep rootedness to place, one might come to the question of what it means for Euro-Canadian people to be immigrants to an already settled place, rather than settlers of an empty territory.

Literary cartography draws attention to the process of representation of place in texts, focusing specifically on how the texts bring together spatial representation and storytelling. Robert T. Tally, Jr., whose research interests turned in the early 1990s to "space, place, and mapping in literary studies," originally envisioned literary cartography as something that writers, not critics, engage in. In the introduction to *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Tally writes that "[u]sing literary cartography, a writer maps the social spaces of his or her world; a geocritic would read these maps, drawing particular attention to the spatial practices involved in literature" (1). By bringing together a representation of a particular space and a narrative, an author creates a literary map—the storyteller becomes a literary cartographer. However, as more scholars focus on spatial representation in literature, the term is now being applied both to what the author creates and how the critic interprets. Sally Bushell, in her article "The Slipperiness of Literary Maps: Critical Cartography and Literary Cartography," provides an overview of the development of critical cartography as the movement toward viewing maps as texts that one can read or decode in order to

understand how they were shaped by, and then go on to shape, society (150). J. B. Harley, in his discussion of the relationship between maps, knowledge, and power, argues that maps, which he views as "a kind of language," "contribut[e] to dialogue in a socially constructed world" (53). Similar to written texts, maps—the product of a cartographer's decisions regarding content and style—"are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations" (53). Literary cartography, then, while also arising out of the interplay between literary theory and cartography, turns its attention to the various ways that literary texts and maps relate. Graham Huggan, in *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction*, puts forward his methodology for literary cartography, "deriv[ing] basic principles . . . by charting ideological links between the physical maps of geography and the conceptual maps of literature" (xv). Huggan considers how maps in literature—whether as motif, metaphor, or icon (i.e., a visual map included in the text)—function in ways similar to visual maps, such as how they can marginalize a people or place through the inclusion and exclusion of details, or how their framework delineates a centre and a periphery.

As a methodological approach to reading texts, literary cartography can follow a number of different avenues, including the following: reading visual maps that an author includes as paratexts; creating visual representations of spatial descriptions in a text; explicating an author's use of maps, mapping, surveying, topography, etc., as metaphors and motifs; and illuminating how the text itself functions as a map, that is, how it orients readers to the place it portrays. Bushell, for example, studies literary mapping that

considers how one might "read and interpret a map when it is presented alongside the text in a work of fiction" (149). Franco Moretti, in *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary Theory*, takes places described in texts and plots them out visually, creating a map for the text. He argues that creating such "literary maps" offers a productive starting point for textual analysis, because they reveal previously hidden patterns in the text's spatial representation (53). In yet a different literary cartographic reading, Katja Sarkowsky discusses Thomas King's use of maps as metaphor and motif in his work to reveal and criticize "asymmetrical power relations and oppressive structures" (215). For my own approach to literary cartography as a reading methodology, I am guided by de Leeuw's poetry and literary nonfiction to discuss the works themselves as maps, and to analyze the language and tropes related to geography, mapping, and routes that de Leeuw uses to give meaning to the places she is inviting readers to experience with her. Narrative mapping enables authors to orient readers in a particular way, signaling them, for instance, to pay attention to the significance of borders, place names, ecological distinctiveness, inter-national disputes, and traditional and contemporary land use. I turn again, therefore, to Tally for my entry into literary cartography:

> In a manner of speaking, literature also functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, situating them in a kind of imaginary space, and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live. Or maybe literature helps readers get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live, or will live in times to come. From a writer's perspective, maybe literature provides a way of mapping the spaces encountered or imagined in the author's experience. Completely apart

> from those many literary works which include actual maps, the stories frequently perform the function of maps. (*Spatiality* 2)

I am primarily interested here in how Sarah de Leeuw's *Unmarked, Skeena*, and *Where It Hurts* function as maps and lend themselves to a literary cartographic reading, as they both serve as textual maps and include mapping metaphors and motifs, as a means to disrupt colonial narratives in a place and to navigate Indigenous–settler relationships fraught with tensions over land claims, resource extraction, hunting and fishing rights, pipeline protests, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Because of the powerful role of maps in British Columbia's colonial history of Indigenous displacement and dispossession, it is productive to consider how literary maps might be employed to resist the "patterns of coercion and containment" of colonial cartography and to advocate, instead, mapping as "a medium of spatial perception that allows for the reformulation of links both within and between cultures" (Huggan 153). In the broad scheme of European powers building empires through colonization, maps, Harley summarizes, were "weapons of imperialism" used to gather and disseminate information that served the goals of conquest through "pacification, civilization, and exploitation" in the colonies that the maps outlined (57).

In British Columbia, following the Land Ordinance of 1861, the Crown enabled settlers to acquire land that was not designated for an Indian reservation, as long as the settler agreed to permanently reside there and to improve the land according to Euro-Canadian standards: "In such instances the would-be settler simply *wrote a description* and *sketched a map* of the selected land and submitted both to the surveyor general in Victoria for registration" (Raibmon 63; emphasis added). Textual and visual maps were

integral to this act of settler colonial dispossession that created what de Leeuw refers to as a colonial geography ("Intimate Colonialisms" 340). Historian and scholar Paige Raibmon provides multiple historical examples of settlers whose actions, whether aligning with or in contradiction to government policy aimed at displacing Indigenous peoples, rendered them participants in a "choreography of dispossession" for "transforming Aboriginal territory into settlement lands" (69, 58). In the Bulkley Valley, the Crown granted to Boer War veterans land that the Witsuwit'en cleared and built homes on, but where they lived only during certain seasons (Mills 9). Peters, in *Canyon Creek: a script*, portrays one such dispossession, revealing and questioning "the lines we've drawn on the land and between each other" (43): "The land situation was complicated. . . . Speculators had been picking up scrip, coming north, staking and registering land. They weren't supposed to stake land Indians were occupying, but those clever Wet'suwet'en knew the land well and were living on some of the prime farm land along the Bulkley Valley Road" (20). Peters's references to land surveying are part of her creation of a literary map that seeks not to delineate new boundaries or fixed territories as the result of an ever-lengthening and -developing settler presence, but to challenge the ignorance of settlers, like herself, who know little to nothing of the land's history before they claimed ownership of it.

Although many maps continue to reinforce the power of the settler majority over the lands that the colonial narrative convinced them they had the right to take, scholars are turning our attention to how maps might be "deployed as a strategy to counter hegemonic models of space" (Sarkowsky 210). Since both maps and literary texts construct reality through what they selectively represent, new maps and texts—and the

combination of the two, whether as textual maps or maps alongside texts—can reveal discrepancies, challenge previous representations, and unsettle colonial perceptions of a particular place. Even though any map that attempts to revise the colonial legacy will be equally fraught with the provisional and constructed nature of cartography—"incomplete, indeterminate, and insecure"—I maintain, along with Huggan, that "it is in that state of insecurity" that cultures on disputed territories "may both reconceptualize their past and map out their different visions of the future" (xvi). Indeed, de Leeuw's choice of poetry and literary nonfiction embraces the uncertainty and incompleteness of the maps she constructs. Joan Retallack suggests that the essay form acknowledges the writer's limitations as they explore the ideas and possibilities of the world they seek to represent, and that the writer therefore needs the collaborative "help of an intelligent, informed, interested reader" (49). I offer this project as my attempt to be that reader for de Leeuw's literary cartographies of northwestern British Columbia as I add this layer of dialogue and interpretation to her narrative maps, and call for other readers of her work to do so as well.

Dissertation Overview

In the first chapter, I examine the ways that de Leeuw employs creative literary mapping to represent the meaning of, and to give voice to, the rural, resource-economy communities that populate the forested and mountainous landscapes through which northern British Columbia's highways wind. Both of de Leeuw's collections of literary essays—*Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16* and *Where It Hurts*—recognize that such places are entangled in Canada's narratives of settlement and natural resources

development, narratives that the federal and provincial governments make a concerted effort to bolster, particularly in these places of which de Leeuw writes, because First Nations hold title to much of the land and have not yet finalized treaties with Canada. The maps that de Leeuw creates of stories from living and working in these communities convey information about their physical and cultural geographies. But the maps also illustrate and contemplate the precarity of communities that exist on the edge of wider public recognition and that were built primarily for extraction industries with the support of settler governments, rather than in relationship with the land and the peoples who live there. My discussion of the essay collections therefore begins by considering of the role of maps and narratives in the work of colonization in northwestern British Columbia. It then builds to argue that reading de Leeuw's narrative maps empowers potential challenges, in collaboration with other modes of decolonial action, to the ongoing project of settler colonialism.

The chapter's first close reading of de Leeuw's texts examines the form of the visual and narrative maps in *Unmarked* and asserts that the text disorients readers by resisting a unified, linear narrative and a coherent cartographic representation. This disorientation, I maintain, disrupts the idea that the rural settler communities marked on de Leeuw's maps can achieve a sustainable and desired future if they prioritize meeting the demands of Canada's resource extraction industries. The essays expect readers to repeatedly reorient themselves to the places the narratives represent at different scales, from varying angles, and with changing tones. Subsequently, there are tensions and contradictions in the text that prompt readers to practice carrying multiple narratives of place. The chapter then develops this reading of the disorienting and layered literary

maps to argue that de Leeuw represents these places as embedded in a geography of colonialism in which the communities and their residents are both the products and the producers, the victors and the victims, of a resource-extraction connection to the landscapes they call home. The essay collections do not chart a course from the present state of settler–Indigenous relations to a decolonized one, but I make the case that they do incite envisioning a new and productively unsettled sense of how to build communities in the landscapes of northwestern British Columbia.

The second chapter delves into an extended close reading of de Leeuw's *Skeena*, a long free verse poem—written in the voice of the Skeena River as de Leeuw hears it—that flows around excerpts of stories that Indigenous and settler peoples, past and present, have told of this river through myths, newspaper articles, family histories, scientific studies, archival collections, museum exhibits, and tourist information signs. As the river persona narrates glimpses of their journey across vast distances and beyond the limits of human history, readers can glean information about the Skeena's route; the flora, fauna, and geological formations that the waters interact with; the chemical composition and seasonal cycles of their currents; and the roads, railways, industries, and communities established on their banks. My discussion of the text therefore provides context for and literary analysis of the way that de Leeuw represents the place names she chooses for the river persona to claim, the histories that she gives the impression of drawing from the river's memory, and the knowledge that she conveys from the river's experiences and juxtaposes with records that settlers, scientists, and scholars have compiled.

But *Skeena* seeks to do more than to educate. De Leeuw's poetic representation of the river's voice asks readers to hear and view the Skeena as a relational other-than-

human being who is animate and has agency in creating the places that they and their tributaries sustain and connect. The Skeena is a witness to, is affected by, and is a participant in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living and working in the watershed, and *Skeena* provokes readers to consider this relationship from the waters' view. So, I situate my reading of *Skeena* within a larger dialogue of writers and scholars who discuss the potential for a watershed mindset—cultivating a view from water and our dependency on it—to foster decolonial thinking in which water bodies are relatives and the ongoing land claims of northwestern British Columbia are responsible to and for these waters. In sum, the second chapter argues for reading de Leeuw's *Skeena* as a map of a storied river that orients us differently within northwestern British Columbia. It envisions, I assert, the Skeena watershed as a place where Indigenous peoples' millennia-long and continuing presence has primacy in the rivers' experience of shaping and being shaped by human culture; where non-Indigenous settlers have made their marks and celebrated achievements in and alongside the waters, but whose colonial project is remarkable for the harm it causes and its uncertain future; and where rivers offer language and knowledge for how to live in this place with an understanding of our shared interdependency on and necessary respect for the watershed.

The final chapter focuses specifically on literary representations of Highway 16—one of the most consistently and definitely marked spaces on maps of northern British Columbia and a primary means for moving through it—and its reputation as the Highway of Tears. The highway has earned this appellation and the related notoriety due to the disproportionately high number of women and girls who go missing from or are murdered along or near this road and to the tragedies' links to colonial violence against

and displacement of Indigenous peoples. In particular, I offer critical readings of Adrianne Harun's novel *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* and Sarah de Leeuw's creative nonfiction essay "Soft Shouldered," and examine what these texts convey to readers about what it means to both speak about responsibility, and to write responsibly, on the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Similar to the literary maps discussed in the previous chapters, de Leeuw's "Soft Shouldered" locates readers in the geographical and cultural landscapes of northwestern British Columbia and directs their gaze to what is often unmarked or overlooked in such landscapes in order to identify, name, recognize, and creatively represent the value of people and places harmed by or lost to the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism. However, for this chapter I chose to also include an extended analysis of a literary text not written by de Leeuw. Harun's *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* is a fictionalized account of a young Indigenous woman in northern British Columbia who disappears from a highway that strikingly resembles the Highway of Tears (but is not named as such), and of her friends and family who seek to understand this loss. Harun, like de Leeuw, is an educated, white, settler woman whose writing receives institutional support and attention that expands her audience, and the novel was published in the year following readers' first encounter with "Soft Shouldered." But Harun is also a resident of the United States whose introduction to and experiences of Highway 16 and its stories of violence are those of an outsider, a tourist or visitor, and a curious consumer of media about the Highway of Tears. My critical reading throughout this project of the way that de Leeuw writes northern British Columbia places guides my interpretation and analysis of Harun's novel.

Both authors portray evocative landscapes that capture the moods of the highway space in northern British Columbia, but I argue that de Leeuw's essay more carefully and responsibly represents the cultural and colonial landscapes through which the highway winds and in which the missing and murdered are too often unnoticed or perceived of as disposable or inevitably lost. I begin the chapter with an overview of the Highway of Tears Symposium that took place in Prince George, British Columbia in 2006, and of subsequent commission reports, to provide context for my interpretation of if and how Harun's and de Leeuw's texts draw the connections between the images they create of the missing and murdered and the structural violence enacted against those people whose lives were the inspiration for such images. In contrast to Harun's novel, de Leeuw's essay, I maintain, offers a model for writing places like the Highway of Tears where such violence is enacted, particularly for writers and audiences who, like de Leeuw, straddle the boundary of being both an insider to the places shaped by colonial spaces like Highway 16 and an outsider to the experiences of the missing and murdered women and girls and their families.

The writings of Sarah de Leeuw that this project reads are first and foremost creative literary texts that play with form and language in remarkable and thought-provoking ways. But they are also settler narratives of belonging to geographical and cultural landscapes, and they strive not to perpetuate the colonial dispossession, invisibilizing, or violence that Indigenous peoples experience in northwestern British Columbia and in Canada more broadly. Together these chapters craft a dissertation that critically analyzes de Leeuw's creative portrayals of northwestern British Columbia's peoples and places in order to encourage, and provide a model for, reading literary maps

that challenge colonial narratives that enable settler peoples to feel secure in making claims to and benefitting from the land. De Leeuw's stories orient readers—through the locations the texts mark or leave unmarked; the boundaries they draw or challenge; the place names they preserve or replace; and the space they present as empty or peopled, peripheral or central—to move through her imagined spaces and the tangible places they represent along routes headed towards a decolonial future.

Chapter One: Sarah de Leeuw's Settler Literary Cartographies of Northwestern British Columbia's Unmarked Places

"A Sure Road to Wealth." This slogan is inscribed on an illustration of a roadway filled with settler families walking towards "Fort Fraser, B.C.: The Land of Big Crops." The road cuts through neatly parceled, river-adjacent agricultural land; on this land, the illustrator includes two bags of cash that dwarf the landscape and are labelled "$ Dollars From Nechaco Farms" (Hayes 260). This 1913 advertisement for land in the northern interior of British Columbia along the new Grand Trunk Pacific railway line appears in *British Columbia: A New Historical Atlas*, researched and annotated by Derek Hayes. His curated maps and images include a collection of early twentieth-century advertisements and townsite maps that demonstrate a common rhetorical tone: "Birmingham Townsite—Destined to be the Second Greatest City in British Columbia" (259); "Smithers—One of the last big opportunities in Western Canada offered you by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway" (262); "put ten dollars into the new city of Hazelton and start yourself on the road to wealth" (264). Destiny. Opportunity. Wealth. These alluring claims, together with the fine-print assurances about the future of the yet unrealized cities, construct the narrative that land is available and accessible in northern British Columbia, that it is an achievable and guaranteed investment for "the man of small means" (259), and that it is well-situated and -suited to being made valuable through settler endeavour. This narrative cultivated and took advantage of what historical geographer Cole Harris categorizes as immigrant self-interest that injected momentum into the colonial project of dispossession, development, and settlement of land in British Columbia (Harris 171).

These visual and rhetorical inducements are clearly an instrument of colonial power. As Harris succinctly states, “Colonies entailed settlers, and settlers required land” (169). Such representations communicate the availability of empty, unused land and entice settlers to capitalize on the opportunity. However, Harris maintains that for a “fuller understanding of colonial powers” (165), such cultural objects need to be contextualized within the material experience of the dispossession of Indigenous land and examined without presumptions about the significance of their representation of space within the process by which British Columbia became and is sustained as a settler colonial geography (168). In other words, we cannot assume the impact that such advertisements and maps had on establishing the settlements they extol, nor can we remark on their role within the colonization of the province, without accounting for the infrastructure by which the land was made available, and for the belief in a better future that motivated settlers to seek it out**.** In his article “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” Harris asserts that it is unhelpful for explaining colonial power to simply emphasize the complexity of this power without disaggregating its various forms and methods and examining how each operates, how they intersect, and to what effect (179). Consequently, he critiques postcolonial scholarship for centering colonial culture—particularly the “assumptions and representations” in its discourse (such as “the binary of civilization/savagery”) and its “procedures of knowledge generation”—as the principal, dominant power and momentum of colonialism (165). No matter how many settlers made their way to Hazelton after imagining which plot on the townsite map they would purchase, cultivate, and civilize, such representations of this land did not create or enforce the reserves to which their would-be Gitxsan neighbours

were relocated. Historian Paige Raibmon distinguishes between Indian policy, settler policy, and settler practice when she explains the production in British Columbia of what she calls "settlement lands," referring "both to lands required for the settlement of Aboriginal claims and lands claimed by settler society and its descendants" (57). Indian policy allocated land for reserves and enforced confinement of First Nations to these boundaries (58), and settler policy allowed white settlers to pre-empt Crown land (63). Settler practice refers to the numerous "microtechniques of dispossession" (63), including individual acts of land appropriation and the mundanities of settler life, that accumulated to unmake Indigenous hereditary territories and entrench the new "colonial reserve geography" (58). I would argue that the visual and narrative representations compiled by Hayes of Euro-Canadian settlers claiming available land fit into this category of settler practice. Companies used these representations, which normalize and naturalize settler movement into the region, to profit from land made available through the dispossession enacted by Indian and settler colonial policies. Such cultural artefacts were a technique to propel, manage and sustain the work of settler colonialism made possible by the policies.

Many of the promoted settler communities were established and continue to draw new residents, immigrants, investors, and tourists. Many people did and still are able to achieve the promised prosperity on land that remains under the jurisdiction of the federal and provincial governments despite the fact that First Nations neither ceded nor sold their territories. But other maps and narratives of the lives that settlers have built for themselves and the future that is available in this part of the province have emerged as well. Settler poet, essayist, and cultural geographer Sarah de Leeuw, for example, has published two collections of literary essays—*Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16*

(2004) and *Where It Hurts* (2017)—that take readers into towns, reserves, and camps across northwestern British Columbia, and create a sense of place grounded in the physical geography and how people move through it and build communities on it. Rather than chart a course for parades of settlers venturing into vast areas of virgin land that they can develop as the next hubs of trade, agriculture, and economic growth, these essays represent the movement of various people to and through economically precarious towns, looking for work, for escape, for belonging, and for community. De Leeuw's essays narratively map these places that are often outside the purview of, or unremarked on by, people who do not live in or have ties to this part of the province. These places carry and preserve legacies of displacing and marginalizing Indigenous peoples in order to access and use their lands, but there is uncertainty that arises about and from the land use that was then established and naturalized, which de Leeuw's portrayals of these places provocatively illustrate and examine. It is this orientation toward uncertainty in these narratives that, I argue, makes them an instrument to support the work of decolonization.

How might we read *Unmarked* and *Where It Hurts* within a region where land is being reclaimed and re-mapped by decolonial acts of Indigenous sovereignty and assertion of title that claim land for First Nations beyond reserves, such as the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* case and the Unist'ot'en Camp? Such acts refuse and challenge the authority of institutions that the settler colonial state uses to declare and defend its sovereignty, the significance and implications of which most Canadians do not (yet) fully comprehend. These unequivocal reminders of the incomplete and unresolved project of settler colonialism offer momentous opportunities for settlers to participate cooperatively in decolonial work by confronting and re-writing their Western discourses and maps that

mutually constitute structures that build and manage settler colonial society through what Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman describes as "the violent erasure of alternative modes of mapping and geographic understanding" (2). The Unist'ot'en Camp is an expression of one such alternative—Wet'suwet'en *yin tah* (territory) governed by hereditary house groups within a matrilineal clan system that the Unist'ot'en are upholding. Thinking critically about how de Leeuw, who presents her approach to writing as anti-colonial re-forming and -graphing, plays with the language and forms settlers use for creating and communicating place, is one starting point for imagining and producing places in northern British Columbia where non-Indigenous geographies do not always and already erase Indigenous peoples from their territories and presume the success and completion of settler colonialism.

I here preface my discussion of de Leeuw's literary cartographies by acknowledging that representation and knowledge creation that strives to challenge, complicate, or reconfigure settler colonialism cannot, on its own, decolonize a geography that was not constructed solely or principally through a culture of colonialism. De Leeuw's essay collections merit critical literary analysis for the way she plays with form and narrative voice and develops extended metaphors that entangle physical and cultural geographies in interesting ways. In her review of *Unmarked* for the *BC Studies* academic journal, Jocelyn Smith writes that each chapter "is a beautifully crafted essay, loosely connected with the others but able to stand alone, on the complexities and sadness—there is little happiness in this book—of life in the settlements through which de Leeuw's journey pulls her" (107). *Where It Hurts* similarly receives recognition for the ways that de Leeuw "infus[es] landscapes with personal metaphors" (DeCoste 145), "use[s]

landscape as a visible symbol of unseen turmoil" (Ens), and writes as a poet, in that "[w]hat she chooses to say is intimately tied and ultimately revealed by the way she chooses to say it" (Yanofsky). Much of this chapter therefore engages in close reading the texts' language and form.

Yet this larger project is an examination of the anti-colonial work that such texts might do, particularly through what is novel in their use of language and form. In essays in *Where It Hurts*, de Leeuw "gives a quiet nod to colonization" through imagery and wordplay, writes Melinda Kachina Bige in a review of the collection (159). This chapter considers the implications of such literary gestures. So, aligned with Harris's theorization of intersecting colonial powers, I read de Leeuw's narrative maps as situated and contextualized within a specific space that was created through the intersections of colonial powers grounded in land first and foremost, and as best understood in terms of their potential to challenge settler colonialism in partnership with other modes and manifestations of decolonial power.

Approaching Decolonization from Places of Uncertainty

Investigating British Columbia as "a site where colonialism was actually practiced," Cole Harris models the creation of a "situated knowledge of colonial practices and power relations" that assesses and accounts for "the relative weight of different agents of colonial power . . ." (166). In terms of the power wielded by the land advertisements promoting settlement of Indigenous land, it is worth noting the absence of any mention of Indigenous peoples and of any acknowledgement of how real estate and investment companies acquired this land to sell. Identifying that such promotional

materials erase Indigenous presence and assume the imperial concept of terra nullius offers insight into how the province legitimized settlement. Harris cautions, however, that too narrow a focus on this identification risks decontextualizing discourse and representation from the other forms of power—physical force, the state apparatus, and "the interest of capital and settlers in land"—that were the preconditions and impetus for settler colonialism (174). Take, for example, a collection of pamphlets and posters that position the emerging northern port city of Prince Rupert against a backdrop of expansive landscapes ready to be settled and connected to Canadian and global economies, adorned with slogans like "A Dawning Empire," "A Vast New Empire of which Prince Rupert is the Threshold," and "Barren Waste Five Years Ago—Today the Metropolis of the North" (Hayes 252-54). Rather than abstractly locate such advertisements in the tradition of Eurocentric imperial rhetoric rooted in the heart of the empire, Harris advocates focusing on the situated practice of colonialism in this "edge of empire." As he states, "Missionaries excepted, immigrants had not come to British Columbia to civilize native people. They had been attracted by the prospect of unused land" (Harris 171). In other words, while "[a] discourse that treated colonial land as waste awaiting development . . . was exceedingly serviceable" and offered legitimation for settlers possessing the land, it "did not provide the momentum for settler colonialism" in such places (174). For men excluded from owning and profiting from land elsewhere, the prospect of changing this reality, not the desire to civilize land or people, brought them to the new province.

A discussion of the language and texts of settlement offers a limited and decontextualized understanding of colonialism if it does not account for the wider range of interrelated powers that constitute the system that introduced settler colonialism to

British Columbia (174)—such as "physical power and the supporting infrastructure of the state"—and that continue to manage it, such as laws, numbers, and maps (165). Beliefs in, assumptions about, and representations of Euro-Canadian superiority, civilization, and progress have certainly pervaded and shaped British Columbia since its creation as a British settler colony. Literary texts were integral to the dissemination and normalization of such narratives. But this colonial cultural discourse could not construct, maintain, or govern this settler colonial space on its own. Harris convincingly argues that settler colonial power is multiple and intersects in various ways. Colonial maps, for example, "conceptualized . . . in Eurocentric terms" the recently dispossessed land that was still unfamiliar to settlers (175). Settlers could pre-empt what they viewed as unoccupied and unused land by sketching a map of the area that they intended to make their private property; surveyors would later create "a more precise cartography" of these boundaries and of proposed reserve lands, maps that provincial commissioners would use to finalize and bureaucratize British Columbia's geography of reserves (175-76). Settlers continue to use these conventional maps—tools to assert and substantiate Canadian sovereignty—to manage both their claims to and understanding of land that is "ours" and the confinement of Indigenous peoples and knowledges to the parcels of land the Crown deemed could be "theirs" in the form of reserves. It follows, then, that decolonial work would also need to comprise different and intersecting tools and modes of power that move beyond representation and discourse analysis to the material realities and lived experiences of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous scholars repeatedly call for meaningful critiques and disassembling of settler colonialism that move beyond performative language and symbolic acts to good

faith actions that not only rectify systemic inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health, education, employment, incarceration, and quality of life, but that also recognize and respond to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. In particular, these calls are often directed at the moves of colonial institutions supposedly towards reconciliation, indigenization, or decolonization. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson acknowledges the appeal of believing that when Canadian institutions and their representatives engage in Indigenous protocols or ceremonies it marks a shift away from the practices that entrench settler colonialism (45-46), such as the erasure of Indigenous peoples. Yet she emphasizes that such shifts, even if they are more than superficial, do little to divest settler colonialism of its power. For Simpson, dismantling settler colonialism and creating an alternative relationship with settler Canadians and their state requires nothing less than Indigenous peoples engaging in "unapologetic placed-based nationhoods using Indigenous practices and operating in an ethical and principled way from an intact land base" (50). In other words, and to adapt Harris's categorization of colonial powers, developing cultural discourse that legitimizes decolonization and creating maps, data, and laws that would manage decolonization cannot end settler colonialism without also taking apart and replacing that which enables and gives momentum to it, namely, land dispossession, the Canadian state, and settler capitalism. In their often-referenced article "Decolonization is not a metaphor," Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, who identifies himself in an article footnote as a "settler/trespasser/scholar" (3n1), similarly decry decolonization that becomes symbolic or disconnected from settler dispossession of Indigenous land. They do so because without actual, substantive restitution, the settler state remains, but with a new façade:

"[D]ecolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice" (21). Substitutes for actual decolonization are increasingly prevalent in Canadian political and educational institutions. Speaking from her experiences as a professor of geography at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Mushkegowuk scholar Michelle Daigle asserts that post–Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) apologies, land acknowledgements, and celebrations of Indigenous cultures do not change the fact that this university, along with its counterparts across the country, remains "an intrinsic part of the settler colonial state" that ultimately reproduces rather than challenges colonial power (6). In agreement with these scholars on the meaning of decolonization, I present one of the premises of this chapter: if a dialogue about decolonization does not include the issue of land and does not move toward an actionable plan for restitution of land and sovereign Indigenous governance of it, the conversation is not actually about decolonization.

Mindful of these Indigenous critiques of focusing on symbolic decolonization, and of Harris's critique of separating and elevating the power of colonial discourse, this chapter examines the role and value of reading de Leeuw's literary representations of northwestern British Columbia as narrative cartographies of human relationships to this land, the unceded Indigenous territories on which the province has been built. Given that British Columbia remains a settler colonial space, it is justifiable to read any literary text that claims to explore or convey a sense of place in northern British Columbia with the question of how the work is situated in relation to settler colonialism and its systems of power. If representations of uncivilized natives living in vast areas of mostly empty land that they were not using correctly according to Euro-Canadian standards were a pervasive

and integral aspect of cultural discourse that served "[t]he legitimation of and moral justification for dispossession" and if maps are a technology to manage this continued dispossession (Harris 179), then, I maintain, narrative maps that do not presume settler colonialism as the necessary and forgone present and future of this place would serve the decolonizing work of land restitution. In her work as an activism-oriented anti-colonial poet-geographer, Sarah de Leeuw is committed to disrupting and rethinking how we write about place and geographies, particularly in terms of how settlers understand colonial violence and situate themselves in relation to it (de Leeuw, "Writing as Righting" 309). She imparts a call to geographers (especially those who are non-Indigenous settlers) that she takes up in her own writing as well: "We need new forms of stories, we need re-formed writing, writing that works to right, writing that refuses the very forms, the graphings, that have assisted in building the colonial violence pervading so many geographies, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous" (316).

De Leeuw has lived and worked in many of the northern British Columbia communities once represented, as Hayes's atlas shows, as ripe for potentially unfettered development and settler prosperity. She has published two collections of personal essays about her experiences of these places as a non-Indigenous person and the relationships that she and other residents create with each other and with the landscapes in the ways that they arrive, move through, and make homes in this region. Such relationships and movements are often still intertwined with how government and industry conceive of and administer the use of the region's fields, forests, mountains, rivers, and oceans. In these landscapes perceived primarily as resource-rich, the settler communities did not develop into the shiny metropolises of the imagined futures that early settlers had been promised

and set out to attain. And yet these places are markers of achievement; they are the products and sustainers of settler colonialism possessing land belonging to sovereign First Nations and re-making it as colonial space. Northern British Columbia's communities manage colonial space by displacing, distancing, and obstructing the members of neighbouring First Nations from their own territories. De Leeuw's representations of these communities that are entangled in settler colonialism create knowledge about how the current iteration of settler interest in profiting from the land shapes the human geographies of the region. To use Harris's articulation of dispossession again, the colonial powers that enabled this settler society to emerge constructed "a new human geography" in British Columbia. In other words, the settings that de Leeuw portrays and imbues with meaning—including "the survey lines, the property boundaries, the roads and railways, the farms, the industrial camps, the towns" (Harris 178)—are integral elements of the human geographies that settlers "[s]uperimposed on [First Nations'] former lands" (178), so that the movements of Indigenous peoples "were blocked or channeled, and the resources on which they had always lived were increasingly out of reach" (179). De Leeuw's body of literary and scholarly writing, especially her research into how rural and northern sociocultural colonial geographies create health and economic inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, acknowledges the origins, manifestation, and effects of British Columbia's settler colonialism that Harris narrates in his work, and addresses ongoing settler complicity in maintaining this status quo.

Here I turn to the work of Mishuana Goeman, who theorizes the intersections of mapping and storytelling that, as part of "spatial decolonization," does not erase

Indigenous knowledges, nations, and bodies (Goeman 4). Perhaps for the sake of brevity and clarity, Harris presents discourse, including literary narratives, as legitimizing settler colonialism, and maps, such as townsites, reserve allocations, treaty negotiations, as technologies that manage dispossession. Narrative maps like the ones de Leeuw crafts require thinking through how these two modes of power might work together towards decolonization by delegitimizing settler colonialism and unfixing and moving the boundaries that have shaped Indigenous and settler relations with each other and with the land. I maintain that much of de Leeuw's work in writing literary cartographies aligns with Goeman's work to "produc[e] decolonized spatial knowledges and attendant geographies that acknowledge colonial spatial process as ongoing but imbued with power struggles" (11). In *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, Goeman discusses the work of Native women writers who "employ traditional and new tribal stories" to "(re)map" the land and their past, present, and future relationships to it, as both individuals and nations (3). There is power in these literary mappings, she asserts, to "generate new possibilities" (3) through new "geographic imagining" for the way we configure space, construct place, and "put forth sets of social relations that lead us in directions beyond a settler heteropatriarchal mapping of space" (15). Unlike the work that Goeman's study examines, de Leeuw's writing is not grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and futures. However, Goeman reminds us that all North Americans are situated in "socially constructed spaces" that often have the power to constrain and limit us, a power that is often intertwined with colonialism (1). Consequently, she examines Native women's writing for how it thinks through and beyond the "paradoxes and contradictions" of colonialism (4) and posits that "[a] fruitful acknowledgement of the

pain and chaos of colonization provides the fertile ground needed for decolonization" (13). In this chapter, I argue that de Leeuw's narrative mapping similarly acknowledges that structures of colonialism are tied up in place-making and that the resulting colonial violence, which disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples, distorts relationships to land and community.

But, unlike Goeman's project, de Leeuw's work does not, and does not claim to, contest settler colonial geographies through Indigenous forms of mapping or Indigenous understandings of being and belonging to the territories on which British Columbia has been mapped. Rather, from a settler perspective, de Leeuw models and prompts—primarily for a settler audience—a critical and creative mapping of a sense of place in northern British Columbia that does not desire or presume possible a narrative of settler certainty and rootedness best served by the absence of the peoples, histories, cultures, laws, and rights of the Haida, Nisga'a, Haisla, Tsimshian (Ts'msyen), Gitxsan, Witsuwit'en, and Dakelh.

As settler narrative cartographies, de Leeuw's literary essays convey knowledge derived from familiarity, experience, and shared stories of how these places and their inhabitants reciprocally mark one another. Yet, these maps and readers' movement through them are disorienting and even unsettling at times. The narratives often bring readers into places they have little to no knowledge of and leave them unclear how to orient themselves to these places. Are they observers, participants, interlopers, guests, tourists, residents? It is this uncertainty—not about whether the cultural geographies of these places have meaning, but about how to understand and be in these places with good relations—that this chapter focuses on as a space for decolonial work.

In the Canadian context, both the federal and provincial settler colonial governments often use citizens' desire for certainty, particularly certainty of economic opportunity and prosperity, and of access to or private ownership of land, to manage the dispossession of Indigenous territories. For many residents of British Columbia, "[i]t is practically a truism," writes Raibmon, that it is too late to repatriate land and that there is not enough land available to settle Aboriginal claims (57-58, 61-62), even though ninety-four percent of British Columbia's territory is provincial Crown land ("Working"). For those people who hold such views, the matter of them living on and benefitting from the land is resolved, even if they are willing to admit that how the province acquired the land was reprehensible. This certainty of the inevitability of the status quo forecloses alternative understandings of both current and potential future uses and sharing of land. Consequently, there are often incommensurable starting points for dialogue even when settlers reach out with good intentions. Daigle writes about how Canadians' recent interest in reconciliation regularly involves "well-intentioned white Canadians . . . want[ing] to know specific steps and courses of action they could take to reconcile their relationship with Indigenous peoples" (3). This desire for a precise and fixed plan fails to recognize the generous, ongoing, and place-specific negotiation and imagination that will be required to decolonize Canada. For example, Daigle describes participating on a panel discussing whether Indigenous self-determination and Canadian dependence on resource extraction could be reconciled: "The framing of the panel implied an unwillingness to reckon with the structural colonial foundations that such resource extraction is facilitated by and reproduces" (3). In other words, there were panel participants who, like many residents of British Columbia, were certain that Canada's current relationship to the land

is settled, but were uncertain how to fit Indigenous sovereignty into this model.

Conversely, the BC Treaty Commission (BCTC) was established in 1992 to facilitate treaty negotiations between First Nations, British Columbia, and Canada and "to settle the B.C. land question . . ." (Manuel and Derrickson 89). The BCTC's website expressly states that "[a]chieving certainty is a primary goal of the BC treaty negotiations process"—here, certainty means "to have clearly defined land ownership and jurisdiction," which creates "predictability" that, in part, will encourage economic investment and development ("Frequently Asked Questions"). Although this process concedes that it is not too late and that there is land available for settlement claims, its goal is still certainty for settlers. Secwepemc political activist Arthur Manuel argues that this language of certainty in treaty negotiations is a meaningless change in terminology that the government employs to obscure that it is still working to extinguish Aboriginal rights and title (Manuel and Derrickson 90). In *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization*, Eva Mackey also examines the language and debate around, and the legal implications of, Canada's comprehensive land claims process. She arrives at the same conclusion: "The goal of 'extinguishment' in land settlements has often been to remove *undefined* and thus *uncertain* Aboriginal rights and turn them into *fixed, definable* and *certain* or *predictable* rights" (61). Thus, for Manuel and for many First Nations in British Columbia, Canada's approach to modern treaty making is a non-starter in terms of preserving their rights and achieving Indigenous sovereignty. Indeed, in both framings of if and how to resolve the question of land where settler certainty is the goal, decolonization becomes impossible.

Mackey writes that because there is no "tried and tested path" or "pre-scripted"

route to decolonization that can be applied in all contexts, settlers should think of treaty as an ongoing relationship and imagine this act as learning how to canoe alongside Indigenous peoples without crashing into or taking over their boats: "To be able to even take a step into the treaty canoe, we settlers might first have to unsettle our expectations of certainty about the origin, the route and the destination, and learn to embrace the uncertainty of the voyage" (191). Following this metaphor of settlers journeying an uncharted course alongside Indigenous peoples, I move on to discussing de Leeuw's essays as an exercise in developing cartographic literacy in the marks of settler movement and uncertainty on colonial geographies as they make and unmake places.

