

## ABSTRACT

# MEMORIALIZING INDIVIDUALS, SEEKING JUSTICE FOR COMMUNITIES: THE EPIDEMIC OF SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE ROLE OF ART AND PUBLIC RESPONSE IN BRINGING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE

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Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas are often targets of violence stemming from settler colonial societies that would position Indigenous peoples on the outskirts of mainstream, often Eurocentric societies. For Indigenous people, the systemic violence against them works to erase *all* Indigenous identities from dominant non-Indigenous societies. Even as Indigenous identities in general are targets of systemic violence, there are two subgroups within a larger Indigenous community that are targeted for violence more often than the overall Indigenous community – Indigenous women and those individuals who identify in ways that deviate from the dominant society's preferred heteronormative and gender-binary identities. Queer Indigenous people and Indigenous women represent the minority of a minority who are hunted in an effort to erase their divergent identities entirely. Through the examination of prose, film, poetry and social movements, I will address the question of how these Indigenous peoples can begin to recover from this systematic violence against two of their subpopulations through the creation of memorials to the victims. Through memorialization, Indigenous populations return power and agency to these victims and continue a quest for justice that will offer psychological healing for victims, their families, and a larger Indigenous population. Through the process of

memorializing the divergent and individual identities of these victims of sexuality, gender, and gender expression driven violence, art and social media begin the process of obtaining justice through rediscovering and revalidating these identities.

Chapter One explores questions of jurisdiction in crimes against Native women as presented in Louise Erdrich's novel *The Round House*. The jurisdictional challenges faced by Geraldine Coutts and her family following her sexual assault and attempted murder prevent justice from being served against her attacker. Without justice, Geraldine and her family are not able to heal fully from the trauma of the crime. Chapter Two discusses the documentary *Finding Dawn* and Canada's Indigenous women. Christine Welsh, the film's director, tells personal stories of some of the victims of violence against Indigenous women in Canada in an effort to begin a larger conversation about the systemic attacks against Indigenous women and the lack of attention these victims receive from the Canadian government. Welsh's documentary gives faces to a few of the names on Canada's list of missing and murdered Indigenous women and memorializes the victims in very personal ways so that their families may begin to heal.

Chapter Three addresses the poetry of Qwo-Li Driskill, and explores her use of memorial to heal psychological wounds in "Love Poems for Billy Jack," "Chantway for FC," and "Gay Nigger Number One." Driskill's representation of queer Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and the systemic violence against them re-humanizes the victims in an effort to return power to the powerless. Chapter Four explores the ongoing social movements guided by the hashtag #MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women) on social media and by public protests in the United States and Canada as global attention is drawn to the violence against Indigenous women and communities. Social media, protests, and ongoing conversations with governments show that the violence against queer Indigenous people and women is not isolated to the pages of

literature or the frames of a screen – it is a situation that must be addressed in order to begin to change the settler colonial system that seeks to erase Indigenous identities by violently attacking populations. Like the works of Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill, the social movements seek to bring wider attention to the violence against Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people. The combined efforts of literature, film, and social movements draw attention to the injustice these people face and demand social change.



Memorializing Individuals, Seeking Justice for Communities:  
The Epidemic of Systemic Violence Against Indigenous Peoples and the Role of Art and Public  
Response in Bringing About Social Change

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## INTRODUCTION

### A Historical System of Violence

Indigenous peoples have often been the target of violent attacks from their European descended white American and Canadian counterparts. This violence stems from settler colonial structures in which European settlers felt a false sense of superiority over the Native populations present in the Americas based on differences in physical appearance, cultural practices, and languages. The settler colonialism ideology that focused on European settlers' inherent right to take the land in the Americas from Indigenous populations enabled a violent relationship between the settlers and the original peoples of the land.

Patrick Wolfe offers an exploration of settler colonialism that focuses on the violent nature of the structure and its frequent genocidal tendencies. The "logic of elimination," as he puts it, involves "summary liquidation of Indigenous people," as well as the appropriation of Indigenous lands by the settlers (Wolfe 387). The "liquidation" – both economic and cultural – of Indigenous people is evidenced by continued violence against Indigenous identities in an effort from settlers to remove the Indigenous population from the newly created Eurocentric society. This Eurocentric society places European ideologies and identities at the privileged center of society at the detriment of the Indigenous populations that had already inhabited the Americas for generations before the arrival of the European settlers. Wolfe goes on to define settler colonialism in broad terms as "an inclusive, land-centered project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan center to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies" (393). As history shows, European settlers in the Americas sought to gain sole power over the land, culture, government, and all other aspects of society at the often violent expense of Indigenous peoples. With this goal of domination in

mind, we see the movement of Indigenous people from their ancestral lands onto reservations and into territories that are relegated away from the more desirable locations claimed by the settlers. Under a settler colonial system, the colonizers took what they wanted by force, often resorting to violent acts in order to solidify their status as rulers in the Americas. This violence turned Native populations into victims of the targeted violence inflicted upon them by the settler societies. That is, settlers attacked Indigenous people solely because of their Indigenous identities as the settlers perceived those identities to be inferior, undesirable, and unworthy. That is not to say that Native peoples existed only as objects and victims, but rather that the European colonizers viewed them as such. The settler society effectively – in the eyes of the settlers, that is – removed agency and voice from the Indigenous population, ignoring the rich cultural histories in favor of colonial exploitation of the “uncivilized” Indigenous population. From a settler perspective, much of the violence against Indigenous people was simply a means to an end of removing competition for land. Further, as many settlers viewed Indigenous peoples as less than human – at the very least as less than the Eurocentric perspective – this violence served to dehumanize and erase a different culture. From an Indigenous perspective, the systemic violence against Indigenous identities was an attempted genocide aimed at removing non-European identities from the Americas. Despite settler colonialism and its inherent violence, Native peoples continued to live vibrant lives within their cultures and, eventually, within the larger mainstream society.

In a settler colonial society, Native peoples are considered second-class human beings and relegated to the outer fringes of a larger society because of the inherent differences projected by the settler society. The Eurocentric society is a heteropatriarchy that privileges heterosexual, European descended male identities above all others, relegating women and minorities to a

position of second-class citizens. As the Eurocentric heteropatriarchy maintains belief that Indigenous people are subhuman and therefore deserving of the violent treatment they receive, Native peoples are left to question their own identity and place within a society that allows their mistreatment to continue.

### A Brief Commentary on Terminology

While there is no single Native American or Indigenous population, and different tribal groups hold distinct cultural practices, for the purposes of this thesis, I have attempted to normalize my use of terminology for the sake of exploring the broad effects of violence against Native peoples as it is represented in literature and art. While different tribes have different cultures, religions, and histories, the systemic violence against Indigenous peoples often transcends these tribal distinctions and seems targeted not at one tribal identity, but rather at an Indigenous identity in general. My choice to focus on general Indigenous identities rather than specific tribal ones is not meant to ignore or disparage the rich cultural variety that Indigenous people come from and continue to live. Instead, this choice seeks to show that systemic violence against Indigenous people in America targets Indigenous peoples despite their tribal differences. Much of the violence targeted at Indigenous peoples does not account for these tribal distinctions and instead stems from a desire to erase Indigenous identities from a Eurocentric culture entirely. From a settler colonial perspective, *all* Indigenous peoples are Othered from the larger Eurocentric perspective; *all* Indigenous peoples are therefore to be equally considered as potential targets of colonial violence. Violence against Native American and Indigenous people – especially violence perpetrated by many Euroamericans and Eurocanadians – does not consider tribal affiliations. This means that all Native American and Indigenous people may potentially

face violence targeted against their Native identities, and this shared potential serves to unite Native people across tribal boundaries in an effort to put an end to this targeted, racist violence.

The most often used terms to discuss Indigenous people as a collective coalition of individuals are Indigenous and Native American. However, both of these terms are problematic as they do not take into account that, “for Native people, individual identity is always being negotiated *in relation* to collective identity, and *in the face of* an external, colonizing society” (Lawrence 4). In many ways, the idea of an Indigenous identity is a social – and colonial – construct used to define people who do not fit the Eurocentric mold that privileges white complexions and identities above Indigenous ones. Native identities, as Lawrence states, are formed both on an individual level within a larger community and contrary to a Eurocentric, settler colonial society. However, despite the broad “Indigenous” identity existing as a social construct, Native people continue to self-identify separately from their settler counterparts in society, and scholars continue to use Indigenous and Native to describe these identities.

Unless a text uses a different term, I use the terms Native and Indigenous to discuss all Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada. Native American is often the term used to discuss Indigenous people in the United States. In United States government dealings, such as self-reported race or ethnic groups, Native American and American Indian are used, while the Canadian government tends toward the terms Indigenous, Indian, or Aboriginal for population reporting. Where individual texts use different terms, I match my own terminology to those texts in discussion. Just as there are varied Native populations, there are varied populations that identify beyond the binary male/female gender expression and heterosexual/homosexual sexuality identities preferred by a Eurocentric heteronormative society. These clear-cut binaries set up expectations for behavior and identity expression that cause people who identify as

transgender, genderqueer, or gender fluid to be considered deviant and undesirable in the Eurocentric heteropatriarchy that dominates most American societies. Further, people who identify with a sexual expression that is not clearly heterosexual are also considered deviant and undesirable by the Eurocentric heteropatriarchy. This push for heteronormativity “Others” – that is places in a space without privilege – anyone who identifies themselves in ways that do not align with the expected binaries. One way of defining heteronormativity and its effects is that it “sets up unconscious and automatic assumptions about heterosexuality as the norm and all other types of sexual experience as abnormal” (Habarth 2). Sociologists Page and Peacock further define heteronormative as “a system of valuing heterosexuality as the natural and normative sexual orientation, thereby devaluing all other expressions of sexuality” (640). Within a society that privileges heteronormativity, identities outside of the binary expressions – both sexual and gender – are denied equal protection from violence and equal treatment within society. As a system, similar to the system that defines Indigeneity, heteronormativity creates a binary system of heterosexual/homosexual in terms of romantic and erotic expressions of emotion. Furthermore, heteronormativity “operates within a patriarchal framework where gender is viewed as a natural derivative of sex and males and females are depicted as appropriate and complementary sexual partners” (Page and Peacock 640). Thus, anyone who identifies with a sexuality or gender expression that would not have an opposite-sex partner becomes queer, and by virtue of not identifying as heterosexual, is considered lesser within the heteronormative social construct.