Orienting Ourselves to Sarah de Leeuw's Literary Cartographies

When Sarah de Leeuw was eight years old, her father announced that their family would be moving from Vancouver Island to Haida Gwaii, an archipelago along British Columbia's northern Pacific coast. To help convey what the journey to their new home would entail, he traced his finger on a map along the route they would take through British Columbia and "mentioned place names [she] had never heard of" (*Unmarked* 1). However, with only a graphic representation of this new place, de Leeuw failed to grasp the implications of how this move would affect her life; this map did not communicate anything meaningful to her about their destination, Port Clements, or about how this community would engender a different sense of place than her home in Duncan. It was when she and the land and communities along Highway 16 reciprocally impressed their stories upon one another that she "discovered this landscape" for herself and could "detail the many truths" of its physical and cultural geographies: "In my mind, story of place is

inseparable from geography of place. The telling of stories is the creation of maps, words following a finger tracing the thin red lines of roads, the curvatures of topographic lines, the stories of landscapes passed through and passed on" (2). Through telling stories about and grounding them in a particular place, and creating narratives about that place that are focused on the geographical elements of its landscape and culture and how these concepts reciprocally shape one another, de Leeuw crafts what she calls "creative literary maps" (*Along* 28). Her literary cartographies of more than a dozen places across northwestern British Columbia, from Haida Gwaii to Prince George, meld creative narrative representations of place with geographic information about the landscape and its ecologies as well as of the sites of human habitation and their relationships with each other and with the land.

Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16, de Leeuw's first published collection of literary essays, is a work of creative literary mapping and her contribution to literature "published *as* works of geography" (*Along* 139). In her master's thesis, *Along Highway 16: A Creative Meditation on the Geography of Northwestern British Columbia*, de Leeuw cites the work of geographers who employ "narrative representations of place," such as Kent C. Ryden, to assert that "traditional modes of geographic inquiry (the map for instance) no longer suffice as representational methods" when it comes to understanding and communicating meaningfully about place (20). In response, she argues that narrative, by which she means "the recounting and representation in textual format of both real and imagined events" (3), combined with the more traditional inquiries of geographers can yield "a new, and ultimately more productive, way of investigating and representing place" (16). Literary maps, de Leeuw insists, both convey and create

knowledge about human interaction with place, which is the concern of cultural geographers, through layering stories of "experience and memory" onto landscapes (62).

A brief example from the first essay in *Unmarked* demonstrates how readers might distinguish between the author conveying geographic knowledge and creating it through literary maps. Describing her family's arrival in Port Clements, de Leeuw wonders how she could identify and indicate the beginning of this place and of her experiences there. She starts by mapping the markers we would expect of a traditional geographic representation of a place: a bend in the road, highway signs, a community sign—"Port Clements: Unincorporated" (*Unmarked* 4). This depiction conveys geographic knowledge about this landscape and human interaction with it, not unlike we would learn on a map or from a tourist centre. But de Leeuw goes on to write that "a better place to begin is Jack's house," because it lies at a crossroads where everyone must turn left or right, into town or away from it. During her time in the community, she learns that Jack had already lost two homes to fire and his third is being eaten through by rust and she observes his "life piled in front of his trailer" in the form of scrap materials, auto parts, and unfinished projects (5); these details that residents relate about "their history and geography with brilliance, humour, and empathy" (2) impress themselves onto de Leeuw's discovery of sense of place. Thus, Jack's home is the geographical marker for entering this community: "Everyone knows that when you see Jack's place you have made the drive home to Port Clements. His house announces home, declares for residents that just around the corner their own warm rooms rest in wait" (5). This place "speaks of continual loss yet infinite hope, an absolute certainty that in nothing there exists something" (6). For Jack's home to represent the beginning and the opening up of the

first of many overlooked communities de Leeuw would live in and to symbolize a feeling of home more broadly indicates the kind of knowledge de Leeuw strives to produce and share about these places and how humans live in relationship to them. Where others, if they see northern places at all, might observe loss, absence, remnants, or failure, de Leeuw, without erasing or ignoring the "miserable chaos of junk" (5), recognizes and marks renewal, memories, community, and shared knowledge.

De Leeuw's creative literary mapping of northwestern British Columbia focuses on rural, resource-economy communities that are mostly connected to one another and to the rest of the country by Highway 16. Having lived or worked in many of these communities, she seeks to "give voice and description to landscapes and places that have, from time to time, lacked extensive technically mapped representation, but by no means lack meaning as places" (*Along* 9-10). In her essay collections, it becomes clear that the meaning of these places is entangled in Canada's settler colonial apparatus to claim title to and authority over this part of the province that is largely not under treaty with local First Nations. The narratives that de Leeuw builds around the physical and cultural geographies of these places acknowledge the precarity of living in a resource-dependent economy and the hard work of non-Indigenous settler peoples to build homes and communities here. However, the narratives also produce geographic knowledge that confronts this understanding of these places, illustrating the fragile, violent, contingent, unsustainable, and not indigenous existence of communities constructed primarily in relation to extraction industries, rather than in relation to the land itself and the peoples who live there. In *Unmarked*, the way that de Leeuw integrates into her stories elements of visual representations of place and textual details about measurable geographical

phenomena reflects the possibility of understanding these places in new ways. The form of these essays guides readers to be unsettled by the narratives' content, namely, literary maps that prompt questioning and reimagining of cultural geographies that perpetuate settler colonialism.

The first part of the following critical analysis examines how the form of literary mapping that de Leeuw creates in *Unmarked* begins to disrupt the idea that these rural settler communities necessarily exist to support Canada's resource economy and that their current trajectory is toward a sustainable and desired future. Her essays intersperse narrative maps with visual maps that disorient; non-chronological and non-linear structures within each story and within the collection as a whole resist a unified narrative of progress from a distinct beginning to a clear future point; and shifts in narrative voice challenge the concept of there being a single perspective of this region.

Consequently, the essays repeatedly require readers to reorient themselves to a new position and perspective within the region and to grapple with any tensions or contradictions that might arise as a result. In the places that de Leeuw maps, altering the angle of our vision might reveal new eyes, a new perspective, looking back. For example, in "In a Field of Lava: The Nass Valley," she describes walking across the Nass River suspension bridge into the Nisga'a village of Gitwinksihlkw, where she had years earlier spent a summer cooking in a logging camp, and noticing for the first time a run-down Salvation Army church, which she went to get a better look at: "But as I bent lower, my hands freezing against the snow, eyes of bears and killer whales could still be made out. The huge logs making up the foundation were totem poles, hacked and sawed so the church could be built on top of them, slowly turning to earth in this tiny village on the

edge of the lava" (*Unmarked* 73). A simple bend of the knees transforms this symbol of intrepid Euro-Canadian settlement and faith into a monument of explicit colonial suppression of Indigenous culture. Similarly, in an unspecified elsewhere along the paved highway that "reaches right up and inside" places recently accessible only by air or water, "the [t]otem poles for corner posts on bridges that the Ministry of Transportation and Highways inspects" (*Where It Hurts* 11) could signify partnership between two cultures or the subjugation of the art and ceremony of one culture to the institutional oversight of the other, depending how one's interpretation of this spatial marker maps the presence and interaction of these peoples on this land. The form of the literary maps in *Unmarked* primes readers to be open to the discomfort of shifting narratives that lack coherence and closure and to embrace the idea that different angles and perspectives are necessary for creating maps of these places that recognize and mark the settler colonial presence and that create the possibility for imagining a new relationship for navigating the future in this place.

The second part of my critical analysis argues that de Leeuw's literary mapping of northwestern British Columbia resource communities in both *Unmarked* and *Where It Hurts* represents these places as focal points in a geography of colonialism in which the inhabitants become simultaneously the products and producers, the victors and the victims, of a primarily resource-extraction connection with landscapes. De Leeuw posits that colonialism involves a "spatialized set of endeavours" ("Intimate Colonialisms" 341); that is, she uses the term "colonial geographies" to discuss landscapes and sense of place in and through which colonial policies were established and are perpetuated (339). In her narratives of industry towns, there is room to honour the labour and love of the

people who cut down forests, fish oceans, and dam rivers, while also recognizing their complicity in transforming the landscapes into colonial geographies that inflict and sustain physical, cultural, and environmental violence against inhabitants, communities, and the land itself. Indeed, the messiness of the form of the essays captures this tension between the narratives of settler industriousness and settler colonialism. The essay collections do not navigate a route from the present state of settler–Indigenous relations in the region to a decolonized geography in which non-Indigenous peoples respect and enter in relationship with the First Nations and laws of this territory. But the texts demonstrate the implications for the future of these places—the harm inhabitants are imposing on themselves, on communities, and on the land—if one's sense of place here is not unsettled and opened to envisioning a different way to be part of this landscape.

Reading to the Margins of the Disorienting Cartographies in de Leeuw's *Unmarked*

To foreground the geographic focus of the place-based literary essays in *Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16*, each essay has a title page that consists of a black and white topographic map that shows natural and human-made features of a landscape that the essay portrays. Each map takes up the entirety of a page, with the maps for the final four essays each covering two pages. Printed over a section of each map, in the centre of the upper half of the page, is a bordered rectangle of white space; in this box is the essay's title, composed of a metaphor or image that appears in and is significant to the essay, and a place name. For example, the fourth essay in the collection is titled "Magnet Blood: Queen Charlotte City" (30). However, rather than complement the essay that follows by clearly orienting readers to the titular community and landscape that the

narrative describes and constructs, the graphic maps as they appear in this volume obstruct the expected function of the map itself. The maps are magnified to make visible the place names of the landscapes de Leeuw narrates, including unincorporated villages and logging camps—places that usually remain unmarked or unnoticed on maps available at highway-side community information centres. As a result of the close-up view, only portions of bodies of water are visible, mountain ranges are bisected, and highways and railroads run off the page. Text-based markers often are incomplete, with letters folded into the book's binding, obscured by the title text box, or extending beyond the paper's reach. And at this magnification some of the maps offer few landmarks, natural or human-made. The map of Tlell, for instance, names the settlement of fewer than 200 people, the Yellowhead Highway (i.e., Highway 16), and a cemetery. The beginning of another marker—G R A—is cut off by the page's edge (21). With few geographic reference points that might be familiar to a non-local audience, the maps are more aesthetic than informative.

Rather than spatially orienting readers or rendering these landscapes visually familiar, de Leeuw manipulates the topographic maps to destabilize traditional cartographic views and reflect, instead, the way the narrative maps create and convey different kinds of geographic knowledge and a sense of place. The visual maps cannot be pieced together to comprise a composite topographic map or visual representation of northwestern British Columbia. The maps are in different scales, without indicating to what scale each image appears. The entire downtown of Prince George, the most populous city in the province's north, is mapped on a single page (82), whereas the map of Lejac, the site of the now demolished Lejac Indian Residential School, zooms in on a

stretch of the highway fewer than five kilometres in length and spreads the image over two pages (100-01), making the place name itself almost illegible. Moreover, with the exception of Lejac, which is indicated and named on the maps for both the Lejac and the Fraser Lake essays (94-95, 100-01), none of the communities that serve as the focus of an essay appears on more than one map. There are no overlapping marked places to create visual reference points for putting the maps in relation to one another. In fact, even Highway 16, which the subtitle of the collection—*Landscapes Along Highway 16*—implies connects these places, appears in only ten of the fifteen maps, and is not labeled in two of those maps. None of the sections of highway that are visually represented can be lined up and connected across pages; large swathes of the physical and human geography of northwestern British Columbia are not mapped in this volume. Without having geographic knowledge of the region, using the aid of a reference map, or reading the essays, a reader would be unable to position the maps in relation to one another to reflect the material reality of the physical landscapes. Consequently, each title map unsettles any coherent sense of orientation or perspective readers might have begun to develop from the preceding text(s), resisting an easy and unified representation of the landscapes of northwestern British Columbia.

Similarly, the essays do not offer a single narrative map or sense of place. As with the technical maps that de Leeuw incorporates, the scale of the narrative maps shifts at various points within and between essays. For instance, recounting her move with her parents and sister from Vancouver Island to Haida Gwaii for her biologist father's work for British Columbia's Ministry of Environment, de Leeuw traverses the province, listing the names of the many communities that they drove through, a journey during which she

feels “lost in the hours it has taken to travel this far,” along a seemingly “endless” highway (8). The essay about Prince George introduces the northern city from the sky, from the seat of a plane where passengers can view a sunrise that is the colours of salmon flesh and scales, over a city “small in a landscape of wilderness” (83-84). These wide-angle perspectives of place are juxtaposed with narrative maps of smaller, more intimate places and landscapes, which de Leeuw creates more frequently throughout the collection. These narratives navigate the single paved road of a community, the after-school routes of bored teenagers, the bunk houses and kitchens of logging camps, the seasonal makeshift tent city of mushroom pickers, the cramped quarters of railway cars and research ocean vessels. Mapping the wanderings of herself and other kids around the Juskatla logging camp, de Leeuw writes, “No one seemed to notice when Leaha and I climbed out the side door and slipped down to the mess house and bunk houses and machinists’s [sic] yards where we crouched in the metal jaws of front end loaders and taught ourselves to inhale” (15). It is movement in and through such overlooked spaces that frames de Leeuw’s portrayal of communities that are themselves often forgotten or unmarked. With each new orientation and scale as she narratively maps these places, de Leeuw refuses erasure or essentialism, which are antagonistic to expanding and nuancing understanding of settler colonial geographies and the alternative maps that might confront them. Representing place, especially with a claim to significance but not completeness or coherence, requires, in de Leeuw’s view, mapping from multiple angles, both from within and outside of the multiple places layered on top of and nestled within one another.

De Leeuw’s use of different narrative voices further disrupts attempts to read the essay collection as a single narrative map of a clearly defined region. De Leeuw writes

most of the essays from the first-person perspective, plotting personal memories and inherited stories in the landscapes where they happened. She reflects on the sense of place she has created and continues to do so through stories she tells, from the imaginative local lore she crafted as a child that "become part of the school landscape" (26) to the creation of a feeling of familiarity during a summer at a logging camp in the Nass Valley as she "braided together people and landscape, logging camp and villages" (68). De Leeuw's "I" is the moving marker tracing the landscapes she narrates; other people who travel or wander sections of these landscapes with her remain nameless, with few exceptions. In the Prince Rupert essay though, there is a shift in the narrative style as de Leeuw directly addresses the audience, explicitly asking what most of the essays imply: "Travel with me. Along Highway 16 and into Prince Rupert."; "Keep your eyes closed: the picture will become more focused. Be patient."; "You are getting close to Prince Rupert . . . you are passing the tight left hand turnoff to Port Edward. . . ." (44); "We have arrived. Follow my arm and look in the direction I am pointing" (45). Other essays include comments and questions directed to an auditor, a presence within the narrated memory. The Lejac essay, for example, recounts learning the stories of this site from a friend, to whom de Leeuw narrates: "We are here because of your story. . . . Last night you suggested we travel to your cabin on Francois Lake . . ." (102). Several of the essays employ the second-person perspective, although the "you" appears to still be de Leeuw herself, since the stories remain personal, like when she writes, "You are not sure where you went to, only that leaving Kitwanga was leaving your mother. It was the last town of a whole family, and of one thing you are clear. The town was the site of your first heartbreak . . ." (57). Although the content of each essay remains focused on de

Leeuw's memories, experiences, and stories that others have shared with her, the differences in spatial perspective and narrative voice challenge readers to avoid assuming that portraying a sense of place rooted in the landscapes of one's childhood is easily or best conveyed through a single point of view.

Moreover, the topographic maps in *Unmarked* do not chart routes through the landscapes; they do not visually mark the movement, the navigation, the escapes, or the returns that fill the pages of the essays. Rather, they enhance the essays by representing the innumerable possibilities for beginnings, ends, and changes in direction and perspective that the narratives reflect on. In the first essay, appropriately titled "Starting Somewhere: Port Clements," de Leeuw begins: "It starts somewhere. It must. Everything has a beginning after all, even when the beginning denotes only something missed—a skipped heartbeat, a breath hesitated, a head turned back, something surely moving in the periphery. But where? Where does it begin?" (4). The essay then attempts several starting points: a bend in the road, a highway sign, the marker announcing the presence of this unincorporated village (4). Acknowledging the near impossibility of articulating the beginning of a memory or experience of place—"So this beginning springs forth from confusion; it's muddled" (5)—de Leeuw eventually turns to a landmark significant to Port Clements locals to begin her narrative of finding a home here. This question, and ultimate acceptance, of multiple possible beginnings and directions lies in some form beneath many of the essays' representation of specific memories and experiences and how they are inseparable from moving through and interacting with particular physical and human landscapes. The structure of the essay collection itself indicates this refusal of a delineated narrative with a distinct beginning and ending that bookend a straightforward

passage through the region. The essays are neither ordered in a precise chronology nor in a continuous east to west, or vice versa, trajectory along Highway 16. Each one can be read on its own as a self-contained narrative vignette that maps a place and de Leeuw's experience of it, and the collection can be read out of order.

Rather than visually centre the titular landscapes, the graphic maps foreshadow the way that de Leeuw's narratives embrace and explore the peripheral nature of the landscapes and the communities that make home in them. These communities remain literally on the edges of the images. The "P" of "Port Clements"—"a passed-by town" (6) that exists "away from cities and towns whose names everyone knew" (7)—lies in the crease of the book's binding. The Juskatla logging camp, now dismantled, lies beyond the edge of its accompanying map, which gives instead the label for the inlet after which the settlement was named. Neither the words "Nass Valley" nor "Cranberry Junction" are printed on their essays' maps, perhaps not surprising for places that de Leeuw describes respectively as existing "where the lava flows end" (64) and "[c]ompared to anywhere, this is nowhere" (75). The names "Kitimat," a community reached by traveling through "endless space" and the "uncharted territory of grizzly bears" (49), and "Kitwanga," a place of events that are "invisible but to the tiny populations who witnessed them firsthand" (56), cling to the edges of their pages. "Prince George," in contrast, is displayed clearly at the centre of its map (82); as the largest city in northern British Columbia at the junction of two major highways, it is a reference point for many people unfamiliar with the region's smaller communities. But in the essay de Leeuw qualifies this prominence, referring to it as "not a real city" (84) from which "[e]veryone seems to be always leaving" (85). The visual maps point to a narrative thread that weaves

throughout the essays—the existence of these landscapes as places on the edge, or as places beyond the awareness of most non-local people, is what impresses itself on de Leeuw's experience of them as home.

The literary narratives, then, venture to these edges, portraying de Leeuw's experience of these places as akin to walking along precipices, of balancing on the periphery of existence, of navigating tensions. Imagery and diction related to edges, borders, and peripheries permeate the text. The boundaries of several communities have a marked "edge . . . where pavement meets gravel road" (39). Homes are built "on the edge of a clear cut" (11), "perched at the thin end of a lake" (59), "at the edge of the lava" (67), "balanced on the edge of the Pacific Ocean" (114). Many of the mapped communities, however, are also situated on metaphorical edges, striving to maintain a balance between material and ideological tensions. In other words, it is not primarily their location that renders many of these communities peripheral, but their contingent nature—they arise during an industry boom that demands labour for resource extraction in a specific location, but remain precarious, constructed by and for economic nomads whose transplanted homes live in the shadow of looming market busts.

Re-Mapping the Landscape of Northwestern British Columbia's Resource Communities

In her essay "What Fills Our Lungs," de Leeuw intertwines her experiences of two deaths—that of a fifteen-year-old girl, a friend and classmate who drowned while tubing down the Kalum River, and that of Cassiar, a remote northern British Columbia resource town just south of which de Leeuw worked at a truck stop during the summer

when her friend died. As the title alludes, de Leeuw parallels the drowning death of the girl with the dismantling of Cassiar when it became widely known that the asbestos it mined "wages war against our lungs" (*Where It Hurts* 53). De Leeuw compares the shock of learning that teenaged girls who dream of a good job and dependable future with companies worth believing in were not invincible (54, 60-61), with the disturbing realization that "corporations killed entire towns" filled with families who trust in the future of their community (60). Extending the essay's titular metaphor, she laments the dismantling of Cassiar "as a mass drowning, a forced under, a gasping loss of consciousness. Lost. Never to resurface" (61). Addressing her friend, de Leeuw concludes the essay stating that she herself survived the things that often pull down teenage girls of northern British Columbia "because the time was meant to come when I would speak you back into this breathing world" (62). Given how closely the essay, through its language and structure, entangles the death of the girl with the death of the town, we can infer that de Leeuw means to speak the latter back into our consciousness, too.

This desire to recover and to create narratives of people and places in northern British Columbia that have become "an absence" (62) is at the heart of the narrative geographies that de Leeuw presents in her two collections of literary essays. Her starting point is the unmarked towns, "the kind of place invisible on television, invisible in school texts unless mentioned as 'rural places where men worked hard and life was difficult'" (*Unmarked* 118), and the First Nations reserves that are "beyond [the] imagination" of the many Canadians who, not uncommonly, have never set foot on one (*Where It Hurts* 14). Her primary concern is to represent such communities and landscapes as "places of

memory and human experience" (*Along* 23), and, therefore, as meaningful cultural geographies. And the essays accomplish this. They give names and directions to places that appear on only the most detailed visual maps; they map the memories and experiences of people who shape and are shaped by these places; and they create and convey knowledge about things like how certain human-made physical markers on the landscape came to be and how local flora and fauna are affected by the presence of resource industries.

However, more significant to my project, these collections comprise nuanced narratives of the precarious economic and social balance in which settler resource towns find themselves, as well as both honour the work of the people who build these communities and confront them with the need and possibility to imagine other futures in this place that are grounded in relationality, rather than in extraction. In other words, de Leeuw's essays credit the physical and social labour of settler peoples who build communities that can sustain themselves, but the texts also emphasize the tension between industry and community and reveal the harm that is inflicted on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples when these communities become entrenched within the settler colonial geography that has resource extraction as its core and are unable to imagine any other future for themselves. The essays are not instructive, prescriptive, or moralizing. The narrative maps that they create do not concretely chart a way forward for settler–Indigenous relations. Yet, inviting readers to see these places in new ways, the cartographies unsettle the idea that the present relationship in northern British Columbia between resource communities and their residents, and Indigenous nations and the land itself, is desirable or sustainable.

De Leeuw's portrayal of Cassiar in "What Fills Our Lungs" encapsulates much of what the books as a whole achieve in terms of priming readers, particularly settler audiences, to accept the need and potential for orienting themselves to and navigating through this region in a new way. The essay names the town that is now only a ghostly presence on maps and charts its location "up the easterly arm of the Stewart-Cassiar Highway . . . the arm of Highway 37 that goes north, the arm that reaches out and snakes up across the Yukon Border . . ." (*Where It Hurts* 57). It asserts that the community contains something meaningful and worth honouring: "I want to remember Cassiar. . . . I want the lungs of this nation to inhale deeply, to remember that it was men with good hearts who mined a mineral that, during its time, no one thought could be as dangerous as we now know it is" (53). In this instance, de Leeuw juxtaposes the damage caused in lungs by asbestos with the image of the country breathing in and sustaining life through the memory of people willing to dedicate decades of their lives to building "places where lives were lived" and to pulling a seemingly miraculous natural insulation from the ground (60). However, in her portrayal of this town "made" by a mineral and the company who owned the mine (53), de Leeuw emphasizes the tension between industry and community and stresses the precarity of both, as "mining companies simply pulled up stakes and bulldozed under the family homes" when the resource ceased being profitable (60). Truckers, too, end up being "lost" (61) in the unpredictable "life and death of resource towns, some left standing while others are washed away in torrents of progress" (62). During these towns' lives, though, the workers, their families and communities become cogs in the larger colonial apparatus that shapes landscapes in its image, inflicting harm on both the land and the peoples, settler and Indigenous, who live there.

The Cassiar essay also gives a brief glimpse into ways de Leeuw connects how inhabitants' relationship to the land within a framework of extraction shapes their relationship to people who live there, particularly Indigenous peoples. For instance, the truckers transporting asbestos south and repeatedly travelling the same remote, unpaved highway "lament their wives and give tips on how to strap down or winch up the heavy loads they hauled on roads they grew so sick and tired of that all they were left to do was swig on flasks of Canadian Club and tell jokes about Indians, hookers, and whores across the CB radio waves" (60). As a result, they turned a highway built to connect logging roads to a mining district into a place where hitchhiking women, who are disproportionately Indigenous and unable to access safe travel, "were left for dead if they didn't put out for the truckers they rode with" (62). This road that was built for industry, not community, ends up part of a structure that harms the latter.

In this brief sketch of the cultural geography of this highway, de Leeuw alludes to the connection between extractive industry workforces, gendered violence, and racism. She remembers and portrays these men as part of a transient collective with shared misogynist and racist views, who slept in their trucks and ate in roadside diners between long stretches of work that is largely repetitive, isolating, and dependent on the market value of a particular mineral. Common effects of this work life—hyper-masculine culture, social isolation, lack of self-care, and alcohol abuse—are among those included in the Firelight Group's report *Indigenous Communities and Industrial Camps: Promoting Healthy Communities in Settings of Industrial Change* as factors "that could make already vulnerable women and children even more so" (Gibson et al. 15), due to the actions of men looking for an escape from the demands and conditions of their jobs (19-

20). After working with the Lake Babine Nation and Nak'azdli Whut'en to determine how to mitigate the risk of negative impacts, including violence, on their communities caused by nearby industrial camps that temporarily house a primarily male workforce (5), the research group maintains that workers who shape and are shaped by structures that separate them from land and community "are not invested in the community, and they do not have relationships with people in the area. They are disconnected from the region, and this lack of connection creates a context in which some workers conduct themselves in ways they would not in their home community" (20). Having lived in many communities that experience the impact of such disconnection, de Leeuw uses the Cassiar essay in part to again call attention to the potential violence embedded in places constructed on and for industry. She marks the wide-reaching nature of the issue by asking "the world" for a favour: "do not take the lives of girls who, full of hopes and dreams about a future solid with companies they believe in working for, walk the gravel roads that make up towns built on mines . . ." (*Where It Hurts* 61). That such loss is often invisibilized is underscored in this case by the fact that Cassiar itself no longer exists on contemporary conventional maps. De Leeuw narrates these absences back into the collective memory of this region, bringing readers to momentarily exist in this disquieting space and perhaps confronting them with their ignorance of or willingness to accept an approach to place-making in northern British Columbia constructed on the disposability of people and communities.

Because Cassiar is a town that did not survive the boom–bust asbestos economy, de Leeuw's recounting of it does not outwardly offer promise for its future; rather, the hope is in being able to call back its memory and mark it again on the map as a narrative

of *if only we'd known*. However, in other essays about communities that are still holding on, there sometimes is promise for a future different than Cassiar's and in these moments de Leeuw often points to how settler peoples can learn through relationships with Indigenous communities how to orient themselves differently to these places and to imagine its future otherwise.

In her portrayal of northern resource towns, de Leeuw acknowledges the narratives of settler prosperity that precipitated their founding, but then undermines these narratives by charting the boom and bust cycles, foregrounding the communities' contingent, non-native roots and their systematic building and un-building by economic currents. The narrative that encouraged Canadian and immigrant settlers to stake their claim on land newly marked as prosperous is the same that government and industry have used, and continue to use, to populate and profit from the lands across the nation that they claim as their own: the promise of success and wealth, of making a mark in a community, in return for honest work. As de Leeuw recounts, Prince Rupert was billed as an upcoming "city of prosperity," in the certainty that a railway and the port would soon be the hub for lumber and coal that "flow[s] directly across the Pacific" (*Unmarked* 43), while local fishing "was good," with "cannery floors . . . slick with guts and the air seemed rich" (45). Cassiar lured men with reports of "asbestos so thick it's said the geologists thought it could be gathered up with rakes," and with tales of this mineral deposit in a region where, years earlier, prospectors had rushed, following "the dreams of treasure offered up by the earth to men who took chances and chased the dreams of mining" (*Where It Hurts* 56-57). Residents of Fort St. James became "moneyed-up with cattle, clear-cutting, and mining" (23). A woman moved across the country because a

magazine suggested that the opportunity for mushroom picking in northern British Columbia was like encountering "a forest floor paved with gold" (*Unmarked* 81). In each of these descriptions, de Leeuw presents an element of the natural world alongside diction related to wealth—"rich," "treasure," "moneyed-up," "gold." Her metaphors evoke the idea of prosperity issuing from the land itself and in reach of industrious hands. She makes known the power that a narrative created by a surveyor and geologist with a "map of minerals" (*Where It Hurts* 56) has to necessitate the re-drawing or re-marking of maps to account for a new resource-driven community that seemed to similarly spring from the ground. De Leeuw envisions the young days of Prince George as "[c]amps and tents and men [that] are bursting with the same energy and force as the full-flow rivers rushing across the land" (64), the quickly built housing in Stewart that "sprang up within metres of terminal glaciers" (*Unmarked* 111), and the seasonal camps that assemble off of the highway "filling like a stream in spring runoff" (75). In these moments when resource towns are booming, the settler colonial narrative makes them appear meant to be in this land.

While imagery inspired by the land itself implies the development of these settler communities as natural and rooted in their specific environments, the more prevalent narrative in de Leeuw's essays is that these communities can just as easily be uprooted because their very existence is dependent on their relevance to a narrative written by industry that is not primarily of this place. The narratives on which these resource towns are founded are not indigenous to these places, but are transplanted, with no guarantee they will set down roots that weather economic storms. These are "towns built on mines and factories and mills and docks and truck stops" (*Where It Hurts* 61). This metaphor

shows that the towns' founding relationship is with industry, not with the land or its original inhabitants; industry brings people to these landscapes but does not secure their belonging. Consequently, de Leeuw's representation of resource communities often marks their undoing, making visible through her narrative maps the reasons why they are not prominent, or even visible, on conventional illustrated maps. Prince Rupert exists now as a "forgotten" (*Unmarked* 42) city of *if onlys* and *would have beens*—the man championing the transcontinental railway having literally "gone down with the Titanic," the mills shutting down, and the salmon stocks depleting (43). Cassiar was "bulldozed into oblivion" (*Where It Hurts* 57), the dreams of miners and truckers "obliterat[ed]" (61) after just four decades when people learned asbestos was best left alone, and the town site is "now nothing but an absence" (62). The Juskatla logging camp was dismantled, with "every piece of something and nothing upon which logging camps run, upon which communities build themselves" auctioned off (*Unmarked* 19). De Leeuw underscores this erasure of the logging camp by preceding the essay with a graphic map that does not mark or name its presence (13). Prince George remains the province's largest northern city and an orientation point for the region, but de Leeuw's impression while first living there is that residents' time in the community is short-lived. Moving trucks are hard to come by in the city, because "every morning the news of rips in our economic fabric" sends people "fleeing the north" (85). Residents watch helpless as "[a] red tide blood[ies] our northern horizons" (*Where It Hurts* 68); the mountain pine beetle infests the forests, "chok[ing] the veins of pine trees" that the mills depend on (63). Together these portrayals of northern communities past and present emphasize that even for settler residents whose being in this place is grounded in the land and knowing it well, a

relationship that is precipitated and mediated by an industry whose connection to the land is extractive can be abruptly and unceremoniously uprooted.

In turn, this dependence on a contingent demand for particular resources creates paradoxical settler-nomads. It is a paradox because, as J. Edward Chamberlin writes, the enduring premise underlying encounters between "natives and newcomers" across the world and throughout human history is a distinction between "people who settle down and people who roam about" (29), a dichotomy between civilized farmers making land useful and idle hunter-gatherers leaving land useless (28-29). Chamberlin then disrupts this conception by pointing out its central contradiction:

> For millennia, farming people have roamed around the world looking for new places and dreaming of the home they left behind, moving on after a generation or so to other new places. And we call these people—[. . .] my people, Us "settlers"? The other people, the indigenous people who have lived in the same place for tens of thousands of years . . . we call Them "wanderers"? It's hard to imagine a more cockeyed set of categories. (30)

One example from the Indigenous territories on which northern British Columbia is mapped supports the idea that this dichotomy does not make sense from an Indigenous perspective either. Neil J. Sterritt explains that when the first Europeans arrived in their communities, the Gitxsan referred to them as *k'amksi'waa*—their word for driftwood—because these white-skinned peoples "came and left with the tides . . ." (Sterritt 92). In contrast to these transient newcomers, his people, Sterritt states, "*[S]ettled* on the upper Skeena some 6,000 to 8,000 years ago, after the glaciers receded from the valley" (31; emphasis added). But the ideas that the Europeans brought on the tides with them—

including that land acquires value when civilized people use it properly by controlling nature and labouring on the land—comprise a cultural discourse that prevented them from perceiving "[p]eople who marked the land lightly and lived within the rhythms of nature" as anything other than "unprogressive and backward," which justified, for them, colonial dispossession of Indigenous territories (Harris 171).

Obviously, then, decolonial geographies of place will undercut this nomadic native–settled newcomer dichotomy. De Leeuw's mapping primarily does so by emphasizing the ways in which non-Indigenous peoples create and move through places in this region are often not settled, but uncertain, short-term, or planned elsewhere. In conjunction with powerful decolonial acts that affirm and uphold settled Indigenous use and occupancy of these territories since time immemorial, like the Unist'ot'en Camp and the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en testimonies during the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* land claims trial, de Leeuw's essays participate in the necessary supporting work of re-writing narratives of place by non-Indigenous authors to not perpetuate the erasure or misrepresentation of the purported wandering Indians and to not presume their right and capability to inhabit, use, and supposedly improve the land.

I would argue that she also unsettles the settler–nomad distinction without falling into two other potentially problematic uses of these terms regarding the relationships of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to the land they both claim. First, sometimes when the dichotomy is flipped—"The truth is that We [non-Indigenous peoples] are the nomads and They [Indigenous peoples] are the settlers" (Chamberlin 30)—non-Indigenous people in the Americas will develop the notion that Indigenous peoples happened to be the first settlers and then will cling to a narrative of "we are all

immigrants," in order to deny the reality and significance of Aboriginal rights and title. When Sterritt describes the Gitxsan as having settled in their territories in the Skeena watershed, however, it is clear that their culture and ancestry are of this place, are Indigenous and not immigrant. He writes about learning from elders the place names that are derived from traditional stories, "thus connecting the moral map contained within the Wiigyet stories with actual land marks on the physical map of Gitxsan territories" (Sterritt 19). The way that the Gitxsan map the geography of their territories is intertwined with their understanding of what it means to be in this place as Gitxsan, People of the Skeena; how they live and understand themselves as a people and a nation is in relationship to this river and the land through which it flows. De Leeuw gestures a couple times in her essays to such indigeneity of the First Nations on whose territories she has lived. For instance, having overheard the planning of an event to bring together Haisla and Nisga'a people, she recognizes it as a gathering of distinct nations who "know the difference of currency, the difference of taste and language" (*Unmarked* 50); these economies and cultures are Indigenous, shaped by native foods most valued from their respective territories. Without erasing the presence of First Nations or questioning their precedence as the original and continuing settled inhabitants of their expansive territories, de Leeuw also does not map or foreground her own understanding of indigeneity in this place, which non-Indigenous writers sometimes do to indicate their own deep, settled knowledge of and belonging in a place and to diminish distinctions between natives and newcomers.

Second, there is an aspect of the Euro-Canadian conceptualization of the nomadic native character that some non-Indigenous peoples will claim for themselves as a way to

assert their belonging on the land and exempt themselves from responsibility for settler colonialism, namely, a life of "closeness to nature and . . . distance from the artifices of towns and cities" (Chamberlin 36). Chamberlin gives cowboys as an example, explaining how they were contradictorily envied for their self-sufficient freedom (36) and "denounced [along with Indians] as barbarians, beyond the pale of settler societies" (38). De Leeuw, mapping places with relatively few cowboys, uses the word *nomad* when describing seasonal travellers to the north—"tourists, campers, modern nomads, mushroom pickers" (*Unmarked* 75) —who "seem to have a touch of the nomad running through their veins" and who convene annually in "pieced-together" tent cities that have their own rules and conventions, "a nomad's law" (75, 78-79). Such tent cities are not the creation of the province or resource-extraction companies, but of wanderers who want "to live just a little outside the rules of regular society" (78). Like the cowboys Chamberlin describes as living with an "apparent acceptance of uncertainty and insecurity" that situates them outside of "civilization" (Chamberlin 38), these nomads seem to move through the landscapes of northern British Columbia outside of and apart from the institutions that sustain settler colonialism.

And yet, de Leeuw's diction to describe her introduction to "The Zoo," an established tent city near the junction of Highways 113 and 37 that her essay walks readers through, suggests that the makeshift community is not that different from the towns most of these people (temporarily) left: "There are main streets and politicians, a tiny collection of trailers the locals call China Town" (78), and apologies for pothole-filled gravel roads "as if some failure in municipal government had caused them" (79). Indeed, these "northern nomads"—some running away from hurt (78), some drawn to

and “comfortable with the land around [them]” (77)—did not envision or build an alternative way of being in relationship with each other or the land. They are, in fact, largely involved in a small-scale capitalist resource-extraction endeavour, with some tent city residents “carefully guard[ing]” productive mushroom patches (81), which are “profit from the forest soil” (78). And at the end of the season, they eventually return to their hometowns, or continue their wandering, “just existing from place to place to place” (76). These people are Sterritt’s *k’amksi’waa*, or Chamberlin’s colonial nomadic newcomers on native lands. Moreover, de Leeuw situates this tent community as ensconced in “a landscape of emptiness” (*Unmarked* 75) and as an opportunity for “frontier living” (78), indicating, perhaps, these travellers’ desire for freedom to claim a space where they can unburden themselves, or even de Leeuw’s own failure in this essay to avoid this easy colonial trope. By mapping this place, de Leeuw marks, I maintain, another otherwise invisibilized site in British Columbia’s colonial geography.

Although the image of the nomad does not appear elsewhere in the essays, the language of similar intermittent cycles of migration does. De Leeuw’s essays relate “years of moving to, from, and through logging towns” (*Unmarked* 110), moving trucks being used to leave a town just as soon as someone else arrives (85), and newly trained high school teachers from the south arriving every second year, desiring “to be close to nature” (*Where It Hurts* 82). Even the fact that de Leeuw lived in at least nine of the northern communities she writes about, some just for a summer’s work or for weekends visiting family, demonstrates this migratory movement through the region. In addition to this transient workforce, travellers are encouraged to visit northern British Columbia, but not to stay long enough to recognize its colonial geography. In an essay set in Prince

George, de Leeuw explicitly connects the prescribed tourism to the language of civilization and wilderness that European nomads used to claim so-called discovered land for their imperial homelands:

> When you go north, say the guidebooks, look for pristine wilderness. When you have witnessed such primitive purity, your metropolises become all the more civilized by comparison. Think of yourself as an early explorer. Look for vast unsullied tracts of ancient rain forest, glaciers and mountain ranges, the lumbering bodies of grizzly bears. (96)

She notes how the guidebooks also stress that visitors should focus on this seemingly untouched nature, and "not linger" in Prince George itself, a city marked by pain wrought by colonialism (97). The title of this essay—"Columbus Burning"—is symbolic, as de Leeuw draws a line between the women Christopher Columbus's men used in order to stake a claim in the new world and the young sex-workers "fighting men and fighting back tears" in the hallways of the local Columbus Hotel (97-98). When this hotel, where tourist-nomads should not linger, burns down, some residents of this town sustained by resource-nomads declared that the fire started the necessary work of cleaning up and purging a downtown they generally avoided (100). But this hotel was also home to several people, people "not whom the guidebooks were written for. . . . not whom the history books were written for" (102). And so, de Leeuw centres the Columbus Hotel in this particular narrative cartography of Prince George, prompting readers to consider what lingering here might reveal to them.

In reading de Leeuw's essays, we can tease out why Chamberlin's claim that non-Indigenous peoples are the nomads should give us pause. As she charts these movements

of non-Indigenous people and their communities, she renders these nomads both as part of an ongoing, incomplete colonial project and as excluded from claiming unproblematic belonging to the land. Perhaps, then, such people are more accurately settl*ing*-nomads. For my critical reading of these literary cartographies of northwestern British Columbia, I will continue to use the word *settler* for non-Indigenous peoples, not to ignore the contradiction in the colonial discourse, rightly identified by Chamberlin and Sterritt, that is used to justify Canadian claims to sovereignty, but to emphasize the role of these newcomer nomads in the ongoing work of settler colonialism.

In de Leeuw's cartographies of northwestern British Columbia's remote places, industries are living entities that choreograph the movement of people and resources through the region, enlisting residents in the project of shaping the landscape primarily to serve the more well-known places at the nation's centre. She graphically reveals the implications for a community whose central life source is not the land itself, but a force that requires extracting from the land. Through repeatedly employing metaphor to embody the central industry of a resource town, de Leeuw underscores what it demands of its labourers to keep it alive. She writes of experiencing the Alcan plant in Kitimat as a living being, and its "breathing, pulsating" is a calming presence, because it signifies the vitality of the economy that allows this town to exist: "for a moment your breath is deep and calm, listening to Alcan's heart pulsate, pumping life through aluminum veins." However, this aluminum smelter's expansive steel and concrete structure simultaneously makes it appear as a "giant monster," one that is fueled by a dam that during labour disputes has shut down an entire river, stranding "[s]almon by the thousands" (*Unmarked* 51). Similarly, the multiple mills in Prince George give life to "a town with lungs filled

with pulp air, veins pumping with rivers and glacier runoff, limbs held strong with the iron and steel of trucks and trains" (87). But as this personified town breathes, its mills "gasping" and "heav[ing] blue smoke into our air" that is heavy with the smell of pulp, which becomes infused into residents' belongings and "follow[s] them forever and beyond" if they leave the city (86). Although with a more subtle power than a dam that can dry up a river, the mills imbue the air with a presence that touches everyone, whether a mill employee or not. Elsewhere, de Leeuw personifies Prince George as a dance partner who takes its residents in its arms (*Where It Hurts* 64) and two-steps them through a resource-based economy, holding them close to the "mills at its heart" (67). A town with industry, rather than land or community, as its respiratory and circulatory systems, however, is susceptible to the unpredictable, yet certain, afflictions of aging industry. It was "lethargy [that] had sunk deep into the veins of the logging industry" that led to the dismantling of camps on Haida Gwaii (*Unmarked* 19). Prince George has felt the slowing steps of its dance, following "[t]he beat of a resource town curling up around the edges, downsizing and dismantling" (*Where It Hurts* 66). De Leeuw often represents industry as a living force that is inextricable from inhabitants' sense of place in remote rural communities to impress upon readers the lengths that people will go to sustain it, or to revive it if need be.

The need to keep these industries alive incites the region's population to indelibly mark the physical geographies they are altering and de Leeuw's narrative cartographies record the effects. Yet, in her illustration of the violent and encompassing environmental degradation that humans create, de Leeuw makes room for the tension between protecting the environment and supporting families and communities. The essays never take either a

shut-it-down or move-forward-at-all-costs position on resource extraction. This tension is part of her articulation of sense of place in this region, respecting the current state resource towns are in and what they have provided, but unsettling them with the unsustainable legacy they are creating. Given the size of Prince George and its centrality to the northern economy, the city and its "landscape of pulp mills" (*Unmarked* 84) receive an extended focus in de Leeuw's literary essays when she writes of the way that industry and workers—mutually dependent on one another for survival—mark the land. In an essay titled "Quick-Quick. Slow. Slow.," de Leeuw describes local couples enjoying an evening of learning how to two-step at the local Y, to create an analogy for the varying rhythms of a cyclical resource economy. In a striking contrast, the arms of the men who hold their partners close and guide them safely across the dance floor become the tools of extraction when a booming, "quick-quick" economy demands it. The hands that caress a partner's shoulder and waist are the hands that lay "their palms down on the machines that fill our factories and mills, that chew up and spit out the boards . . ." (*Where It Hurts* 68). This image of hands feeding machines that devour the natural world is part of a series of recurring metaphors:

> Into the arms of the men who hoist chainsaws and make *deep cuts* into the forest, the wail of *metal teeth* into soft wood, spruce trees *bleeding* their sticky pitch into pulp, mills *devouring* everything that is measured in broadsheets and cubic feet. Into the arms of men who *beat* rocks into dust, the earth *chewed up, spat out*, the arc of ash and tobacco chew. (65-66; emphasis added)

Despite the capability for gentleness when the men's arms are at rest, their hands unleash violence in service of extracting resources to fuel the mills and plants. De Leeuw's

portrayal of resource communities does not deny the necessity of using what the land offers to build economically viable communities. But the diction in this essay in particular reveals the pattern of violence inflicted on the land and confronts readers with the enormity of this impact: the men "*break* the land" and "*sliced* into" woodland growth to "*carve* out miles and miles of road into the bush" with equipment that "*punches*" through the forest, creating "*scars* that encircle Prince George" (65; emphasis added). Moreover, this impact is of course not limited to the earth itself, as the water and sky also circulate the effects of their interaction with industry. Kitimat's aluminum smelter "power[s] the economy behind this town you call your new home," but also "has reached mightily into the waters and mountainsides of Kitimat, [and] locals say the [oolican] taste like tinfoil" and the river "produce[s] Coho with metal scales" (*Unmarked* 50-51). In towns built on industrial lumber ventures, the "sky reflect[s] clearcuts" (17), "trucks are skyscrapers, the . . . sky scraped with them" (86). Everyone is "breathing an air thick with pulp dust" (*Where It Hurts* 67). In de Leeuw's northern British Columbia, industry, through the people who sustain it, reaches into the earth, seeps into the water, and pervades the air. The essays accept the premise of these towns that their existence is due to and dependent on resource extraction, but her narratives are unwilling to leave the consequences unnamed, because to do so creates a willful ignorance of how this approach to living with the land also harms the people who live there.

A recurring theme in de Leeuw's two essay collections is that in these places where violence against the physical geography is intrinsic to their existence, cultural geographies develop that also harm people and communities. Her descriptive language implies that breaking the land breaks the bodies of labourers in resource industries, and

these broken bodies often succumb to desperation, anger, and pain. When men fold their bodies into vehicles and around heavy machinery that extract resources with ruthless efficiency, their bodies and minds do not remain unscathed. De Leeuw details the "broken body of a Juskatla logging man": "wrecked" hands, scarred and busted face from bar fights and work accidents, monster-like skin "burned from chainsaw diesel spilling behind their collars as they packed saws . . ." (*Unmarked* 14). This man passes his weekends overtaken by a "slow logger's drunk" while he spends more time caring for his prized Cadillac than for his family. The car is "an escape from work that ruined him" (15). However, not only does this activity offer respite for the man, but the luxury car also itself indicates that he has the means, both literal and economic, to leave. Not everyone living in such places does. Each remote resource town experiences its own rendition of this embodied pain and desire for an escape. In Prince Rupert, exhausted fishermen fall into hotel beds "thick with insects" and the blood stains of past bite victims, while on the streets below, men brawl, "fights over fishing license allocation, over netting ground, over deckhands, wives, Federal Fisheries, stealing fish, over stealing space, getting cut out, over edging people out of prime water" (45). "Desperation" fuels these fights and becomes an invisible, physically unmappable part of this place, a "smell . . . on the pavement" in this town where the people who find the most work are nurses, counsellors, and social workers—those "paid to work with pain, employed to assist the broken hearted" (45-46). Through these portrayals of how the act of scarring the landscape begets scarred people, de Leeuw exhibits the need for taking a hard look at how violence becomes an undeniable characteristic in the sense of this place.

In de Leeuw's narratives of how these places were settled, it is often such broken

men who build and lead resource-driven towns, towns in which many young people feel trapped and families often fall apart. Many of de Leeuw's essays recount childhood and adolescent memories of coming of age in these towns and chart the experiences of those who were both bystanders and victims of the expectations for them in these precarious places. The way that de Leeuw entangles her portrayal of the towns and camps with the narrative maps of how she and her friends moved through them reveals that the place of young people in this landscape and their ability to navigate it safely is inseparable from the cultural geography industry creates. For example, as an unsupervised preteen wandering around a logging camp, she was witness to the sounds, sights, and aftermath of parents inflicting violence on their children. The narrative does not insinuate that being employed by a resource-extraction company corrupts one's parenting; but, through metaphor, de Leeuw suggests that the use of force to shape the land and the use of force within the home can be interconnected. Unable to forget the face of the camp foreman's son, "red and pulped as a rotting nurse log" after a fight with his father, the author comments that this boy "would go on to be a logger" (*Unmarked* 17). Through the simile describing the effect of the violence, and the brief aside about the boy's future, de Leeuw hints that the marks that industry leaves are not just on the land. In a similar example, the memory of a friend's body covered with dozens of welts from a metal spoon, becomes "welded together" with de Leeuw's memory of the night the logging camp was broken down and auctioned off, because the two types of pain seem connected in how they mark and bruise the sufferer's body. The sound of the abuser's spoon and of the auctioneer's gavel become fused together (19). In her remembered sense of this place, domestic abuse is inextricable from the demise of the camp that had always been precariously grounded:

"Roaming a logging camp, knowing a company-owned town, a community suspended on the edge of being nothing, leaves blisters and boils just beneath the skin's surface" (18). Throughout the collections, de Leeuw repeatedly uses metaphor and imagery related to the human body, the elements of industry, and the natural world to describe one another, emphasizing that these personal spaces, socioeconomic spaces, and physical spaces are always in relation to each another.

More pervasive than physical abuse, though, is that while their towns and families are caught up in the movement of economic currents, the young people find themselves trapped, immobilized by the lack of opportunity to realize a life lived differently in this place and surviving only by dreaming of this possibility somewhere else. Through her adult eyes, in the essay "Unmarked: Terrace" de Leeuw sums up her adolescence in a town rife with teen violence, pregnancy, suicide, and substance abuse as a time to "dream of escape . . . dream of endless motion when you are anchored in absolute immobility" (110). While passing time physically existing on the periphery of places built to serve industry—"getting drunk on the edge of clear-cuts, in gravel pits, behind truck stops" (110)—young people tell stories to "propel [them] forward" and create a "map . . . carefully folded inside [their] minds" to mark movement, to "navigate being an adolescent in a place like Terrace," and to chart "an escape plan . . ." (114-15). As the youth strive to know themselves and what they want for their lives, the beehive burner at the centre of town is "glowing hot orange pink, throwing flames like mountain ranges into the sky, illuminating nothing but log sorts and box cars" (118). This town with mills at its heart lights up only one path forward, back to itself. For the young people who have watched others follow this route, this map does not represent the promise of what they

might imagine for themselves: “We had plans to escape . . . every shut down, laid-off, out of work, depressed, and trapped resident who filtered through the edges of our understandings about home” (115). In other words, what for the generation labouring for industry is forward movement, is for the next generation immobility, until they either escape or join the industry’s embrace. There is a recurring tension in de Leeuw’s writing between settler inhabitants as rooted in this place and as making and re-making routes through it. But for those residents, especially the youth, who cannot see a way to live in this place outside of a prescribed settler colonial industry framework, the roots–routes tension becomes the seemingly hopeless choice between feeling trapped or feeling transient.

Relocating Settler (Un)certainty

While de Leeuw writes from her experiences as a non-Indigenous person, her narrative maps create a sense of place in which she must acknowledge the unequal negative impact on Indigenous peoples and communities. The texts do not simply isolate and elevate settler suffering; they recognize and witness to the colonial hierarchies of power that resource economies were part of creating and that they sustain. De Leeuw’s narratives are conscious that resource towns and their residents, misunderstood and relegated to the margins of the nation’s awareness, in turn centre themselves in relation to Indigenous peoples and communities, rendering these neighbours, from a settler perspective, marginalized, invisible, and voiceless. Although explicit references to the physical and structural presence of colonialism are themselves often on the periphery of de Leeuw’s essays, even passing descriptions are incisive. For example, in a brief

description of the village of Kitwanga, de Leeuw use synecdoche to map the colonial hierarchy: "Beneath the rim where teachers, police officers, and clergy balanced themselves on high, is the reserve, Gitxsan schools, baseball fields, a stretch of totem poles against the Skeena River" (*Unmarked* 53). In this image, residents with particular careers stand in for institutions that have power to protect and perpetuate settler colonialism and are symbolically elevated above this First Nations community. Thus, in a short essay in which de Leeuw primarily recounts childhood memories of her parents' divorce, she visualizes the power disparity and the presence of colonial education, law, and religion in this Gitxsan Nation village that was tied to the logging industry. She later reveals how this colonial imbalance—the ease with which the downtrodden could tread on others—is replicated in the smaller spaces, such as schools, that comprise the settler landscapes. With her writer's hindsight, de Leeuw begins to mark the tragic suicides of two "young First Nations men" (116), but then concedes that this type of recognition would not have been given to these men in this town's past that she is narrating. Rather, the non-Indigenous students would use slurs, if they noticed the reserve kids at all:

> ([W]hy not be honest? In school everyone called them Indians, slurring the syllables, mocking the accent—this is what they were to everyone. Indians.) They seemed ephemeral to us, as if they did not exist—fleetingly they were bussed in from out of town reserves, caught only on the edges of our vision, our bodies, because in schools clear divisions had been created, territories mapped out with the confines of halls and locker rows. Skid row, where the Indians hung out at break and lunch, reservation alley, where we caught ourselves not looking. (116)

This description hints at the parallel colonial landscape that these students are

constructing. While their parents are logging and fishing the territory opened to them by governments assigning First Nations to reserves and ignoring them, the children are learning to perpetuate this model for living in this region.

In addition to straining settler relations with one another and with the earth, these colonial geographies prevent respectful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous peoples. Even when settlers are themselves harmed by the effects of these cultural landscapes, de Leeuw's texts elucidate that they are also complicit in the disproportionately negative effect on Indigenous communities. In a brief essay titled "Screamed on a Fence, Beside a Passing Train: Burns Lake," de Leeuw succinctly combines the characteristics of the colonial geographies explored in the rest of the collection to frame a single image of the fractured relationship between settler and Indigenous peoples in many northern British Columbia communities. This region is situated in a "landscape of fire scar [that] has not yet fully healed" (90), where "broken trees" lie as "high piles of sawdust and woodchips" (92); its men work at sawmills, "smelling like steamed wood, like a forest on fire," in towns "balanced . . . desperately, impossibly, yet with such absolute conviction"; and its youth, armed with alcohol, anger, and a shotgun, pass an evening shooting at the husks of discarded cars (91). This portrayal comes from de Leeuw's perspective through the window of a train filled with passengers just passing through. Like so many of the communities that de Leeuw maps, this precarious and often unnoticed town has an industry at its core that marks the land and the people that it encompasses. What makes the illustration of this community stand out in *Unmarked* is that racism simmering below the surface in several of the essays comes to a boil in this one. As the essay's title hints at, along the train station platform there is a sign,

> neon surveying-tape letters knit into a chain-link fence, done in the careful, stitched hand of controlled fury, fury with nowhere else to go, ignited fire with nothing left to burn. Such an extensive fence, a fence long enough for everyone on the train to turn toward and read words screaming at a passing train, screaming at residents of Burns Lake and passers-by alike, INDIANS HAVE NO RIGHTS IN THIS TOWN—END APARTHEID NOW! YOU CAN CONTROL OUR WATER, BUT YOU CAN'T CONTROL OUR SOULS! (91-92)

The declaration on the fence delineates the literal and figurative divide between "the homes of those whose water has been turned off by the municipality and the homes of those who turned it off" (93). In other words, even though the settler community is precarious and has questions about its future, it also has power and de Leeuw makes that power visible in the image of a fence proclaiming a message built by settler entitlement and Indigenous anger.

The train soon pulls out of the station again, yet de Leeuw states that a person having seen this message cannot ignore it, because it becomes "[e]mblazoned" in their memory (92). Rather than confine this memory to its imprint on her mind, de Leeuw transforms the sign, its context, and her response to it into knowledge of this colonial geography that her narrative cartographies convey. She marks on the map this anti-colonial act that reflects and alters this place, but that which otherwise might have been relatively fleeting or missed in one's peripheral vision. The train that "does not have time to stop for souls, [or] for the land outside the windows" (92) becomes a metaphor for what might have been the sign creators' intended audience: those people passing by or through colonial geographies without noticing or caring about the conflicts that such

geographies engender. The sign and the way de Leeuw represents it call out the layers of complicity in the colonial project here—the people who create a racist division of rights and access to services, and those who are content to either ignore it or simply observe it happening. Because de Leeuw did witness and comprehend the significance of this sign, she also bears witness to it by recording it in her narrative map, amplifying the voice of those telling an alternative understanding of this place. The essay remarks another sign, one intended to greet train passengers—"a wood sign, carved and painted with sure hands, well paid for, reading, 'Welcome to Burns Lake, Gateway to Tweedsmuir Park'" (91)—but the attention she gives to the fence that screams back at this geographical marker supports the demand that non-Indigenous peoples learn about and respond to the impact of the lines they have drawn on Witsuwit'en territories to create municipalities and provincial parks.

Indeed, several of de Leeuw's essays are forthright in representing how the settler peoples in communities near reserves are willing to disregard the rights of Indigenous peoples even when their own stability and comfort is secured. Her portrayals do not deny that rural settler communities often find themselves economically, culturally, and politically disadvantaged in comparison to their urban counterparts, but assert that these circumstances do not excuse their ignorance of their role in the region's systemic racism. The essays remain focused on the idea that relationships built on a landscape shaped by settler colonial maps—especially in situations where settler peoples are ignorant (willingly or not) of their role as colonizers—by default reproduce this system. One particularly striking vignette situates readers on the southeastern shores of Stuart Lake, where the homes in the community of Fort St. James (built on a site where settlers have

lived since 1806) are separated from the homes of the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation by reserve boundaries. Such "line[s] between the reserves and the rest," Cole Harris contends, "became the primary line on the map of British Columbia" (167) as settler colonial geographies were imposed on First Nations territories. De Leeuw maps the enduring power of these lines to sustain a colonial relationship as she narrates the experience of a young non-Indigenous woman who went with her husband to Fort St. James for his temporary work in labour negotiations with the men at the mill. A road through the edge of this town marks one boundary of a Nak'azdli reserve, and de Leeuw's narrative map of this place juxtaposes the material reality of these "[t]wo communities touching" in a few seemingly innocuous descriptors (*Where It Hurts* 23). Fort St. James has paved roads, off of which ranchers with "good trucks" in "tidy driveways" live in "double-wides" with their well-behaved "tethered dogs" and corralled horses (23); where the pavement ends, there are "heaps of rusting cars," kids' toys discarded in ditches or lying broken under car parts, in front of homes with "cracked-and-duct-taped-over living room windows" and rez dogs running around (24). This dichotomy becomes racialized when de Leeuw exposes how the woman is appalled not at the discrepancy in living conditions, but by the possibility that she might have to live on the disadvantaged side. When the woman's husband leads her to believe that their new home is on the reserve, she cannot hold back tears: "You've never seen a town like this. You don't want to live here. There are so many Indians. You close your eyes" (24). The husband's reassurance that they will be returning back across "an invisible divide" only underscores the colonial structures that he and his wife will benefit from as he explains that "[y]ou're in the Indian reserve. Not the real town. This is Federal Government land.

They don't even bother to pave the roads here" (24). The government's decision not to "bother" with places with mostly Indigenous populations shapes the geography of this region in a way that not only perpetuates the poverty therein, but also facilitates Canadians' ignorance about Indigenous communities.

De Leeuw's essays do bother with such places, mapping the ways that colonial cultural geographies are continually remade in places that bear the marks of lines drawn on colonial maps over a century ago. In refusing to naturalize the invisibility of such lines and geographies, she sometimes also denies readers the possibility of remaining as casual onlookers of the places her narratives ask them to journey through with her. When de Leeuw addresses the new-to-Fort St. James woman in the second person, repeatedly using the phrase "you don't know" to account for the woman's response to her encounters with the people and culture of the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation, the narrative point of view makes readers complicit in this ignorance as well. The woman learns to live with her ignorance and discomfort, but the greater significance of this acceptance of the current order of things is in de Leeuw's choice of narrative voice. This vignette appears at the end of an essay in which de Leeuw writes in the first-person voice; this section begins with an abrupt shift to the second-person voice. It is not unusual in her nonfiction writing for de Leeuw to employ "you" to address an auditor within the text itself, which is what she does here ("You were a young mother in Fort St. James . . ." [23]). However, many of the "you" statements in the essay are too broad and too recognizable to non-Indigenous readers for it not to be clear that de Leeuw intends to implicate this audience as well. The woman does not know that the apparatuses in the yards on reserve are for tanning moosehides and smoking salmon (24), she does not

know why fear is her response to meeting a First Nations woman named Cowboy on the sidewalk, she does not know or inquire which nation Cowboy belongs to, she does not know what to say to her (26). This not knowing only fuels her fear: "You're scared . . . of everything you don't know and never wanted to see . . ." (26). Despite seeing Cowboy almost daily for six months, the woman does not talk much with her, never even asking, despite her curiosity, if Cowboy is her real name (27). The first time the woman meets Cowboy, the First Nations woman is morning drunk, but friendly, smiling, and asking to meet the woman's baby. The latter's response is simultaneously alarming yet predictable: "You're scared she will kill you. You're scared you will catch something. You're scared of being scared, of not knowing what to say, of every side-ways side-slipping 'drunk Indian' thought you've ever had . . . . You don't say anything" (26). That the woman hardly moves beyond this initial interaction represents all those times non-Indigenous peoples have fallen short in building relationships with Indigenous neighbours. In a landscape where divisions between Indigenous and settler peoples are constructed and reinforced through physical and social marginalization, fear and ignorance become impressed upon the region's inhabitants as normalized and acceptable.

These impressions are created effectively in layers, with myriad small, often invisible or unmarked places nested together, such as the remnant markers of a residential school. One of the few residential schools that operated in the northern half of British Columbia is the subject of one essay, in which de Leeuw illustrates the argument that colonial geographies are not just sweeping landscapes of non-Indigenous settlement and resource extraction, but smaller places, such as residential schools, in and through which Indigenous bodies become part of and marked by colonial systems. In a scholarly essay

that derives from her doctoral dissertation and that was published just a few years after *Unmarked*, de Leeuw writes that residential schools were not merely "containers through which colonial narratives were delivered" ("Intimate Colonialisms" 344), but that their very materiality and architecture "transmitted a colonial narrative" of settler power and superiority (343). Moreover, in these places, Indigenous students sometimes were made "to embody and live the colonial apparatus by partaking in its very creation," including being forced to manually clear the land around Lejac Indian Residential School near Fraser Lake, in order to create a place that reflected the settler-constructed dichotomy of civilization versus wilderness (345). The literary essay portrays this assertion in the way that it incorporates into this site's narrative cartography the history of how First Nations boys were put to work to transform the land to reflect the Western values symbolized by the imposing brick structure that housed them and that "dominated" the horizon (*Unmarked* 106):

> Do you know, I am asked, how they made this field? and I answer, no, how is a field made? By chaining together young Native men, boys, children, chaining them together and hitching ploughs to them, leather straps not for a moment slack; they would work like mules, clearing the stumps and complex root systems of trees, breaking the soil and making it arable, levelling the ground, opening their bodies, sowing the wheat. . . . the field is smooth. Something one might take pride in, wilderness conquered. (105)

As de Leeuw's language underscores, the overseers of the school used Indigenous bodies to further the colonial project, to turn what the settlers viewed as wilderness into a tamed and fenced landscape suitable for agriculture. Dehumanizing the children by working

them as beasts of burden, the settlers both mark their bodies and use them to create "[l]andscape transformed, marked" (105)—a "field created on the backs and blood of boys" (106). The school also altered the landscape with these children's bodies in the form of a cemetery. Part of the field the children created became their resting place as well; in it now stand small wooden crosses contained by a white picket fence (105). On their own, the field and the cemetery are visually unremarkable. Today, not even a brick of the school remains, so the site is mostly "invisible" from the highway (104, 106). The danger of this place remaining invisible along the highway is that the violence that created it is forgotten and the colonial apparatus becomes invisible as well.

This essay, "To Preserve the Invisible: Lejac," is intended to create a narrative map that can be part of honouring the lives of the children who attended this school, since "old maps" of the area that depict this site when it was populated are "mute with regard to the pain of the residing population" (104). Her narrative mapping is a response to the way that this particular piece of land impressed its mostly unheard history onto de Leeuw's body, an answer to the way that it communicated its pain to her: "My feet ache with the touch of a field whispering around me, sighing out the possibilities of bones never discovered, pain and grass, grass and pain. What might remain unmarked" (105). By creating a map that marks the pain that happened here, the essay is a response to learning the truth about this place, modeling the ideas that a map, graphic or narrative, can shape a person's understanding of a place and of themselves in that place, and that new understanding of a place should engender re-mapping of it.

The essays in *Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16* and *Where It Hurts* do not chart a clear route forward for decolonizing northern British Columbia. They are first

and foremost evocative creative narratives that explore the author's sense of place, not proposals that present an action plan for the return of land to Indigenous nations and recognition of their sovereignty and right to self-government. However, it is consequential that several exceptional moments in the essays in which de Leeuw writes of being drawn to the land and of being buoyed by community—rather than feeling trapped or directed by broken communities breaking the land—often are intertwined with intentional, positive relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. For example, de Leeuw writes of Queen Charlotte City that a local water source will charge one's blood "like a magnet: you will always return, a compass needle veering towards the magnetic north" and that after her family moved off the island her "joints ach[ed]" until her feet returned to it (*Unmarked* 31). In contrast to the towns where she spent drunken evenings at teenage parties in gravel pits off of logging roads that scar the earth, in Queen Charlotte City "[a]s a teenager [de Leeuw] stood below watchmen with human bones at their base" (31) and drove "logging roads held tightly by the branched hands of Alder trees" to see fish that had burst the banks of flooded streams and were swimming down roads (32). De Leeuw recalls turning her face to see the faces of the watchmen on top of the Triple Watchman Pole—three carved cedars poles facing three directions and that had marked burial sites—and received their story from the carver's granddaughter (36). It was in this town that the school had decided that one of its students should visit a local Elder in the hospital each day, an opportunity that de Leeuw later realized few schoolchildren had, to "hold[] the hands of Charlotte, a Haida woman well over one hundred and three years old . . ." (34). The recurring attitude toward teaching young people in the other essays is primarily of preparing them for work in a resource economy;

here de Leeuw remarks the opportunity for and expectation that young people would build community through relationship. While this town does not escape the precarity, the colonial presence, and the violence that characterizes much of the region, de Leeuw portrays it with a different focus and tone. It is a logging community, but here de Leeuw emphasizes instead that what is "cut into the land in this city" is "family" (36), not means for resource extraction. It is a town that balances tragedy with "joy with no boundary" (39), because in de Leeuw's view it sees a future for itself with a healthy community, culture, and land. A childhood friend who still lives there speaks "of children being born and poles being raised and new teachers replacing old and swarming schools of silver salmon filling the nets of fishermen and the sightings of otters and whales and all that marks change and possibility for the future" (39-40). The lack of punctuation in this list of promise reflects the boundless optimism grounded in family, community, and culture.

Even in the essays where de Leeuw is an outsider to and observer of Indigenous nations engaged in cultural practices and community building, she articulates experiences of perception-shifting reorientation to the land itself. While living and working in Kitimat, de Leeuw overhears preparations for a marriage between a Nisga'a woman and a Haisla man, which momentarily alters her experience of the region. Rather than existing in a network of resource communities that share small airports and narrow highways to transport people and materials elsewhere, she finds herself in a "stretch[ed]" landscape where nations are building relations. De Leeuw hears, beneath the sound of "joyous laughter," a discussion about "[a]n exchange of gifts . . . how the Haisla will give cockles and ocean gifts, how the Nisga'a will bequeath their legendary oolican. . . . This stretches the landscape, makes right your knowledge of great distances. These are two nations

exchanging gifts from different worlds" (50). In this brief moment, the distance between communities is not part of the Canadian narrative of intrepid settlers in remote places bringing national unity and sovereignty into the wilderness; the distance here is between economies, languages, and cultures, each sovereign and Indigenous to their nation's territory. Moreover, this exchange between nations reflects a partnership to counter the effects of settler economies. The Haisla have oolican as well, but the fish taste is affected by the local aluminum smelter (50), so the Nisga'a gift will help nourish this central aspect of the local diet. Similarly, de Leeuw writes that while spending a summer as a cook in the Nass logging camp near the Nisga'a village of Gitwinksihlkw, she helped cater a celebration for the seven local graduating high school students that "was like nothing [she] had ever known." Hundreds of people came for the community celebration: "People from up and down the coast came, crowding into the school gym and dressed in satin dresses and tuxedos, button blankets and cedar skirts" (69). The next day, the community's newest baby was born (70). Here, as in the Queen Charlotte City essay, de Leeuw emphasizes through the narrative structure of the text, that continued cultural practices and new life in the community are interwoven. Her portrayals of Indigenous communities are not romanticized and do not escape the forthright depictions of anger, violence, and despair that emerge throughout *Unmarked*. But, in these three illustrations of Indigenous futures, there is a sense of promise that seems less fraught with precarity and brokenness than the outlook for the region that has at its core resource-extraction economies that marginalize and make invisible the communities they depend on.

These moments of building community against the apparatus of settler colonialism are part of the human geographies de Leeuw creatively conveys as a

meaningful representation of these places. Yet, these moments are otherwise fleeting for de Leeuw and her readers; de Leeuw moved on from each community not long after each of these experiences, and the narrative directs readers to the next map of a forgotten place filled with invisible hurt. These glimpses, then, are of communities that settler nomads are not guaranteed to be part of in terms of reciprocal relationships grounded in and sustained by the places where they are being built. De Leeuw's essays map contradictions in settler certainty. Non-Indigenous residents, visitors, and workers live in and move through northern British Columbia as if the boundaries of municipalities, parks, reserves, forestry service areas, and resource transportation routes are certain and fixed. When this organization of and access to the land brings them security and prosperity, settler communities further entrench these demarcations—and the land dispossession they manage and sustain—in order to protect their own privilege. But in de Leeuw's representations that otherwise resist a definitive or settled sense of place, what is certain is that normalizing and reproducing these settler colonial geographies makes inhabitants of these places both complicit in and harmed by ongoing and unsustainable failure to build good relations with the land and with First Nations peoples. If, however, settlers do the work of learning how the places they live in, call home, and depend on are not settled or inevitable, but are continuously constructed and used to manage dispossession, then it should become clear to them also that the effects of this dispossession, including precarious communities, destructive land use, economic uncertainty, violence against women, racism against and erasure of Indigenous peoples, and the denial of settler colonialism are not unchangeable either. Sarah de Leeuw's literary maps resist coherence and closure, locating and marking unsettling experiences and uncertain futures along the

literal and metaphorical boundaries, routes, and peripheries created by and for settler colonial geographies. By countering the narratives and maps of settler certainty, de Leeuw's representations of northwestern British Columbia bear witness to what becomes forgotten, ignored, or invisible, and they urge willingness to consider and learn from alternative understandings of these places.

Chapter Two: Views from the Skeena:

A Watershed Mindset Reading of Sarah de Leeuw's *Skeena*

Expecting relatives and neighbouring nations to arrive by water, Indigenous peoples of British Columbia's northwest coast and connected watersheds often built houses and totem poles facing "a river or beach so visitors could locate the houses of clan relatives from the water" (N. Sterritt 274). In such places, families and communities orient themselves to one another in terms of a literal view from the water. This small but precise example of culture shaped by water demonstrates in part how the bodies of water that have long nourished the First Nations territories they traverse or demarcate are integral to the peoples' identities, territories, economies, and politics. The name of the Gitxsan, for instance, means "People of the Skeena" (327), a river whose name is derived from the Gitxsanimx word *Xsi'yeen*, meaning "river of mist" (13). It is this river and their tributaries that flow through *Mapping My Way Home: A Gitxsan History*, in which Gitxsan researcher Neil J. Sterritt maps the land and histories of his people using family stories and research conducted in preparation for the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case, and writes about how the Gitxsan adapted and responded to non-Indigenous peoples moving through and into the Skeena watershed.

Small but consequential waves of unexpected and uninvited settler colonizers arrived on the coast in search of inland water routes, such as the Skeena River. These newcomers did not yet have a place in the existing network of relations, so the Gitxsan located and identified these people in terms of the waters. The Gitxsanimx word for the white travellers who first arrived along the Pacific Northwest coast near the mouth of the

Skeena in the late eighteenth century is the same word as that for driftwood (329). Sterritt explains that

> [e]ach spring the Skeena and its many tributaries gather debris—brush, sticks, and trees—and deposit it as driftwood—*k'amksi'waa* as we know it—at the estuary. There it comes and goes with the tide. Because the first Europeans to appear on our shores—Russians, Spaniards and British—were bleached as white as the driftwood and came and left with the tides, they too came to be known as K'amksi'waa and are so called to this day. (92)

This initial understanding and naming of Europeans signifies the seeming impermanence of their presence, with their comings and goings contingent upon currents and tides both literal as well as political and economic. Although this name arose out of an historical and cultural context relatively unknown to most residents of northwestern British Columbia, I suggest it remains an apt descriptor, not necessarily of white people as a racial group, but of settlers in British Columbia broadly speaking. The metaphor of settlers as driftwood reflects the relatively brief and incomplete project of settler colonialism in this region when we view it in terms of waters whose existence stretches back to time immemorial. It is productively unsettling to reflect on the implications of being viewed through the languages and waters of this place as a transitory object subject to the currents of outside forces and washing up on shores it does not originate from. Moreover, the metaphor impresses upon me a comparison worth contemplating: as debris in water can both bring materials worth scavenging and create disruptive obstructions, non-Indigenous peoples offered or imposed ideas and innovations (and continue to do so), both beneficial and harmful to the peoples of the Skeena watershed.

In my reading of Sterritt's Gitxsan history, using the word for driftwood to name the newcomers is one of two meaningful metaphors that he employs to describe relations between Indigenous and settler peoples from the view of water. The second metaphor illustrates the relationship between the two as a confluence of distinct water bodies, each with their own attributes. Places where bodies of water merge within the Skeena watershed are key locations for past and present interactions between nations and cultures, and in Sterritt's text also serve as a metaphor for the necessary balance when such engagement takes place. He writes that "the Gitxsan confluence of river and sea—of K'amksi'waa [white peoples] and Aluugigat [Indigenous peoples of the Americas]—brings an inevitable cultural mingling, but does not bring an inevitable drowning of Gitxsan history, land, culture and values" (144). In Sterritt's metaphor, First Nations and British Columbia's settler communities together form an estuary—there is a flowing together of characteristics distinct to each that creates a place subject to the influences of each, and yet, one does not become the other. We can understand these metaphors as a call in Sterritt's text for non-Indigenous peoples to acknowledge elements of dislocation in their own cultures as they live in the Skeena watershed and their responsibility to uphold and engage in a confluent, not colonizing, relationship.

This chapter reads settler poet-geographer Sarah de Leeuw's *Skeena* as similarly narrating a story of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in northwestern British Columbia from a water view. More specifically, I discuss this text through a watershed perspective that conceives of the Skeena and their tributaries as animate, relational, co-creators of a sense of place. De Leeuw's long poem arises out of the confluence that Sterritt describes, and it contemplates the paradoxically immense and

inconsequential effects of settler colonialism in terms of the river's long memory and expansive reaches. *Skeena* is a free verse poem written in "the river's voice," interspersed with excerpts from archival documents, scientific studies, and contemporary representations that, as she explains in an introductory note to the text, de Leeuw "translated and adapted . . . to construct a poetic rendering of the Skeena River" (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 6). This representation of the Skeena River decentres settler colonial narratives; layers and intertwines multiple ways of knowing this water body, pushing against generic and disciplinary boundaries that often relegate oral histories or experiential knowledges to the margins; and acknowledges the primacy and indigeneity of Gitxsan, Witsuwit'en, Tsimshian, and Tahltan place-making in this watershed, inviting and necessitating the inclusion of their knowledges of the Skeena as well. To cultivate a watershed mindset in my reading of these aspects of *Skeena*, I identify how the river persona unsettles conceptions of this place as colonized; I articulate the ways in which I understand the text to generatively entangle past and present stories of and relationships within and to this watershed; and I assert that reading this storied map of the Skeena watershed incites us to contribute to it beyond the book's pages. *Skeena* grapples with things immense and intricate—a watershed—and potentially overwhelming and unachievable—decolonization—and distills them through poetry to glimpses and moments we can engage with and think through in meaningful ways. Consequently, this poem is one valuable articulation of laying necessary groundwork for seeing and talking about northwestern British Columbia outside of the framework of settler colonialism. De Leeuw's Skeena River both knows and transcends the colonial borders and cultures mapped onto them and immerses readers in this world where the success of the settler

colonial project is not a foregone conclusion, and the rivers give us language to understand how to live in this place through a shared interdependency on and respect for the watershed.