Within this system, gender identity is also rigidly defined in binary terms, but in actuality, such rigid binary definitions fail to adequately define all the many ways that individuals express their genders. Page and Peacock address gender norms and gender

expression, stating that “gender norms and attributions influence allowable emotions, types of occupational status, and even personality characteristics” (640). Thus, a person with a biological sex of male is expected to behave in ways that conform to social expectations of masculinity such as strength, power, virility, and assertiveness. The same expectations apply to individuals with biological sexes of female – they are expected to be feminine, soft-spoken, and maternal, to offer a broad definition of heteronormative expectations. Because Indigenous Two-Spirit and transgender individuals often identify with and exemplify aspects of both traditional male and female gender roles, their identities cloud the simple binary definition and cause discomfort to the system that would deny this expression. The violence inflicted against individuals who would express their sexuality and gender identities beyond the preferred heteronormative and binary definitions works as an effort to remove these divergent identities from the dominant society.

I would go so far as to say that a heteronormative society privileges only those who identify within the prescribed sexual and gender binaries, relegating those who identify in ways that deviate from these binaries to a lower perceived status within the dominant society. Within this heteronormative construct, the violence inflicted upon a person who identifies as Two-Spirit, gay, lesbian, transgender, or queer (2GLTQ) affects the entire population of people who identify as such. While I explore the origin and importance of the term Two-Spirit to identify Native peoples who do not identify within heteronormative and/or gender binary definitions in Chapter Three, I use queer, Two-Spirit and 2GLTQ throughout the thesis to discuss Native and non-Native people who self-identify in ways that diverge from the Eurocentric heteronormative expectations. This choice is an effort to normalize terminology and allow for inclusive and privileged terms, and I use queer in the hope of drawing upon understanding of a larger non-

heteronormative and non-gender binary community that is not delineated along racial lines as well as to privilege these individuals rather than the heteronormative society that seeks to violently erase their identities.

### Violence Against Indigenous People and Its Repercussions

While Native peoples in general are often targets of violence, there are two specific subpopulations within the larger Native population that are targeted far more often than others – Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people. Indigenous Two-Spirit and GLTQ (or, 2GLTQ) people are victims of violence directed at both their Native identity and their gender expression or sexual identity. In a heteronormative society that positions heterosexuality and binary male/female gender expression as the normal or natural identity and attempts to suppress or remove sexual identities and gender expressions that deviate from the norm, queer Indigenous people are hunted for their deviant identities. Indigenous women are “hunted” because of their female and Indigenous identities. The historical representation of a female Indigenous person as a “squaw” – defined by Welsh as a sexually available, “savage” woman – have persisted into the modern era to perpetuate the belief that Indigenous women are *always* sexually available (*Finding Dawn*). In modern Native cultures and literatures, however, women are being cast in new roles, no longer as sexually available women. Yet, in much of the larger Eurocentric society this image lingers, however unconsciously, in the minds of many Euroamericans and Eurocanadians. This lingering image leads to sexual assault and violence targeted against Native women because of this perceived identity of the sexually available woman. Many members of Eurocentric societies continue to hold onto these past misconceptions about Native women through a refusal to understand and engage with modern Indigenous communities on any

meaningful level; these individuals continue to attack Native women because of these misconceptions.

Violence against Native women occurs at a higher rate than violence against white women, leaving Native populations to view the hunting of their women as being targeted specifically against these women's Indigeneity rather than only their gender. Violence against queer Indigenous people also appears motivated by their status as a subpopulation – both culturally and sexually/gendered – of much of the larger non-Indigenous and Eurocentric society. Not only are these subpopulations Native, they are females and individuals who do not fit neatly into privileged Eurocentric, heteronormative gender and sexuality binaries. They are individuals whose gender and sexual identity defy the “neat” binary definitions that much of the Eurocentric heteronormative societies insist upon. Further, when one subpopulation is made a target, Native cultures as a whole are left to question the meaning for the violence and the effects of such violence on Native identities. In many ways, an attack on an Indigenous person, for any of these targeted identities, resonates to communal memories of violence against all Indigenous people because of the settler colonial histories.

Identity, violence, gender expression, and sexuality questions play a crucial role in many works of Indigenous literature. The complex relationships between sexuality, violence, and identity continue to provide critics with more questions than answers, yet I will attempt to answer the question of how larger Indigenous populations seek to recover from the continued violence against 2GLTQ and female identities through memorializing the victims in an effort to return agency to a victimized population and to bring about social change for a larger Indigenous coalition. Through representations of victims and the violence inflicted upon them, Native writers and directors push for social change and justice for the victims, their families, and

Indigenous populations as a whole. In this thesis, I explore the representations of violence against several Native people in *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, the documentary *Finding Dawn*, and the poetry of Qwo-Li Driskill, as well as the social and public reactions to the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and violence against Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people.

Explorations of poetry, prose, and film representations of the effects of violence against Native people allows for engagement with different perspectives of violence against Native peoples. Violence against Indigenous people pervades larger societies – from historical settler colonial genocide to the modern hunting of women and Two-Spirit people – and its presence in varying artistic forms reflects its pervasive nature. Just as representations of violence are not limited to a single artistic form, the actual violence against Native women and queer Native people is not limited to a single tribe or identity within these subpopulations. Treatment of the violence and memorializing the victims while seeking justice for Indigenous communities is not limited to a single artistic form. Indeed, its spread across prose, film, poetry, and into the public realm speaks to the scope of the situation and the larger cultural engagement surrounding the situation and the implications of such violence.

#### Why These Pieces?

While there is a vast collection of literature and art composed by Native authors and artists, I chose these particular pieces, and their particular forms, for several reasons. Individually, each piece focuses on a single subpopulation that has been mistreated and victimized by settler colonial societies for centuries. The choice to use more contemporary literature and film stems from a desire to engage others in a conversation about the ongoing violence against Native peoples and to draw attention to the fact that this violence is not

relegated to history books. Indeed, Erdrich's novel *The Round House* was originally published in 2012, *Finding Dawn* was released in 2006, and Driskill's collection *Walking with Ghosts* was published in 2005. It is telling that these artists continue to write and document violence against Native women and queer people, because the violence continues even into our modern society. Because this violence continues, and because victims and their families are not seeing justice served, Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill continue to memorialize them. As long as victims and their families are denied justice, we *need* these artists to continue the conversation through their artistic representations.

*The Round House* came about in response to the continued violence against Native American women that Erdrich saw reported on the news. She considers her novel a crusade masquerading as fiction because she wishes to bring about social change and justice for Native women who are victims of sexual abuse and violence (Tharp, "New Erdrich Novel"). Erdrich herself believes that her novel is more than a novel, and wrote it in an effort to bring public attention to the situation that Native women face. As a fictional account of one woman's rape and assault, *The Round House* uses its form to engage readers with a story rather than facts and figures. As a novel, it is able to engross readers with a single representation of violence against Native women and to begin a conversation among readers, and others, about the larger effects that this violence has on Native women and Native communities. As readers engage with Erdrich's ideas and representations, they will continue to think about and share them with others as Erdrich hopes they will, in order to cause further social engagement.

Much like Erdrich, Christine Welsh created her documentary *Finding Dawn* to bring public attention to the situation of Indigenous women in Canada and their continued murders and disappearances. Through her careful representations of victims of sexual assault, violence,

murder, and kidnapping, Welsh personalizes the situation by including interviews with family and community members. The documentary form allows Welsh to create her own story through her representations, and the story centers on how violence affects the individual victims, their families, and communities. Welsh does more than repeat facts; she weaves a narrative that demands change while engaging her audience in the personal stories of a few of the many Indigenous women who are victims of sexually and racially driven violence in Canada.

Driskill uses the poetic form to create memorial poems to queer victims of racial and sexuality and gender expression driven violence. The poetic form allows Driskill to engage with the victims in a different way that Erdrich's novel and Welsh's documentary while at the same time celebrating the identities of the victims. Through rich imagery and carefully chosen language, Driskill creates representations that read almost like songs, and certainly address the need to memorialize the individuals she writes about.

The individual forms that each of these artists use reaches different audiences in an effort to begin – and continue – a larger conversation about violence against queer Indigenous people and Indigenous women. Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill are not only artists, they are each active participants in a public conversation that demands justice for these victims and social change to protect Indigenous people. Each of them uses their art as a means of engaging their audiences in a conversation that transcends the individual forms and sparks social change, as we see in the public reactions to the violence against Native women and queer people.