The Skeena in our Stories, Our Stories in the Skeena:

Reading Sarah de Leeuw's Literary Skeena River as Political and Animate

In the introduction to *downstream: reimagining water*, Secwepemc and Syilx visual storyteller Dorothy Christian refers to her "childhood water memories" as she situates herself within a collaborative academic and artistic project that contemplates water as relational (Wong and Christian 1). For me, such water memories include swimming in Tyhee Lake or skating on frozen unnamed ponds and dugouts. But it is the waters of "the creek," namely Driftwood Creek/C'ide' Yïkwah, who quench our thirst, bathe our bodies, and water our livestock on the family farm. When I was home for a visit during the winter of 2016-17, the valley where this farm is located faced extended periods of unseasonable weather, during which there was a lack of snow cover to insulate the ground, coupled with recurring freeze and thaw cycles that included unusual amounts of rain. One of the consequences of this weather was that the course of Driftwood Creek altered just enough, in just the right place, to prevent water from entering the cistern that supplies the farm as well as neighbouring homes. The remedy while waiting for the creek to return to the regular route was for my dad to make multiple trips daily to turn on a pump to fill the cistern with creek water.

For a short period of time, my family's relationship with Driftwood Creek necessarily became immediate and tangible in a new way, and required regular, concrete

interaction between my dad and the specific water body who sustains this rural neighbourhood. Although the creek has resumed the course by which water fills the cistern without intervention, this moment has also become part of the narrative of how humans have interacted with Driftwood Creek. Subsequent weather anomalies or water supply complications might elicit recollections beginning with *Remember that winter when . . . ?* This story conveys knowledge about the creek and affects expectations of how these waters might behave again in the future.

Driftwood Creek flows even more strongly through the memories and stories of author and publisher Sheila Peters, who lived upstream from our farm for over forty years in Driftwood Canyon. The creek seeps into her writing, including her blog, where she has posted poetry about the songs she hears while crouched on the creek's gravel bars ("Song of C'ede'i Kwe"), recounted hikes up to the headwaters and down to the mouth, asked a local mapmaker to map the Driftwood Creek watershed, and shared a local historian's archival findings about settlers building bridges over the creek. Peters also poses the possibility that stories "might find their way into the creek" and end up "swirling down its path to find their way out into the world" ("Stories Looking for Home"). This concept is not just an abstraction for Peters. She once launched a book of poems on a bank of the Bulkley River/Widzin Kwah and sent her writing into its waters as folded paper boats carried away by this river who collects Driftwood Creek and brings it to the Skeena. Peters imagined that this collection of sonnets about a kayak trip along the coast near Prince Rupert might end up in the same ocean waters from whom the verses were born ("Bathymetry River Launch"). She also sent stories—her own and those of others—out into the world via Creekstone Press, which she founded with her husband, Lynn Shervill,

at their home near the creek.

Peters's writing relationship with Driftwood Creek reflects the idea that water is both storied and storyteller and that how we hear or learn from those stories has cultural and political implications. Peters has told many water stories, but she is also aware that there are stories that have been lost, misunderstood, or unheard, especially the stories of Indigenous knowledge keepers:

> The stories I miss—the ones I hear only as rumours—are Wet'suwet'en stories: rumours of sacred places, of marmot hunts, of goats, of the vanished caribou. *C'ide' Yïkwah* or Driftwood Creek marks the division between two territories, that of *Wos* of the Gidimt'en Clan and that of *Ut'akhgit* of the Likhsilyu Clan, a name currently held by Henry Alfred. You know it carries many stories. It's time to listen up. ("Stories Looking for Home")

One carrier of such water stories that Peters wanted others to hear from was Neil J. Sterritt; she and Shervill asked Sterritt to write a history of Hazelton and, years later, Creekstone Press published Sterritt's *Mapping My Way Home* (Sterritt 336). Sterritt begins this text's introduction by remarking on the power of the maps that reflect and guide our understanding of the places we have experienced and of those we only hear about. These maps, many of which we hold in our minds, and the stories that add "texture and meaning" to them "can unite people and define their connection to the land, family, culture, language, history—to home" (1). He then offers in Chapter One a narrative map and brief history of the Skeena watershed, which the rest of *Mapping My Way Home* populates with stories. In other words, to orient his story, as well as those of his family, community, and nation, within Gitxsan territory, Sterritt first narrates the flow of waters

through the Skeena watershed, beginning with "a mere trickle at Otsi Creek near Gunanoot Mountain . . ." (13).

Paying attention to where the water that we use daily comes from and to how we understand and interact with water is also a starting point for what poet and scholar Rita Wong calls "approach[ing] life through a watershed mind." She writes, "From a watershed perspective, I understand that the water always circulates, connecting me to places I do not see, but nonetheless rely upon and affect" (Wong, "What Would Restitution" 86). Because my own impulse is to imagine such unseen places as the waterscapes of pristine mountain lakes or rocky coastal shores that my laptop offers as background images, I take a moment to remind myself that in the unseen places Wong refers to are also people I do not know; flora, fauna, rocks, and bacteria I could not identify; and political struggles and industrial projects I am not aware of. But the waters connect me to them as well. So rather than thinking about water in the abstract or as a commodity, Wong asserts that we can learn about our place in this world by thinking about the "sociality and materiality of specific waters" that we interact with daily ("Waters" 209). Such thinking about water has implications for relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples, because it calls attention to exploitative settler colonial systems that enact violence on water, land, and peoples, which settlers have inherited and must respond to (Christian and Wong, "Untapping" 235, 245). For those of us who are not yet practiced in listening to and thinking through water, literary texts written by authors who seek to, as Wong puts it, "speak with water, as an ally to it," might offer revelatory teachings and insights for restructuring the future we hope to create (249). *Skeena* is, I argue, doing the work alongside the contributors to *downstream* of

"cultivating peaceful and creative cultures that foreground water as a builder of relationships" (Wong and Christian 1).

To explore the potential significance of learning with water, particularly the Skeena watershed, from a perspective of water imagined through poetry, my reading of Sarah de Leeuw's text shares two premises with the work of artists, activists, and academics who advocate for watershed thinking in the ways we tell and learn from water stories. Specifically, my reading of *Skeena* takes into account that watershed thinking is political, and it contemplates water as an other-than-human being who is animate, relational, and filled with stories. I will unpack in turn what each of these premises entails for discussing *Skeena* as part of a larger exercise in learning, discovering, reclaiming, and telling "better stories" about water. Stories that we have inherited about water cannot sustain us, our relations with others, or our societies if they perpetuate the ignorance, fear, and violence that colonialism uses to control, displace, and dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands and waters (Wong and Christian 7). We "need and deserve" stories that restore relations (7), and "understanding that waters are situated, lively, and shared" (Chen 275) offers a potentially transformative water view.

To say that watershed thinking is political is to recognize that bodies of water are sites of power and the stories that are told about them, and who gets to tell the stories, particularly those stories that are heard most widely and from positions of authority, often have real-world consequences regarding who has access to which waters and for what purposes. Moreover, watershed thinking is political in that it is not an individual act, but happens in collaboration with people and other-than-human beings, including waters themselves, who believe that how we know water and our responsibility to it lays a

foundation for the kind of societies that we create, uphold, or strive for. Ideally, this collaboration creates heterogenous communities whose members may be differently affected by and oriented to the status quo of water thinking, but who respect the resulting multiplicity of water experiences and knowledges in order to foster reciprocity and accountability. It bears repeating that each of us has a body that needs water to function and that each human settlement relies on a clean and reliable water source. It is also not a revelation that each of us is descended from peoples whose survival depended on, and culture was created in relation to, specific bodies of water. But it is worth intentionally making these realities less abstract, because these bodies of water are inextricable from the cultural geographies of the places that develop; the ways that we understand and use water shape and are shaped by the laws and politics that govern societies and the relationships between them.

The settler colonial politics of British Columbia work to uphold jurisdiction over lands and waters that the province, and the Canadian nation-state it is part of, cannot claim legitimate title to. Consequently, these governing bodies, in order to maintain the power and perceived legitimacy of their political structures, displace Indigenous peoples from the waters of their cultures (sometimes, as with damming projects, using the waters themselves to displace communities) and disrupt "their kinship to waters and lands" (Christian and Wong, "Untapping" 246). Perhaps not unsurprisingly then, when the British Columbia Court of Appeal overturned Chief Justice Allan McEachern's earlier ruling on the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* case that the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en Aboriginal rights to land had been extinguished in the province, Earl Muldoe, the hereditary chief who held the name Delgamuukw at that time, was quoted as saying, "If you take a bucket

of water out of the Skeena River, the river keeps on flowing. Our rights still flow and they will flow forever" (qtd. in S. Simpson B8). This river view of an historic challenge to the ongoing and tenuous settler colonial project in British Columbia evokes for me an element of Wong's watershed mindset that springs from her awareness of streams flowing beneath the pavement of Vancouver: "The dominant colonial systems we've inherited run on a somewhat predictable logic: capitalist, hierarchical, predatory, exploitative. But underneath them, quietly persisting, are the watersheds and the underground streams, reminding us that another world is possible, and will indeed continue with or without us" (Christian and Wong, "Untapping" 245).

Certainly, the watershed that sustains the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en nations is also witness to whether the colonial Crown and its settler subjects honour the rights they claim to acknowledge, which they cannot do unless they shift their perception and develop their understanding of their historical and continuing relationship to this place in part through restoring connection to and interdependency with water. Wong argues that the Canadian government's residential school apology, for instance, carries only as much sincerity as the government's demonstrated and actionable commitment to stop inflicting violence against Indigenous peoples. But "[f]or this to happen, the government needs to try to perceive and act from within an Indigenous world view, one that respects the land and watersheds as life-giving forces, not merely as resources to be exploited and controlled" (Wong, "What Would Restitution" 84). If fundamentally shifting the way that Canadian law and politics, and the citizens they govern and represent, view water is integral to negotiating land claims in good faith and to making meaningful restitution for past and ongoing colonial crimes, then this turn to watershed thinking must aim to be decolonial.

Diné scholar Melanie K. Yazzie and Hupa, Yurok and Karuk scholar Cutcha Risling Baldy maintain that "Indigenous people are (re)activating water as an agent of decolonization, as well as the very terrain of struggle over which the meaning and configuration of power is determined" (1). In their editorial introduction to a special issue of *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* they explore an "ethos of living well" in "a struggle for decolonization" that foregrounds a view from water, not of it, that they term "radical relationality" (2). They propose this term to refer to an Indigenous feminist framework within which "water is a relative with whom we engage in social (and political) relations premised on interdependency and respect" (3). If we take a moment to recognize that the ongoing land claims negotiations in northwestern British Columbia are also water claims, we might consider that the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en both claim title to the rivers whose names their nations carry and make a claim on behalf of these waters so that their nations might protect these relations to whom they are responsible. In *Colonialism on Trial*, a collection of illustrated and contextualized glimpses into the courtroom during *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, the first two images that political cartoonist Don Monet and Gitxsan researcher Skanu'u/Ardythe Wilson include are maps of Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en territories with an upriver perspective. The maps rotate the conventional representation of the region counter-clockwise ninety degrees and position the viewer on the edge of the Skeena, looking inland (Monet and Skanu'u vi). These maps both represent a view from the water and suggest that in order to hear, understand, and respect the histories and testimonies in which Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en land claims rest, non-members of these nations should allow themselves to be disoriented and guided through the culture, politics, and laws that

are Indigenous to this watershed.

To move beyond thinking about watersheds in a way that conforms to existing political structures that have removed, obscured, abstracted, and commodified people's connections to the waters they live with, into thinking instead from the perspective of the watershed in a way that learns from, respects, and relates to water, we need language and stories that recognize water as a relational co-creator of the cultural, not just physical, geography of a place. This recognition is the second premise for my reading of *Skeena*. At various points in *Skeena*, de Leeuw portrays the river as learner, listener, story receptacle, and knowledge keeper. This storied river learned to discern the difference between various geological formations and soil composition as they adapted to canyons formed in epochs past (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 68-69). The waters are the being who remembers the first calls of the alder trees, the first Sm'algyax words (one of the Ts'msyen [Tsimshian] languages), the first storytellers (69, 72). The Skeena recounts the story of Gitanmaax, where a young girl, pregnant by a "more-than-human creature" and subsequently abandoned by her family in a place cursed with a lack of salmon, called back the fish with a torch and fed her children (30-33). The waters marvel at Raven for "making the world" and desire to gift something that will delight this bird who can no longer be surprised by the world over which it has flown for so long (62-63). It is clear that de Leeuw's Skeena is not a passive backdrop for knowledge, culture, and place-making, but a co-creator in it.

De Leeuw's representation of the Skeena as alive, knowledgeable, and vibrant employs the freedoms of poetic expression to find in the English language and its sounds and grammar ways to convey the meanings of water. To resist reducing water to a

commodified resource with the central purpose of sustaining bodies, economies, and industries, we need a different language—what Robin Wall Kimmerer calls a "grammar of animacy" (55). Kimmerer, a Potawatomi botanist who writes about how she is (re)learning how to hear the voices of other-than-human beings, teaches that whereas the Potawatomi language acknowledges the animacy of plants and animals, as well as "rocks . . . mountains and water and fire and places" (55), in the English language "you are either human or a thing" (56). Wong similarly "feel[s] the limits of [her] English filter" (Wong and Wah 139) and agrees that English is an integral part of what she calls the "imperial delirium [that] imposes its own agenda and arrogantly assumes that its way is the best way, without making meaningful efforts to listen and learn from who and what are already there" (Wong, "What Would Restitution" 88). As writers, poets, and language learners, Wong, Kimmerer, and de Leeuw are attentive to the power that language wields and understand that English carries the baggage of its colonizing work. Kimmerer contemplates that her work as a botanist—learning a language to speak about the plant beings who populate our world—may come from "a longing to comprehend this language I hear in the woods" (48). Perhaps, to borrow Kimmerer's words, de Leeuw was "[l]istening in wild places . . . audience to conversations in a language not our own" (48) and turned to poetry in a similar search for grammar, sounds, and images to make the river's language comprehensible.

The central means through which de Leeuw attempts to make the Skeena intelligible and to represent its animacy is the river's first-person "I" or "we" persona who speaks in perpetual conversation as a relative to other beings in the watershed. Each tributary that the Skeena collects, each winter wind that brings ice, each riverbank that

floods, each chickadee or saw-whet owl chick who succumbs to their currents is a "you" that the river gathers into a "we." As the waters near the Pacific Ocean, the Skeena greets four neighbouring tributaries as "[s]iblings running from our motherlands" (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 88). Alongside knowledge of the rivers' ocean-bound journey, the Skeena conveys watershed workings as a kinship network:

> I am the family member you can't
> ignore. A liquidy topographic pull
> an ocean outlet
> with tides and gravity on my side. (88)
> . . . . . .
> Sometimes you fool me. Make me believe you're *choosing* me above
> clouds the coveting rain coaxing roots of yellow
> cedar. Like you said no to those glaciers
> and nosed into me. You sibling on the run
>
> making me feel wanted
> brother of my lowest lowlands. (89-90)

Throughout *Skeena,* the "I" cautions and commends, and reminisces and ruminates with their watery kin, geological and botanical neighbours, and animal and human communities. De Leeuw's imagined Skeena persona is a communicator and relative, who can be both powerful and violent, but also gentle, forgetful, receptive, and loving. This literary endeavour to know and convey the Skeena through the language available to the poet, does not, I maintain, uphold the arrogance of English that, in many stories about waters this language has claimed as its own, reduces rivers to objects or resources with utilitarian and economic value.

De Leeuw's decision to use an "I" persona to tell Skeena stories through poetry prompts readers to reflect on the implications of the way that we situate our voices, perspectives, knowledges, and languages in relation to those of the waters, particularly

when we maintain that they have their own. In a review of *Skeena*, Emily McGiffin, a writer, scholar of environmental literature, and former resident of the Skeena watershed, notes that de Leeuw's text "gives voice to a non-humanity entity that doesn't communicate using human language. . . . rivers lack representational agency in a linguistic sense; *Skeena* addresses this silence with a single, long, reverberating ode to the northern river that is the poem's protagonist" (1). I would suggest, though, looking at *Skeena* not just as de Leeuw's poetic address to this river, but as her imagining of an ode that the river might speak to the other beings who live in and rely on the watershed. De Leeuw's poetic rendering of the Skeena's voice offers a story of the watershed whose structure and tone are neither definitive nor narrow-minded; rather, *Skeena* reflects a spirit of collaboration and learning in which watery networks sustain the central focus. A watershed mindset requires commitment and accountability to thinking with water, rather than "thinking *of* or *about* water" (Chen et al., "Introduction" 3), and to a "water view" that situates us in relation to how water views the world (Yazzie and Baldy 2). When Christian writes about the need for mindfulness as we undertake a "watershed moment"—in the sense of both "reframing our identities in relation to water" and seeking a paradigm shift—she commits "to speak *with* water, because many humans are not listening to her voice carefully enough" (Christian and Wong, "Untapping" 234; emphasis added).

Listening in humility to water and bringing their teachings into the water stories we tell is a work of collaboration, of learning from water with others. The work of Christian and Wong bears out such collaboration; they have co-authored and co-edited writing that reflects their understanding of and participation in watershed thinking. In

water writings she has authored by herself, Wong often still acknowledges Christian, the "sister-friend-comrade" who invited her to join in "this watershed route" (Wong, "What Would Restitution" 86). Christian and Wong also look for ways to amplify in the forms of their work the collaborations that can otherwise become muted or invisible in conventional essays or poetry collections. For instance, they are listed as co-authors of the essay "Untapping Watershed Mind," but they each wrote their own coherent essay, in dialogue with one another's ideas, that were then spliced together and published as alternating pages; in other words, Christian's essay appears on the even-numbered pages, and Wong's on the odd. Moreover, in each essay there are pauses for water memories and poems—disruptive moments heightened visually by italicized text that is sometimes aligned along the right margin. Similarly, in Wong and poet Fred Wah's *beholden: a poem as long as the river*, each author composed—in handwritten script and typed text respectively—a poem that flows alongside and sometimes crosses an enlarged image of the mapped Columbia River, which is part of a watershed in the Pacific Northwest. This creative project was printed as a 114-foot banner that was exhibited in galleries and divided into pages when published in book form. So, on each page there is a clear visual and textual representation of three river stories. For Wong, writing water poetry as a collaborator with, or ally to, water, which she does in works like *beholden* and her poetry collection *undercurrent*, means not using a first-person persona. Wong is "hesitant to speak *for* water in the abstract" because "defining and speaking for the other, pretending to know better, [and] rapidly asserting mastery rather than humbly acknowledging one's limits" are endemic and naturalized in settler colonial societies. She strives instead to speak "nearby" water where she can "attune [her] senses" to how it exists outside of

colonial structures and languages (Christian and Wong, "Untapping" 247, 251). Wah, too, contemplates the exercise of looking for or discovering the "right language" to represent the materiality, history, and situatedness of water—language of awareness, respect, and responsibility (Wong and Wah 141). When we learn and communicate in English, we inherit its colonial toolbox, as well as its broad, malleable, dynamic, and inventive lexicon. A poet writing with a water view of relationship building in a place of decolonial struggle understands the gravity of, and possibilities within, discerning between the two.

I propose that the aims of speaking with or nearby water that Wong strives for—learning in collaboration, listening in humility, writing with accountability to a decolonized future—can ground a respectful speaking with water from the imagined perspective of an "I" taking river form. De Leeuw dedicates *Skeena* to her late father Dionys de Leeuw, a biologist who worked on habitat protection, who "introduced [her] to and taught [her] to love the Skeena River. He is now with the Skeena River" (*Skeena* 5). Learning the river's ways with family suggests that relationship was one of the lenses through which de Leeuw develops a Skeena voice. Although de Leeuw is listed as the sole author of *Skeena*, its words are not hers alone: she curated early settler accounts from archives, excerpted research and scientific studies, requested permission to incorporate histories and images belonging to First Nations, drew from letters written by schoolchildren, and articulated the voice of the Skeena. *Skeena* is an accumulation of water views. Moreover, in the sections of the text where she writes the river persona, de Leeuw crafts an overheard conversation saturated with sensory imagery and seemingly not bound by patterns or conventions in its rhythm, grammar, or form. There is, however,

no response to the river's questions, observations, musings, compliments, or laments. De Leeuw introduces readers to the Skeena as animate, storytelling being and invites us to imagine the response of mountain peaks, the moon, American Dippers, or Kitselas Canyon, which are dialogues many of us may not have realized that we have overheard before.

She implicitly asks for and cultivates attentive reading or listening to words, syntax, and logic that at times may seem meaningless or unintelligible because they are unfamiliar. Rather than an attempt to distance or exclude readers who are less acquainted with or attuned to the cadences or dialects of speech beyond the human prose they encounter daily, this river voice is a revealing of the generative thinking that can take place when we reach a limit or obstacle to our understanding and experience and confront it with humility and inquiry. In the onomatopoeic "p…ppp…ss… …ss… … …ht… … …t-t-t-t-t-t" can we hear the excitement of the droplets returning to the Skeena as rain after having visited skyscrapers, boreal forests, and the back of a running black bear in their tour through global water cycles (78-79)? How does a river whose memory and experience stretch to the Pleistocene forget when an unyielding canyon appeared (69, 77), but remark on "[e]phemeral ephemeroptera. Sticky transparent / wings wet with our waters" (17) and the flecks of yellow highway paint floating to the Pacific Ocean (92)? Can we see the beauty in a spring-strong river loving this seasonal sense of self, even as their currents snap the legs of a moose and taste the "willow-tip breath" of this creature in her death throes (65-66)? Can we see the imposition and invasion of a railway that connects a nation, but "drown[s] out" the river's sound, its "[g]reat sooty black breath" leaving behind trails of creosote (20)? When Wong writes that she might be able to learn

from and speak nearby rivers "if [she] keenly listen[s] to its shapeshifting grammar, its stubborn flow despite human obstacles and impositions" (Christian and Wong, "Untapping" 251), she could be describing what I hear de Leeuw articulating through the Skeena persona. Christian's approach to creating visual representations of water movements and perspectives is also relevant here: when we begin with collaborative listening and learning and then "allow our imagination to flow with the water," it becomes clearer "how profound a connector water is for all of us" (240). Through de Leeuw's portrayal of a watershed's "I"-view, we can envision an animate, relationship-building water body whose view of the world has shaped the other beings in their watershed and will continue to do so, in spite of and beyond this relatively brief project of settler colonialism that waters have been subjected to.

In terms of decolonial watershed thinking with the Skeena that recognizes the rivers as sites of power and politics and as animate co-creators of place, a poem like de Leeuw's *Skeena* cannot dismantle the colonial structures that are irreconcilable with land restitution and the rights and title of the Skeena watershed First Nations, nor can it compel its readers to take it upon themselves to dismantle these structures. But as readers who embrace the complex and entangled Indigenous, settler, and other-than-human histories that this text intertwines, and who learn humility in being confronted with how little we understand of how rivers might know the world differently than us, we should not be satisfied with having learned a scientific fact or historical tidbit about the Skeena, or even with feeling sympathetic for the salmon whose numbers are dwindling, or for the First Nations whose rights and laws are violated. Rather, we should be encouraged and empowered to engage with water stories that undermine colonial borders, that affirm the

precedence and presence of Indigenous nations created by and with the waters of the Skeena, and that call out the tools of settler colonialism. As such readers, we might be inspired and invigorated to see what new languages and stories we can learn to develop good relations—perhaps a watery dialect that cannot translate the logic of sacrificing a river to pollution for short-lived economic gains. In her reflections on the role that arts and humanities can have in orienting us differently towards water as we seek a better world, but have no clearly defined path to it, author Larissa Lai suggests that what is important about a project like *downstream*—and I would add *Skeena*—is that it "actively makes a commitment to the life of water, and actively seeks multiple pathways to its ebb and flow, its life of and for itself" (262).

In his Massey Lectures, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, author Thomas King makes the case that who each of us is and the kinds of societies that we build are comprised of the stories, both real and imagined, that we hear and tell. He concludes each lecture with a variation of the following statement:

> Take Will Rogers's story, for instance. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Make it the topic of a discussion group at a scholarly conference. Put it on the Web. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story.
>
> You've heard it now. (60)

Readers of *Skeena* will come away from the text having encountered a multiplicity of this river's stories and facing the decision that King describes. We learn to hear conversations between river kin and detect in them echoes of the watershed's oldest human stories:

> That petroglyph just west
> of your mouth a face smiling through lichen even I

do not understand. (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 89)

Can you now look at the flow from a faucet without wondering what salmon have left their stories in this water or what First Nations songs have been sung over the river currents on their way to you?

"We Join. You into me.": Undertaking a Watershed Reading of *Skeena*

Skeena begins with a full-page black and white photograph of an incomplete bridge rising from the freshly cleared banks of a river. Titled *Construction of Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Bridge Over Skeena River* and taken circa 1911, this archival image captures a man standing on a truss that reaches out towards the centre of the river; the man is dwarfed both by the equipment and materials and by the environment the construction is trying to bridge. Turn over the page to read a short poem titled "Skeena Crossing" that describes the image and reflects the unfinished bridge project in the poem's form. For example,

A bridge built middleward.
Inward.

Bridge — bridge — bridge — bridge — water. Bridge — bridge — bridge bridge — (8)

On the facing page, de Leeuw reproduces the words from a road sign on Highway 16 that marks the historical significance of this bridge, which was ultimately completed in 1912. The sign commemorates the settler accomplishment of replacing sternwheelers with trains for the "vital" opening up of the Upper Skeena and "shorten[ing of] the route to the Orient" (qtd. in de Leeuw, *Skeena* 9). The following three pages likewise comment on the impact of this bridge, but in poetry from the perspectives of the poet and of the river.

First, de Leeuw prompts readers to imagine this moment in "1911. A river still uncrossed by railway track" (10), a watershed not yet traversed by the rails of empire. Then, the voice of the river persona enters the text for the first time with a declarative "I am the river" (11) and reflects on the day the man stood above the Skeena's waters on this half-finished bridge, the day the river "became small . . ." (12). These first six pages establish the form of this text, support the premises that water is political and is an animate storyteller, and offer a watershed reading practice.

My reading practice focuses on how a water view, and de Leeuw's representation of it, pushes back against structures and logics that uphold settler colonialism; reveals complex entanglements in past and present stories of and relationships within and to this watershed; and invites collaboration to further contextualize, expand, and enrich this particular narrative map of the Skeena. Both the Skeena and *Skeena* push against conventions that have been normalized as logical and meaningful, namely, a visually represented watershed with clear borders and a collection of poems with an obvious spot in the bookstore's poetry section, rather than on its local or natural history shelves. There are parallels between how *Skeena* does not follow a linear or chronological narrative, and how the waters that move in and out of the Skeena defy conceptions of watery movements suited to the written directions or visual maps that we commonly turn to for guidance to and through a watershed. Morgan Hite, a cartographer who has worked with Neil J. Sterritt and Sheila Peters to create visual maps that complement their narrative ones, questions the value of the theoretical concept of a watershed in which all waters run downhill in search of flowing bodies that will carry them to the ocean. Because, he says, in reality, water poured out on the ground will likely evaporate or disappear into the soil,

rather than become part of the river's journey to the ocean. However, it is possible to map a theoretical watershed, so when Hite visually represented the Driftwood Creek watershed at Peters's request, he emphasized roads and trails to clearly depict how easily we cross from this watershed into the larger landscape in which it is embedded (Peters, "Driftwood Creek Watershed"). What is particularly striking to me about this map is that it shows only a section of my family's farm as part of the same watershed as the creek that waters it; I learned from this map that each school bus ride and each family trip into town took me on a different route in and out of this small watershed. Rita Wong experiences a similar continual movement "over various micro watersheds" in Vancouver and learns from this realization how "intimately, sensitively" water experiences gravity and topographical shifts (Christian and Wong, "Untapping" 235, 237). Indeed, situating ourselves and our stories in relation to watersheds requires a heightened sense of the places and communities we are most immediately connected to, which unsettles, in potentially decolonial ways, the power that the imagined communities of British Columbia and Canada hold over the way we view our rights and responsibilities to a watershed.

De Leeuw's poem in both its content and its form tells a story of situated waters that defy easy borders, which creates generative uncertainty that requires continual attentiveness and adjustment to where the text and its Skeena view positions us as readers, and potentially, as people dependent on these waters. *Skeena* does not ignore the settler colonial past and present in which the watershed exists; the early-twentieth-century bridge construction on which the text opens was just one of many colonizing projects in the young province. De Leeuw includes excerpts of texts written for the

National Research Council of Canada, the Royal British Columbia Museum, and newspapers like the *Victoria Daily Colonist* and *The Western Call*—institutions created in and for the legislative and economic hubs of colonial Canada. But the Skeena waters do not view themselves primarily as a British Columbian or Canadian river. If we accept that the Skeena, who witnessed an ice age melt away and mountain ranges appear (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 68), was "[a] river still knowing the world in Skeena time" when the bridge was constructed in 1911 (10), we see the arrogance of colonial claiming laid bare. As Canadian literature scholar Kit Dobson writes about *Skeena*, "The insertion of the river's voice allows de Leeuw to work with the longer memory of the Skeena, well before the settlers arrived, and allows her to break, moreover, from the anthropocentric challenge that the documentary collage otherwise risks imposing" (139). Moreover, the river persona's continual narration of the myriad waters—including rivers, waterfalls, salt-water waves, elk urine, rain, ancient seas, ice, streams, glaciers—that join and become "we" makes strange the logic of desiring precise demarcations for beings, histories, and places that are better understood as mutually constituting one another. As Hite points out, much of a watershed's waters are not in the flowing bodies our maps focus on (Peters, "Driftwood Creek"), yet these waters are integral to the ecology and the culture of the watershed. Wong would add that the water we take into our bodies on a daily basis perpetually remakes us, so we, too, cannot be viewed from a water perspective as separate (Wong and Christian 7). In her poem "Declaration of Intent," Wong writes, "water is a sacred bond, embedded in our plump, moist cells," and portrays as animate the water-sustained "salty pulse within, the blood that recognizes marine / ancestry" (14). De Leeuw similarly brings together water and body words that are more descriptive than

metaphorical as the persona in *Skeena* thins the distinction between themselves and human bodies. The Skeena says to a woman swimming,

> Your skin membrane a watery system
> veins like tributaries thin splinters and blue
> sparks. (80)

Wong's and de Leeuw's poems emphasize that the waters within and outside of our bodies are in intimate relation. If our cells are replenished and recognized by the watershed's rivers, are our bodily waters also Skeena waters? When we are willing to pollute, commodify, and irreparably alter river waters, why do we think we can avoid doing the same to our bodies' waters?

So, in a watershed reading of *Skeena*, I look for concepts dependent on colonial structures and logics that the water view unsettles. For example, given the size and reputation of the Skeena as difficult to navigate (Vickers and Budd 10) and how, from a Canadian perspective, the watershed is remote and pristine, there is a history of writing about the Skeena as a river that is integral to the success of settlement and that to navigate it demonstrates the indomitable pioneer spirit. "Such is the Skeena—," writes R. G. Large, a doctor who practiced in Prince Rupert from 1931-1982, "a river with a dirty brown face and a violent disposition, but destined to be the gateway for the march of civilization across the northern half of the Province" (Large 4). Intentional or not, Large's personification of the river as having a "brown face" and "violent disposition" seemingly aligns the river with Indigenous peoples—whom Large repeatedly describes as having been "treacherous" (15, 20)—as features of this place that need to be controlled so that they may serve rather than impede settlement. Indeed, whether explorers and settlers navigated rapids or trade routes, Large attributes any success to their characters and the

honour of their mission in the face of incredible hostility from both the landscape and its heathen inhabitants. For instance, of Major William Downie, an Englishman scouting the Skeena watershed for a railroad route, Large writes that

> he had a natural gift for dealing with primitive peoples. To travel through a country of hostile Indians without any serious altercations, and, in fact, with their cordial co-operation, was an amazing feat. The information he was able to give Governor Douglas on his return undoubtedly contributed greatly to the success of subsequent efforts to open up the country. (28)

These sentiments come from a written history of the Skeena published for the 1958 centennial celebration of the united Colony of British Columbia and certainly commemorate the colonizers' use of and movement through this watershed. For *Skeena*, de Leeuw excerpts part of an article printed in a 1913 issue of the *Bella Coola Courier* that similarly lionizes the men who took ships up the wild Skeena. The article claims that "[t]here is no more difficult river in the world to navigate than the Skeena," before describing captains of a fleet of efficient sternwheelers who had been in a "continual fight" against a river intent on sinking their boats (qtd. in de Leeuw 36). Notably, this article animates the Skeena, but does so through transplanting European myths to the riverbanks. The article imagines the captains "anticipating the Skeena's latest cantrip," such as when "the spirit of the Skeena enlisted the aid of the Erl-King in the bush by the river-banks" to fling a tree onto the boat; when this effort created a hole in the hull and made visible the "imperturbable" engines powering the boats, the river sprite was left "baffled" (qtd. in 36). *Cantrip* is a Scots word meaning "a witch's trick or mischievous device" ("Cantrip, n."). Erl-King is a reference to the "malevolent elf who haunts the

Black Forest, luring children to destruction" in Germanic legend (Britannica) and the titular character of "Erlkönig," a ballad by German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in which a young boy sees the elfin king in the night's mist and dies by force when he does not follow the elf's beckoning (Goethe). Here the settler colonial writers have not heard the animacy of the river, but have imposed their own spirits onto it, to romanticize the settling of the Skeena. With this impulse to justify or inspire control of the waters for the purposes of transportation and trade is the imperialism of animating this river with transplanted myths. When the story of a river is that its central characteristics are strength and malice that defy settlers to control it and that it is baffled by or respects those who do, there is a need for more and better stories.

De Leeuw's Skeena does have destructive—yet not malevolent—power, but the waters also experience destruction, disruption, and displacement. This part of the river's stories is often absent from the narratives of empire building, but it is recurring in *Skeena*. The river's voice is the perspective from which most of *Skeena* is written and if we navigate the book from front cover to back, the first characteristic of themself that the river articulates is that they are aware of even the most minute things that they touch, including "tips of drifted-down pine / needles" and "the husk of a hair from a rutting bull moose" (11). When we take a moment to observe water bodies, we may notice briefly that even mayflies can "rupture" and "dimpl[e]" a river's surface (17). But a failure to perpetually recognize that this river is affected by their surroundings at any scale enables us to look at the vast Skeena watershed and maintain that it can handle what we put into it, what we take from it, and what we build to move through it. The river persona calls out this lapse in perception:

Still you do not believe I am small.

You refuse to believe.

Insist I can take anything. (11)

In multiple senses, the Skeena does and can take a lot. The waters gather tributaries that drain tens of thousands of square kilometres of land (14n1). They collect geological debris and envelop bridge foundations, until they are hurling one against the other, "spit[ting] mountains / against your pilings beneath / your decks . . ." (37). They consume property and take lives, their swollen spring waters flooding homes, sinking ferries (46-47), and drowning full-grown moose (65-66). This river and their watershed are mighty and immense. This river and their droplets are fragile and finite. We must learn to hold these two truths simultaneously, or risk disrupting the life-giving cycles of the Skeena's waters in all their forms, from H_2O molecules to ocean estuary.

For instance, the river persona's opening address suggests that when we lose sight of the river's smallness, its intricate and complex delicateness, we might both assume that the watershed is too large for us to irrevocably alter it and also strive to make it small on our own terms: manageable, controllable, and traversable. This latter understanding of the Skeena as small reflects what Stó:lō author Lee Maracle describes as entitlement that lays the foundation for invading, owning, overusing, and destroying water (37-38). In a short essay reflection on relationships to water, Maracle shares her own learning to humble herself before water—to "feel [her] smallness, [her] inconsequentiality, [her] imposition on water" (33)—and emphasizes that such humility is the wellspring for respecting life, appreciating the magnificence of water in any quantity or form, and engaging with water in a responsible relationship.

Indeed, when the persona first confronts the "you" who does not believe its smallness, it is not evident who "you" is; as a reader, I feel implicated. A few lines later, the persona speaks directly to the man in the photograph who is doing the work of making the river small by crossing it with a bridge that can hold freight trains. This man needs to be told that what he puts into the river feels like a "splitting" (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 11) and tastes like "black" and "creosote" (12). Rather than accept that we, the readers, are therefore released from the initial critique of not believing the river, I suggest that it is productive to read the text's portrayal of the construction worker as a symbol for the pioneers of colony building in this watershed, but also of those who have inherited and accepted this unfinished project and pick up its tools in turn. Although the text states that the bridge was completed over a century ago, the image captures the construction in progress and the river persona uses the present continuous verb tense to address this moment: "You young man are still / finishing the job" (11). The legacy of such projects is ongoing, but, as Larissa Lai reminds us, not everyone relates to this legacy in the same way—some people have survived it, others benefitted from it, some people are disenfranchised by it, others empowered by it, and sometimes these inheritances overlap (260). So, to productively orient ourselves to the history of colonization in this watershed, "[o]ur thoughtful, honest self-reflection on these complex histories and our place within them must be the site of knowledge from which we begin to work" (260). The Skeena persona indirectly asks us in these first pages of the text to contemplate what "job" we might be undertaking that continues the work of making the river small and useful on our own terms and in service to upholding a claim to the watershed. Emily McGiffin asserts that *Skeena* beginning with the construction of the bridge "opens the Skeena's story not at

the beginning of time, . . . but with the arrival of the railway, that seminal moment in the colonial history of Western Canada. In this way, the text ratchets up the importance of that moment as it adopts—and forces the river to adopt—colonial reference points and values." She rightly notes that the poem is "laden with the detritus of western capitalism," and questions whether this attention is at odds with de Leeuw's intent to present "the Skeena as an entity with its own agency and voice," because the text gives the colonial "structures and the society they represent the very power the book perhaps seeks to question while undercutting the strength and timelessness of the river itself" (2). But I would argue that there is agency and strength in the river persona first calling out the power that such colonial projects have to alter the identity and vitality of their waters. The river critically responds to, rather than simply observing, the awe and commemoration that the archival documents convey for the project. And the river persona does also recount memories from pre-human and pre-colonial times, which McGiffin suggests the book could have opened with. Moreover, as McGiffin goes on to acknowledge, the marks of colonial presence that the persona adopts "are all part of the life of a river wending its way through a peopled wilderness that is far from untouched and it is clear that de Leeuw strives to honour all of its inhabitants, past and present" (2).

The relationships built in and with this watershed are complex, multiple, and intertwined—in order for the water stories that we listen to and that we tell to reflect this complexity, they must not flood out one another. They must mingle and flow as currents around and through one another, as part of the cultural confluence that Neil J. Sterritt describes. This confluence metaphor calls to mind the pentimento metaphor that Cree scholar and educator Dwayne Donald uses to challenge the desire of mainstream

Canadian history and of the nation's public memory to view Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories of this place as separate and to obscure and forget the former by focusing on the latter as the complete and accurate portrayal of the civilization Euro-Canadians brought to and built in this place (23). *Pentimento* is a word to describe in a painting "a visible trace of a mistake or an earlier composition seen through later layers of paint on a canvas" ("Pentimento, n."). To view history as layered in this way—with Euro-Canadians painting over Indigenous understandings of history and place with their own interpretations—then, argues Donald, "the idea of *pentimento* operates on the acknowledgement that each layer mixes with the other and renders irreversible influences on our perceptions of it," so when we see traces, we should pay close attention to these stories thought to no longer be part of the picture and to learn how and why they have been covered up (24). A view from the water can help us see such traces. To teach the history of Indigenous peoples in Edmonton, Alberta, Donald guides walks through the River Valley to view this city from the perspective of a gathering place, both before and after colonial contact, along the North Saskatchewan River. From the river's view, we can see the sites best suited to crossing the river to set up camps for trade and ceremonies, against a backdrop of skyscrapers, multi-lane bridges, and light-rail transit. From the river's view, we can see in the painting of Edmonton as a political and economic hub the traces of the Indigenous histories, families, stories, and ongoing presences that cannot be separated from how we view and live in the city today.

Therefore, in a watershed reading of *Skeena,* I pay attention to the echoes, overlaps, and complex places that de Leeuw creates through the excerpts that she selected as part of the existing Skeena stories, and through the river persona who speaks around

and alongside them. I contemplate what traces of histories, memories, and place-making de Leeuw hears in or sees from the Skeena and how she guides readers to consider these potentially obscured stories more closely. For example, there is an eleven-page portion of *Skeena* that focuses on the Kitselas Canyon, an archaeologically significant site with evidence of five thousand years of Tsimshian settlement and a geographically significant site with a reputation for its narrow canyon and swift currents that was a treacherous obstacle for Euro-Canadian boats. In mapping the river's journey through this part of the watershed, de Leeuw includes an archival photograph; a brief description of the Gitselasu—People of the Kitselas Canyon—written by the Kitselas Nation; a clipping from an August 1912 issue of *The Western Call* about the railway journey from Prince Rupert to Hazelton; a description of Skeena riverboating from an educational video series about Canada's great rivers; and, flowing around these excerpts, seven pages of the river persona's voice, including a list of reserves allocated to Kitselas and the Skeena's memories of past geological epochs. We could try to view these different moments in the canyon's history as discrete layers in the construction of civilization in northwestern British Columbia, each covering up what came before with a new and complete representation of progress in this place, as Dwayne Donald asserts Canadian mainstream accounts of history tend to do.

But the river's view refuses separate, layered histories, because the marks of each narrative co-exist within their waters and along their banks to this day, which de Leeuw represents in this relatively extended focus on the Kitselas Canyon. In its description of the role that the Skeena played in Canadian history, *The Great Canadian Rivers Project* recounts the failures—steamboats, the Collins Overland Telegraph—and successes—

sternwheelers, the settlement of Hazelton as (briefly) a bustling trade centre along the Skeena—that resulted from the ambition, fierce competition, and "lucrative business" of settlers arriving in the region in the late nineteenth century (qtd. in de Leeuw, *Skeena* 76). This account, published in 2002, that de Leeuw excerpts reinvigorates and reminds us of the promise of settler success that was prominent a century earlier. In 1912, *The Western Call* praised the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, which made the sternwheelers no longer necessary and therefore was "of incalculable interest and value to all Canada and the British Empire. It is an important part of the present empire-building process." The view from the train, says the article, includes the Skeena's canyons, small villages, and "embryonic garden lands" that bear the potential for city building and economic development, such as "lumbering, farming and mining activities" that will make the province and nation "throb with a new life" (qtd. in 74). De Leeuw does not recover this representation from the archives and publish it for a new audience in order to re-centre and celebrate settler colonial aspirations. Rather, I maintain, this excerpt is an example of how much faith the early inhabitants of this young province had in their narrative of opportunity to settle and develop promising, unclaimed land, and an example of the sometimes intentionally forgotten colonial declarations whose reverberations are still felt in this province that wishes to believe itself actively reconciling with Indigenous peoples. Indeed, lingering beneath the surface of this settler dream is the unacknowledged presence of the village makers living in those canyons, and the histories that rendered this land seemingly available to settlement. So, following this newspaper clipping, the river persona lists the surveyed boundaries marked by "Commissioner O'Reilly. September 18, 1893. // Timber Reserve. Indian Reserve. Railroad Reserve. / Git'aws to Indian Reserve

No. 1" (75). The river records such re-naming and re-creating of place, but this project of imposing a new map and version of history onto Tsimshian territories was not as complete as O'Reilly might have envisioned it to be. The Kitselas Nation today uses their original place names and tells their own history of living in this place since time immemorial as "[t]hey continue to work and live in this rich landscape and have a very proud heritage that is still practiced today" (qtd. in 71). Notably, then, the most recent voices in this section of *Skeena* are telling the earliest histories. The settler stories of progress that are invested in Indigenous displacement and dispossession are not the sole or most authoritative history of this place.

The Skeena as storyteller resists the impulse to obscure one history of the Kitselas Canyon with another. From the river's view, flowing through the canyon today means seeing the geological marks of a retreating ice age; the cultural marks of "village makers" who brought language, stories, and family lines into the canyon and "[p]etroglyphed" it; and the colonial marks of "iron slivers nailed / into torsos of Sitka spruce" and "lines of forest / cleared" (70, 72-73). Each new narrative created in this canyon is collected by the Skeena who, in this poetic rendering, reminds us of the continuing relevance of each in understanding and creating the stories that both settlers and Indigenous peoples tell of living in relation to this place and to each other.

Finally, in a watershed reading of *Skeena*, I look for ways in which hearing and contemplating the confluences of storied waters in this text invites me to collaborate, or recognize the ways in which I am already collaborating, as well. *Skeena* is presented as having a single author, but nineteen of the book's ninety-three pages reproduce the work of others and name the sources or locations of these other Skeena stories (with varying

specificity). So, while de Leeuw's Skeena persona is the central current through this text, *Skeena* is not an attempt to offer a new, comprehensive river story; the inclusion of other stories disrupts the flow of her own and calls attention to her choices of what to include and, subsequently, to not include. As a poetic map and history of the Skeena, the text is rich with stories and imagery that orient us to a water view, but this map and water view is fundamentally incomplete—this water story can be infinitely added to with our own experiences, memories, and knowledges of the Skeena, their tributaries, their drainage territories, and their water cycles that connect these rivers to global waters. In an exploration of the way that we claim knowledge of water places particularly through mapping them, and how this affects our relations with water and the way we perceive place and community, architect and scholar Cecilia Chen asserts that "[e]ach map needs a readership," because the concept of an "authoritative iteration" presented by a map is a "fiction" and those who engage with the map can further contextualize it (293). Chen also offers suggestions for how visual maps might therefore take into account and represent multiple perspectives and collaborative authorship, including "an awareness of the same watery place or event over time" and multiple understandings of water and orientations to it (293). De Leeuw's *Skeena* practices bringing together multiple perspectives, encouraging readers to see this written map as one possible constructed representation of this river and to reflect on, if not share and contribute to, the depth and complexity of this confluence of water stories.

In the first pages of *Skeena* and scattered throughout the text, I read invitations and prompts to collaborate and to seek out other Skeena stories and perspectives. In

response to the text's opening photograph of the construction worker on the bridge, de Leeuw writes,

> His hand is extended.
>
> The photo doesn't capture it but.
>
> Imagine.
>
> A saucer hurled for the sheer joy of watching fine bone china. Slice air. Slice water. Launched from the grease-stained hands of a railroad engineer. (10)

De Leeuw offers here her own imagining of what the photo does not capture, but the instruction to imagine what is just outside the view of the lens nudges readers to actively engage with the text and to respond to the curiosity-provoking loose ends or shifting edges of the multiple perspectives de Leeuw incorporates in *Skeena*. For instance, for each visual element or written document that de Leeuw reproduces, excerpts, or responds to in *Skeena*, she mentions one or more details about the source's title, date, creator, and physical location. There is enough information that if readers have access to the internet or to a library, they are able to seek out additional context for most of the narratives de Leeuw has brought into her poem. The text that de Leeuw copies from newspapers, for example, she introduces with the name of the periodical and the date that the issue was published; de Leeuw does not, however, identify if the copied text comprises the entirety of the published item or where this item appeared in the newspaper. Elsewhere in *Skeena*, one page of de Leeuw's poem describes *Skeena Crossing*, a 1926 painting by the Group of Seven's A.Y. Jackson, and asks questions about its representation of a Gitxsan village, but the book does not reproduce the painting. In both cases, my desire to see how these views of the Skeena that de Leeuw interacts with were originally framed, coupled with

the fact that she does not provide in *Skeena* a bibliography of the sources she consulted, led me to Google. Consequently, I ended up perusing the University of British Columbia's searchable database of the province's digitized historical newspapers and encountering other portrayals of the Skeena from the perspective of the province's early settlers and champions of colonialism. Without the clear map of the research destinations de Leeuw arrived at that a bibliography would have offered, my reading practice included a meandering research course that flowed in and out of *Skeena* to other narrative spaces, such as websites created by First Nations to serve community members and to educate non-members, and the online exhibits of digital images from Tsimshian and Gitxsan villages curated by Simon Fraser University's Bill Reid Centre for Northwest Coast Studies. *Skeena*'s use of glimpses from competing and complementary river stories that represent a multiplicity of perspectives encourages readers to participate in a reading practice that asks us to learn to recognize the complex interconnectedness of relationships to and within a watershed and to be willing to reposition ourselves in relation to the waters that sustain them in a way that is more engaged, nuanced, and responsible.

Perhaps less directly than the entries that de Leeuw winds her poem around, the river persona poetry also offers multiple watery stories and through them enlivens perspectives that we may not have encountered or listened carefully to before. The persona names places you may not have heard of, portrays landscapes using geological terminology that you may skim over without understanding, and identifies flora and fauna you may not be able to conjure an image of. But the poem teaches about what makes this watershed culturally and ecologically distinct through how the river contextualizes such words and characterizes the beings and places they speak to and

about, while also connecting these place-based representations to movements that reach beyond the watershed into readers' lives and contexts, like water cycles, animal migrations, and human industry and community building. The river persona takes something unfamiliar of this place and makes it recognizable. For instance, the Skeena names two companies that built salmon canneries along the Pacific coast over a hundred years ago, and then describes

> [w]omen packed side by side by side slicing salmon slick in blood
> boots sloshing in sleet rain and salmon guts.
>
> Freezing hands shoving flanks
> of salted sockeye into tins. (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 24)

Because there are no auxiliary verbs that determine the past or present tense, the waters could be both remembering a distant past and noting the ongoing work of preparing the waters' bounty for market. In this instance, the river both identifies specific marks of settler industry that shaped the culture of this watershed but that do not have name recognition, and hints at the connections between this place and the harvesting and packaging that continues today across the country. Conversely, the persona names places you may live in, portrays landscapes using geological terminology you may use in your work, and identifies flora and fauna you may see in your backyard. But the poem situates such words in the perspective of a watery being and disrupts expectations in order to invite readers to unmoor themselves from the familiar and to look at their surroundings from a potentially reorienting view from the water. For instance, the Skeena vividly notes how they could confuse the moon with elements of the detritus, animals, and landscapes in and around their waters, such as "the rain-bleached / knucklebone of a drowned / squirrel rotted to my bottom . . ." (64). Imagining that the river could mistake the moon

with this small remnant of death and decay disrupts our sense of scale and of what might be remarkable and beautiful beneath the Skeena's surface. In either case—whether the river persona makes the unknown familiar or the ordinary surprising—a generative reading of *Skeena* that orients readers to have a view from these waters and to cultivate a deeper understanding of how these waters and their stories permeate our lives involves examining and exploring the gaps and abundances in our knowledge and experience that we bring to these watershed stories.

"Then the names came": Re-Placing the Skeena Watershed through Naming

When the river persona recalls a time before humans named them, Sarah de Leeuw models a way of naming that orients a being to place through describing what is ecologically distinctive or is experientially remarkable about particular locations from a watershed perspective. Because this persona is affected by each and every interaction with their waters, their existence is necessarily relational, which their naming practices reflect and perpetuate. The poet imagines that this river being would identify local flora, fauna and water qualities; describe their sensory interactions with each ecosystem; and use these descriptors to mark distances and locations. In a section of *Skeena* titled "Tributaries," the river says,

> Before we had names I measured
> here and there
> in salmon eggs buried thin
> in flat rock sharp stone sand.
>
> In the gap between granite
> and eelgrass.
>
> In spruce cones and not salal.

In places with molluscs in places of grizzlies. (49-50)

Each “here and there” becomes known to the river by what animals, minerals, plants, and waters they encounter. These locations then receive from the river a sensory-laden designation that conveys knowledge about each site based on patterns and cycles of experience. For instance, the river marks confluences with their tributaries using words like “slow-and-full-of-water-with-lily-roots-thick-as-a-young-doe’s-knee-knuckle” (50) and “rotten-fiddleheads-frothing-churned-through-mud-flavoured-like-blood-and-iron-into-my-own-flanks” (51). By hyphenating these words—creating what look more like compound adjectives than place names—de Leeuw suggests that to the river these qualities are intricately connected and inseparable in what defines the essence of that location in the watershed. She concludes this section,

Nameless by humans

we still
water-fed
each other

still called. (52)

De Leeuw here prompts readers to consider that mutually-sustaining relationships with a particular place—the waters feed each other as they call out to each other what makes them distinct—are cultivated through knowledge and experience grounded in that place. Indeed, through imagining that the river would identify their network of watery relations in terms of direct observations, personal interactions, and ecological cycles, de Leeuw honours place-making that is rooted in understanding how the one who names and the one who is named affect each other.

By constructing this before and after in terms of humans naming the Skeena watershed, de Leeuw uses the river persona to comment on the monumental effect that introducing and imposing names has on place: the names not only replace the designations the river uses, but re-place, or create new places, of and alongside these waters. The river persona prefaces each of their own tributary descriptors with the past tense: "You were once," "[y]ou were," "you were no longer" (50), "[n]o longer" (51). After twice describing their knowledge of seasonal and mating cycles in the time "[b]efore we had names" (49), the river declares,

> Then the names came.
>
> Voices called over
> our waters
> soil markers
> valleys stated. (50)

And this transition, first to Indigenous names and then to Euro-Canadian names that modified, translated, supplanted, or added to the places created by the cultures and languages that have precedence here, did not happen passively. The river describes this naming process as "[s]lippery words forced into us" (50). The verb choice here suggests some sort of resistance that required power, or even violence, to compel the river to accept these new names. Names like Boucher, Comeau, Deep Canoe, and Harold Price were given to creeks in the Middle Skeena watershed and appear as a list in this poem (50). According to the BC Geographical Names Office, Boucher Creek is named for Jean Baptiste Boucher, a French-Cree interpreter working at Fort St. James in the early nineteenth century, or perhaps for his granddaughter, who married the Hudson Bay Company's Post Manager at Fort Babine ("Boucher Creek"); Comeau Creek is named for Denis J. Comeau, who in 1911 applied to purchase a lot of land in the vicinity ("Comeau

Creek"); and Harold Price Creek is named to commemorate a land surveyor who died in the trenches of France during World War I ("Harold Price Creek"). Canoes, forts, land surveys, and pre-emptions—humans were making their marks on the banks of the Skeena and naming the waters to reflect and maintain what they had built. De Leeuw does not include these place name origin details in *Skeena*, but these names bear the traces of how early settlers were claiming and making places for themselves here. By listing these names in her poem, de Leeuw incorporates and perpetuates these traces in her narrative that also becomes part of place-making in the Skeena watershed. In other words, the poem emphasizes the way that these names, not those that de Leeuw imagines the waters using, are continually inscribed on maps and recorded in databases and thereby frame our understanding of such places and how they came to be.

These place names and the cultures they stem from not only signify the arrival of new ways of knowing and navigating the watershed, but also, the river persona insinuates, change the river itself. In a slightly nostalgic tone, the river asks,

> Where did the flavour of rotting
> packed-down muskeg go?
>
> Where are traces of caribou scat
> mating coyotes and the struggles
> of Dolly Varden trout on steep
> shoots of thin waterfalls? (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 51)

The phrasing and context of these questions open them up to two interpretations. First, that the river now also uses names like "Spring Creek / Star Creek / Thomas Creek" (51), rather than qualifiers that describe what the water witnesses or experiences at each location. Second, that the qualities of the waters and of the plants, animals, and soils that they nourish have changed as well, due to the actions of the people who chose the new

names. In other words, perhaps as a result of the people whose presence brought new names, the caribou, coyotes, and trout no longer inhabit the place that these creatures once made ecologically distinct. This "Tributaries" portion of *Skeena* suggests that the two interpretations of the river's questions are related: the names and, coincidentally, the places have changed. For instance, the river speaks of noteworthy changes that brought people to and through the watershed:

> Then gold and railways
> metal metal metal
> and then more metal and
> you were no longer
> waters-last-to-be-free-of-snow-and-ice-cooler-of-my-headwaters. (50)

De Leeuw links the arrival of railways with the disappearance of this river name, but it is difficult not to hear in these lines that the waters themselves are no longer what they were before. Elsewhere in *Skeena*, the river persona describes the "Curve. Rail. Steel. Nail. Creosote. Trestle." of the rail line that now follows their route to the coast, with train engines "[p]anting. Great sooty black breath. Hauling" (20). These trains pass by hills marked with fissures seasonally filling with snow or becoming waterfalls that feed the Skeena, but after the passing of a freight train, "[i]n the end nothing will remain / but a greasy creosoted slide-trail" (20). New names, but also new materials and substances, come into the watershed with the people who build, operate, and are supplied by the railways. Through articulating a river's experience of naming and being renamed, de Leeuw illustrates how closely linked place names are to the values and practices of the cultures who call these names out over the land and mark them on their maps.

From the perspective that the Skeena is an animate storyteller and place-namer, our diminished ability to hear the river voice and their names and identifiers means that

we lose the waters' knowledge and accept more narrow categorizations of where such knowledge belongs and can be found. Following the "Tributaries" section of her poem, de Leeuw reproduces the concluding paragraph of a research paper titled "Biogeochemical Contributions to the Water Quality of the Skeena River." This excerpt summarizes that the water quality is affected by factors—including whether a tributary feeds the Skeena "turbid glacial meltwater" or snowmelt from groundwater aquifers, the sequence in which the Skeena receives these waters, the effect of the resulting water chemistry on fish populations, and the decomposition of organic matter—that create intricate and complex patterns and cycles of chemicals, nutrients, and organisms (qtd. in 53). Because de Leeuw places this excerpt directly after the river persona offers, through their naming, knowledge of their waters' qualities, I maintain that we read these river descriptors, such as "[a]lways-sliding-gravel-once-the-snows-lift" (50), as similarly conveying biogeochemical information. *Skeena*'s poem is brimming with sensory imagery that teaches about the ecology of this watershed, including where the river tastes salt and copper, identifies salmon species and life-cycle stages, feels the seasonal influx of mountain-fed streams, and expresses surprise when observing, in their "too turbid" waters, a bird that normally swims through clear streams (86). Where the river persona speaks to four adjacent tributaries and details what characterizes each, they articulate or allude to knowledge we might expect to find in research papers, through the perspective of a being who views these waters as alive, complex, intentional, and worthy of respect. For example, of the Kasiks River the Skeena says,

> Is it true Kasiks your sands taste sweet?
> Your back eddies enthrall me I marvel at your slow slow running into me. Seducer middleman. Confident child. Not quite trusted.
> You hoard ice shards in winter collude

flood easily refuse me cool in summer
calling chinook salmon and seals the first blades
of eelgrass and ripe elderberries. (89)

Similar to the research paper's author, the Skeena persona observes the composition, speed, temperature, and seasonal patterns of these waters that attract and nourish certain species—but from the perspective that the Kasiks is a subject with agency. Reading such passages is an exercise both in using language to animate the waters as relations with whom we speak and experience the world, rather than as objects to speak about and study, and in expanding our expectations of where we might look for, or how we might write about, such water knowledge. Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that elders have reminded her to think and speak of other-than-human beings as persons who have their own languages, knowledges, and abilities to guide and teach. She then encourages us to inhabit the world in this way: "Imagine the access we would have to different perspectives, the things we might see through other eyes, the wisdom that surrounds us. We don't have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us" (Kimmerer 58). In response, I propose considering de Leeuw's poem in part as an exploration or illustration of poetry as a productive genre in which to create from English a grammar of animacy that allows us to, as Kimmerer writes, "[K]now the world as a neighbourhood of nonhuman residents . . ." (56). De Leeuw's poem points to the idea that if more of the Skeena stories and place names that we encounter, create, share, and speak alongside of the river recognize and honour the waters' perspectives, our understanding of and being in this place would be more relational, humble, and attuned to the waters' voice, character, and changeability.

By creating a before and after in terms of imagining how the river might know

themself apart from the place-making human cultures that now call the Skeena watershed home, de Leeuw asks readers to reflect on the names we use. However, by choosing the arrival of human language as the significant shift in naming from the river's point of view to human ways of knowing, de Leeuw's text also diminishes the differences in ways that cultures and languages name place, and the effects of different nations overlapping on the land and re-mapping it. The river persona in *Skeena* does not explicitly distinguish or create a dichotomy between Indigenous and settler place names; the river reflects the cultural confluence that Neil J. Sterritt writes about. Throughout the poem, when the river uses the human names for the waters, mountains, and communities they pass by and through, the voice says Tāłtān, Sm'algya̲x, Gitxsanim̲x̲, Witsuwit'en, and Dakelh words,[19] anglicized or translated versions of such words, and English or French words. The names are swirling around together in the narrative currents of these waters. Neither I nor the text is arguing for a hierarchy of naming that strives either to recover only Indigenous language names unaffected by the existence of Canada as part of performing reconciliation, or to steadfastly hold on to all settler names as part of assuming the completed and immutable project of settler colonialism. Rather, we need to acknowledge the confluence of names that are entangled in this place and to identify the nuance in specific place names and in the different approaches to and reasons for place names across these cultures. Dwayne Donald mentions Indigenous language place names as indicators of pre-contact Indigenous presence that most Canadians plainly see but then argue that such languages and cultures are "outdated and largely irrelevant." But when

[19] In *Skeena*, de Leeuw only mentions the Sm'algya̲x language by name. However, following the spelling in an excerpt that she includes in the text, de Leeuw writes the name as *Symalgya̲x.* Sm'algya̲x and Gitxsanim̲x̲ both belong to the Tsimshian (Ts'msyen) language family. Tāłtān, Witsuwit'en, and Dakelh are Athapaskan languages.

we recognize "that Aboriginal people and Euro-Canadians are intimately connected through the stories they tell of living together in this place," then we can tell stories that "reveal these relationships" and that reimagine ways of living as Canadians in these shared places (Donald 23), including the stories we tell through the place names that we use and understand. My reading of *Skeena* is that it supports the need to meaningfully reflect on which names we hold on to and which we reclaim, which names we understand, and which names we willingly let obscure our knowledge of this place.

An engaged and collaborative reading of de Leeuw's poem moves beyond simply recognizing that the place names on our maps and signs bear a mixture of origins, often forgotten or unknown. This knowledge, while a good starting point, too easily falls into a narrative of Canadians accepting that the nation's place names reflect the existence of pre-contact Indigenous cultures and their own country's colonial beginnings, but rejecting that the legacy of these beginnings, and of the names that mark them, reverberates in the present. In other words, simply learning the Indigenous origins and meanings or the colonial changes and additions of place names does not necessarily lead someone to support or engage in decolonial action. My research to contextualize de Leeuw's inclusion of lists of place names as lines of poetry in *Skeena* led me, for instance, from quickly searching the glossaries and online databases scattered across my desk and internet browser tabs to uncovering a glimpse of a relatively minor, yet meaningful, articulation of a colonial narrative playing out in trial transcripts and newspaper archives. This narrative is indicative of how emptying place names of the histories and relations that they encapsulate, whether through ignorance or rejection of, or lack of curiosity about, their origins or significance sustains settler colonialism.

This research exercise began with a single and seemingly mundane line from de Leeuw's poem. Following the river persona's description of the arrival of human names for their waters, de Leeuw lists the names of three neighbouring tributaries that join the Skeena in the upper portion of the watershed: "Shilahou Slamgeesh Sustut" (50).[20] Each of these tributaries flow through territory that the Gitxsan claim and, therefore, these rivers were named and discussed during the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* court case. So in my search for clarity regarding the meanings, origins, and significance of these place names, I happened across a document from the trial transcripts of *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* that contains all three names, and that is particularly remarkable to me due to the minor but privileged voice of a non-Indigenous witness who could navigate these names and places of the Skeena watershed while relegating the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en use of this territory to a past that the people and culture were fortunate to have been elevated from. The document I am focused on here is part of the testimony that Igor Steciw, a medical doctor and a part-time guide outfitter based in Smithers, gave in July 1989 as the first witness called by Michael Goldie, lead counsel for the Province of British Columbia. Goldie questioned Steciw to make the case that there was little evidence of Indigenous peoples living or hunting in the approximately ten-thousand-square-kilometre area, including around Slamgeesh River, where Steciw was certified to guide hunters (Monet and Skanu'u 149; British Columbia, "1989-07-10"; British Columbia, "1989-07-11" 18573-74). What is most relevant about Steciw's testimony in terms of my initial queries about the names of the three tributaries, is that

[20] It is not evident in *Skeena* which map(s) or database(s) de Leeuw used to populate her narrative poem with place names, but the river persona generally seems to use the names recognized by the provincial government's BC Geographical Names database.

this witness's unfamiliarity with the significance of the place names in the region that he testified is generally empty of an Indigenous presence seemingly was a factor in his confidence to make this claim. Stuart Rush, counsel for the plaintiffs, included the following questions about place names in his cross-examination of Steciw:

> Q [Rush] And let me ask you also, you understand that the word Slamgeesh is a Gitksan name?
>
> A [Steciw] I guessed it, but I didn't know for sure.
>
> Q All right. And you use the word Damshilgwit?
>
> A Yes.
>
> Q You understand that's a Gitksan name as well?
>
> A I again understand that, but I wasn't quite sure.
>
> Q And what about Shilahou?
>
> A Shilahou Creek.
>
> Q Yes. You understand that to be –
>
> A Probably all Indian names. I kind of surmised that, but again this is the first time I hear for sure that they are. (British Columbia, "1989-07-11" 18580.6-18)

My point in including this exchange is not to single out a settler resident who profited from his use of this land, but to reiterate that knowing and using Indigenous place names does not preclude someone from declaring that the peoples who first marked these places have been assimilated and that their rights to the lands that bear their names have been extinguished. Indeed, in his Reasons for Judgment when he determined in March 1991 that Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en title had been extinguished, Chief Justice Allan

McEachern states, “The most striking thing that one notices in the territory away from the Skeena-Bulkley corridor is its emptiness. I generally accept the evidence of witnesses such as Dr. Steciw, . . . that very few Indians are to be seen anywhere except in the large river corridors. As I have mentioned, the territory is, indeed, a vast emptiness” (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 1991 “Part 2”). Even after Steciw learned during his time on the stand that these place names he uses belong to the languages spoken by Indigenous men with whom he has hunted (British Columbia, “1989-07-11” 18553-554), and after McEachern’s ruling was overturned by the Court of Appeal, Steciw continued to hold and publicly espouse his belief in the civilizing mission of Canadian settler colonialism. As recently as 2013, Steciw wrote several letters to the editor published in *The Interior News* (the local newspaper in Smithers that also serves nearby Witsuwit’en and Gitxsan communities) in defense of residential schools (Steciw, “Claim”), the humane colonization of Canada (“Treaties”), and equal fishing rights for non-Indigenous people (“Equal Rights”), among other issues and positions that rely on colonial tropes. Indigenous place names relegated to static markers of a past interaction between an Indigenous person and a settler explorer, surveyor, or government official do not complicate the narratives of empty spaces and assimilated peoples on which the presumed success of settler colonialism rests.

But when we encounter and accept such place names as dynamic expressions of living languages, cultures, and territory systems, they become part of an assertion of and respect for Indigenous rights and territorial claims. Sterritt writes about the work of documenting place names to create maps and record histories in preparation for submitting to the court their statement of claim: “The place names are the geographic

markers of spiritual and historic events showing the breadth and depth of our Gitxsan ancestors' long-standing presence on, and occupation of, the land. The chiefs who provided this information to me were the contemporary voices of our ancestors, the repositories of the knowledge of their own House territories" (N. Sterritt 303-04). To ensure that the court and its records understood and reflected this knowledge, and that the testimonies aligned with the maps and documents created by the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en to support their claim, the plaintiffs, their witnesses, and translators often carefully repeated and spelled out the names of places, chiefs, territories, and clans and houses that they know and use—to the point that McEachern suggested it would be simpler at times to use English names. Observing this moment in court, political cartoonist Don Monet deemed it worth illustrating; Monet drew the chief justice, dwarfed by his chair and holding his hands up in a questioning manner, saying, "Why do you use Indian names, can't you just use their english [sic] name? Why does everybody use both? I have to struggle to catch up every time you use one… I just can't see why?" (Monet and Skanu'u 90). In this particular instance, McEachern was referring specifically to chief names.[21] However, the place names in the glossaries that Sterritt later published in two books about Gitxsan history and territories that present summaries of the research that they conducted in preparation for negotiating land claims and used during the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa* trial suggest that these names would also necessitate pauses and clarifications due to their unfamiliarity to an English ear and eye. For instance, when

[21] During the testimony of Sakxum Higookx/Vernon Smith, McEachern said that he would need to pause questioning to double-check the use of non-English names of chiefs, so if it were "convenient" he could follow the dialogue if they used English names (British Columbia, "1988-05-03" 5680.3-5). When the defence counsel stated that they would continue to use both English and Indigenous names because the latter appear in the related documents, McEachern conceded, but noted again that "everytime [sic] you do it you lose me. I struggle to catch up to you again, but I don't always make it" (5680.10-12).

Sterritt discussed the Sustut River during his testimony, he also gave the Gitxsanimx word—which is *Xsuwii Aks* (Sterritt 13), meaning "river with big water" (335)—and spelled out the name so that the court could also recognize it in the records and maps that the Gitxsan created: "That is the valley of Xsuwii Ax or Sustut River, Xsuwii Ax is X-s-u-w-i-i A-x . . ." (British Columbia, "1988-06-29" 7455.28-29). Learning to hear, say, and understand such names requires committed work from English speakers, especially when, as McEachern's admitted struggle highlights, an English or anglicized name is available as well. In an article that discusses how the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en used cartography during the trial both to make their claim to sovereignty over their territories intelligible to the court and to supplement colonial maps with their own maps based on their oral knowledge, Matthew Sparke comments on the careful attention to Indigenous languages: "Every time a First Nations' word was used, it had to be interpreted and meticulously spelled out for the court records such that the cultural distinctiveness of the peoples as First Nations with disjunctive cultural histories was reaffirmed" (472). The Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en persistence in speaking their languages and sharing their naming practices, particularly when the court found them unintelligible, or incompatible with the province's representation of the land and understanding of jurisdiction over it, is an integral part of how these nations demonstrate their pre-colonial and continuing use and conceptions of the land and exercise their inherent right to preserve and develop their territorial system of land ownership. In 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirmed that "Indigenous peoples have the right . . . to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons" (UN General Assembly art. 13).[22] For the Gitxsan, whose "names and histories of their

[22] In 2019, British Columbia passed Bill 41, the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*,

territories form the 'deed' to the property, demonstrating ownership in the feasthall, and are thus proprietary" (Johnson 41), and for the Witsuwit'en, who also have proprietary names that "serve to validate the relationship of Houses (*Yikh)*, and Clans to bounded Territories" and that are often not general public knowledge (54, 163), it was a significant decision by the hereditary chiefs to share these names and histories in court where they would be recorded and the province's lawyers "would go to great lengths to undermine the validity of all that evidence and would try to attack the credibility of the chiefs" (N. Sterritt 308). But these nations "subordinated" the danger of publicizing their knowledge "to their wider project of educating Canadians and seeking recognition of self-government" (Sparke 474). As recipients of the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en maps and testimonies, when we resist the work of hearing and conceiving of these territories in a way that is challenging to us and our place in them, desiring instead the familiarity or the supposed fixedness of English names, we refuse the generous gift of these histories and tacitly continue the work of settler colonialism.

Returning to the line of place names from *Skeena* that precipitated this research and reflection, the perspective of the river persona hints that how we understand these places might be unstable or shifting and require us to reposition ourselves with a different footing as we learn these names and how they are preserved today by those people who carry the histories of their nations and territories. De Leeuw lists the names Shilahou, Slamgeesh, and Sustut directly following the Skeena persona's remembrance of the arrival of the first human names called out over waters, which insinuates the Indigenous origins of these place names. Then, working with the incidental repetition of the *sh* and *s*

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which requires the province to apply UNDRIP to its laws and "provides a framework for decision-making between Indigenous governments and the Province on matters that impact their citizens" ("B.C. Declaration").

sounds, de Leeuw refers to these names as metaphorically "slippery" (*Skeena* 50), implying that such names were initially difficult for the river to handle, perhaps in terms of their pronunciation or their significance to the watershed. In my research, I encountered two ways that such names continue to be difficult to have a firm hold on, particularly for those of us to whom these names and places are unfamiliar. First, glossaries contain inconsistences in orthography and incompleteness in translations or origins, and second, comparing documents that map First Nations territories sometimes reveals that there are competing land claims and contested boundaries. The names Shilahou, Slamgeesh, and Sustut offer a prime example of such slipperiness beyond the poem's metaphor. The Gitxsanimx word for Shilahou Creek is *Xsilax'uu* (alternately spelled *'Ksa'Lax-oks*), meaning "water/upon where/swamp" (Sterritt et al. 306). The Gitxsanimx word for the Slamgeesh River, Lake, and surrounding area is *K'alaanhgiist* (alternately spelled *Qalanhlgist*), meaning "upper/grey willow" (302); elsewhere the name appears as *Galaanhl Giist* (N. Sterritt xvii, 326). Given the focus of his work as a cartographer for the Gitxsan land claim, it makes sense that Sterritt uses the Gitxsan name *Xsuwii Aks* when referring to Sustut River. However, the origins of the Sustut place name, similar to the Skeena watershed's Suskwa River/Sis Kwah, meaning "Black Bear River" (Morin 345), are in the Witsuwit'en-Nedut'en language. The root *sus* in both names is a spelling variation of *sis*, the Witsuwit'en word for "bear" or "black bear" (Alfred et al.; Mills 453).[23] Searching for a northern British Columbia place name results in multiple maps and studies related to tourism, land claims, resource development, and environmental conservation that, in this case, reveal that there are competing claims to

[23] The BC Geographical Names Office database records Bear Wallow River as a previous or alternate name in its entry for the Sustut ("Sustut River").

the land around the Sustut and its tributary Bear River and Bear Lake. A territory map created for the Gitxsan Treaty Society shows these bodies of water as belonging to the Sustut watershed (one of nine watersheds the Gitxsan divide the Skeena into for the purpose of governance and administration), and to particular territories of hereditary chiefs ("Gitxsan Territory Map"). However, several reserves, including Bear River (Sustut River) No. 3 at the junction of these two rivers, lie within this area as well and belong to the Takla First Nation, a member of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council ("About Takla Nation"); the Takla Nation also maps Sustut River, Bear River, and Bear Lake within the boundaries of its traditional territory ("Takla Nation"). In short, Sustut, the more commonly known and mapped Witsuwit'en-Nedut'en name for this place in contested territory, is tied to a history of disputes and ceremonies between the Gitxsan and Sekani, entangled with settler colonial interference through the establishment of forts, reserves, and the modern treaty process.[24] Similar to the Skeena persona who reflects on how their understanding of familiar places changed with the arrival of these names, I found myself disoriented and seemingly alien to my home province as I tried to piece together the varied appearances of these names. However, from this slippery vantage point I was prompted to seek firmer footing in this more layered and complex story than my previous simple recognition of place names offers.