Further, these pieces are the authors' attempt to create an ongoing dialog. Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill do not produce their art solely for art's sake. Rather, they seek to engage in a larger conversation that crosses the boundaries of art, literature, social commentary, public reaction, and social engagement to bring about change. These artists create their works in an

effort to bring about real and lasting change for Indigenous peoples by rehumanizing victims who have been so dehumanized by the perpetrators of violence, and much of the larger non-Indigenous society. The act of representing these victims and taking back Indigenous voices – because these artists are Indigenous themselves and seek to speak from this identity rather than allowing non-Indigenous society to speak for them – works to bring change and justice for Indigenous people. The justice that these artists seek to bring to Indigenous victims of violence is not limited to courtroom or punitive justice. Rather, it comes when Indigenous communities are given a chance to gain closure following violent acts against members of their communities. This closure comes in many forms; for some, it is seeing courtroom justice through trials and punishment of the perpetrators; for others, justice comes from having the story told and the victim remembered as a human rather than as an object. In any interpretation of justice, Erdrich, Driskill, and Welsh work toward bringing justice to victims through their art and the social engagement that their art encourages.

### Intersecting Identities

The interplay of gender, sexuality, and violence creates an interesting intersection of identities for Native peoples to work within. Many critics have addressed the impact of sexuality on understanding formation of personal identity, such as Julie Bolt, who asks, “Why does sexual politics become a metaphor for identity politics” (44)? To further Bolt’s question, I would ask why, and how, do sexual politics and identity politics come to interact with larger contexts of Indigenous experiences? As a means of identifying oneself, gender and sexuality are inexorably linked for many individuals and therefore an exploration of one will inevitably lead to an exploration of the other. When Indigenous peoples’ gender and sexual identities are both attacked through violence, which stems from settler colonial ideas of Indigenous and queer

identities, leaving women and those who identify as queer as targets for this systemic violence. Furthermore, violence – be it from within or from outside of Native American cultures—is often inflicted upon its victims through sex or because of one’s sexual or gender identity. Hossein Dabiri argues that “gender violence against Indian people aims to degrade the Indian body, erode tribal sovereignty, and assimilate Indian culture” (386). Gender violence, as it seeks to eliminate Indianness, works within settler colonial attitudes and patterns. As a tool of settler colonialism, gender violence targets deviant identities – that is, those identities that deviate from the heteronormative gender-binary – in an effort to remove them because of their perceived inferiority within this settler colonial system. In this way, sexual violence and non-consensual violent sex, exists to attack Indigenous identity and self-worth. Targeted sexual violence against Indigenous women and queer identities works to unhinge Indigenous understandings of self. Further, such targeted violence also works to attack a larger Indigenous community, leaving Indigenous people in need of justice and healing from the violence inflicted by the system.

The violence against Native peoples leaves the victims and their families seeking justice. The victims of violence that Driskill writes about — Billy Jack Gaither, FC Martinez, and Steen Keith Feinrich--are brutally murdered because of their queer identities. Gaither, Martinez, and Feinrich were attacked due to their deviant identities, and their families and communities were left without explanation or a chance to heal from these attacks. Their murderers are allowed to operate with little consequence because of the nature of the crime and the nature of the settler colonial system that places minority groups in positions of inferiority in the eyes of the “dominant,” settler system. Because of their queer identities Gaither, Martinez, and Fenrich were not considered worthy of justice by much of the Eurocentric heteropatriarchy, and their

murders were not treated as hate crimes because, by definition, hate crimes, at the time, did not extend to crimes committed because of an individual's sexual or gender expression preference.

As I explore in Chapter One, Louise Erdrich's novel *The Round House* focuses on the sexual assault of a Native American woman, Geraldine Coutts, and her family's subsequent search for her attacker over the course of a summer. Questions of jurisdiction hinder justice for Geraldine, leaving her son Joe, the narrator, to question the possibility of justice and healing for his mother. *Finding Dawn*, as addressed in Chapter Two, examines the situation of Indigenous women in Canada with a special focus on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement and the victims of continued, targeted violence against Indigenous women. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, Driskill's poetry serves a dual purpose – to memorialize these victims and to offer a chance for justice and healing for their families and the larger Native population as a whole that must engage with the effects of violence against these Two-Spirit people. Erdrich, *Finding Dawn's* director Christine Welsh, and Driskill work from a desire to memorialize and rehumanize the victims of violence. Further, each work offers insight into the personal and communal justice that these memorials can offer along with the belief that only through attention from Native and non-Native people alike can this justice be served. The attention to social movements in Chapter Four further solidifies the efforts of Native and non-Native participants in the work of memorializing, healing, and amplifying the voice of the Indigenous victims of systemic violence.

However, despite the common goal of drawing public attention to the systemic violence against Native American women and queer Indigenous people that we see in the representations created by Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill, public responses vary widely. Even within Native communities, a hierarchy exists that separates heteronormative and gender-binary identities from

queer identities in terms of public outrage over the violence against them. Chapter Four looks more deeply into the unbalanced response to the violence against Indigenous women as contrasted to the violence against queer Indigenous people. Even among hunted and victimized populations, some victims appear to be more in need of justice than others.

The work of this thesis is to engage the representations in each of these pieces in an effort to explore the impact that such representations have on social engagement and reaction. Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill create their art in an effort to engage their readers and society as a whole in order to bring social change and justice for Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people who have been victims of systemic violence. As I explore these works and the social reaction that each has received, I show the relationship between art and the real world and the importance of art on the real world.

## CHAPTER ONE: LOUISE ERDRICH'S *THE ROUND HOUSE*

### Violence Against Women as Portrayed in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*

Sexual violence against Indigenous people exists as a social system that is difficult to navigate in any effort to find an enduring solution. Louise Erdrich explores the lasting damage that sexual violence against women has on Native American communities. Set on a fictional Indian reservation in North Dakota, *The Round House* could easily take place in any rural Native American community given the personalities that Erdrich instills into her cast of characters. The act of representing – of both fictionalizing and presenting again – the violence against Native American women serves to tie Erdrich's fiction to the real-world violence that she describes through her fictional family. The characters are more than shallow representations and possess their own humanity even as they were created to represent the larger situation that Erdrich fictionalizes. It is this humanity that gives the novel its powerful resonance as it addresses a societal concern that nearly all Native American women face. Erdrich claims that “a writer is responsible for writing the truth” and the truth that she writes in *The Round House* – the truth of the continued prevalence of violence against Native American women – is a necessary, though not easy, truth to write (Keane). The widespread violence against Native American women denies them their rights to exist, and the resulting challenges of prosecuting such violence often lead to unreported attacks against women. What's more, Native American women “are more than 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women in the USA in general,” meaning that not only are women being targeted for violence, but Native American women are being targeted 2.5 times more often than other women (“Maze of Injustice” 2). These women are frequently attacked by non-Native men, and many women do not report their assault (“Maze of Injustice” 1). Many of the victims do not know their attackers, and are unable to identify them

in any effort to prosecute them and seek the justice that the victims and their communities deserve. So long as the victims feel powerless to prosecute their attackers and change the broken system of prosecution, this violence will continue. Only when Native American women and their communities are given the voice and authority to seek justice against their attackers will this system begin to be repaired. In *The Round House*, Erdrich uses Geraldine Coutts and her family as an example of the countless Native American women who are victims of sexual violence. Through the Coutts family and its fictional story, Erdrich represents real-world Native American women and Native American families. By giving voices and agency back to the often silenced victims of sexual violence, and by drawing national attention to the endemic sexual violence against Native American women, Erdrich hopes to bring an end to this systemic violence and to begin a process of healing this societal trauma so that Native American women can feel safe again.

One of the myriad reasons that sexual violence against Native American women has become so pervasive is the difficulty of prosecuting cases of sexual assault and rape. In cases of sexual assault of Native American women, especially the assaults that occur on reservation or trust land, questions of legal jurisdiction make a complex situation nearly impossible to navigate from any legal standpoint. Due to centuries of treaties, revisions to treaties, and a general lack of respect for tribal sovereignty from Euro-American lawmakers, at best it is tricky to determine which law enforcement agency holds jurisdiction to prosecute a criminal case – the tribal police, state police, or federal law enforcement. By denying individual tribes the right to prosecute sexual assault crimes against their members, Euro-American lawmakers send a message that Native American women are not worth protecting, leaving tribes to wait for a chance to heal from continued attacks against their most basic human rights to life. Without a clear idea of

which law enforcement agency has the legal right to prosecute a crime, often no agency takes up the case. Instead, Native women and their communities are left in limbo, without justice and wondering when or if their attacker will be prosecuted. At worst, jurisdictional issues lead to crimes being left unprosecuted and victims being left without justice. Thomas J. Perrelli, a former associate attorney general, describes the jurisdictional situation that often hinders prosecution of crimes against women in Indian Country:

There are tribal lands where state police have no jurisdiction and federal law enforcement has jurisdiction but is distant and often unable to respond. There are tribal communities where the federal government has no jurisdiction but state law enforcement, which has jurisdiction, does not intervene. And there are still other tribal lands where there is a dispute about who, if anyone, has jurisdiction. All of this has led to an inadequate response to the plight of many Native American women. (qtd. in Horwitz)