Skeena does not inform readers of many place name origins and meanings, but the river persona's narrative does erode the idea that much of northwestern British Columbia

[24] For instance, because the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en understood that competing territorial claims could jeopardize the strength of their case in the eyes of the court, representatives of these peoples, along with those from the Dakelh (Carrier) and Sekani peoples, camped at Bear Lake in July 1985 to discuss territorial borders, recount oral histories, and renew relationships (N. Sterritt 53). Sterritt notes that "[s]ome of the younger people from Takla . . . were surprised and perturbed that Gitxsan people they had never met were claiming land in the area" (54).

was as empty as Euro-Canadians first mapped it. Place names are a primary way that residents of and visitors to Canada become familiar with the sight and sound of Indigenous languages. As de Leeuw's *Skeena* saturates readers' minds with such names, it also normalizes accepting the precedence and continued presence of First Nations place-making throughout this watershed. Arthur Manuel, a Secwepemc political leader and advocate for Indigenous rights and title, explains that "[a]ccording to the tenets of the doctrine of discovery, all that Europeans had to do to expropriate the lands in a region was to sail past a river mouth and make a claim to all of the lands in its watershed" (Manuel and Derrickson 4). Whether they think such settler colonist claims were valid or not, many Canadians have heard the founding myth that Europeans discovered vast areas of empty and unused land that they therefore had the right to claim and settle on. De Leeuw's story of the Skeena does not maintain this premise. Toponyms appear throughout *Skeena*, but there are two instances where the river persona alludes to the act of marking the geography with Indigenous languages, which I read as a rejection of the "obvious mistruths" underlying the Europeans' early maps of the Americas as terra nullius (Manuel and Derrickson 3). Along with witnessing the first voices calling out names over the waters that would become Shilahou, Slamgeesh, and Sustut, the Skeena recounts first hearing human voices in Kitselas Canyon:

> We alone remember
> the first voices.
>
> *Symalgyax.*
>
> Larynx syntax and lexicon
> calling against the wind.
>
> Voices and feet on ferns voices and a village. (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 69)

Here the text joins the naming event with people physically touching and marking the topography being named. Moreover, it is significant that what follows the presence of "[v]oices and feet" in the canyon is a village. The Skeena details how these first "village makers," in addition to marking the canyon with their voices and rock tools, experienced collective growth by establishing "[f]amily lines. Deep into / our private canyon" and building "longhouses" where children heard "*adaawak*," the histories belonging to their people's clans (72). These village makers were society builders. De Leeuw interrupts the river persona's description to include an excerpt from the Kitselas Nation to support and clarify the Skeena's portrayal. There is "[a]rchaeological and ethnographic evidence" that suggests that the Tsimshian people who built this village and named themselves as belonging to this canyon—the Gitselasu, meaning "People of the Kitselas Canyon"—occupied this area of the watershed as far as back as five thousand years (qtd. in 71). In contrast, the only example of the Skeena persona directly describing an act of settlers naming does not affirm their discovery of untouched lands, but reminds readers of work the government did to make the land empty. Within the section of the poem about Kitselas, de Leeuw lists three Tsimshian communities, including a village in the canyon, whose land was surveyed, re-named, and numbered to create reserve land: "Git'aws to Indian Reserve No. 1" (75). The Skeena persona remembers that the land was neither discovered nor empty in the way that many Canadians accept and so this myth that looms large in the settler imaginary does not need to be given voice again in this text's watershed perspective.

Rather, the absence and refutation of this myth leaves readers to consider the uncertain and Eurocentric foundation on which Canada's sovereignty rests. As Eva

Mackey explains in her analysis of ongoing settler colonialism, the doctrine of discovery entitled the first European nation who encountered territory previously unknown to them the right to negotiate with the Indigenous inhabitants and that the term *terra nullius* "did not usually mean actually *seeing* the land as *empty of people*, but instead as *legally unowned* and therefore claimable by Europeans. In other words, the lands were seen only as *occupied*—not *owned*—and therefore *empty of people and societies that mattered"* (48). It is this more complex process of representing places like Kitselas as vacant in terms of civilized societies with rights to the land that the creation of the reserves rests on and that the poem gestures to with its juxtaposition of the millennia-old lineage of village makers with the post-confederation arrival of reserve creators. The poem does not prove or explain Indigenous land ownership, but it also does not make space for or shore up the colonial doctrines that seek to justify Canada denying such land rights. Dismantling this national foundation is the first step in "The Six-Step Program to Decolonization" that Manuel outlines for Canadians: "Formally denounce the racist doctrine of discovery and terra nullius as justification for settler presence on our lands, as well as any other doctrines, laws or policies that would allow you to address us on any other basis than nation to nation" (Manuel 275-76). This denouncement can only lead towards restitution of land if it comes from the government, but citizens must hold their leaders accountable and *Skeena* is a droplet in the flood of stories Canadians need to hear to disabuse them of their colonial fictions.

As the Skeena watershed has become a touchstone for how Canada responds to Aboriginal rights and title and UNDRIP, place names have a heightened political and legal significance. While the river persona's language fluency is limited to de Leeuw's

own, the poet's abundant use of the watershed's place names, which come from multiple distinct language families, enables her to gesture toward the size and international scale of this watershed. Both a footnote—"Together, the Skeena and Wet'sinkwha Rivers drain 60,800 square kilometres of land in northern British Columbia" (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 14n1)—and the text's preface—"The Skeena is British Columbia's second-largest river contained entirely in the province" (6)—state the significance of the Skeena in terms of its size. But the Skeena is also significant geopolitically, a perspective that is diminished when we view it solely as a Canadian or a British Columbian river. In a section of the poem titled "Wet'sinkwha," the persona uses their confluence with this river to mark how far they travel from their headwaters as they "gather tributaries into watersheds" (18). The origin of the Skeena, along with the Nass and Stikine rivers, lies in Klabona, a valley known as the Sacred Headwaters and filled with trickles, creeks, ponds, and lakes that are, writes Wade Davis in *The Sacred Headwaters*, "the very sources of the rivers that inspired so many of the great cultures that cradled the civilization of the Pacific Northwest: the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en, the Carrier and Sekani, the Tsimshian, Nisga'a, Haisla, Tlingit, Tahltan, and Haida" (7). The Skeena begins in Tahltan territory and collects in Gitxsan territory the Wet'sinkwha, which drains Witsuwit'en territory. The river persona maps this inter-national journey:

> By the time I reach you Wet'sinkwha
> I have nearly forgotten
> the Klappan Valley.
>
> Separating from Stikine
> from Nass from our headwaters
>
> where the human names sound

like spitting

on rock
on dirt.

Spatsizi.
Edziza.
Tatlatui . . . . (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 18)

I read the simile of spitting on the ground that de Leeuw employs to describe the distinct sounds spoken near the headwaters as implying that the onomatopoeia she hears in these names reflect a tangible human interaction with the land. In other words, we can imagine that the people not only named it, but touched it with their own bodies' water—saliva—that, from a watershed perspective, would end up mingling with the Skeena. This part of the poem again reminds readers that not only is this river journey marked by literal water confluences, but also by cultural and national confluences. That the river has only vague memories of Tahltan territory by the time it reaches the meeting places near Gitxsan-Witsuwit'en territorial boundaries speaks to the geographically and culturally vast scale of this watershed.

Notably, when the river persona in *Skeena* speaks to Wet'sinkwha, it is one of only two instances in the text where de Leeuw deliberately uses a less commonly known place name and provides a footnote with historical information for this word choice. *Wet'sinkwha* is one spelling variation of the Witsuwit'en name for what is currently known as the Bulkley River, the significant tributary that connects the Bulkley Valley to the Skeena watershed. Similar to the Gitxsan, the Witsuwit'en people's name for themselves puts them in relation to the river central to their territory; Witsuwit'en means "people of the lower drainage" (Morin 1). The various groups of Witsuwit'en who

traditionally lived in different parts of the nation's territory also bear names that represent their location within the watershed, such as the Unist'ot'en, "the people of the headwaters [of the Widzin Kwah]" (106). *Widzin Kwah*, or *Wedzin Kwah*, are the Witsuwit'en spellings that the Witsuwit'en use today. In the footnote accompanying her first use of the name Wet'sinkwha, de Leeuw writes (in her voice, not the river persona's) about the size of the watershed and informs that "[t]he Wet'sinkwha, now known as the Bulkley, was renamed in the late nineteenth century after an American engineer in charge of the area's telegraph line" (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 14n1).[25] She does not explicitly make a case for reclaiming the Witsuwit'en name. But her choice to use it demonstrates her knowledge of this often unmapped and unspoken name and of its significance to the people who hold title to the land through which the river runs. It is also worth noting that the river persona uses the Witsuwit'en name for the tributary when there is a Gitxsan name for the Bulkley River as well—*Xsi'yeen Ando'o*, meaning "Skeena over there" (N. Sterritt 335)—and the confluence lies within Gitxsan territory. I read de Leeuw's river as knowing and respecting the territories of the First Nations, even though the Skeena precedes and is not contained by such boundaries. Using the name Wet'sinkwha alongside Skeena represents that both the Witsuwit'en and the Gitxsan are nations belonging to and claiming watersheds, which the name Bulkley River implicitly denies the Witsuwit'en. In a

[25] In the only other instance of de Leeuw using a footnote to explain her place name choice, she writes that "[t]he 'Copper' River is only called the Copper River by 'locals' (principally settler locals). On maps and in most 'formal' (e.g. not local but, rather, scientific or touristic) documents and records, the river is referred to as the Zymoetz. The Copper/Zymoetz is home to the locally famous Copper River Fossil Beds" (*Skeena* 57n3). De Leeuw's note that the name is locally known is relevant to her poem because the first words the river persona says after the title "Copper River" are "[w]e are on such familiar terms / locals to each other" (57). The Skeena persona conveys their familiarity with what makes this tributary distinct, including the copper they detect in the waters, in the scales of steelhead, and in the colour of redwood trees (59-60). So, this English place name points to the same knowledge of this river that the Skeena persona learns from inhabiting and intermingling with their waters. Here de Leeuw's choice to use the English, settler name—and to call attention to this choice—is a subtle acknowledgement that such names can also represent knowledge of these waters, and a reminder that maps are created for specific audiences and change over time.

textbook about their history and culture created for the Bulkley Valley School District, the Witsuwit'en welcome readers to their territory with an introduction of themselves and the watershed: "This ancient river has always been the source of our survival, wealth, and culture. Though it is known to many as the Bulkley River, its ancient name lives on in our communities, language, and culture" (Morin 1).

Through reading de Leeuw's poem I am prompted to learn how the particular names I and other past and present residents use to navigate the region came to be and how they continue to shape and reflect our relationships to this place, its communities, and its nations. For example, my hometown is nestled in the Bulkley Valley, a geographical marker that many local businesses and institutions have incorporated into their own names, including the hospital in which I was born and the school that I attended. A common question asked by people unfamiliar with the name is *Buckley? B-U-C-K-L-E-Y?*, never *What is a bulkley?* or *Who is this place named after?* Having grown up with the name representing simply a beautiful region where people who enjoy the outdoors are privileged to live or a district through which to administer health, education, economic, and media services, I never asked any of these questions. If I had, I would have learned sooner that in this case Bulkley refers to Colonel Charles S. Bulkley, a U.S. Army engineer tasked with overseeing the surveying for and construction of the Collins Overland Telegraph that would connect North American communications to Europe via Russia; with the completion of the transatlantic cable, this unfinished telegraph project was abandoned in 1867. The Bulkley Valley is contained within the territories of the Witsuwit'en, who, in one published history of their people, claim that Bulkley never saw the river that would come to bear his name (Morin 218). Instead, such

names were, and continue to be, "an attempt to erase [Witsuwit'en] presence on and ownership of the land" (238). Indeed, the Bulkley Valley place name is a striking example of naming as a settler colonial tool to commemorate people involved in projects that would supposedly civilize the northern reaches of the colony and connect the region to the rest of the world.

If Euro-Canadian names are part of a settler colonial apparatus, then Indigenous names are a decolonial tool. As a growing number of Canadians are hearing names like Wet'suwet'en, Unist'ot'en, and *yin tah* (meaning land or territory) for the first time due to the hereditary chiefs' opposition to pipelines through their territory, normalizing Witsuwit'en names for territories, chiefs, laws, and the land itself is a small but integral aspect of understanding how and why the Unist'ot'en established their camp to practice the land use and governance structure that protects the waters and land they have occupied for millennia (Unist'ot'en Camp). Gitxsan reporter Angela Sterritt has even created, on behalf of CBC News, a pronunciation and translation guide for journalists and the public (@AngelaSterritt). Such names, if they are unfamiliar, might initially cause one's tongue to trip over them, but Sarah de Leeuw suggests considering such stumbling as part of a generative dialogue in which we share what we know or have learned about these names. In a correspondence with African-American poet C.S. Giscombe about changing the name of the Queen Charlotte Islands, where de Leeuw spent part of her childhood, to Haida Gwaii, she shared: "Every time I say 'Haida Gwaii' I want to say a million other things that I feel need saying—that the islands are untreatied contested lands claimed by a sovereign nation (the Haida) who named and still name their homes with many different words, most of which were erased or disregarded by colonial

settlement." These poets agreed that the context of this name change—including the past and present significance of the colonial and Haida names and the potentially only symbolic reconciliation between Haida and non-Haida people—is something "to stumble over. But [de Leeuw] wrote to me: 'Maybe stumbling is good. Maybe it's good to always want to say more'" (Giscombe). Once we know the history and significance of place names that are layered on our maps and memories, we bear the responsibility for understanding and explaining why we choose to use one name over another.

"I brush up against / the estuary of your heart":

Moving Through Waters in Solidarity

Poets and activists in northwestern British Columbia have been using their own growing knowledge of the region's places and names in water poetry to draw attention to and advocate for protection of the watersheds. As drilling, mining, and pipeline projects—such as Royal Dutch Shell's proposed methane gas wells in the Sacred Headwaters, Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway bitumen pipeline, and TC Energy's Coastal GasLink natural gas pipeline—have increasingly been viewed in the northern part of the province as a threat to the environment and as a failure to meaningfully consult with First Nations and to meet the standard established in UNDRIP of obtaining "their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization, or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources" (art. 32.2). Several poets in the region have highlighted river names in their work as a way to fill in the blank spaces of the broader public's mental map of the province, to share knowledge of their

home watersheds, and to foster a sense of the wide-reaching watery networks of these places. Sheila Peters's blog *Say the Names*, an allusion to Al Purdy's poem of that name that celebrates the names of and our souls' connection to rivers in Canada, shared updates on community activism to stop the Enbridge pipeline project (which was ultimately achieved in 2016 when the federal government revoked the project's approval) and collected stories and poems from locals living by the waters and on the lands that the pipeline would cross. In one of her own poems, titled "Skookum Wawa," Peters writes of the rivers that fall from the Sacred Headwaters,

> Water becoming:
> becoming Spatsizi, becoming Stikine, becoming Tahltan
> becoming Nass, becoming Nisga'a
> becoming Skeena, becoming Gitxsan, becoming Tsimshian
> the ancient submerged heart pumping
> oxygen
> salmon
> life into this land. ("Sacred Headwaters")

Peters blurs the line between the rivers and the Indigenous nations who settled on their banks, as the one flows into and becomes the other, providing life itself. This poem joins the named rivers with the peoples who named, and are named for, them, much like de Leeuw's *Skeena* does.

There is another name that appears in many of these water poems: Ali Howard. In 2009, this resident of the Bulkley and Kispiox Valleys swam the entire 610-kilometre length of the Skeena to raise awareness about the river, its vital wild salmon populations, and the need to protect the waters from unsustainable industrial development and potential environmental damage (de Leeuw, *Skeena* 80n5; "Why Swim?"). Although her poem does not mention Ali, Peters prefaces the blog post with a summary of the events

that precipitated her writing it and notes that she wanted to "celebrate [Ali Howard's] achievement" ("Sacred Headwaters"). Peters also posted "Lists of Lovers," a poem by Norma Kerby about the people who love and speak the names of the rivers who they dream will continue to rush free. For example, Kerby writes,

> **We have lists** lists of lovers river lovers writers of
> poems to angry waters *Stikine* *Skeena* *Spatsizi* *Nass*
> . . . . . .
> **Lists of lovers** *river lovers* Jim and Wade and Cheryl and
> Shannon Walter Dennis even Ali
> **We have their names. We watch. We listen.**
> **Lists of lovers** who speak of rivers *northern rivers* (21)

Kerby's poem appears in *The Rivers Speak*, a locally-created and self-published anthology of poetry and visual art to support the arts community in Terrace, alongside Cheri Reidy's "Spark in the Water" and Susann Williamson's "Skeena Valley ROLL CALL," two other poems that reflect on Ali's swim. Reidy's poem honours the swim and the impact the poet believes it has. Ali is the metaphorical "spark in the water" that awakens us to what threatens the headwaters of three life-sustaining watersheds (35-36):

> An ordinary woman
> entered the water alone
> told a story of our belonging
> to this river /strand/
> web of life.
>
> In doing so
> she made all of our shoulders
> the wider. (36)

Finally, Williamson's poem is a list of the names of the rivers and creeks in the Skeena Valley, creating a dense block of text that spans a page and a half, followed by these "NOTES":

there are unnamed creeks
there are mistakes on the maps
spellings vary from map to map
there are sometimes more than one name for a tributary
there are traditional names
Ali Howard swam past all of these
all of these had to be added to the spellcheck dictionary
each of these has a story of its own (48)

By including in this list the note about Ali's swim, especially following the compilation of over a hundred tributary names, Williamson offers a sense of the magnitude of this journey and also presents this event as a way to think beyond how the visual maps of this watershed are limited in how they represent the rivers' significance. Each of these three poems has a perspective for how we might conceive of what Ali accomplished and singles her out for what she has done for the watershed and the communities, human and other-than-human, that rely on it. Although Ali is part of a community—she was accompanied on the water by a support and documentation team, she is one of many "river lovers" (Kerby 21), and she swam past "crest poles / first signs of first peoples, / their homes, / where she's welcomed and fed" (Reidy 35)—her feat is distinct and the poems convey admiration and gratitude for this achievement. Ali's swim seemingly had a large impact on the cultural geography of the Skeena watershed in a way that suggests that there is a desire among many residents to be able to have as tangible and remarkable a knowledge of and sense of responsibility to the river.

De Leeuw's *Skeena* also includes a section of poetry titled "Ali" that commemorates her swim, but the river persona perspective, I argue, encourages readers to view her achievement not primarily as an inimitable act of solidarity with the watershed, but as an act of intentional intimacy and reciprocity with the waters that we

might each create in our own ways. One page of this section of *Skeena* is a found poem created from letters written by children to Ali, who had spoken at their schools about swimming the Skeena. The greeting "Dear Ali." starts and ends a compilation of repeated *thank-you*s, compliments on her bravery, and expressions of love and gratitude for the river's fish that Ali must have encountered along the way (de Leeuw*, Skeena* 82). This poem, then, contains some similarities in tone and approach to those in *The Rivers Speak*. But when the Skeena persona addresses Ali, who is the only named human the river speaks directly to in the text, the focus is not on the attention and awareness Ali garnered for the defense of the watershed. What was surely a dangerous and grueling swim the persona speaks about as a celebration of two different watery bodies knowing each other on an intimate, sensory level. The Skeena recognizes their own ecosystems in this human body as they "brush up against / the estuary of [her] heart," her "red blood cells / like salmon roe. Riparian ribs" (80). From the river's perspective, this woman swimming different strokes moves through their waters in a distinctly human way, yet is also like the other-than-human beings comfortable and familiar in water currents. Ali, the river describes, is "the texture of freshwater / molluscs stripped of shell," her "body seal-slick" (80) and diving "[l]ike a young / porpoise" (83). The river revels in the tastes that she brings into their waters, including

> [t]hat half a glass of white
> wine you didn't quite
> finish last night before diving
> into me this morning,

and remarks on the structure and strength of the human spine and sweat that propel her

swim (83). The river persona does not focus on what Ali did that others have not or could not accomplish, but on the experience of being with and in each other. And so, even though this part of the poem focuses explicitly on this woman, it draws our attention to contemplate if and how the rivers of our daily lives would have the opportunity to celebrate their experiences of us. There may not be a river who could say of you,

> 311 km down me in me you
> turn back flip back slide slip
> a somersault suspended swimming. (83)

But might we not be someone whom the river meets walking along their banks, tossing a piece of driftwood in the waters as a greeting and a way to learn something about the speed and movement of its currents, or looking for markings of the complex histories that led us to live with this body of water? Regardless of the scale of such actions, when we attend to the material and social contexts of specific waters in this way there are also, Rita Wong reminds us, "specific First Nations with a long history of coexistence with those waters" ("Waters" 212) and "an opportunity and a requirement" for communities to work together (210) to determine the kind of future we can build through the water views we hold.

The Unist'ot'en are living on their territory, through which Wedzin Kwah flows toward the Skeena, fulfilling their responsibilities to this land and waters, preserving it for future generations, and calling for acts of solidarity to support Indigenous sovereignty and resistance against harmful resource extraction projects. Here, I turn to one more river poem. Jennifer Wickham, a Gitdumt'en women from the Wet'suwet'en people, writes in "Engussi Wedzin Kwah" that this river, whom Wickham knows as a healer, friend, life-giver, and relative, "heard the songs and touched the skin / of the Original Wet'suwet'en"

(10). The poet laments that we have forgotten to listen to the "sacred knowledge in every drop" (10) of this river that enlivens the bodies and souls of the people who experience her, and prompts readers to strive to restore this fluency:

> Let's get back to listening . . .
>
> What are the names of your rivers?
> Can you hear them inside you?
> Let's resurrect those words together
> ALL our words, all at once (11)

The Unist'ot'en Camp has shared Wickham's poem on their website, and reading it in this context heightens the tone of certainty and purpose in the poem's closing lines:

> I am a Wet'suwet'en woman
> my purpose is clear
>
> Like ancient protocol and boundaries
> I'll show you where the line is
> we were born her guardians
> warriors watch over Wedzin Kwah (12)

For those of us who are not Wet'suwet'en to respond in support, not only of learning the river's names and stories, but of the sovereignty of the Wet'suwet'en to decide who can come into their territories and for what purposes, requires that we exercise humility and respect as we learn about and from a way of being on this land and in relation to these waters that may unsettle or ask us to reimagine how we live in and use the watersheds we call home. To return to Neil J. Sterritt's metaphor of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples coming together as a confluence in the places where they live, we bear the collective responsibility to not uphold a society that pollutes the currents of our tributary with the fallout of pipeline leaks and disregarded Indigenous rights. The Gitxsan name for a confluence is *wilnaawadihl'aks*, which translates as "where the waters get to know

each other" (Johnson 46). Within the confluence of cultures, the way that we view water, particularly the waters who we interact with daily, will affect the outcome of the ongoing work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples getting to know and building relationships with one another. The reading practice that I engaged to discuss Sarah de Leeuw's *Skeena* with, and to further develop, a watershed mindset offers a challenging and productive means of thinking through how we might learn from, and with responsibility to, a water view that regenerates relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as decolonial and life-sustaining.

Chapter Three: Looking Beyond the Highway: Naming the Sociocultural Geography of Violence Against Indigenous Women in Sarah de Leeuw's "Soft Shouldered" and Adrianne Harun's *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain*

In 2008, Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams co-founded Walk4Justice, a campaign to raise awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) in Canada and to bring together the families of these women to support them and carry their stories ("Walk4Justice"). Since then, Radek has co-organized and participated in seven walks, covering thousands of kilometres and meeting with families of the women and girls whom the walk honours, including a trek that took place over three months in the summer of 2013, during which walkers traversed the country's highways from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Prince Rupert, British Columbia. The catalyst for Walk4Justice was the disappearance of Tamara Chipman, a twenty-two-year-old Witsuwit'en woman and Radek's niece, along northern British Columbia's stretch of Highway 16 on September 21, 2005. Radek, from the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en nations, had been actively championing the rights of Indigenous women and supporting friends and family affected by the murder or disappearance of loved ones, but when she received a call that her niece was missing, the injustice that Indigenous women face hit closer to home. Frustrated with the lack of response from authorities concerning Chipman's case, Radek strives to do more to raise awareness about MMIWG, with particular emphasis on the stretch of highway where her niece was last seen (Aiello).

Not only did Chipman's disappearance propel Radek's fight for awareness and

justice for the relations of the girls and women who have gone missing or been murdered, it was one of two cases that motivated community awareness campaigns to unite as a "region-wide response to address the disappearances and murders . . ." (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al. 9). In a twist of cruel irony, Chipman disappeared while hitchhiking near Prince Rupert just four days after the town hosted Take Back the Highway, a walk and rally to raise awareness and to listen to the stories of victims' families (8-9). Four months later, fourteen-year-old Aielah Saric-Auger went missing from Prince George on February 2, 2006. Her body was found in a ditch along Highway 16 eight days later (3). First Nations communities in northern British Columbia believe that as many as thirty to forty girls and women since 1969 could be included in the number who have gone missing or have been murdered in close proximity to the 724-kilometre stretch of highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert that has earned the notorious appellation "Highway of Tears" (*Those Who Take* 35). This term "was born out of [the] fear, frustration and sorrow" felt within First Nations communities along Highway 16 in response to the accumulating cases of missing and murdered women (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al. 7).[26] This history, compounded by the more recent disappearance of Chipman and murder of Auger, led to the Highway of Tears Symposium.

The symposium took place on March 30-31, 2006 in Prince George. Preceding the two-day event, members of the victims' families mobilized the Highway of Tears Awareness Walk, covering the stretch of highway beginning in Prince Rupert and ending in Prince George, to officially commence the symposium. The victims' families then

[26] According to Adriana Rolston's research for an article on Canadian journalistic treatment of Highway 16 disappearances, the term "Highway of Tears" first appeared publicly as the name of a 1998 vigil for victims held in Terrace, British Columbia. The first major newspaper to use this name, according to Rolston, was *The Province* in a news story in 2000 (58).

participated in the symposium, along with delegates from more than ninety local, provincial, and national organizations, representing government, industry, law enforcement, media, health services, women and family services, Friendship Centres, and First Nations. Building on awareness campaigns that victims' families and communities had been leading in the region, the Highway of Tears Symposium "goes beyond raising public awareness of these murdered and missing women. The symposium is a community call for action" (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al. 10).

This chapter reads two literary texts that portray the Highway of Tears as responses to such a call for action. It explores the intersection of literary expression with public calls for a national inquiry and political action concerning the issue of MMIWG and for information about the disappearances of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women along this highway. As Highway 16's reputation as the Highway of Tears becomes more pronounced outside of northwestern British Columbia, extending even beyond Canada's borders, it is inspiring creative voices to address its tragedy in a variety of narrative forms.[27] Looking specifically at Adrianne Harun's novel *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* (2014) and Sarah de Leeuw's creative nonfiction essay "Soft Shouldered" (2013), I identify and discuss how the authors similarly acknowledge their position as non-Indigenous women who have the means and privilege to traverse the highway without fear of becoming a Highway of Tears victim. The authors also both

[27] Since 2006, the Highway of Tears has, in some measure, also prompted the creation of the following works: Métis filmmaker Christine Welsh's documentary *Finding Dawn* (2006); Ontarian Métis actor and playwright Keith Barker's play *The Hours That Remain* (2012); Quebecois actor and filmmaker Matt Smiley's documentary *Highway of Tears* (2014); Ontarian singer-songwriter Jon Brooks's song "Highway 16" (2014); Prince George resident and CBC journalist Betsy Trumpener's unpublished play *Highway of Fears* (2014) (Hinzmann); Dutch illustrator and designer Tim Hengeveld's video game *Black Feather Forest* (in production) that takes a true crime approach (Hengeveld); and Métis playwright and filmmaker Marie Clements's chamber opera *Missing Women*, commissioned by City Opera Vancouver, that premiered in 2017 (Early Edition).

view their texts as creative expressions that can bring needed attention, and incite responsive action, to the systemic and ongoing brutality of violence against Indigenous women and girls and to its roots in settler colonialism.

But I argue that the meaning and ethics of representing violence against Indigenous women responsibly and with an openness to accountability is more clearly understood when we juxtapose the texts. In keeping with de Leeuw's other literary cartographies that I have examined in this dissertation, "Soft Shouldered" situates readers on the edge of places, in this case the highway, and prompts them to notice what is often overlooked, to consider the language used to name and portray such places and the people who inhabit them, and to understand and move through northwestern British Columbia with recognition of both its fragility, pain and hurt, and of its vulnerability, love, and community. De Leeuw maintains that to write with care and compassion about those people who are lost involves doing so "[w]ith an understanding about the sociocultural and historical contexts and powers that have produced hierarchies of worth, that have produced and positioned some people and places as mattering more (or conversely less) than others and that, consequently, result in attention being paid to certain entities/subjects/ peoples/sites while ignoring so many others" (de Leeuw, "5 Questions"). Harun also portrays such hierarchies of worth in her novel, but often abstracts or diminishes the settler colonial contexts and powers that de Leeuw mentions, and focuses instead on representing the fear, confusion, and hopelessness of characters caught in a battle between good and evil. "Soft Shouldered" prompts readers to call into existence a highway where girls disappearing is not inevitable. *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* does not envision such a future. Aligned with arguments that

discussions of reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settlers in Canada are disingenuous if they do not address questions of land, and that settler colonialism perpetrates gender violence and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land, this chapter examines how these literary texts written about and in response to MMIWG from the places along Highway 16 become part of the discussion.

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and academic Leanne Betasamosake Simpson asserts that violence against Indigenous women—and more broadly all violence that arises out of patriarchal heteronormativity against Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality—works to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land and to prevent reclamation of it, "because communities coping with epidemics of gender violence don't have the physical or emotional capital to organize." This violence, along with the anger, anxiety, and hopelessness it causes, destroys relationships Indigenous peoples have "to the land and to each other" ("Not Murdered"). Bodies are, Simpson asserts, the sites of "every single meaningful relationship," the spaces through which "physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual attachment flows" ("Anger, Resentment & Love"). Consequently, Simpson maintains that tackling gender violence is a core resurgence and decolonization project ("Not Murdered"): "we simply cannot build strong Indigenous nations until we can figure out how to cherish all the bodies that belong to and hold our nations" ("Anger, Resentment & Love").

Focusing on two literary texts written by non-Indigenous women—and women who do not see their own families among the faces of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls—who are established writers risks centring voices that already have a more privileged place in society than the often marginalized voices of

MMIWG and their families. However, choosing these texts is not meant to be a move, which Simpson resists, to "seek out allies in white feminists, who don't really get it" ("Not Murdered"). Rather, Harun and de Leeuw have spoken publicly about their motivations and intentions for portraying MMIWG from the perspective of privileged outsiders, and their writing received relatively widespread attention in media outlets at a time when the founding of Canada's National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was still years away.[28] These authors should be held accountable for the language, imagery, tone, and themes they employ to represent the disappeared and the families who carry the loss.

I call attention here to the criticism and acts of accountability that followed the 2018 publication of poet Shannon Webb-Campbell's *Who Took My Sister?* When Inuk activist Delilah Saunders read a graphic description of her sister Loretta's murder from Webb-Campbell's collection of poems and letters, she called out the poet for not reaching out to Saunders's family, or the families of other victims, and then "creating work that vividly describes something so unnatural and traumatic as murder," which Saunders sees no value in. She asks, "How can we expect to rewrite the narrative when people who claim Indigeneity [Webb-Campbell identifies as part Mi'kmaq] are also reinforcing the narrative that has time and time again found our women and girls murdered?" (Saunders) Two days after Saunders published this response, Webb-Campbell's publisher pulled the book from sale. Webb-Campbell, with the editorial guidance of Stó:lō writer Lee Maracle, eventually revised the work and published *I Am a Body of Land*, poetry that is self-reflexive about her relationship to colonial violence and her ethical responsibilities as

[28] The Government of Canada established the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2016. It was concluded in 2019 following the publication of *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*.

a poet. Jessica Janssen, in a review of the latter work, summarizes the reason for, and the learning that arises from, the tangible consequences Webb-Campbell faced because of her initial portrayal of MMIWG:

> The earlier book's graphic descriptions of the murder of Indigenous women—without their families' knowledge or permission—initiated discussions about Indigenous protocol in the arts, the author's responsibilities to Indigenous individuals and communities, and, most importantly, the harmful and re-traumatizing effect of dealing with individual cases of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls when settler violence and the victimization of women are perpetuated. . . . Each poem [in *I Am a Body of Land*] is a space where [Webb-Campbell] performs self-reflexivity, exercises accountability, and practices the principle of "do no more harm." (Janssen 164)

This case demonstrates the necessary and potentially productive work of considering the relationship to violence and trauma that literary representations of MMIWG either perpetuate or undo and rewrite, particularly poetry and narratives from authors who have not experienced the traumatic loss themselves and are privileged to be able to distance themselves or look away from the violence. Acknowledging, along with Sarah Hunt, that a "consequence of developing broad public awareness about the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women has been the privileging of some women's voices over others," the reading here of Harun's and de Leeuw's writing seeks to be aware of "how colonial values continue to shape whose voices are seen as legitimate" (Hunt 192).

These texts are not the answer to, a replacement for, or more valuable than the concerns and needs of the families of MMIWG. They are not a response to Simpson's

call for Indigenous communities to build skills, strategies, and systems that provide an alternative to what the state offers, in order to end gender violence ("Not Murdered"). The texts are, however, a support to the dialogue and to the raised awareness that the families would like to see happen among settlers as well as Indigenous peoples. Harun's novel and de Leeuw's literary essay are the voices of allies when they acknowledge MMIWG as, to use Simpson's words, "a symptom of settler colonialism, white supremacy and genocide" ("Not Murdered") and seek to hold Canada accountable. But a seemingly allied voice can be problematic, as in the case of Harun's novel, to the extent that it risks reducing violence enacted against women to inexplicable and inevitable disappearances or the work of the devil, or benefits from the notoriety of the Highway of Tears narrative more than it serves victims and their families. Simpson asserts that white Canadians have "invested . . . energy into pretending that they don't benefit from colonial gender violence perpetuated by the state, in fact they've invested a lot [of] energy into pretend[ing] colonial gender violence perpetuated by the state isn't even a thing" ("Not Murdered"). The potential violent backlash from calling out this settler complicity in colonial gender violence can deter Indigenous peoples, as Simpson admits it has for her, from articulating their "rebellion" and "outrage" against the colonial structures that dispossess and disempower Indigenous women and girls, and, therefore, families and communities ("Not Murdered"). This chapter looks to how settler peoples, with de Leeuw's essay as an example, can begin to call out their own complicity, not protecting their own fragility from truths about settler colonialism and state-perpetuated violence against women, but facing this national culture head-on.

The argument, then, is not that these literary texts will incite Canadians to action,

thereby positioning non-Indigenous peoples as enlightened-through-literature rescuers of MMIWG. Rather, this chapter, working from the premise that literature shapes our view of the world and our place in it, looks to these texts as the products of writers who believe that the more awareness—from more and varied outlets—of MMIWG as an issue with deep sociocultural, historical, and political colonial roots, the greater the hope for significant systemic change, wherein Indigenous communities set the terms for supporting and protecting Indigenous girls, women, and families. As Métis artist David Garneau posits,

> Art moves us but does not necessarily move us to action. Gestures in the aesthetic realm may symbolically resist the dominant culture, but there is little empirical evidence to show that art leads to direct action or that viewing it makes us better people. And yet some of us do feel changed, and we continue to make and enjoy the stuff *as if* it mattered, *as if* it made a difference. What art does do—and what is difficult to measure—is that it changes our individual and collective imaginaries by particles, and these new pictures of the world can influence behaviour. (qtd. in Hill and McCall ix)

The same could be said of writing and reading literature. Harun's and de Leeuw's writing has the potential to shape the imaginaries of their readers, to open up audiences to listening to the families and communities of MMIWG whose stories the authors seek not to co-opt, but to support with narratives that attempt to portray and challenge the tragedy of a system that perpetrates gender violence.

To examine how Harun's *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* and de Leeuw's "Soft Shouldered" portray the Highway of Tears and its MMIWG epidemic, this

chapter reads the literary texts in light of the historical and political context of the Highway of Tears, as well as compares and contrasts the themes, language, and images in the primary texts to that of two reports published about the Highway of Tears. These two reports[29]—the *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report* (2006) and *Standing Together and Moving Forward: The Northwest Consultations* (2012)—confirm the reasoning that MMIWG is a sociological phenomenon and offer a summary of the MMIWG-family-driven dialogue that laid the groundwork for each publication.

A Look at the History of the Highway of Tears and Consequent Reports

Since 2011, the attention of people travelling northern British Columbia's section of Highway 16 has been distracted from wildlife, mountain ranges, and vast forests of pine and spruce to something that has become tragically common in the region: the face of twenty-year-old Madison Scott on missing persons billboards dotting the highway's shoulder for hundreds of kilometres and similar signs appearing on the doors and bulletin boards of gas stations and diners in the communities the highway passes through. Scott, a non-Indigenous woman from Vanderhoof known as Maddy, went missing from Hogsback Lake, a spot down a gravel road off of the highway where locals like to picnic, hike, camp, and party. Despite a regional search effort led by the Royal Canadian

[29] Legal researchers Pippa Feinstein and Megan Pearce have created a brief literature review of forty reports listed by the federal government concerning violence against Indigenous women and girls, as well as ten additional reports that they found. Feinstein and Pearce provide an overview of each document's purpose, summary, and recommendations. This literature review is part of a larger, ongoing research project seeking to analyze the findings and recommendations of the reports, and to determine how many of the over seven hundred recommendations have been implemented. Feinstein and Pearce volunteered to work on this project for the Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence Against Indigenous Women (LSC), "a nation-wide ad hoc coalition of groups and individuals formed in 2014 following the murder of Inuit university student Loretta Saunders, to marshal resources that address violence against Indigenous women" ("New Research"). The literature review and preliminary research outcomes are available on the website of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), a member of LSC ("New Research").

Mounted Police (RCMP), a continuing criminal investigation, a reward offered by Scott's parents for information, and sustained awareness throughout the area via the signs, there have been no developments in the case (Friel).

Such billboards have been up for more than a decade though, featuring different victims. In 2002, the face on the signs was that of Nicole Hoar. Hoar, a twenty-five-year-old non-Indigenous Albertan woman working in British Columbia as a tree-planter, disappeared from this highway on June 21, 2002 near Prince George, after deciding to hitchhike west to Smithers to visit her sister and attend a music festival. Hoar was not the first young woman to disappear along this highway; her case did, however, become a turning point, drawing attention to the heart-wrenching number of girls and women (most, but not all, of whom are Indigenous) who have disappeared in northern British Columbia. Posters and billboards with the faces of missing young women and warnings against hitchhiking are now unexceptional along this highway, situated among advertisements for the nearest fast food restaurant or local campground.

The increased attention that the Highway of Tears received in response to the disappearance of Hoar underlines the racial bias that has shaped, and continues to do so, the reception and representation of missing and murdered women and girls whose cases are linked together via their proximity to this highway. Adriana Rolston, in an article about Canadian journalistic treatment of Highway 16 disappearances and murders, writes that despite the decades-long history of a relatively high number of women disappearing in this particular region, newspapers like the *Vancouver Sun,* the *Edmonton Journal*, and *The Globe and Mail* did not cover the Highway of Tears until Hoar's disappearance (59). Rolston cites the frustration of Kate Rexe, former director of the Native Women's

Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit initiative, who identifies the "cruel irony that the fate of one white woman focused attention on Canada's epidemic of lost native women," who became "footnote[s]" (59).

The RCMP did, however, subsequently establish in the fall of 2005 an investigative team dedicated to cases of missing and murdered women and girls along the northern sections of Highways 16, 97 and 5. Named Project E-PANA, this task force was looking at eighteen cases, ranging in date from 1969 to 2006, based on the following criteria: the victim is female, was "involved in hitchhiking or other high risk behaviour," and "last seen or their body found within a mile or so" from one of the aforementioned highways. Of these eighteen girls and women, ten are Indigenous and eight are non-Indigenous. The primary concern of this investigation "was to determine if a serial killer, or killers, is responsible for murdering young women traveling along major highways in BC" ("Project E-PANA"). Also symptomatic of the RCMP's approach to this investigation is that the task force headquarters are in Vancouver, with some resources dedicated to it in Prince George; therefore, the families of those who went missing while hitchhiking because of a lack of transportation options available to them (sometimes to travel fewer than twenty kilometres), might live hundreds of kilometres from the officers familiar with their cases and in charge of finding them answers. Moreover, while E-PANA once had seventy investigators, funded by an annual budget of $5 million (between the 2009-10 and 2011-12 fiscal years), as of 2013-14, the task force had twelve investigators with a budget of just over $800,000 (Culbert). Although one case has been solved—DNA evidence linked the murder of Colleen MacMillen, whose remains were found in 1974, to Bobby Jack Fowler, an American sex offender—E-PANA has yet to

make any arrests or lay any charges, because MacMillen's killer had already died in a U.S. prison (Culbert). These details regarding the operation of E-PANA suggest that, in addition to uncovering little information to pass along to the families, this task force, then the primary and most direct response from Canada's institutions, fails to address the questions of how to support the families of the missing and murdered and how to work with communities to prevent any further cases, and does not have the resources to be able to do so.

E-PANA seems to be indicative of the type of answer to MMIWG that former Prime Minster Stephen Harper staunchly relied on, namely, that the murders and disappearances are solely criminal in nature, not the consequence of centuries of settler colonialism, racism, and gender violence upon which the state has been built and which it perpetuates. Responding to the murder of fifteen-year-old Tina Fontaine, from the Sagkeeng First Nation, in Winnipeg in August 2014, Harper said, "We should not view this as a sociological problem. . . . We should view it as a crime. It is crime against innocent people, and it needs to be addressed as such" (qtd. in "Harper Calls"). Rejecting all calls for a national inquiry, the Conservative government decided to leave cases of MMIWG to the RCMP to handle, thereby reiterating that the trend is a criminal, rather than sociological, problem.

Challenging this perspective, Leanne Simpson writes that it is necessary to understand violence against women as "intrinsically tied to the creation and settlement of Canada" ("Not Murdered"). Angela Sterritt, a Gitxsan journalist, artist, and filmmaker who has spent years reporting on and researching the issue of MMIWG in Canada, also points to a "national culture" and "history of violence against Indigenous women [that]

can be traced to colonization, systemic racism, denial of culture, language and traditions, and laws designed to destroy identity, dislocate, and fragment families" ("Legacy"). Sterritt, who is writing a book about MMIWG through the lens of her own survival story, has said that the impetus for the project is her belief that "it's a healing opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to understand how [Indigenous women's] vulnerability fits within the context of history in Canada of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and why the violence we see today . . . is so high" (qtd. in Billeck).

Frustration with colonial institutions' ignorance, willful or not, of the vulnerability of Indigenous girls and women in Canada and the consequently disproportionate violence enacted against them, was the motivation for the Highway of Tears symposium. As if to begin countering Harper's position, and the settler colonial attitude he represents, before he spoke the now infamous statement, the Highway of Tears Symposium foregrounded the voices of the families of MMIWG as it searched for practical actions to combat systemic issues, rather than criminal activities, that have created the Highway of Tears. The resultant *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report* presents a summary of the short- and long-term goals for community response to missing and murdered women in the region, as well as thirty-three recommendations aimed at achieving these goals.[30]

The first page of the report reveals several of the overarching characteristics of the document: respect, collaboration and unity, and prioritization of Indigenous voices. It identifies the five Indigenous-run organizations that came together to host the symposium

[30] Many of the reports addressing violence against Indigenous women that came after the *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report* reiterate the call for implementing these thirty-three recommendations. This support for the document not only emphasizes the strength of its counsel, but also draws attention to the provincial and federal governments' continued failure or refusal to act.

and “respectfully submitted” their summary report of recommendations. The authors of the report begin by dedicating the document and the work that it reflects to the “memory of all young women who have gone missing or were found murdered along Highway 16” (Lheidli T’enneh First Nation et al. 3). In particular, photographs of nine women who have gone missing or been found murdered—eight of whom are Indigenous, and all whose cases remain unsolved—put faces to the losses that the gathering hopes its work will help individuals and communities come together to find healing from and to prevent from happening again. The report puts the needs of girls such as these, and of their families, at the forefront:

> First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge and extend our deepest appreciation to all the victims’ families for sharing your stories of loss, for sharing your grief and sorrow in such a public manner, and for providing direction and advice to the Highway of Tears Symposium. Your attendance and courage while participating in the symposium was critical to its success. Your words and emotions profoundly moved all the delegates who attended; you are the ones who provided true meaning and substance to the symposium. (5)

More so than statistics and police reports, these stories from the families of victims are both the impetus for and the source of the recommendations that follow.

The *Symposium Recommendations Report* is as much a product of this region and its voices as the Highway of Tears is a horrific by-product of the region and its systemic problems with settler colonial violence; the report represents the best of community building to counter the worst that threatens to tear communities apart. Presenting its recommendations as the “collective and unified voice of the victims’ families and the

community," the report outlines four key areas for improvement: victim prevention; emergency planning and team response; victim family counseling and support; and community development and support (10). The recommendations specific to each category are, according to the report, "realistic and achievable" (10). They are the culmination of dialogue, consensus, rationale, and victim family support. In its appeal to its audience, the report calls for local communities and political representatives to commit to the same collaborative, cross-cultural community work that sustained the symposium and prioritized the voices of the victims' families (11). In particular, Recommendation #12 stresses that Indigenous youth need to "be organized and listened to" (22), #14 maintains that all media awareness and prevention campaigns should receive "full input and prior review of the RCMP, victims' families, and a Highway of Tears community governing body" (23), and #29 requires that each victim's family appoint someone to speak on their behalf on the board of directors for a Highway of Tears community governing body that would "provide direction and support" for the initiatives outlined in this report (29-30).

The pragmatic optimism of the *Symposium Recommendations Report* has, however, been repeatedly hampered by slow progress and inadequate government support, and replaced by increasing frustration. Consequently, victims' families have repeated calls for action, producing other reports and summaries of what they believe are the most pressing needs. *Standing Together and Moving Forward: The Northwest Consultations* was published to provide background information for the work of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry.[31] It comprises an overview of the context of

[31] The Lieutenant Governor in Council in British Columbia established the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry on September 27, 2010 and named Wally Oppal as commissioner. The inquiry had a four-fold

First Nations in northwest British Columbia and a summary of the input and recommendations offered by people living in the region "regarding the safety of women, practice and procedures of the police, and recommendations for healing, reconciliation and implementation" (Locke 2). Authored by Linda Locke, a Stó:lō lawyer who served as an Advisor to the Commission and who is the "first aboriginal woman in BC appointed a Queen's Counsel" ("Linda Locke"), the report is based on a series of focus groups that took place in April and May 2012 across four northern communities, as well as on eight telephone interviews. Unlike the *Symposium Recommendations Report*, which presents the culmination of the symposium's work and offers agreed upon recommendations, *Standing Together and Moving Forward* is a preliminary companion piece to the inquiry's final report and offers neither conclusions nor the consensus of the commissioner, commission staff, or participants in the forums. *Standing Together and Moving Forward* does, however, endorse many of the same values and emphases as the earlier report, especially respecting and prioritizing the voices of victims' families and of First Nations community members.

One aspect of *Standing Together and Moving Forward* that diverges from the *Symposium Recommendations Report* is the prominence it gives to cultural and regional specificity—not only of the Highway of Tears, but also of the northern British Columbia communities connected by Highway 16. It maintains that "[t]he missing and murdered women of the North West disappeared in a very different world than that of the urban

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mandate: briefly, [1] to inquire into the 1997-2002 police investigations into women missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside; [2] to inquire into the Criminal Justice Branch's decision to enter a stay of proceedings on charges against Robert William Pickton in 1998; [3] to recommend changes to investigations of missing and murdered women in British Columbia; and [4] to recommend changes to the process and co-ordination of multi-organization homicide investigations in the province. The resulting report released in November 2012—*Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*, dubbed the Oppal Report—endorses many of the initiatives outlined in the *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report* (Oppal 124-25).

South" (Locke 6). While acknowledging that many of the women who go missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside are originally from northern British Columbia (9), this report largely came about because northern residents were unable to attend the Vancouver forums and were concerned that their missing young women would be "'lumped in' with" the Vancouver cases on which the Commission was focusing (15). One repeated recommendation that Locke heard from the northern forums was "that a separate inquiry be held" (15). Subsequently, the document repeatedly refers to the "unique" situation in the northwest, and notes that steps were taken to make their consultations "distinct" from their southern counterparts by adapting them to circumstances of the rural communities that participated (4). Clearly the symposium report presented a similar position six years earlier, by focusing specifically on the cases and context of the Highway of Tears; its recommendations are directed at the people and communities along a particular highway with its own social, cultural, and geographical contexts. However, to support its strong emphasis on community collaboration to build a united and interconnected front in the face of the Highway of Tears, the *Symposium Recommendations Report* speaks on behalf of a collective First Nations community. Although the multiple First Nations who sent delegates to the symposium are each listed separately at the end of the report, the document itself refers only to "First Nations communities."

In contrast, *Standing Together and Moving Forward*, with its broader aim to provide background and to report themes rather than consensus, elects to provide a brief overview of the cultural, geographical, linguistic, and economic characteristics of the region, attempting to draw attention to the nuance and complexity in the relationships

between the various communities. Furthermore, there are hints among the recommendations in *Standing Together and Moving Forward* that while collaboration and collective action is vital, this goal cannot be used to further marginalize the more rural and coastal communities. Prince George, where the Symposium had been held six years previous, serves as a sort of urban hub in the northern interior of British Columbia, offering services not available elsewhere along the Highway of Tears. The city is also the home of Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS), one of the five authors of the *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report* and the current host of the Symposium's online presence. *Standing Together and Moving Forward* notes that some of its participants, particularly those at the other end of the highway in Prince Rupert, want better access to resources throughout the northwest, rather than via Prince George, and feel that "the involvement of the Prince George community and policing services ends in Terrace, B.C."[32] (Locke 20). Notably, the forums that Locke held all took place west of Smithers, itself almost four hundred kilometres west of Prince George. The consultations therefore reveal a tension between community and regional needs and expectations, and point to the balance between them that a thorough inquiry or action plan must strike.

Both reports, however, are candid in expressing shared frustration and anger with RCMP handling of missing persons reports and investigations, and their attitude toward and interactions with both victims' families and Indigenous peoples more generally. Considering, specifically, the perceived RCMP portrayal of young Indigenous women who go missing, northwest communities see evidence of victim blaming and double standards. Less than a year after Project E-PANA was established, for instance, the RCMP and its investigation were failing to meet the needs of victims' families,

[32] Prince Rupert is situated 144 kilometres further west along Highway 16 from Terrace.

prompting recommendations in the *Symposium Recommendations Report* that call for the RCMP to "re-establish and maintain communication with each of the victim's families" and for a First Nations advocate "to bridge the long-standing communications and awareness gap which exists" between these two parties (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al. 28). Moreover, the report contends that the criteria for RCMP investigation need to be expanded to account for "the aboriginal community's assertions on the actual number of missing women." Failure to do so means refusing to give each victim that "same respect and attention" as the nine honoured at the symposium (31).[33] Another six years later, such lack of respect was still felt and concern regarding law enforcement relationships with First Nations communities was again at the forefront of discussion among participants in the forums:

> A sense of frustration and disappointment with Police response to reports of missing women, especially Aboriginal women, persisted. . . . The police are not seen as a positive support for families with missing teenagers and young adults, as they generally do not respond immediately to missing persons reports, do not work with the family members in a coherent manner, do not follow up during the investigations of missing persons, and generally do not build positive and forward-moving relationships with Aboriginal people and communities in the Northwest. (Locke 19)

When tensions between First Nations communities and law enforcement escalate, they alter and monopolize the narrative around northern British Columbia's MMIWG, drawing attention away from honouring the victims, preventing further tragedies, and

[33] Beyond the Highway of Tears Symposium, Carrier Sekani Family Services more broadly "provide[s] advocacy, support for any family members and friends who have lost loved ones to violence" ("Highway of Tears").

healing families and communities.

Each report, RCMP statement, and news article creates a narrative about the girls and women whose stories become forever associated with the Highway of Tears. The *Symposium Recommendations Report* portrays the victims as young women, the majority of whom are Indigenous, struggling with poverty and, therefore, "placing themselves at risk by hitchhiking because they simply have no other transportation options" (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al. 16). These young women "will continue to travel by any means necessary" to access the recreation, business, health, and other services not available in their home communities (17-18). These women are not ignorant and naïve, but vulnerable to targeted predation because of their socioeconomic status (18). The participants who spoke at the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry's northwest consultations maintain that many of the women missing in the north "were simply abducted and were not hitchhiking or in the sex trade" (Locke 15). If this observation is indeed the reality, it challenges the already problematic perception of the public and of law enforcement that these young women engage in what is deemed risky behaviour. The MMIWG are "not nameless statistics," but are remembered as "daughters, sisters, wives and friends, individuals who were central to people's lives and vital in their communities" (9). The loss of these women, the heart of northwest First Nations' matrilineal cultures, creates "a disruptive ripple throughout the clan and nation" (21). The reports never lose sight of the young women who have been lost or reduce them to numbers or police investigations, employing statistics only in the service of designing awareness campaigns and preventative measures.

Central, then, to the profile of girls and women more likely to go missing in

northwestern British Columbia is not their behaviour, but the socioeconomic factors that limit their options and leave them vulnerable to risky behaviour, and therefore, to predation. In its overview of the situation underlying the shocking number of women disappearing along Highway 16, the *Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report* asserts that "[t]he first and most significant contributing factor for many of the aboriginal women being on the highway is poverty" (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation et al. 16). *Standing Together and Moving Forward* even includes statistics from 2010 that reveal the economy of northwest British Columbia to be depressed in comparison with the rest of the province (Locke 7). It later reminds readers that poverty here includes not only personal poverty, but also a general lack of community resources, which is a "structural issue" (16). Poverty in this region, which is often intergenerational and disproportionately affects First Nations communities, leaves women without transportation options, because vehicles are an unaffordable luxury and public transportation is either unavailable or unaffordable or both. The report also identifies post-secondary students who migrate to the region, often for tree-planting work, as economically vulnerable and more likely to risk hitchhiking for reasons similar to disadvantaged Indigenous women. Not unexpectedly, given the climate and infrastructure of the region through which Highway 16 runs, the hitchhiking and tree-planting seasons coincide.

This focus on systemic socioeconomic issues in the region emphasize the inadequacy of E-PANA and the RCMP for responding to the Highway of Tears crisis. With each new disappearance or murder of an Indigenous woman, and with every inflammatory statement from a politician blaming Indigenous communities for the tragic

trend, there were renewed calls for a national inquiry into the causes of the disproportionate number of Indigenous women who go missing or are murdered in Canada. According to a searchable database of unsolved cases of MMIWG that the CBC currently hosts online, families of four of the Indigenous girls and women included in the E-PANA investigation—Alberta Williams, Ramona Wilson, Lana Derrick, and Tamara Chipman—said that they wanted a national inquiry (Friesen et al). Gladys Radek agrees, believing that a national inquiry could tackle some of the rooted, systemic causes behind MMIWG and the Highway of Tears, such as poverty and exploitation: "A public inquiry is going to show where the ball was dropped—in the seriously flawed judicial system itself" (qtd. in A. Sterritt, "Missing, Murdered"). Leanne Simpson, although she respects the call of families of MMIWG for an inquiry, does not trust that the federal government could undertake an inquiry that would "address the root causes of gender violence," as "the perpetrators of colonial gender violence cannot be in charge of coming up with a strategy to end it because they are the beneficiaries of it." Any inquiry then, in Simpson's view, must be organized by and mobilize Indigenous communities ("Not Murdered").

For many families, friends, and community members in northern British Columbia directly affected by MMIWG, the Highway of Tears Symposium and the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry's consultations in the northwestern part of the province were smaller-scale inquiries mobilized by Indigenous communities, which provided recommendations that are yet to be implemented. Linda Locke comments in *Standing Together and Moving Forward* that more participants might have attended one particular forum, except that "some people were apparently feeling that nothing was coming out of all these meetings regarding the Missing and Murdered Women" (3). One

recommendation that arose from these consultations, then, is to publish stories, perhaps as part of a "traveling exhibit of the missing women for Northern communities" (25). Perhaps until a radical alternative to conducting similar dialogues in the future is proposed, First Nations near Highway 16 are open to other means of sustaining awareness of the Highway of Tears, such as Harun's novel and de Leeuw's literary essay, that take into account their concerns about how MMIWG and their communities are represented.

Reading the Literary Texts

A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain is the debut novel from American author Adrianne Harun. Harun, a non-Indigenous woman who lives in Port Townsend, Washington, explains that she first learned about the Highway of Tears from a story on National Public Radio (NPR) about places not to visit while on vacation, including northern British Columbia (Bookey; Harun, "Good, Evil"). Mentioning that her husband is Canadian and that together they have spent time driving along Highway 16 and "meandering in other ways through the landscape," Harun says that after learning more about the disappearances and murders she found herself feeling "a sense of outrage and helplessness" ("Interview"), "heartsick" ("Writer"), and "haunted" ("Good, Evil"). Harun then turned to writing to grapple with the questions she has about evil and the role it plays in this situation ("Good, Evil"). In the novel's acknowledgements, Harun notes that anger over the trend of missing and murdered Indigenous women along the Highway of Tears "sparked" her to write the story. She goes on to say that the disappearances in this region are "a situation that needs as much light as can be shined upon it—and energy and

solutions" (Harun, *Man Came Out* 257). The implication is, one would assume, that Harun believes her novel either can achieve, or incite action toward, these aims. In an article to draw attention to her new novel and to her public readings, Harun more explicitly states that her goal in writing *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* "was to shed a little light on [the murders] and make this emotionally felt, and do what I wanted from there" (qtd. in Bookey). This comment about fictionalizing the events and the pain at the heart of the Highway of Tears, although perhaps innocuous or made offhand, raises concerns about the novel's representation of it. The question arises, then, how—or whether—Harun's novel aids in achieving the goals of raising awareness about, and engendering respectful, effective responses to, MMIWG and the Highway of Tears.

As an outsider to the experiences of MMIWG and their families, as well as to the region itself, Harun knows that she needs to represent the situation with respect and awareness; however, the novel seems to benefit more from its association with the Highway of Tears than its potential to benefit the situation and communities it draws from warrants. Although Harun is clear that the novel is the result of her response to learning about the Highway of Tears, she maintains that *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* is not actually about the Highway of Tears itself: "Most of these murders and disappearances, which are still occurring, are unsolved. . . . Violence against women is constant, but violence against Native women is off the charts. That's the backdrop and impetus for the novel, *but not really the story here*" (Harun, "Book Notes"; emphasis added). The novel explores the nature of evil, both human and supernatural, and the porousness between seen and unseen worlds, through narrator Leo Kreutzer's recounting of the mayhem and reckless behaviour that befall himself and his four friends when "the

devil slipped into" their small town in northern British Columbia (Harun, *Man Came Out* 3). Intertwined with teenaged Leo's narration of how his and his friends' lives were affected by divided families, a looming forest fire, and a violent showdown with the town's meth dealers, are both short folkloric tales from Leo's Uncle Lud that caution against succumbing to the devil's control, and interludes from the devil himself. While Leo, Bryan, Ursie and Tessa are caught up in schemes involving gamblers and drug dealers that the devil in its many guises has machinated, Jackie, the other member of this group of protagonists, disappears while walking along the highway's shoulder. So, although the novel's backdrop is a small town struggling with poverty, racism, and misogyny that has a history of girls going missing and law enforcement not willing to acknowledge that it is happening, the central action of the novel is neither girls going missing, nor the town attempting to find them, to solve the crimes or socioeconomic inequalities, or to prevent future disappearances. One reviewer agrees that while the disappearances of women and girls from the highway shape the setting and the tone of the novel, they do not drive the plot: "The book is not, however, 'about' that ongoing tragedy. . . . Rather, it uses the menace of those crimes, of the malevolence and violence in the air, as a backdrop for a novel that is part folk tale, part horror story, part thriller and part literary fiction" (Wiersema).

To her credit, Harun reasons that the Highway of Tears is not her story to tell and describes how she "cringed at the idea of co-opting a real family's tragedy" ("Writer"). The way that the novel portrays the highway and violence against women and girls seems to bear out this intention of not capitalizing on the loss and pain that victims' families and communities experience. First, as Mike Bookey notes from a discussion with the author,

the novel's narrator is Leo, a teenaged boy, despite the story's repeated depictions of violence against girls and women. Harun suggests that this choice of narrator was a gut decision, and that because she "wasn't going to be able to write about the Highway of Tears," she went with a storyteller who is, in some ways, outside of this aspect of the narrative (qtd. in Bookey). Harun, moreover, confronts her own status as an outsider to the place, communities, and tragedies on which *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* is based, through Leo. Leo, addressing an unidentified audience, but, presumably the novel's readers, explains his decision not to name his hometown in his retelling of the summer's events: "You know where we are. You do. . . . You've heard of this place. The news was all over it for a while" (40-41). Harun, through Leo, refrains from naming a specific community to avoid critiques from locals regarding the accuracy and integrity of the narrative's representation of this place. So, although the Highway of Tears is explicitly the model for the novel's "tainted highway" (54), the story names neither the highway as such, nor the small town along which it runs. In fact, Leo names some towns in the region—Terrace, Smithers—and then explicitly states that his location is "none of these" (41). The road is always referred to simply as "the highway," sometimes accompanied by an adjective that calls attention to its reputation. The novel's town has the amenities, industries, and social struggles found in any number of communities in northern British Columbia, including, for example, a handful of stores, motels, and churches; a Greyhound station and a railroad; a pioneer museum and First Nations gift shop; mill yards and logging camps; teen alcoholism and drug rings—but none of their specifics or their names.

Regardless of how well-intentioned Harun was, however, the line between the Highway of Tears as the impetus for the novel and as the substance of the novel becomes blurred, and, consequently, *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* should be evaluated as a text that is representing the Highway of Tears tragedies. Not only do Harun's acknowledgements at the end of the novel mention the need for further awareness about the Highway of Tears, her dedication at the outset of the text includes the families of the missing and murdered girls and women whose lives are now tied to this highway: "This book is dedicated to the families of the Highway of Tears victims—the mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, lovers and friends—of the stolen sisters." Framing the novel in this way leads any attentive reader to look for parallels between the Highway of Tears context and the novel's narrative, of which there are many. In addition to recurrent disappearances of girls from along "the Highway" (3)—"the famous highway" sometimes featured in the newspapers of urban centres a day's drive away (a likely allusion to Vancouver) (43)—that connects small, struggling communities rich in natural resources, the novel's description of its setting includes details that unmistakably place it in the region of northern British Columbia's section of Highway 16. For instance, four of the novel's five protagonists claim some sort of ancestry among the Haisla and Kitselas peoples (6), whose traditional territories include part of the Pacific coast and move inland along the Skeena River, as well as land around the settler communities of Kitimat and Terrace, respectively; the narrator refers to "Rose Prince, saint of the Carrier Nation" (16), an Indigenous woman who attended Lejac Residential School along Highway 16 near Fraser Lake; and the narrator mentions molybdenum mining (112) and pine beetles (163), which

have both affected the region's geography and economy.[34] Perhaps unsurprisingly then, many interviews with Harun and reviews of the novel frame their discussion through the lens of the Highway of Tears.[35] Harun herself, in a blog post about music that reflects or inspired the themes of her novel, writes that "*A Man Who Came Out of a Door in the Mountains* takes place in an unnamed town in northern British Columbia, just off Highway 16, the infamous Highway of Tears" ("Book Notes").[36] Elsewhere, Harun claims that the setting, with its "connection to B.C.'s Highway 16" and its lonely, uncanny, or sublime landscape, "is crucial to this story and the way [she's] chosen to tell it" ("Writer").

Therefore, the novel cannot be untangled from the context and reality of the Highway of Tears. Harun, however, apparently thinks that by fictionalizing events and people and setting them within an unnamed town she distances herself enough from the stories of the victims and their families to protect her from criticism of appropriation or exploitation. In three separate interviews, Harun claims that she is not a journalist

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[34] British Columbia is the only place in Canada (as well as the only place in the continental Pacific Northwest) that has molybdenum mines, and the current mountain pine beetle outbreak began in British Columbia.

[35] Several published interviews that Harun did to promote the novel begin with a discussion about the Highway of Tears, before stating that this social reality is the impetus for, not the central story of, *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* (Bookey; Harun, "Book Notes"; "Good, Evil"; "Write Question"; "Writer"). Of the ten reviews of the novel that I read while writing this chapter, seven mention the Highway of Tears by name (and some provide background information about it) (Brown; L. Cook; Golob; Wagman; Walschots; White; Wiersema), but only three of the ten acknowledge that the actual highway in northern British Columbia was (supposedly) just the inspiration for Harun's fictional tale about the infiltration of human and supernatural darkness and violence into a small logging community (Golob; Marchand; Wiersema). In other words, the majority of the book reviews do not distinguish between the novel's unnamed highway and the Highway of Tears, reading the text as about the Highway of Tears, not just inspired by it. On a personal note, I first came across Harun's novel at a local bookstore in Smithers, British Columbia, which, if I recall correctly, was displaying the novel prominently at the time. After reading the first lines on the back cover (including "In isolated British Columbia, girls, mostly Native, are vanishing from the sides of a notorious highway"), I assumed the novel was about the Highway of Tears.

[36] In a review of the novel for Tor.com (which caters to readers and writers of science fiction and fantasy), Alex Brown echoes this description of the novel being set in an "unnamed Canadian town" through which "Highway 16, the Highway of Tears, rends its way." This review does not make a distinction between the Highway of Tears and the unnamed, but similarly notorious, highway in the story.

("Good, Evil"; "Write Question" 00:02:31-34; "Writer"). Because she "[doesn't] know how to write from true fact, true crime, or whatever" ("Write Question" 00:02:35-39), and did not want to "co-opt" another person's tragedy ("Good, Evil"; "Write Question" 00:02:40-03:02; "Writer"), Harun turned instead to fiction, desiring "to make the situation and that world emotionally felt" ("Good, Evil"). Moreover, the novel's narrator comments that, as a storyteller, he is not too concerned about specificity or details, choosing instead to unsettle what his audience thinks they know (Harun, *Man Came Out* 40, 45). Leo also states that the newspaper article about a girl disappearing that his mother has pinned up in their kitchen does not adequately convey the reality of the place in which they live: "You see, here's a place where a singular story won't suffice, if one ever could" (40). Through such comments, Harun suggests that by not claiming to tell *the* story about the Highway of Tears grounded in facts, she is free to fictionalize it as she chooses. Which, of course, she is. But this "bold and controversial decision," according to reviewer Leah Golob, to include MMIWG in fiction "considering how close to home the tragedies hit" (Golob), opens up the author to criticism that her novel benefits more from the notoriety of the Highway of Tears than it honours or supports the victims, families, or communities. The following discussion of the novel, therefore, looks at the aspects of the text that are clear parallels to the Highway of Tears and identifies where it succeeds and where it fails to raise awareness and to potentially shape the discussion or actions in response to MMIWG in a good way.

In its portrayal of the highway and its reputation, the novel points to some of the sociological issues underlying the disproportionate number of missing and murdered women and girls along the Highway of Tears, which has the potential to raise awareness

among readers regarding problems that must be addressed alongside the need for criminal investigations. First, the novel reflects the reality that hitchhiking is a common way for people without other means of transportation to travel along Highway 16 between communities, or between home and work. Jackie, a young Indigenous woman, voices the fact that, without access to public transit or a vehicle, "hitchhiking the highway route" is sometimes the "quicker solution" (25) than searching for a ride with a friend, or perhaps walking or biking. Also, Leo remembers the most recent disappearance near his town of a girl named Carla who tried to hitchhike from "the tiny settlement where she'd ended up" to the nearest grocery store. Without a car, and a Greyhound bus ticket costing more than the necessary groceries, Carla, seemingly without options, hitchhikes and vanishes from the highway, leaving a three-year-old boy motherless (116). Carla's case exemplifies how necessity and limited options trump the risks that many women face as they walk the highway's shoulder.

Although the novel points to women's frequent consideration of hitchhiking as an option, it is careful not to normalize the situation and the risk that the women know they are taking. When Jackie says that she plans to hitchhike with Hana Swann, a stranger to town who found work alongside Jackie in the nearby logging camp's dining hall, her friends immediately dismiss it as a bad idea, particularly since Jackie "know[s] better than that" (25). The girls are not ignorant, but are susceptible to justifying their decision to walk or hitch a ride with a stranger. Jackie's reasoning that "there's two of us" and "[i]t's daylight" does nothing to reassure her friends; even Jackie is "unable to fully keep the doubt out of her voice" when she explains that Hana has already travelled in this way without a problem (25). The image of the two girls "wandering up the highway together"

makes the group "uneasy" (26); so, in this instance, the friends persuade Jackie and Hana to accept a ride in the back of Bryan's truck, as Jackie often does, along the highway to the gravel trail through the bush that the girls take to and from the logging camp (27-28). This exchange and Carla's story are two representations of the type of thought processes that might take place before a girl decides to hitchhike and begin to answer questions that perhaps readers have about why there is so much hitchhiking along Highway 16 in the first place, especially if for such readers hitchhiking carries connotations of adventure or of romanticized encounters with intriguing strangers.

Second, the novel portrays how within Highway 16 communities the onus is largely on women to protect themselves from becoming a statistic, which alerts readers to the inadequate preventative measures, not solutions, women must resort to in the region in the face of continued hitchhiking and violence against women. Drawing from the reality of the Highway of Tears, Harun's infamous highway is also bordered by a "slew of . . . billboards" and Carla reappears only as a face on such signs (116). In northern British Columbia's Highway 16 region these billboards are as much a warning to other girls as an attempt to locate those who have gone missing. For Harun's protagonists, it is surprising that anyone living or working in town, even relative newcomers, might not be aware of the risks linked to hitchhiking and the consequent responsibility to avoid the activity. "Hasn't she heard?" is Tessa's response to Hana's suggestion that she and Jackie hitch a ride (25); *hasn't she seen the billboards?* would be an equally likely response. Moreover, the characters also know that Indigenous girls and women carry the bulk of this burden of awareness and prevention. Leo identifies the racism and misogyny that he sees as responsible for the disproportionate number of girls from Indigenous communities

among those who go missing: “Native girls were prey, as thoughtlessly disposable as the moose carcass or the unlucky martin, and we all knew it . . .” (25). Jackie is all too aware of the prejudices against her. Not afraid to defend herself and her female relatives in the face of racist and sexist slurs, Jackie frequently receives warnings, rather than protection, from the police, with at least one officer propositioning her, implying that she could earn leniency with sexual favours (12). Ursie, who is part-Haisla, also receives warnings from her employer, her auntie, and her brother, Bryan, to protect herself when she begins cleaning rooms at the Peak and Pine Motel, a place frequented by transient men, “[f]rantic, desperate men,” and “[f]urious men” (34), and a place from which the townspeople knew that “[w]omen—*Native* women like Ursie—had been disappearing” (35). Ursie knows “enough not to grin back at” men who stay at the hotel, because “[n]othing good came from cavorting with strange men. Or even familiar men” (35). Bryan gives her a doorstop wedge to help her avoid becoming locked in a room with such men (34). Her employer tries to keep Ursie away from the illegal gambling and resulting brawls that take place at the motel, for which the police were willing to shut down the place (203). The same law enforcement, however, puts little effort into searching for missing girls (84). The novel challenges the incomplete perception that the Highway of Tears is wholly the result of opportunistic serial killers working in an area too large to patrol and search effectively.

Harun’s intention to shed light on the Highway of Tears for readers who might be unaware of the situation is evident in the novel’s portrayal of Jackie’s disappearance from the highway as not the result of reckless behaviour and as exacerbated by the apathy of law enforcement. When the logging camp is evacuated as a forest fire nears, Jackie and

Hana set out on foot to the town; rather than hitchhiking, Jackie walks, "propelled forward as if she can by her own considerable force cover the long miles to the next town" (177). When Hana wanders off into the woods (which readers know is the devil at work to make Jackie a target), Jackie searches for her only long enough to realize that she is now on her own and has to move quickly to make it home safely: "Finally, alone, she presses forward. She'll walk all day if she must—and she *must*, she *must* . . ." (177). It is not long, however, before a man stops to offer her a ride, even though Jackie is "merely shouldering [her] way home, head down, purposefully oblivious to the slowing, ticking engine behind [her]." In the moments before her disappearance, Jackie acts out of necessity and with awareness. She does not intentionally or naïvely make herself vulnerable. The man who takes her is an embodiment of the view that Indigenous women are at his disposal. The narrative voice (here an unidentified third-person narrator, not Leo) sarcastically points out that it is not the man's boundless "generosity"—"[h]e brakes for every hitchhiker and stranded motorist"—and his "persuasion"—"both a subtle art and a clear show of advantages, isn't it?"—that convinces Jackie to get into his vehicle, but his physical strength that forces her: "and who else can lift a full-grown woman by the back of her neck as if she were just one of a dozen spitting kittens ready for drowning?" (178). This simile emphasizes the dehumanization of MMIWG that perpetuates the tragedy along the Highway of Tears. Then, when Jackie's family claims that the girl has gone missing, a search-and-rescue team does a perfunctory search, but "[t]he police were positive Jackie had simply run off with her new friend, a gal most agreed now was nothing more than a troublemaking transient" (254). Despite the family's certainty that Jackie would not have run away, authorities believe that her behaviour was

intentional and risky and, therefore, that her whereabouts were neither their concern nor responsibility. Harun therefore paints a picture of some of the factors that created the Highway of Tears, which for some readers, likely the audience she believes she will reach, will be enlightening.

However, *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* does little to move beyond painting this picture and consequently fails to either model or call for a response other than basic awareness. Harun's decision to create a primary narrator who remains just outside of the experience of Highway of Tears victims and their families, and who has the naïveté of a teenaged boy (the novel describes Leo as "the dumbest smart kid ever" [230]), might help her avoid appropriation, but it also limits the novel's ability to offer informed critique or ways to act. The novel's narrative voice is reserved in its commentary on the situation. For example, Leo describes how although "[they] all knew" that girls were going missing because people viewed them as "disposable," new cases were reported on television with "some uninformed dope" speaking about the impossibility of finding missing girls given the breadth of the landscape and paucity of evidence or leads. In such media defences of inaction, Leo and his friends "heard . . . a kind of irritated grumbling: *C'mon, you can't find anyone out there, especially with skin like that*" (25). That he does not similarly discriminate against the victims is only implied through the fact that Leo himself is friends with Indigenous girls whom he admires and respects; he never explicitly critiques the racism that prevails in his community against MMIWG. The protagonists are aware of this racism and they distrust the official explanations for not finding the girls, and yet silent, mutual understanding is their foremost response. Even when Hana proposes hitchhiking, seemingly out of ignorance or

indifference, none of the friends want to go over the details of girls who have gone missing, details that come from rumours, rather than investigations or inquiries (25). Indeed, in the novel there is no mention of activism, investigations, inquiries, recommendations, or solutions, despite the fact that Harun published, and likely wrote, the novel years after the 2006 Highway of Tears Symposium.[37] In the novel, there is no indication that there is any movement toward seeking justice for the victims and their families, toward inquiring into why this problem has become endemic or how it is rooted in systemic issues of racism or violence against women, or toward finding solutions. There is no hope of reclaiming the highway.

This focus on loss, mystery, and fear in its representation of the Highway of Tears therefore serves the novel's central storyline, the disappearances becoming primarily a narrative tool that does little to serve the victims, families, or communities that sparked the story. The novel begins with a short folktale about human susceptibility to the devil's influence. Then, Leo's narration of how he remembers the summer when the devil visited their town begins with grief: "That wasn't the first summer girls went missing off the Highway, not the first time a family lost its dearest member to untraceable evil, but it was the first time someone I loved was among that number . . ." (3). The main plotline of encounters with the devil feeds off of the tone of loss, helplessness, foreboding, and inevitability that Harun sets by foregrounding the disappearance from the highway of one of Leo's Indigenous, female friends. This and other disappearances then fall to the

[37] In an interview, Harun talks about how, after hearing about the Highway of Tears for the first time, she "found [her] way to a website about the Highway of Tears and fell down that rabbit hole" ("Good, Evil"). While Harun does not state which website(s) she discovered, it would be weak research to not visit highwayoftears.ca. This website is hosted by the Highway of Tears Governing Body that was formed after, and as a result of, the Highway of Tears Symposium to implement its report and recommendations, which are featured on the website.

background of the novel, in which Harun incorporates Leo's thoughts about Jackie and other missing women strategically in relation to Lud's stories about the devil's tactics. For example, Leo recounts to his uncle his uneasiness when meeting Hana Swann and hearing her try to talk Jackie into hitchhiking against the latter's better judgment; Leo also notes at this point that Jackie "knows better," because a friend of her sister went missing and was never found (72). This interaction immediately sets up Lud's telling of the story of Snow Woman, "one form of the devil" who lures people to "meet her in the underworld" willingly (74). And Carla's name "suddenly came to [Leo's] mind as if Uncle Lud had placed it there" in the middle of one of Lud's ruminations on evil (116-17), which precedes his story about a man who comes out of a door in the mountain, a "version of a Pied Piper, the devil arriving in town in one of his many guises" (118). I would argue, therefore, that *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* uses the grief and disquiet of the stories of missing girls to stoke readers' feelings of trepidation as the text explores more abstract questions of good and evil.