This tangled web of jurisdiction – and the resulting lack thereof – leaves Native American women without a reliable law enforcement body to turn to. This jurisdictional question leaves many crimes against women without avenues to justice, and without the potential emotional, spiritual, and communal healing that justice could provide. In a 2006 report titled *Maze of Injustice*, Amnesty International addresses the high level of sexual violence against Native American women and the issues of jurisdiction that often prevent such crimes from being properly prosecuted. The report states that there are three factors that determine which law enforcement agency has jurisdiction in a sexual assault case in Indian Country: “whether the victim is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe or not; whether the accused is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe or not; [and] whether the alleged offence took place on tribal land or not” (27). The complexities of jurisdiction require that Indian “status” and land ownership be addressed when determining how to prosecute a crime because Native American tribal courts cannot prosecute a non-Indian defendant, even if the crime occurs on tribal land. Federal courts retain jurisdiction in matters where neither tribal nor local courts can

prosecute due to a combination of land ownership or Indian status questions. While the criteria defining jurisdiction would appear simple enough, often the answers to these questions are not clear – especially in terms of whether the crime took place on tribal land or not. As Perrelli discussed, tribal land is often surrounded by federal land and the boundaries are not always clear, simple, or well-known. As such, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to determine which law enforcement agency holds jurisdiction in many sexual assault cases. Even when jurisdiction is clear, agencies are not always willing, able, or available to step in and prosecute sexual violence crimes due to backlogs of cases, lack of information, or a victim’s lack of evidence against her attacker. Questions of finances further complicate prosecution in sexual assault cases because it is often difficult to establish a clear case to take to court for crimes of this nature. Tribal police are often underfunded and lack the funds necessary to prosecute a case that may not make it to trial or conviction. State and federal agencies, if they have the funding, do not wish to spend it tracking down a criminal who may not see trial, or who may not be convicted if he goes to trial.

In *The Round House*, Erdrich’s narrator Joe Coutts, who has become a judge following in his father’s footsteps, offers both adolescent naiveté and adult perspective as Joe looks back on his thirteen-year-old self, an only child on the brink of adolescence during the summer of 1988 when the novel’s main conflict occurs. Joe feels that he must tackle the jurisdictional issue in his mother’s rape on his own in an effort to protect her and to give her the opportunity to come back to herself after her attack and the resulting inability to prosecute her attacker. Our narrator describes his concern for his mother and his anger at her attacker as well as with the law enforcement agencies who are unable to bring her attacker to justice. As Joe seeks to uncover the truth, and as he seeks to bring justice to his mother’s rapist and attempted murderer, he must also navigate the complicated territory associated with adolescence. As a narrator and

protagonist, Joe offers distance – from the future looking back on the events of 1988 – and a remarkable closeness as he remembers his emotions during that time. Joe comes to speak for his mother, as well, when she cannot – or will not – speak for herself during her recovery; he takes it upon himself to bring her attacker to justice when law enforcement agencies will not prosecute due to the complicated jurisdictional questions regarding where her attack took place. Just as Joe speaks for his mother, Erdrich speaks for Native American women who are victims of sexual violence. The desire to bring public attention to the injustices that Native American women face makes this representation and speaking for the victims both understandable and necessary, as it seeks to change the system. Through Joe’s point of view, readers share in Joe’s journey of discovery and ultimately come to serve as witnesses for his mother’s crime and the family’s suffering.

Erdrich explores the complicated territory that Native American women must navigate in a world that enables rape and sexual violence against them to go unpunished. Though the political agenda of her novel is clear even to a casual reader, she allows her characters and their stories to remain at the forefront of *The Round House*. Through her characters, she presents her attack against the societal acceptance, if not outright allowance, for sexual violence against Native American women. Further, she demonstrates the questions that face tribal courts in crimes against Native bodies through the inability of Joe’s father, Judge Bazil Coutts, to determine which law enforcement agency holds jurisdiction in his own wife’s case. Erdrich suggests several times that the continued, unprosecuted, and unpunished violence against Native American women must be stopped (“Rape on the Reservation,” “New Erdrich Novel,” *Round House*). In *The Round House*, she explores the full scope of the effects of sexual violence against Native American women and its lingering consequences for the victims, for their

families, and for their communities as a whole. Ultimately, Erdrich's goal goes beyond simply raising awareness, though this is integral to her goal, to ultimately ending the continued acceptance of this violence against women.

#### Erdrich's "Crusade"

*The Round House* exists because of Erdrich's belief that violence against Native American women cannot be allowed to continue unpunished. She tells Mary Beth Keane, "The immense difficulty of prosecuting crimes of sexual violence on reservations has haunted me for many years, but I didn't know how to tell the story." Sexual violence against Native American women is nothing new, and Erdrich is not unfamiliar with its repercussions. She claims she has been "haunted" by these crimes for many years and is not, herself, a victim of such violence. As a Native American woman who has managed to avoid a fate that, according to Amnesty International, one in three Native American women face, Erdrich is nonetheless touched by the rippling effects of such violence. That she would be haunted for years before writing *The Round House* and addressing the issues head on suggests that it is not only the victims of sexual violence who suffer, but a larger Native American female community. Despite the vast diversity of Native American and Indigenous tribes, communities, and lifestyles, violence against women occurs in nearly all tribal communities. Erdrich writes the truth that she witnesses in the world in an effort to bring about real change to the system that perpetuates violence against Native American women. This system fails many Native women like Geraldine Coutts because no law enforcement agency is willing to take on her case, even after she names her attacker. We see Joe's struggle with law enforcement agencies who cannot or will not follow up on his mother's attack and his own frustration with his father for not taking matters into his own hands. Judge Bazil feels compelled to work within the confines of the law, no matter how much he may

disagree with that law and the system it upholds. Joe, on the other hand, seeks only justice for his mother – be that justice at the hands of a court or at the hands of an individual.

The crimes that haunted Erdrich should haunt us all. According to a Department of Justice study, Native American women experience sexual violence at a rate that is two and a half times higher than women in the general American population. Further, “37 percent of Native women can expect to be raped and another 39 percent to suffer domestic violence” (Tharp 27). That a Department of Justice study would suggest that Native American women can “expect” to be raped or victims of domestic violence points to an inherent brokenness in the American judicial system and its treatment of Native Americans. Amnesty International’s report addresses the challenges that jurisdiction poses and the too-common result for victims: “the jurisdiction of these different authorities [state, federal, and tribal] often overlaps, resulting in confusion and uncertainty. In many areas there may be dual jurisdiction. The result can sometimes be so confusing that no one intervenes, leaving victims without legal protection or redress and resulting in impunity for the perpetrators” (27). Due to the complication and “confusion” of prosecuting sexual assault crimes against Native American women, these crimes are often left unaddressed, which results in victims believing that there is no justice for them and in the perpetrators feeling that there is no punishment. This dual outcome exacerbates the problem faced by Native American women because there can be no justice without prosecution, and without prosecution, there can be no deterrent to keep criminals from committing these crimes.

Erdrich believes that her novel came about as a necessity. Her political stance on the issue of sexual violence against Native American women demanded an outlet in order for Erdrich to voice her own discomfort with the situation. Through finding her own voice, Erdrich also gives voice to the Native American victims who might not otherwise have an opportunity to

find justice. Erdrich told NPR about her impetus for writing *The Round House* and taking a political stance, “when I found out that Native American mothers prepare their daughters to be raped, how to behave when it happens, you know, that it’s somehow considered inevitable and that – here’s how we’re going to behave and respond, it felt like a small devastation of my spirit” (“National Book Award”). Here, Erdrich suggests that *The Round House* came out of a crisis of conscience when she came to understand the reach of sexual violence against Native American women. The continued violence against these women has prompted a communal acceptance of the inevitability of becoming a victim of sexual assault and, rather than teach their daughters to avoid becoming victims, mothers teach their daughters how to react *when* they are victims of rape or sexual assault. For Erdrich, this acceptance is utterly unacceptable as it removes blame from the attackers and places responsibility on the victims. Due to legal loopholes that allow these crimes to go unpunished, many non-Native Americans are unaware of the situation that Native American women face. Erdrich takes it upon herself to end the silencing of Native American women and through the act of writing, and the story that she tells, Erdrich offers a chance for justice in the lives of Native American women by bringing national attention to their plight.

While the novel is clearly politically motivated, and while Erdrich does not attempt to hide the politics behind writing *The Round House*, neither did she wish to alienate readers with legal jargon and a plotline devoid of relatable characters. As such, she creates a story that is at once politically motivated and suspenseful, claiming, “I wanted to write a story that had a certain amount of suspense in it, a story that anyone could relate to, a story with a narrator who could relate to people and tell a story that had, as its component, a very serious and ongoing shattering problem in Native American or Indian country” (“National Book Award”). She couches her

political agenda within a suspenseful crime drama that leads readers to, at times, forget the heavy nature of the situation in favor of enjoying the story. By reaching readers, and relating to her audience through Joe and the other characters, Erdrich is able to bring her readers' attention to the atrocities of the "shattering problem" of sexual violence against Native women. Therefore, we are given a "suspense novel masking a crusade," so that readers will be drawn into the troubles surrounding prosecution of rape and sexual assault on Native American women and, perhaps subconsciously, be drawn into a "discussion of jurisdictional issues on reservations, of how tribal courts cannot prosecute a non-Native who commits a crime in Indian Country" (Luscombe). Erdrich's success comes through her compelling storytelling that opens a dialog between her readers and the continued violence against Native American women.