While all of the protagonists' storylines serve to explore how humans become aware of or remain willfully blind to the battle between good and evil, Jackie's role in the novel becomes the most inevitable and disposable in service of this theme. Leo makes it clear at the outset of his narration that his purpose for recounting the events of the summer Jackie went missing are to preserve Lud's folktales and, thereby, to make sense of what happened: "If Uncle Lud were here, he'd tell the story. He'd know right where to begin so you could see how the devil slipped into town, how visible his entry was, and yet how we bumbled right into his path. All the pieces would make perfect sense then. Fractures would vanish. You'd see the whole of it" (3). Yet this clarity does not come for

Jackie's story, or her disappearance. Leo believes that if he they had known the devil could take the form of a girl whose charm would cloud the judgment of their friend and lead her to take a dangerous, solitary walk along the highway, they would have "driven straight to collect . . . Jackie, and taken a sure road to safety" (although he doubts their chances of fleeing the devil) (29). Regardless of whether they knew the stories that would have helped them realize Hana's otherworldly influence on them, the group of protagonists knew enough about the dangers of hitchhiking to recognize their responsibility to Jackie, especially since the teenagers had spent their youth "holding one another in sight as best [they] could" (6). Instead, Jackie going missing seems inevitable. Leo even has a dream at one point in which each of his friends seems to be following silent commands (readers, and Leo in retrospect, will recognize this as an omen of the devil's influence), and he sees Jackie, "just the back of her, disappearing" (195). Even as the novel tacitly critiques the view that Indigenous girls along the highway become "thoughtlessly disposable" (25), the narrative disposes of Jackie; by the end of the novel, Jackie is the only one of the five friends not to survive her encounter with the devil. The plot points of Jackie's story draw readers into the consideration of the devil's influence, as Leo reflects on how to spot evil and what they could and should have done differently, rather than into reflection on or dialogue about MMIWG.

So, rather than delve further into the implications of desperation hitchhiking, institutional racism, and normalized misogyny for women and girls in the region, Harun to a great extent situates the disappearances in the realm of a good versus evil, God

versus the devil binary.[38] Leo's opening sentence describes the plight of the disappeared girls' families as having "lost [their] dearest member to untraceable evil," with the girls seemingly "spirited away" (3). The narrator admits that he knows better than to credit the disappearances to something inexplicable, yet references to the spiritual world repeatedly enter the narrative. Leo's Uncle Lud, a storyteller who attributes his gift to an inherited blessing from an Indigenous "medicine man" (73), is convinced that Hana, the stranger to town who wants to persuade Jackie to hitchhike, is Snow Woman. Offered as an otherworldly explanation for suicide, the story depicts people following Snow Woman as "an act of pure magic: a disappearing act directed by the devil himself" (74). Hana, with her long black hair, unblemished and unbelievably white skin, and mesmerizing presence, fits Lud's description of Snow Woman. Several people who interviewed Harun or who reviewed the novel draw attention to the folktales that the author integrates throughout the text. For some of these readers, these stories are the strength of the novel, perhaps due in part to Harun's accomplishments as a short story writer. When asked about the origins of these stories, or "spooky legends" as Brangien Davis calls them in an interview for *Seattle* magazine, Harun explains that she "[m]ade 'em all up" (Harun, "Writer"). However, in the novel, Harun's narrator attributes Lud's storytelling gift to an "enduring connection to the band" after his great-uncle "did a huge favor for a medicine man in one of the northern tribes" (*Man Came Out* 73). Leo's father, Lud's brother, worries that Lud has been "swept away by stories that weren't even those of [their] kin," i.e., of Leo's paternal German-Polish ancestors (113). Consequently, Harun risks leading readers to believe that Lud's stories actually come from an Indigenous storytelling tradition. Indeed,

[38] In the novel's acknowledgements, Harun comments on her writing process, noting that "[t]he story veered into a more fanciful narrative after a dinner party discussion of good and evil" (*Man Came Out* 257).

reviewers Leah Golob and Claire Vaye Watkins refer to "the Native legend of the devil's companion, Snow Woman," and "[Lud's] cache of native legends," respectively. Alex Brown, in his review, describes Lud as "pass[ing] stories on to his nephew in a desperate attempt to keep the tradition alive," a tradition that includes "[t]ribal magic [that] runs through the town's blood." Although Philip Marchand does not link Lud's stories to an Indigenous tradition, his review, too, talks about the stories as "forms of knowledge, with magical properties." Rather than taking responsibility for this representation of the non-Indigenous Lud carrying the power of Indigenous storytelling, Harun claims the innocence of invention (similar to her fictionalizing of the Highway of Tears). In an interview for Montana Public Radio, Chérie Newman asks where these myths that "sound like tribal myths" come from; Harun responds with a laugh and says that people reviewing the book talk about how it is "full of all these, these Native legends, and whatever," when actually, "there is not a single one in there that is a Native legend. I made them all up" (Harun, "Write Question" 00:24:55-25:09). She goes on to explain that there are parallels between her story about Snow Woman and a story about Deer Woman, who similarly leads young men to suicide. Although she was not aware of this resemblance when writing the story, she claims now, "I guess every tribe has a similar story about a figure" like that in her novel and in the Deer Woman story (00:25:20-28). She has her novel's narrator comment, in the lead up to telling the Snow Woman story, that "[s]ome bands call her Deer Woman" and that this woman who calls young men to their suicides "has found particularly easy berth in young Indian men" (Harun, *Man Came Out* 74). Harun might laugh off the tendency of readers to assume that she has incorporated Indigenous stories in her novel, but intentionally including such details

opens up Harun to criticism about such misrepresentation.

Although Leo maintains that such stories have "nothing to do with the vanishing girls," and that "it would be bullshit romanticizing to imagine they'd simply wandered away following a will-o'-the-wisp, the worst kind of rationalizing" to offer the story as an explanation when there is "a real monster out there," he still chooses to retell this story and his uncle's theory about Hana (81).[39] Moreover, Leo's portrayal of Hana in his retelling of the summer's events more often than not fits with, rather than challenges, Lud's interpretation of her arrival in town. For example, Leo recalls Hana claiming she has never had problems when hitchhiking, simultaneously suggesting that God offers protection and that He has forsaken this place: "'This is *God's* country, isn't it?' she said, with an odd, faraway gaze that implied God hadn't visited in a while. 'And I'm still here, aren't I?'" (26) Leo himself uses the descriptor "God's country" again later to describe how some people view northern British Columbia, but he tempers this praise by noting that "others swear it's been colonized by the other team" (40). Using the word "colonized" here, Harun perhaps suggests that the legacy of settler colonialism plays a role for the evil side of the battle between good and evil in the novel. But this subtle allusion is inadequate acknowledgement. Moreover, one could also point out the work of Christian ideologies in the history of the province's colonization to further question the value of this binary in terms of understanding the disappearances. By emphasizing the mystery of Jackie's disappearance to heighten the intrigue of Hana's presence in town, the novel potentially distracts from practical and achievable recommendations to tackle

[39] Harun also clarifies in an interview that she knows that human actions are responsible for the Highway of Tears, but stresses, again, that the novel is not actually about these MMIWG: "I also want to be clear: *A Man Came Out of the Door in the Mountain* is not really about the Highway of Tears' murders. There is nothing magical or mystifying about that situation. In other words, the devil did not do it—men did—and I'd hate for the devil alone to be the excuse" ("Good, Evil").

poverty, and racial and gender discrimination.

Ultimately, Adrianne Harun's *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* does shed some light on MMIWG and the Highway of Tears, but it offers little critique, it does not honour the work of the families and communities who are offering recommendations and pushing for change, and it leaves readers with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. In his tale about Snow Woman, Uncle Lud comments that people always have gone missing, and will continue to, so "[i]t's how they get lost that's of interest" (75). Leo and his friends are left feeling complicit in the how of Jackie's disappearance—"[w]e knew, too, that we'd failed her, failed, failed, failed to save one we loved" (254)—but are not self-reflective on their role beyond regretting that they did not notice the devil slipping into town. Harun's novel benefits from readers' horror and fascination with the Highway of Tears. A pre-Symposium narrative in which characters speak about the highway in hushed tones with fear and dread better serves the novel than a list of recommendations from families and community organizations who are walking to take back the highway. The novel shows Jackie's family determinedly searching for her (252-53) and demanding the police do the same—"Jackie's sisters insisted endlessly to the police that Jackie had not run away, that she would not run away, that she did not do drugs or sell herself, that she was a good, hardworking girl who had gone missing" (255)—which is a positive representation of the strength of victims' families. Harun, however, seems to think that readers' awareness of the Highway of Tears will be incited more strongly if they are "haunted" by it ("Good, Evil"), and that the "spookiness" for women of having to be extra watchful in such places as Highway 16 is one of the emotions she hopes readers will feel: "This is the reality of the Highway of Tears, and

that's what I try to get across in the book. What's scarier? That [feeling] or the devil?" (qtd. in Bookey). To think back to David Garneau's thoughts on the ability of art to offer "new pictures of the world [that] can influence behaviour" (qtd. in Hill and McCall ix), Harun's novel misses the opportunity to imagine a story about the Highway of Tears in which women have hope to travel it safely.

In contrast to the extended focus in *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain* on a highway meant to resemble the Highway of Tears, the infamous highway often makes more subtle appearances in the work of writers from communities within the Highway 16 corridor. An exception to this generalization is anti-colonial geographer and writer Sarah de Leeuw's literary essay "Soft Shouldered," printed in the Fall 2013 issue of *PRISM international*, a contemporary writing magazine published by the University of British Columbia's Creative Writing Program.[40] De Leeuw believes that publishing writing about this topic that is "dear to [her] heart"—a connection that is informed by her own experiences hitchhiking and picking up hitchhikers along this highway, as well as by her previous work as a women's centre coordinator—works to "humanize the issue" (Fry). Citing the personal nature of this issue for so many northern women, de Leeuw suggests that it is "a topic that needs to be engaged from a very heart felt [sic] and in [her] case, artistic way" (qtd. in Fry). Implicit in her decision to turn to creative nonfiction is the idea that literary writing is particularly well situated to "de-normalize" violence against women, to ensure that readers are "always . . . surprised and appalled by it" (qtd. in Fry). "Soft Shouldered," which de Leeuw refers to as a "memoir piece," emphasizes the social circumstances that compel women to hitchhiking as a counter to

[40] "Soft Shouldered" was later republished in de Leeuw's 2017 collection of literary nonfiction essays, *Where It Hurts*.

the federal government's focus on criminal justice as its prioritized response (Mallam).

As this dissertation has shown, de Leeuw draws attention in much of her work to particular places in northern British Columbia through which settler colonialism was—and continues to be—actualized. In relation to Highway 16, she attempts to name and map in literary writing the places and people that become invisible beyond the boundaries of towns and the shoulders of highways—often Indigenous people, living on reserves, with unequal access to public transportation, health care, recreation, and other goods and services. The highway has become a metonym for MMIWG, but it is the settler colonial geographies through which the highway winds that perpetuate the vulnerability of the women who disappear. These places, de Leeuw writes, are "[n]owhere most of the world will ever go. A land bordering on the lost. An unseen. A beyond cities, a far outside the imaginings of most" ("Soft Shouldered" 8). The Highway of Tears investigation is embedded in a place that, for de Leeuw, largely already exists off the radar of Canadian residents, let alone the global community, and consequently, the missing and murdered women and their families become situated beyond of the state's concern and at risk of vanishing, again. This text asserts that the disappearances are the primary reason that this place "is worth looking closely at" (8), and worth writing and talking about. And so, "Soft Shouldered" conveys the unseen of this place, with missing women at its epicentre, into its audience's imaginary. In an article about creative geographic knowledge, de Leeuw states that she writes "personal essays about communities along the western section of Highway 16 as a method of actively participating in the formation of creative geographic works to convey new stories about the physical and cultural landscape of the region" ("Poetic Place" 30). "Soft Shouldered" is one of de Leeuw's creative texts that

attempt to bring to the foreground a physical and cultural landscape that is often relegated to the margins. Her literary essay not only implicitly calls for an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, but also itself enquires into the traces left behind on the people and landscapes of this region.

"Soft Shouldered" explores the places from which girls go missing and in which they are found: the roadsides, the ditches, the fields, the rural communities, and the reserves. The title comes from de Leeuw linking the shoulders of young girls—shoulders traced by mothers who love them—with the shoulders of the highway that dissipate quickly into ditches and bushes. Describing one of her own experiences picking up a hitchhiker, de Leeuw writes, "Pulling off onto the highway's soft shoulder for a soft-shouldered young woman, standing there on the edge of the road on the edge of the town . . ." (9). Whereas the girls' soft shoulders represent in the text their innocence and the intimacy with which they are known and loved, the soft shoulders of the highway represent the unstable periphery where things are, or become, unknown; the place beyond the edge of the paved and regulated highway; the place where "[t]hings decay and things are consumed in the ditches and crevices on the edge of Highway 16" (8).

"Soft Shouldered" begins and ends with images of broken shoulders, to juxtapose two situations in which mothers experience pain over the broken bodies of daughters and to point to the hope that comes when such pain can be named and confronted. At the outset of her essay, de Leeuw describes Shoulder Dystocia, which is the name for when an infant's shoulders are too wide to pass through the opening in the mother's pelvic bone during childbirth. The prescribed course of action is for the person aiding in the childbirth to reach inside, put their hands around the baby's tiny shoulders, and use their

thumbs to break the clavicle bones quickly and forcefully. Although the break will heal and the infant will not remember the pain, the mother witnesses a violence against her child: “We tell mothers that their children, their daughters, will cross a threshold into life with limp and broken shoulders” (7). The penultimate line of the text returns to this image of broken shoulders. Here the author focuses on the uncommon case where someone discovers the body of a missing and murdered girl, her “shoulders soft as dawn, shattered in a ditch” (11). The difference, however, is that the mother of a daughter whose bones are broken by a doctor faces a situation that has been noticed, investigated, studied, named, reported on, published about, given attention, and accepted as truth. As a result, people created solutions for Shoulder Dystocia that work. Pain and broken bones are followed by tears of relief, healing, and a life filled with promise (7). In contrast, many cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are the consequence of a system that is not easily diagnosed and that many people have yet to acknowledge “is no less true”: “The sparseness of findings and inquiries has resulted in almost nothing and so nothing has been circulated and solutions are slippery and invisible” (7). The essay impresses upon readers that the dismemberment of women’s bodies, and subsequently of families and communities, in this region needs diagnosis for there to be prevention and healing.

While the text is explicit in its desire for an end to the occurrences of missing and murdered girls in the area, it is less direct in its ideas for how it might be achieved. However, the text develops two central themes related to issues that an inquiry might address: [1] naming and mapping people, places, and colonial geographies in order to bring to the foreground that which is usually marginalized; and [2] drawing attention to

how the highway is embedded in a larger landscape shaped by settler colonialism.

De Leeuw begins the essay by asserting that when "there is nothing named or found and so nothing is documented or published" (7), then there are no solutions to the seemingly inevitable disappearance of girls in northern British Columbia. Interestingly, de Leeuw does not name any of the missing and murdered women and girls. Instead, she goes about naming the flora that borders the highway, the items discarded from vehicles into ditches, and the remotely located communities through which the highway passes. These lists and descriptions uncover for readers what becomes visible or found when we take the time to look. For example, noticing "[b]roken beer bottles tossed from cars," can evoke the sensations of a night of teenaged revelry: the sounds of laughter, the smells of a beat-up car, and the feeling of wind on faces (8). The essay asks readers to consider what stories, what record of events, might become clear if it is a body— shattered bones rather than shattered glass—that careful looking detects. "Soft Shouldered" tasks readers with joining to look at, notice, and name that which has gone missing, so as to avoid the complacency that comes with accepting that what is beyond our purview, outside our car windows, is "hazy" or unknowable (8). By following this list that names the previously unnoticed or unknown with a couple stories of the girls and women who hitchhike along the highway, de Leeuw's essay emphasizes that we need to give our attention to them before they become one of the missing. These stories listen to the hitchhikers, who voice their reasons for standing on the highway, looking for a ride. A young girl to whom de Leeuw gives a ride from the town of Smithers to the Moricetown reserve, for example, tells stories of "kids from the reserves hitching 'into town'" to play basketball or to buy school supplies, or just to escape "the smell of reserve smoke" (9-10). Another

hitchhiking woman, too drunk to drive or walk and in a place without public transit or taxis, just wants to get home, and tells stories of family, of picking berries, of an auntie expecting her and ready with a cup of tea (10). To hear these stories and to notice the details of their lives—the girl "all smiles and teeth and chitter-chatter and stories of summer basketball games" as she looks forward to starting Grade 9 (9-10) and the woman certain of enjoying "angel's tea, tea so milky white, warm and sweet" (10)—is to begin to learn and to document motivations for hitchhiking, and to humanize the girls and women who resort to it. Through these anecdotes, the essay makes readers complicit in the responsibility that comes from such awareness; the situation can no longer remain overlooked like the detritus in ditches. In this brief section, then, the essay names and makes visible the people of this region and how they interact with its geography—particularly with the distances between communities and the public transportation-less highway that dictates movement between them—thereby shedding light on root causes behind the region's disproportionately high number of missing and murdered girls and women.

Related to this naming and mapping of the physical and cultural geography of northern British Columbia is the need to look beyond the edges of the highway itself. Two human rights reports that address the issue of MMIWG in British Columbia—conducted by Human Rights Watch and by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)—identify the danger of limiting focus to the Highway of Tears. Both reports cite the E-PANA investigation, pointing out that inclusion in this project requires the disappearance or murder to have happened within one mile of the highway (*Those Who Take* 35; Inter-American Commission 32). The IACHR states that "many family

members of other missing or murdered women whose cases did not fall within the scope of the investigation were dissatisfied with the process . . . that led to the choice of this narrow scope" (32). The Human Rights Watch report responds to this narrow scope in one of its recommendations to the RCMP: "Consider, in consultation with indigenous communities in northern British Columbia, changing the criteria for cases to be investigated by the E-PANA task force to include a greater number of the murders and disappearances of women in the north" (*Those Who Take* 16).

Read in light of these concerns about who becomes forgotten when the scope of inquiry is too narrow, de Leeuw's repeated recognition in "Soft Shouldered" of what becomes invisible beyond the edges of the highway speaks to the need for engaging even more with the people and places whose needs are not met by the highway. When travelling by vehicle down the highway, passengers view trees that become an impenetrable wall, and details disappear (7-8). At highway speeds, daughters who have become "roadside prey" lie overlooked in ditches (11). De Leeuw notes that once when dropping off a hitchhiking girl at her destination, the girl points out a trail off the shoulder of the highway: "An almost invisible cleft in the ditch's vegetation, a path through bush and bramble that we would never have seen had she not known just where to look. . . . Our hitchhiker crosses a borderland, walks over the highway's soft shoulder and is lost from our sight. Enveloped by all that grows on the sides of roads" (10).

Writing from her own experiences of living in the communities along Highway 16 and of picking up hitchhikers, de Leeuw's essay recognizes the privilege, safety and control that comes with having access to transportation and not being subject to racial prejudice and entreats readers to grapple with their own complacency regarding other

people's exclusion from experiencing this beautiful northern highway the same way. Those people travelling at "the freedom speed of a car" along "the regulated and patrolled" road are on the other side of a boundary that separates them from the shoulders of the pavement and beyond, as the "downward slope from the centre line" moves to "a space of refuse and discard" (8). de Leeuw describes how stopping to pick up a hitchhiker puts into perspective the fact that she had "already been driving for five hours," and continuing throughout the night seemed possible (9); she is mobile and free to escape in ways those on the highway's shoulder with thumb outstretched might not be. She recognizes her responsibility to the hitchhiker who might not make it to her destination before the night grows cool and dark: "And that is part of the reason we stop. We do not want her to get cold on the edge of the highway. And of course there is something else" (9). Wanting to offer protection from this "something else," a driver must pull over, take "a detour to the edge" (9), to a place they might not otherwise find themselves. It is this unknown place that de Leeuw asks readers to join her in through their imagination. "So begin with me at the edge," writes de Leeuw to her audience as she sets out to describe the borderland along the highway (7) and to place readers in this region: "You are in northern British Columbia. . . . Look into the thin shoulder space that borders this highway. Here is what you might find" (8). Repeatedly pointing out what "you," the reader, might see, hear and learn in this place culminates in de Leeuw asking readers to "[t]hink of this highway as a cut," as a violence, and then to "contemplate all the soft shoulders you have touched" (10), "ever touched, ever loved. Think about every person you hold dear" (11). Moving then into an almost prayer-like section, de Leeuw invokes protection for such loved ones, hoping that readers never lose daughters to unending and

unexplained disappearances:

> May you never know what it is to lose your daughter. . . . May you never dream of your daughter's shoulders buckled and torn in the mud and silt of a ditch. . . . May you never think of your daughter as roadside prey.
>
> May you never be the mother of the daughter gone missing from the shoulder of Highway 16 in July. . . . (11)

For readers left thinking that they are unlikely to ever find themselves experiencing this type of fear, loss, and pain, de Leeuw's text has the potential to provoke them to ask and answer why they feel protected from it, and why society is not fighting for the right of girls and women of this region, especially those who are Indigenous, to have this same safety and mobility.

Society's inability or unwillingness to see the homes and lives of people living beyond the boundaries of a remote highway, and to hear their stories, leaves the mothers in de Leeuw's text, the mothers in northern British Columbia, with hope for only one of two outcomes: that it is *not* a killer who stops for their daughters on the highway's shoulder, or that the searches uncover "any broken portion, of the family's daughter" so that they might find closure (11). "Soft Shouldered" added its voice to the calls for an inquiry into MMIWG in Canada, but also sets out on its own to name and map some people and places that bear the effects of these tragedies.

De Leeuw's text, then, more successfully than Harun's novel draws attention to the Highway of Tears in a way that challenges readers to hope not just for the solving of cases and arrests of criminals, but for critical discussion of the attitudes and structures that shape the Highway 16 region, and Canada more broadly, as a place that enables

repeated acts of colonial, gender violence. It is a text, I submit, that justifies Garneau's sense that artistic endeavours have the potential to make a difference. "Soft Shouldered," as well as glimpses in *A Man Came Out of a Door in the Mountain,* give reason to join Angela Sterritt in her hope that the national narrative around MMIWG is changing and beginning to acknowledge that this present is the unfolding of Canada's troubled history with First Nations and an opportunity to alter our future: "And maybe, if I push myself to hope beyond, [the changes in the conversation have] to do with our country building awareness based on compassion and love, and an altruistic desire to create a better nation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together towards common goals of safety, mutual understanding and equality" ("Legacy").

Conclusion: Acknowledging Territory through Northern British Columbia's No Longer Unmarked Stories

There is a feeling shared among writers and readers in northern British Columbia that the literary culture of this place is unrecognized or ignored. Yet, undeterred by this sense of existing on the periphery, both geographically and culturally, of Canada's and the wider world's knowledge or interest, there is confidence that stories from or about northern British Columbia are diverse, evocative, and honest—and there is determination that these stories be read both within and beyond the region. Over the past two decades in particular, writers have worked together to publish creative representations of living in or viewing the world from northern British Columbia, in ways that both spotlight and build how contemporary literature shapes and springs from the small, rural communities spread across this part of the province.

Even a cursory internet search or a walk through one of northern British Columbia's bookstores reveal an unexpected array of literary writing, an unreserved pride in the quality and value of this work, and an expressed commitment to foster community between these writers and connections to a broader audience. For example, Creekstone Press was established in Smithers in 1998 after author Sheila Peters encountered records about a Wet'suwet'en family who was evicted from their land by settlers and she wanted to tell this story alongside archival photographs and illustrations from a local artist; this story and book concept, Peters suspected, was "unlikely to be picked up by a big-scale publisher." The press would go on to publish almost two dozen books, "northern stories that might be ignored" by other publishers (Bridges). One of the first publications was

creekstones: words & images, an anthology of texts and photographs from thirty-four contributors from or living in the Skeena watershed. The book is the product of an impulse to collect "creative expression with a uniquely northern focus," to connect the people and communities who craft it, and to provide an outlet for it (Peters et al. 15). Heading east along Highway 16, writers in Prince George undertook the editorial work to produce *Unfurled: Collected Poetry from Northern BC Women*, an anthology to increase the visibility and readership of women's writing. In her preface to this collection, writer and editor Debbie Keahey shares her desire to acknowledge and develop a literary community that northern authors, particularly women, could draw upon to support a culture of writing: "My overall hope for this book is that it clearly announces (both to ourselves and the 'outside world') the presence of a diverse, vibrant and skilled community of Northern BC women poets, that it connects writers with writers, writers with readers, and readers with readers. Let the celebrations begin" (14). Prince George is also the home of *Thimbleberry*, an arts and culture magazine for northern British Columbia that was established in 2017 by Rob Budde and Kara-lee MacDonald at, and with the support of, the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). In the inaugural issue, the editors convey their hope "to add to an already-rich cultural life in Northern BC" by offering a forum that "creates energy and connections between creative people in the north" (MacDonald and Budde 4). The writing community with ties to UNBC also prompted a special issue of *filling Station*, an experimental literary magazine published out of Calgary. In his editorial for *The Northern BC Issue*, Jason Wiens writes that the "issue is intended to present the remarkable literary activity going on in B.C.'s north to a wider audience, most of whom live outside that region and province" (4).

What is striking about each of these gatherings of literary work is not only their shared express intention to build literary communities and audiences rooted in, but extending beyond, northern British Columbia, but also the absence of concern to define what constitutes northern British Columbia or a regional literary identity. Rather, what distinguishes the writing is a perspective of reclaiming the significance and the meaning of living in often unmarked or unremarked upon places and communities. It is not surprising, notes Keahey, that nature fills poetry "in an area where human settlements comprise such a small portion of the physical and psychological space." However, the poems she selected are not limited to or by the geography in which their authors live; rather, the work "shows attention to form, . . . is true to its own style and voice, and . . . demonstrates precision of image and language" (14). The *creekstones* anthology is similarly prefaced with the idea that "[t]here is a freedom, a naivety, that exists when small communities are scattered over large distances and we let them speak. They can give us a freshness of view and an honesty" (Peters et al. 15). In other words, northern British Columbia writers are reflecting and creating cultural geographies and the relationships that sustain them, more than they are writing the vast, hostile wilderness or protected national backyard landscapes that readers unfamiliar with this area's literary scene might expect. In Wiens's estimation of the works that comprise the *filling Station* special issue, the writing often conveys "concerns with ecological stewardship, social justice, the historical land claims of First Nations, and the impacts of resource extraction industries on individuals and communities" (4). Each of these thematic foci, I will point out, require consideration of what it means to cultivate responsible relationships through which both human and other-than-human beings thrive, and through which Indigenous

and settler nations can call the same land home. Wiens also suggests that when landscapes are the focus of the texts, the writing "recognizes that language can never be a neutral system of transparent representation that one uses to de/scribe the natural world, and that the non-human world offers its own, equally legitimate, semiotic systems" (5). The literary culture of northern British Columbia is not homogenous and it does not have a geographically-determined regional personality, but there is a notable awareness that the stories told about the land and about who the people living on it are affects who is able live here and what kind of future they can envision for themselves and their communities. These are the stories of small communities, distant from each other and from the amenities of urban centres, that are dependent on resource-extraction and -transportation industries in the face of environmental destruction and climate change, and are responding to the consequences of unresolved First Nations land claims. As such, northern British Columbia's storytellers have insights, questions, ruminations, and imaginings to share—through burgeoning or well-honed literary skills in their attention to and playfulness with form, voice, imagery, and language—about social and political concerns that not only this part of Canada is facing head-on or will soon have no choice but to do so.

This project focuses on the storytelling work of settler poet, essayist, and cultural geographer Sarah de Leeuw because she intentionally takes on the role of using creative literary expression to write about and create place, and a sense of belonging to it, in order to affect and potentially alter the way that her readers perceive, understand, move through, or live in northern British Columbia's places. She maintains that poetic writing that is innovative, yet accessible, can unsettle or reform the way that people feel about

their place in the world: “I believe humans’ writing of and imagining of space actually forms place: consequently, through poetic renderings of place, of geographies, I try to imagine (and hence make) different ways of being in and sharing space. It may sound hopelessly naïve, but I believe poetry can change the places that make up this world” (de Leeuw, “Place and Poetics”). Moreover, de Leeuw, whose writing, incidentally, is published or referenced in *Unfurled*, *Thimbleberry*, and *filling Station* (and Creekstone Press has published de Leeuw’s collaborative work *Front Lines: Portraits of Caregivers in Northern British Columbia*), has acquired the recognition and larger audience that these literary collections also set out to achieve, and, subsequently, de Leeuw is sometimes attributed as a voice for the region. Yet this position is one that de Leeuw qualifies. In response to an author profile interview for the 2017 Toronto International Festival of Authors, de Leeuw notes that within and among the “overlooked and forgotten” places and peoples about whom she writes “there is SO OFTEN a tremendous sense of worth, of resilience, and of value, love, caring and connection” (“5 Questions”). This observation about the contrast between outside perceptions of, and sense of belonging to, northern British Columbia is important given the context that de Leeuw was at the time promoting her essay collection *Where It Hurts*, which portrays people hurting from the causes and consequences of racism, economic precarity, homelessness and displacement, and missing and murdered women and girls. De Leeuw continues:

> In so many ways, that’s the confusing thing: those of us who inhabit places of the margin (and certainly even here there exists hierarchies—as a settler woman, I occupy spaces of privilege and power not offered to others—Indigenous women—who live and work in rural remote or northern geographies) understand

> ourselves and our spaces as having value—yet we are devalued in normative discourses, in the gridlines of power that are circulated beyond and without us. I think we want to see ourselves, to take up space, to be heard. We are confident we are worth more than a writing-off. So I think we have to write ourselves back in, in part by talking about the missing and the forgotten, the overlooked and dismissed. I can say that is what I devote a lot of my writing to doing. I by no means have the ability (or right!) to tell all stories—but I hope by telling mine, new possibilities for more and different stories might be availed. ("5 Questions")

I quote de Leeuw at length here because this part of her answer to the question "Missing geographies and people, how do we talk about those who are lost, but not forgotten?" sums up and makes explicit de Leeuw's approach to the content and intent of the works discussed in this dissertation, and it also situates her to be accountable to writing responsibly. This project has presented contextualized close readings of three of de Leeuw's books that create literary cartographies of northern British Columbia places and mark the lives, losses, and longings of people who make them home. In reading the texts this way, I have argued that these narratives meaningfully represent and add layers of knowledge and feeling to these places—and therefore

encourage readers to situate themselves within and move through the territories and communities of northern British Columbia in ways that recognize and are responsible to the intertwined histories and futures of Indigenous and settler peoples, and of humans, other-than-human beings, and landscapes.

In interviews and readings, de Leeuw acknowledges her position as a writer with the privileges that accompany her identity as an educated, white, settler woman with the

means and institutional support to travel for and advance in her career as an author and scholar. Similarly, her literary cartographies situate their narrative personae, as well as readers, as participants in the culture and landscapes shaped by and responding to the ideologies of settler colonialism. The representations of northern British Columbia in *Unmarked: Landscapes Along Highway 16*, *Skeena*, and *Where It Hurts*—whether they locate readers on the banks of a river or the shoulder of a highway that runs through the territories of First Nations, on the border between a reserve and a settler community, or on the edge of a town, work camp, or industrial plant that has displaced Indigenous peoples—acknowledge who has lived here before places like Prince George and Smithers were established, and contemplate and complicate the cultural and economic geographies that enable and encourage settlers to claim this land as their own, to benefit from it, and to call it home.

Because territorial acknowledgements are increasingly a way that people in Canada are called to learn whose land they live or work on, I want to take a moment to consider a dialogue happening around the purpose and effect of such statements and how this discussion might inform our reading of literary texts that, like de Leeuw's and other authors' work from northern British Columbia, acknowledge Indigenous territory as they represent, and set stories on, this land. Explaining to the University of Alberta (U of A) community what territorial acknowledgements are, Shana Dion, a Cree woman and the Assistant Dean for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Students, says that a statement at the beginning of an event that names the territory and the people who originally occupied it requires that we "come to the same grounding, space and understanding of each other. Knowing our histories, unpacking our truths, unpacking the history we were told, really

that's what it comes down to" (qtd. in J. M. Cook). Acknowledging territory, Dion notes, is a centuries-old, pre-colonial practice that, following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), has become commonplace at the beginning of political, educational, or cultural events, including campaign-trail speeches, university lectures, and plays, concerts, or sporting events. For such acknowledgements to be respectful, they require education, sincerity, preparation, specificity, and willingness to learn from mistakes. Métis scholar and author Chelsea Vowel writes that contemporary territorial acknowledgements began as "powerful statements of [Indigenous] presence" that could be "shocking" or "unwelcome in settler spaces," because "[t]hey provoked discomfort and centered Indigenous priority on these lands" (âpihtawikosisân). Hayden King, Anishinaabe professor and director of The Yellowhead Institute at Ryerson University, agrees, saying that "they were political tools to assert Indigenous presence and remind settlers of their responsibilities" (qtd. in Moran). Since then, these statements have also been used as a gesture of reconciliation through recognition of Indigenous people, histories, and the legacy of settler colonialism (âpihtawikosisân). As territorial acknowledgements become normalized, particularly among educational institutions or progressive organizations in urban centres, both Vowel and King caution that the practice or the statements can become overly scripted or token or vague and therefore fail to build decolonial relationships with Indigenous peoples—or even work to "validat[e] Canadian presence or settler presence, and . . . ironically in some ways obscure[e] Indigenous power [and] politics" (Hayden King qtd. in Moran). And so, Indigenous speakers, writers, and academics who have heard countless acknowledgements and paid attention to how the statements, and responses to them, change and adapt, call for action following

acknowledgement. For example, Khelsilem, a councillor for the Squamish Nation in British Columbia, has suggested that if you acknowledge that you are living on the territory of a First Nation that has neither sold nor ceded their land, then you need to ask yourself if and how you are actively working for redress or restitution for the people who have been dispossessed from this territory. If your answer is that you are doing nothing, then you are only talking about unceded territory, not living this reality and addressing its implications (Khelsilem).

De Leeuw's narrative mapping of northern British Columbia places, as well as elements of the region's literary community that respond to the legacy and ongoing work of settler colonialism to dispossess First Nations of their land, begin to address a significant absence in the practice of territorial acknowledgements. Vowel argues that such recognition of Indigenous presence and territory is notably "absent" in Canada's rural spaces, where such presence is often most tangible and where such acknowledgements "have the potential to be the most powerful," but where alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are less likely to happen. She asserts that the question of whose land we are farming, mining, logging, and privately owning "becomes much more uncomfortable and immediate" than the question of whose land we are gathering on in a hotel for a conference or meeting (âpihtawikosisân). Territorial acknowledgements in rural areas are more difficult to abstract. It is worth pointing out, then, that the copyright page of *Thimbleberry* states that the publication "acknowledges the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh and the many traditional territories across the region." Additionally, the first volume includes a full-page visual and written statement from the Lheidli T'enneh Nation about their territory, name, history, and

contemporary culture. And the "About Creekstone Press" section of the publisher's website currently begins with the following acknowledgement and commitment:

> Creekstone Press is situated on Witsuwit'en territory. Three of our more recent books . . . reflect our commitment to truth and reconciliation which began back with our first publication, *Canyon Creek: A Script*. In that spirit, we are proud to come out in support of efforts for reconciliation and against the invasion of Witsuwit'en house territories on the Widzin Kwah (Morice River) by the RCMP. (*Creekstone Press*)

Although these territorial acknowledgements are still crafted by academics and writers, rather than uttered by people who primarily rely on agriculture, fisheries, or resource extraction industries, the statements are declared in rural settler communities on unceded First Nations territories. Moreover, UNBC offers degrees in fields like forest ecology and management, wildlife and fisheries, nature-based tourism management, northern and rural community planning, and environmental engineering. Creekstone Press has published stories and histories of people who worked as loggers, trappers, bush pilots, guide-outfitters, and builders of northern communities, both settler and Indigenous; these books are targeted at audiences who similarly work in northern British Columbia so that they can live in its landscapes, or who desire to visit and experience a taste of this rural culture and lifestyle. In other words, these local institutions of education and literary culture in British Columbia's rural spaces are positioned to teach, to recognize First Nations, to make settlers productively uncomfortable, and to facilitate the kind of relationships between rural and Indigenous communities that Vowel believes could most transform the country.

De Leeuw's *Unmarked*, *Skeena*, and *Where It Hurts* do not begin with similarly direct territorial acknowledgements, but the narratives, poems, and maps that she writes identify specific First Nations territories, peoples, and cultures; situate readers in relation to them; and recognize the intertwined histories, present, and future of the inhabitants who call these shared places home. In a sense, territorial acknowledgements are a layer of de Leeuw's literary cartographies that she weaves through stories and images of the northwestern British Columbia places that carry the responsibility to build and sustain the relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples that sincere acknowledgements envision beyond the legacy and structures of settler colonialism. Settler authors will continue to tell stories about the places they call home—when they write these stories in the spirit of recognizing the legacy of settler colonialism they have inherited and benefit from, and of envisioning communities that are invested not in the ongoing colonial project, but in decolonial action, then let us learn from these stories, ask critical questions about them, and commit to living in a more just world that they could help us create.

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