Julie Tharp extends the idea that *The Round House* exists as a part of a crusade by defining the three pieces of Erdrich's agenda. First, Erdrich addresses the "historical background on tribal law and order that have contributed to the crisis in sexual violence on reservations" (25). We see this challenge in the novel when Geraldine is still in the hospital following her attack and forced to give her statement three separate times to three separate law enforcement agencies – "a state trooper, an officer local to the town of Hoopdance, and Vince Madwesin, from the tribal police" (*Round House* 12). Despite the severity of her attack and the presence of not one, but three law enforcement officers, nothing is done to begin to bring justice to Geraldine's attacker while she is in the hospital. Geraldine's difficulty in finding justice stems from historical issues of legal jurisdiction that have not been addressed – because she is unable or unwilling to name the exact location of her attack and the identity of her attacker, the law enforcement officers present cannot begin adequately investigating the crime against her. Further, the jurisdictional questions stem from the settler colonial ideology that would remove all

sovereignty and power from Native populations. By denying Native people the right to prosecute crimes against their communities, a settler colonial society attempts to erase Native identities through violence against Native people – particularly women – and allowing the criminals to remain unpunished.

The second aspect of Erdrich’s crusade is her “fictional illustration and strategic storytelling of the effects of sexual violence,” as evidenced by her careful treatment of Joe, Bazil, and Geraldine’s lives during the summer of 1988 (Tharp 25). We see that Geraldine’s rape affects not only her as she remains confined in her bedroom during much of the summer, but also her husband and son who are left to muddle through their lives without their wife and mother, incapable of healing her and bringing her back to the woman that she was prior to her attack. Erdrich describes Joe’s attempt to put into words the change he sees in his mother following her attack and during one of the rare moments that she interacts with him and his father:

I’d thought she was the same mother only with a hollow face, jutting elbows, spiky legs. But I was beginning to notice that she was someone different from the before-mother. The one I thought of as my real mother. I had believed that my real mother would emerge at some point. I would get my before mom back. But now it entered my head that this might not happen. The damned carcass had stolen from her. Some warm part of her was gone and might not return. (*Round House* 193)

The differentiation between his “before-mother” and the woman who now exists shows just how drastic the change in Geraldine’s personality following her rape has been. Joe hardly recognizes the woman he now shares a home with because her attacker, the “damned carcass,” has taken some crucial aspect of her identity through violence. What’s more, we see Joe and Bazil as they struggle to engage this new woman left in the before-Geraldine’s place, demonstrating the rippling effects of sexual violence not only on the victims, but also on those around them. While Joe can escape the house to spend time with his friends during the summer, Bazil remains Geraldine’s primary care giver. Despite her refusal to come out of her room, he dutifully carries

her meals upstairs each day, removing her uneaten food and replacing it with something fresh. Joe recognizes the toll that caring for Geraldine takes on Basil, as Basil becomes quiet and somewhat withdrawn, despite his efforts to act as though nothing had changed. Basil believes that Geraldine will return to them in time, and seeks to provide care through patience and compassion rather than forcing her to return to her before self. Basil is able to recognize the lasting damage caused by Geraldine's attack, and seeks to allow her the time she needs to heal while at the same time feeling impatient to bring justice to her attacker.

Erdrich's crusade has a final layer, which, as Julie Tharp describes, comes from "the response that Erdrich has urged and that the federal legislation, the Violence Against Women Act, may assist" (25). The desired outcome is a change in the way that sexual violence against Native American women is prosecuted so that there are legitimate punishments for the people who commit these crimes. The Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized in 2013 and, "for the first time will allow Indian tribes to prosecute certain crimes of domestic violence committed by non-Indians in Indian country" (Horwitz). Through this legislation, Native American women are finally able to hope that sexual violence may be properly prosecuted and the criminal properly punished. This legislation expands tribal police jurisdiction and legal rights to prosecute non-Native people who commit crimes against Native Americans on Native American lands. The legislation is new and it will take time to see if there is a clear and definite drop in the rate of violence against Native American women, but this new legislation is a step in the right direction.

In order to fully appreciate Erdrich's crusade, we must further explore its influence on *The Round House*. Erdrich presents all aspects of her crusade – the historical background regarding tribal law that contributed to sexual assaults against Native women, the effects of such

assaults on the victims and their communities, and the response that she so desperately desires at a national level – through their presence in the novel. We will begin, then, with questions of jurisdiction and how those questions hamper efficient treatment of crimes of sexual violence against Native American women. Following her attack, Geraldine must give a statement to three different law enforcement agents because none of them are sure who has the legal right to pursue the crime due to questions of the location of the crime and the identity – and therefore race – of her attacker. A careful analysis of the novel will show how jurisdictional questions hamper justice in these cases, as well as the implications that continued lack of legal consequences for sexual assailants has on Native American women, their families, and their communities. Only by providing justice for Native American women who are victims of sexual violence can Native communities end the ongoing violence and heal from the emotional, psychological, and physical damage that has been done to these communities and individuals for centuries.

#### Which Man's Land?

After Geraldine begins speaking to Joe and Bazil again after her assault, we learn that she was not the only victim. Another young Native American woman, Mayla Wolfskin, an Ojibwe like Geraldine Coutts and Erdrich herself, and Mayla's baby were also attacked at the round house – a building erected by the tribe as a space to practice traditional Native American religions during a time when Christianity was forced onto Native Americans. The attacker blindfolds and rapes Geraldine somewhere outside of the round house so that she is not certain whether her attack takes place on land that belongs to the reservation, state, or federal government, then drags her to the round house where she finds Mayla and her baby are hostages to their attacker. For some time, Geraldine remains silent about her attack in an effort to protect Mayla and her baby from Linden Lark, their attacker. Both Geraldine and Mayla are attacked

because of their Indigenous identities and Lark's belief that they are easy prey. Unlike Geraldine, however, Mayla does not survive, so Geraldine's attempts to protect her are futile. The baby, on the other hand, is the daughter of Mayla, a young Ojibwe woman and the fictional governor of North Dakota, who had a habit of taking advantage of young Native women (Erdrich). The baby's half-Native identity further fueled Lark's desire to erase Mayla's identity and Geraldine's desire to protect it.

Before learning the details of his mother's attack, but after the initial shock of discovering that his mother has been "violently raped," Joe Coutts finds himself waiting for justice (*Round House* 15). His initial response is to turn to his father, the tribal judge, for guidance and assurance that the man who attacked Geraldine will be caught and punished swiftly; however, due to the complicated and often ignored questions of jurisdiction in criminal cases occurring on a reservation, Joe finds that justice is slow to come for his mother. No one can prosecute the crime until law enforcement agencies know where it took place – and who did it – in order to determine *which* agency, federal, tribal, or state, has a legal right to prosecute. Without legal justice, Geraldine's healing comes slowly, and even through healing, Geraldine Coutts cannot erase the scars of her trauma, though she may heal and the scars fade over time. She can never be the same "before mother" that Joe so longs for because her trauma has changed her. As long as her attacker remains free, Geraldine remains fearful that he will return to finish the crime that he began, and so lives in fear for her life and for her family as well as for Mayla Wolfskin's baby. Geraldine, like so many other Native American women who are victims of sexual violence, suffers from the "trauma of sexual violence *and* the trauma of being denied justice" (Tharp 26, emphasis mine). With her attacker at large on the reservation, and before she learns that Mayla was murdered and her baby adopted by her father, the governor, Geraldine

cannot truly return to any semblance of the normal life that she lived before her rape and attempted murder. As the victim of a double trauma, Geraldine retreats into her bedroom, sequestering herself away from her family as she attempts to find healing in her solitude. We see, however, that she instead wastes away into a shadow of her former self and cannot begin to truly return to any sense of a normal life until her attacker is brought to justice – even if that justice does not come from traditional law enforcement.

Despite the presence of local non-tribal law enforcement, federal law enforcement, and a tribal police officer at the hospital, none of these entities offer to take on the case. Like so many other Native American rape and sexual assault victims, Geraldine finds that her case may very well go unprosecuted, and her assailant may go free despite the atrocious attack. Joe, too, refuses to understand this possibility, and often questions his father's true desire to help Geraldine through her trauma. Eventually, when they learn that the attack occurred at the round house, a sacred tribal space built when the tribe was prohibited from practicing their own religion, Joe comes to appreciate the complications of prosecuting the crime against his mother based on the location of the crime. His father attempts to explain to him, going so far as to draw a map and outline which entity claims which piece of adjoining land near the crime scene:

Here's the round house. Just behind it, you have the Smoker allotment, which is now so fractionated nobody can get much use out of it. Then a strip that was sold-fee land. The round house is on the far edge of tribal trust, where our court has jurisdiction, though of course not over a white man. So federal law applies. Down to the lake, that is also tribal trust. But just to one side, a corner of that is state park, where state law applies. On the other side of that pasture, more woods, we have an expansion of round house land. (197)

All of these different claims to land, and with the land, the jurisdiction to prosecute crimes committed on the land, come together on the very site of Geraldine's attack. There are so many conflicting landowners and potential prosecutors that no entity is willing to take on the case.

Further, Basil Coumts states that, even if the tribal court had jurisdiction over the land, they lack

the power to prosecute a white man, and Lark, the assailant, is a white man living near the reservation. Jurisdictional issues – both with regard to land ownership and the ethnic identity of the attacker – prevent law enforcement to take on the case; even with concrete evidence, the jurisdictional issues could likely prevent any productive outcome in the case. Non-Native law enforcement and judicial agencies view such cases as wastes of resources because of the overwhelming challenges they present. Joe and his family believe that the federal government wants to stay out of affairs in Indian Country, and the tribal police force is already stretched thin and lacks manpower to effectively pursue the crime against Geraldine.

Geraldine’s case is complicated not only because she is unable to specifically name the location where her attack took place and therefore clear up the question of jurisdiction, but also because her attacker, Linden Lark, is a non-Indian man. This complication is an accurate representation of the real world plight of Native American women that Erdrich’s addresses through her novel because, until the most recent reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (2013), tribal courts had no jurisdiction to prosecute a non-Indian in a case of sexual violence against a Native American woman. This precedent, set in 1978 with the *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* decision, made it clear that “Indian tribal courts do not have inherent criminal jurisdiction to try and punish non-Indians, and hence may not assume such jurisdiction unless specifically authorized to do so by Congress” (qtd. in Tharp 27). Due to a court decision from a decade prior to the novel’s events, the Coutts family faces challenges to prosecuting the crime against Geraldine and seeing her attacker brought to justice. Indeed, the *Oliphant* decision keeps many Native American women from seeing their attackers brought to justice due to its deliberate separation of Native American women from their white attackers in the eyes of the law. This legal separation exacerbates the continued settler colonial efforts to remove Native

American peoples from the United States by preventing white European Americans who commit violent crimes against Native Americans from being punished, sending the message to Native communities that this violence is somehow permissible in the eyes of a Eurocentric-dominated society.

When we consider that a Department of Justice study found that “around 86 percent of the reported cases of sexual violence [against Native American women] are committed by non-Indian men,” we must wonder how these victims can ever hope to heal fully from their attack when their attackers are never brought to justice (Tharp 27). It is this very inability to bring perpetrators of sexual assault crimes to justice that Erdrich wishes to address in her novel. Joe and his father are forced to take matters into their own hands when law enforcement agencies are unable to determine whose responsibility it is to prosecute Lark. As an adolescent still learning the ways of the world, Joe must come to terms with the shortcomings of the law and what those shortcomings mean for his family and their community.

Geraldine’s experience is not so far removed from the real-world experiences of other Native American women who have survived sexual assaults and domestic abuse. Diane Millich, a Native American woman who married a white man and almost immediately found herself a victim of domestic violence and abuse that only escalated over time, relates the lack of help that she received during her marriage due to the jurisdictional loopholes that prevented tribal courts from prosecuting her white husband (Horwitz). Like Geraldine, Millich cannot escape her torment so long as her husband/attacker remains free. Perhaps the most telling piece of Millich’s story comes after she files for divorce when her ex-husband came to her job one day, intent on killing her for divorcing him. According to Horwitz’s article,

It took hours to decide who had jurisdiction over the shooting. Investigators at the scene had to use a measuring tape to determine where the gun was fired and

where Millich's colleague [who saved her life by pushing her out of the way] had been struck, and a map to figure out whether the state, federal government or tribe had jurisdiction. (n.p.)

Even in a case where the assailant was clearly known, and the victim able to identify the location of her attack, jurisdictional questions continued to hinder justice. How then, can Native American women who are assaulted and raped by strangers ever hope to have justice truly served for their attackers? As Millich's story and Erdrich's novel show, jurisdictional challenges create countless situations where justice cannot be brought against the men who assault, rape, and murder Native American women. As we see with Geraldine, until justice can be served, there can be no true healing for the victims. In Geraldine's case, Joe seeks vigilante justice in his own effort to help his mother heal from her trauma; Joe is driven to this decision because the law will not provide legal recourse against Lark due to Lark's status as a non-Indian living near the reservation and working in Indian Country.

#### Violence Beget by Violence

Erdrich does not shy away from depicting moments of terrible violence throughout *The Round House*. It is this violence that gives her agenda such a compelling appeal for readers. Despite her statement that she "didn't want to write a political diatribe," *The Round House* certainly takes up a political platform while offering insight into the systemic violence that makes such a platform necessary ("Erdrich Novel").

From the novel's very opening, Erdrich describes everyday life in violent terms as Joe and his father work to remove the "small trees [that] had attacked" the Coutts house at its very foundation (1). The trees may be interpreted to represent sexual assaults against Native American women – and as such, as attacks against the foundation of the reservation society. When Geraldine does not return home as expected, Joe feels a shift in his own attitude

as the afternoon passed and everything on the reservation grew quiet and hushed, it seemed increasingly important to me that each one of these invaders be removed down to the very tip of the root, where all the vital growth was concentrated. And it seemed important as well that I do a meticulous job, as opposed to so many of my shoddily completed chores. (2)

Joe's belief that successful completion of the weed removal will offer "justice" of a sort for the foundation of his family home foreshadows his resolve to remove his mother's attacker from the reservation. His drive in the weed removal mirrors his later drive to eradicate his mother's attacker from the world like the disease Joe believes Lark to be.

From the novel's violent opening, Erdrich continues to explore the many ways that violence begets more violence. When Bazil learns who his wife's attacker is, and that he may face an arraignment, Bazil and Joe discuss the continuing challenges that they face in their quest for justice due to jurisdiction and both Bazil and Joe allow for violent fantasies to enter their minds. Bazil tells Joe that, despite all of the evidence pointing at Linden Lark as the rapist and attempted murderer, there is likely no chance that he will face justice through any law enforcement agency and Joe's response is to ask, "Who is it? Why can't they just hang him?" (196). This reaction comes from Joe's anger that his mother has been harmed so deeply that she can only return to his world as a shadow of her former self, and Joe's desire to eradicate the threat to his mother's recovery. Joe is not the only one to harbor violent fantasies, and Bazil admits to his son, "I wish I could hang him. Believe me. I imagine myself the hanging judge in an old western; I'd happily deliver the sentence. But beyond playing cowboy in my thoughts, there is traditional Anishinaabe justice. We would have set down to decide his fate" (196). Bazil Coutts's statement that he would happily sentence Linden Lark to death illustrates the deep injury that he suffered when his wife was attacked. As he sees that she cannot fully recover as long as her attacker remains unpunished, he begins to give in to these violent thoughts. The implication that "traditional Anishinaabe justice" would also result in Lark's death is not lost on

Joe. Joe's realization that his father would seek "Anishinaabe justice" rather than American or legal justice marks the first moment that he begins to believe that law enforcement will not be the vehicle of his mother's salvation and Lark's justice and the moment that Joe begins to plan his own means of obtaining justice for his mother.

The men's anger continues to grow as Lark remains free from police custody and because, in his words, he *knows* that he "won't get caught" because he has been "boning up on law" and knows "as much law as any judge" (161). When Bazil meets Lark in a grocery store, he can no longer contain his hatred and reacts violently and attacks "with such an instinct of sudden rage [that] it looked slick as a movie stunt" (244). For a moment, it seems that this act of violence may end Lark's continued threat. Erdrich describes the scene as Bazil chokes Lark in the grocery store in all of its violent detail, as both Couatts men attack their wife and mother's attacker. Eventually, however, the scene shifts to show Lark's true sadistic nature and the power that violence has over even the innocent, as Joe notices

The thing was, Lark seemed to be smiling. If you can smile while being choked and can-beaten, he was doing it. Like he was excited by our attack. I smashed the can on his forehead and opened a cut just over Lark's eye. A pure black joy in seeing his blood filled me. Blood and cream. I smashed as hard as I could and something—maybe the shock of my happiness or Lark's happiness—caused my father to let go of Lark's throat. (244)

The violent encounter in the grocery store causes Joe to experience his first feeling that he may be the one to kill Lark. That the violence would cause a "pure black joy" in Joe illustrates just how deeply the assault has affected him while he seeks justice for his mother. This moment also reflects the damaging effects that violence has on all of those involved, as Bazil suffers a heart attack and must be hospitalized. Instead of seeing his father's heart attack as a direct result of the violence in their lives, Joe uses his father's health as another reason to eradicate Lark from the world.

Joe comes to think of Lark as a *windiigo* – an ancient demon that devours the bodies and souls of others. Joe learns of the *windiigo* from his grandfather Mooshum’s sleeptalking and storytelling. In Mooshum’s story, the *windiigo* comes to the Ojibwe tribe during a period of starvation and, according to Akiikwe’s husband, takes over the body of Akiikwe and will devour the bodies and souls of other members of the tribe (180). This demon must be destroyed in order for those around it to survive. Like the *windiigo* of legend, Linden Lark “devours” those around him through violence and murder. Linda, Lark’s twin sister confirms Joe’s belief following Lark’s death, telling Joe that Lark was “a man who set loose his monster,” and explaining that

not everybody’s got a monster, and most who do keep it locked up. But I saw the monster in my brother way back in the hospital and it made me deathly ill. I knew that someday he would let it loose. It would lurch out with part of me inside. Yes. I was part of the monster too. I gave and gave, but know what? It was still hungry. Know why? Because no matter how much it ate, it couldn’t get the right thing. (300)

Linda recognized her twin’s potential for evil when she met him, but felt guilty that she had survived when her birth mother tried to destroy her. Through her guilt, Linda gives her brother a kidney in order to help him survive, and she comes to blame herself for some of his actions because she allowed him, through her own sacrifice, to continue living. Lark’s continued hunger for Native American women despite his claimed hatred for Indians reflects the continued hunger of the demon *windiigo* that cannot be assuaged with any number of victims. As she uses Geraldine to represent Native women who suffer from violent sexual attacks, Erdrich uses Lark to represent non-Native men who attack, rape, and murder Native American women. Joe’s decision that he must be the one to kill Lark in order to save his mother and his family follows the belief that a *windiigo* must be eliminated in order to stop its attacks.

Erdrich presents the difficulty of achieving justice in cases of sexual assault on reservations through Joe's ultimate decision to kill Lark himself. Joe must embrace violence in order to mend the brokenness in his family that violence caused in the first place. The "breakdown of the investigation due to uncertainty about whether the matter is the legal jurisdiction of the tribal police, state police, or federal government" leads our adolescent narrator to take on the burden of vigilante justice for the sake of his mother's well-being and chance to heal from her attack (Mace 161). Were it not for the jurisdictional challenges that stymie Lark's prosecution, Joe may not have had to resort to committing murder at thirteen years old. As Tharp suggests, Joe "reluctantly embrace[s] violence in the interests of justice," and we see that Joe believes killing Lark is his only means of obtaining justice for his mother (32). As readers, we find ourselves accepting Joe's choice to murder Linden Lark because we have come to believe that law enforcement will not bring this criminal to justice. Like Joe, we wish to see Geraldine's attacker punished for his actions, and Joe offers an option for that punishment. We act, then, as witnesses to both crimes and are left to judge both men. Linden Lark acts out of a monstrous desire to victimize Native American women, and his crime is deplorable; Joe, on the other hand, comes to violence as an attempt to help his mother, his father, and himself, escape the continued trauma of Geraldine's attack.

Erdrich shows the profound lack of options that Native Americans face in cases of sexual violence in order to highlight the need for change. Joe finds himself in the difficult position of choosing between committing murder and allowing his mother's attacker to go free because of laws governing jurisdiction and rights to prosecute crimes in Indian Country. Erdrich writes from a desire to see these laws change. Until then, Erdrich must face the truth that "there is nothing new about the abuse of Natives in all of these dimensions," and must somehow find a

way to “highlight the fundamental injustice that interrupts the life of a loving [Ojibwe] family simply because there is no legal consistency on which they can depend” (Matchie 353). She does draw attention to the injustice that the Coutts family faces throughout the novel, and Erdrich allows Joe to show his love for his mother by taking the law into his own hands when he becomes completely convinced that there is no other alternative. His family has been so fundamentally damaged that the only way to begin a process of healing for them comes through Lark’s death, since death is the only opportunity for justice that Lark may face.

### Taking the Long View

While the problem of sexual violence against Native American women continues to exist as a societal problem, *The Round House* managed to bring attention to this problem on a national level (“New Erdrich Novel,” “Maze of Injustice,” Tharp). Through her depiction of Lark and her suggestion that even the governor of North Dakota is involved in sexually abusing Native American women, Erdrich implies “that individuals from the very ordinary [Lark] all the way to the governor’s office carry racist and sexist attitudes and practices that essentially institutionalize abuse” (Tharp 34). These attitudes must be addressed before Native American women can hope to feel truly safe from the constantly looming threat of rape and assault. Even if all questions of jurisdiction were solved, punishment for sexual assailants must become commonplace and expected so that Native American women can begin to feel that they are protected against sexual assault. Native American women must be able to take back their voices – to report sexual violence and to believe that their reports will be addressed.

Erdrich surely realizes that her novel alone will not solve the problem of institutionalized acceptance of sexual assault against Native American women, but she must also recognize her success with regard to her goal of making readers say “‘I could not put this book down.’ And

then within that there would be this discussion of jurisdictional issues on reservations, of how tribal courts cannot prosecute a non-Native who commits a crime in Indian Country” (Luscombe). Her readers represent part of a larger public response to the continued sexual assault of Native women, and her readers begin to engage with this larger public in efforts to bring about real social change. Erdrich created a suspenseful novel that also addressed a staggering political concern. Readers come into a national conversation about violence against Native American women by reading the novel and witnessing the violence and its effects on the characters. Erdrich’s goal to have a conversation about sexual violence against Native American women came to fruition through her novel. Through Joe, and his narration of his family’s personal trauma, Erdrich manages to draw national attention to the trauma of other Native American women. Despite Lark’s obvious guilt to readers, there is nothing that Joe, Bazil, or Geraldine can do legally to exact just punishment for his crimes due to the legal loopholes that protect him from prosecution. Only through a nationwide conversation of this system will it ever become possible to eradicate the specter of rampant, unpunishable, sexual violence against Native American women. While the risk of violence may always exist for Native American women, the constant haunting – and hunting – of Native American women can be stopped, but only if a national conversation about and dedication to stopping the impunity of violence against Native American women.

CHAPTER TWO: *FINDING DAWN* AND  
MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada

The situation of indigenous women depicted in *The Round House* is not limited to Native American women living in the United States. Indigenous women in Canada face many of the same dangers as Native American women in the United States. For these women, the possibility not only of being sexually assaulted or raped, but of disappearing from their families and losing their lives, exists as a constant threat. Indigenous women in Canada are victims of abduction and murder at a much higher rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts. A “2015 United Nations report found that young aboriginal women are five times more likely to die under violent circumstances as compared with non-aboriginal counterparts” (“Missing and Murdered”). That Indigenous women seem to be targets suggests that they are “easy” prey for violent attackers – often due to the complicated relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures in Canada. The violence against Indigenous women reflects a larger cultural acceptance of racism against Native people and Native bodies in Canada. Amnesty International’s report “Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada” states that the “social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women, along with a history of government policies that have torn apart Indigenous families and communities” has contributed to the systemic violence against Indigenous women (105). This marginalization comes from the complicated relationship between Indigenous and Eurocentric cultures in Canada that would place Indigenous people in a position of inferiority in the eyes of the Eurocanadian society. Furthermore, Amnesty International’s report “Maze of Injustice” posits that “violence against Indigenous women today is informed and conditioned by this legacy of widespread and

egregious human rights abuses” (1-2). For decades, Indigenous women have been systematically denied justice, and through this denial of justice, denied a voice. By denying Indigenous women a voice and fundamental human rights, the settler colonial system seeks to erase Indigenous women from the larger population. Through the failure to prosecute crimes against the missing and murdered Indigenous women, the dominant society sends the message that Indigenous women – by virtue of being Indigenous, are not worth protecting. The settler-colonial system creates a dynamic that places European Canadians in a position of perceived dominance over their Indigenous counterparts within the larger Canadian society. These Indigenous women are denied a voice and identity and often suffer not only from abduction, rape, or murder, but from a systematic erasure of their identities and humanity. Not only are these women denied their very lives, they are also denied their identity in death; many of the missing and murdered Indigenous women have not been identified or found. By denying these women their individual identities through murders and kidnappings that often leave victims unidentified for years, the perpetrators of violence deny their right to humanity. When the women are not positively identified, their families are left in limbo, unable to mourn their wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers. By denying these victims and their families a voice, there is no opportunity for Canada’s Indigenous people to heal as a larger community until the victims are appropriately memorialized.

### *Finding Dawn*

Director Christine Welsh uses her documentary *Finding Dawn* as a way of representing and re-humanizing some of the missing and murdered women in Canada.. The film opens with Welsh, the film’s director and narrator, exploring the link between DNA and a person’s identity. From the outset, viewers are left with the impression that there is much more to a person’s identity than can be boiled down into DNA and police reports, and Welsh continues to give a

glimpse into the personality of Dawn Crey, one of too many Indigenous women who have gone missing and been murdered in Canada. The work that Welsh does with *Finding Dawn* creates an entirely different picture of the missing and murdered Indigenous women from how the media would depict them, especially those from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Welsh brings them away from the unnamed fringes of society into a space where they have families, stories, and opportunities. Through their families, these stories represent them as individuals rather than as a part of a faceless list of missing women. Instead of representing them as the hopeless, nameless, worthless members of the fringes of society that many Canadian media outlets would, *Finding Dawn* gives these women humanity and importance (Aiello, Beniuk, "Case of Ramona Wilson"). Giving missing and murdered Indigenous women back their humanity, identity, and agency is the first step toward a communal healing from decades of injustice. By allowing individual women to come to the center of a larger conversation, Welsh personalizes the situation that Indigenous women in Canada face in such a way as to draw meaningful attention from her audience and the public at large. Through this attention, and the conversations that such attention sparks, social change is possible.

*Finding Dawn* provides insight into the lifestyle that Dawn led prior to her abduction and murder, painting a picture of a woman who struggled to overcome hardships throughout her life – from foster care and abuse to drug addiction and work as a sex worker – before eventually finding her way toward a hopeful future. It was on this path that she turned to drugs and sex work, which left her in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a community where most of the inhabitants are poor, drug dependent, and must work as sex workers to survive (*Finding Dawn*). Instead of allowing Dawn Crey to be written off as a drug addict and sex worker, Welsh speaks with her family in order to show the true story of the woman she was, a woman like anyone else

who has faced hardships but has worked to reestablish herself in her life. Welsh does not allow these women to be relegated to the image of drug-addled prostitutes – the negative image that the dominant society would assign to them in an effort to blame the victims for their own murders, – choosing instead to speak with their families in order to re-humanize them in the face of their demise. Welsh speaks with families in order to learn about the individual personality of several women who have gone missing and been murdered in Canada, and this act returns their humanity that the violent acts sought to erase. Welsh feels a sense of camaraderie with Dawn, a woman she had never met, because the two share an Indigenous identity, despite differing tribal identities. Welsh addresses the violence against Indigenous women as it crosses tribal affiliations, as this violence crosses tribal boundaries and seems targeted at any Indigenous person rather than at a specific tribe.

*Finding Dawn* explores the stories of Ramona Wilson and Daleen Kay Bosse as well as Dawn Crey. Ramona Wilson was sixteen years old when she disappeared in June of 1994 on the stretch of Highway 16/Yellowhead Highway that has come to be known as the “Highway of Tears” that runs through northern Canada and connects a series of small, rural towns. Welsh interviews Ramona’s mother and older sister, who hold a memorial walk each year on the anniversary of Ramona’s disappearance and call the walk a part of a “healing process” that allows them to remember their lost daughter and sister while also bringing awareness to the other missing and murdered women (*Finding Dawn*).

Ramona Wilson is not the only young woman to go missing along the Highway of Tears, and her family is not the only family that walks to remember. As of 2014, Gladys Radek has walked across Canada five times to raise awareness and bring attention to the continued exploitation of Indigenous women in Canada; she walks for her niece, Tamara, who went

missing in 2005 and for the other missing women who have not been found. Radek believes that her walks “bring attention to the issue” which is “more severe than the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] will acknowledge” (Aiello 34). Radek raises an important point, and echoes Welsh’s work in *Finding Dawn*, when she addresses the treatment that the missing and murdered Indigenous women receive from the Canadian justice system. Similar to the issues of prosecution of crimes against women that Erdrich addresses in the United States, the Indigenous women in Canada who are victims of rape, abduction, and murder rarely experience justice. Amnesty International addresses the hunting of Indigenous women, claiming that “acts of violence may be motivated by racism, or may be carried out in the expectation that society’s indifference to the welfare and safety of Indigenous women will allow the perpetrators to escape justice” (“Stolen Sisters” 105). There can be no question that attacks on Indigenous women are racially motivated, as evidenced by the systematic hunting of these women at a higher rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts (*Finding Dawn*). The Amnesty International report also suggests that “racism and sexism intersect in stereotypes of Indigenous women as sexually ‘available’ to men. This intersection of sexism and racism contributes to the assumption on the part of the perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women that their actions are justifiable or condoned by society” (“Stolen Sisters” 117). There can be no question that this misconception, helps motivate attackers’ choices to assault and murder Indigenous women rather than Eurocanadian women. Further, the “hunters” attack with impunity, leaving the missing and murdered women and their families without justice. While the victims themselves are often not able to benefit from seeing their attackers and murderers brought to justice, their families and communities are also denied the closure and healing that proper investigation and prosecution of these criminals would offer.

Ramona Wilson's case could represent so many other young Indigenous women in Canada because she was a "typical" teenage girl. However, the media painted her as somewhat of a delinquent, suggesting that she frequently skipped school and hitchhiked along the Highway of Tears (*Finding Dawn*). According to Wilson's family, she was a focused and dedicated student who rarely missed school, who had good friends and occasionally attended high school parties. However, following her disappearance, the media portrayed her much more negatively, suggesting that her typical teenage behavior was somehow delinquent and that she brought her attack on herself. The media's apparent war on Indigenous women through suggestions that Indigenous women are more likely to behave recklessly and put themselves into dangerous situations, may be part of why the problem persists. Eva Holland addresses the treatment that Wilson's family received when they went to the police following her disappearance in the 2015 article "The Death and Afterlife of Ramona Wilson," claiming that "at first, the Mounties [RCMP] seemed reluctant to take action" (Holland n.p.). The implication behind Holland's assertion is that the police did not want to "waste" their resources trying to find an Indigenous girl who they had written off as a runaway. Because of her Indigenous identity, Wilson's disappearance was not given the attention that it deserved – the attention that her family believe would have been given to a young white girl in the same situation. Wilson's sister Brenda shared her thoughts about her sister's disappearance and the RCMP's reaction saying, "It was like, now what? Well, now we have to start looking for answers. Because if we just let it go then everyone else is just going to let it go" (qtd. in Holland n.p.). That a grieving family should be forced to investigate their daughter and sister's disappearance because the police force refused to do their job suggests that the Canadian justice system is inherently flawed. Rather than pursue the case to find the young missing woman, the RCMP "just stopped investigating, or putting it as

a priority,” according to Brenda (qtd. in Holland). This treatment mirrors the fictional treatment of Geraldine Coutts’s sexual assault in *The Round House*, and the implications for Indigenous women in the United States and Canada is that their suffering and their lives do not matter to the investigating authorities. The RCMP were unwilling to investigate the case of Ramona Wilson, and unwilling to find her killer when her body was found ten months after she went missing.

Like Ramona Wilson, Daleen Kaye Bosse disappeared without a trace. Unlike Ramona Wilson, Daleen’s family had to wait years to learn of her murder. At the time that *Finding Dawn* was produced, in 2006, Bosse’s family was still holding onto hope that they would find Daleen alive, though she had been missing since 2004. It was not until 2008 that her body was “found in [a] remote clearing on leased Crown land” (“Bosse Body Found”). For four years, Daleen’s family was left to wonder what had happened to their daughter, wife, and mother. During those years, the family was left searching for Daleen with little help from the authorities; they felt that they were on their own to find out what happened to her.

Despite the lack of police attention to Bosse’s case, her family eventually had a chance to see justice served, because her abductor and murderer was eventually – ten years after her murder – found and put on trial. However, despite the 2014 trial and conviction of Douglas Hales, a non-Indigenous man, “members of Bosse’s family have said they had a hard time getting the authorities to take her disappearance seriously” (CBC News). Hales had no prior connection to Bosse, and her family suspect that he viewed her as “just another Indian woman, someone who didn’t count” (Craig). Hales’s sentence of fifteen years for second-degree murder is five years longer than the minimum sentence, and Bosse’s family takes comfort that the court system attempted to show their wife, daughter, niece, and mother respect (Craig). However, when even the investigations that lead to arrests, charges, criminal trials, and convictions are not

taken seriously by the RCMP charged with investigating the crimes in the first place , how can Indigenous families who do not know the murderer of their relations expect to be treated equitably? So few arrests are ever made in cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada that families are left to raise awareness themselves.

### Respecting the Missing

As much as *Finding Dawn* serves as a means to reclaim and name some of the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, it also serves as a means of remembering and honoring the Indigenous women who are survivors of sexual assault, rape, and life on the margins of society. Welsh spends time with two outspoken activists – Janice Acoose and Fay Blaney – both of whom share their stories and reasons for working for the rights of Indigenous women. Acoose openly speaks about her early years and the time that she lived in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside and earned a living as a sex worker. Many Indigenous women find themselves in a situation where they have no prospects for “respectable” work and turn instead to sex work – a term used by Jiwani and Young instead of “prostitute” in order not to objectify the women who work in this profession. Jiwani and Young also suggest that if violence against women tends to be treated as atypical instances symptomatic of women who ‘ask for it,’ then violence against sex workers, who are generally regarded as society’s ‘others,’ tends to cast them as even more blameworthy –blaming them for being in the wrong place and doing the wrong kind of work (901). Acoose shares with Welsh that she was “raped a few times” early in her life but that she didn’t think of it as rape because she had come to believe that this treatment was to be expected. Acoose’s helplessness when she witnessed her mother’s rape , and her acceptance of her own mistreatment and rape illustrates the lack of protection that Indigenous women may feel in these circumstances. Acoose accepts her mistreatment as part of the way things are, and

does not turn to law enforcement for help because she does not believe that her attackers will be brought to justice (*Finding Dawn*). Acoose blames the institutional prejudice for the negative outcomes that Indigenous women experience such as sex work, sexual assault, and murder (*Finding Dawn*). As an example of the hope that Indigenous women hold for a better life, Acoose shows that it is possible to escape the violent life of an Indigenous woman in Canada. Acoose suggests that Indigenous women are expected to suffer during their lifetimes as victims of domestic violence, poverty, prostitution, and sexual assault because that has been accepted for so long. Despite her own harsh beginnings, Acoose works now to help other Indigenous women reclaim their voices and fight against the “country’s history [that is] steeped in violence against Native people” (*Finding Dawn*).

Despite efforts to legitimize the choices that Indigenous women make in order to survive, the truth remains that, if it were not for many Eurocanadians’ attitudes towards Indigenous identities, they may not find themselves in such a situation. Through a choice to support themselves as sex workers, these women accept – however unconsciously – their lesser status in the Eurocanadian society. These women do not turn to the police because they fear that they will be mistreated further if they do; they fear that they will be judged for the lifestyle they are forced to lead in order to survive in the Euro-Canadian society that would prefer to turn a blind eye to the systematic attack on the Indigenous population than address the continued violence against these members of its society. The continued ignoring of the rape and murder of Indigenous women leaves Indigenous women and their families to feel that this violence is permissible. However unintentional this message from the Canadian government and Eurocanadian society may be, it permeates the – unconscious, perhaps – thoughts of Canada’s Indigenous populations.

So long as this message continues to be sent, Indigenous women and their families can never truly feel safe in their own homes.

Janice Acoose and Faye Blaney are survivors of violence and mistreatment, yet both women identify with the missing and murdered women because either one of them could have easily been among the 1200 or more Indigenous women in Canada who have disappeared or been murdered in the past several decades. Blaney is a survivor who mourns for her people's displacement from their ancestral homelands and the sexual violence that she sees coming from social struggles as the Indigenous community is forced to assimilate into the larger Canadian society (*Finding Dawn*). Blaney survived where so many other Indigenous women did not, and she, like Acoose, argues that justice must be served for these women, their families, and the larger Indigenous community. As activists, Acoose and Blaney also recognize that these women and their families need a chance to heal from the pain and suffering of their losses. When the families of the missing and murdered women are given the opportunity to see justice brought to their loved ones, a healing process can begin. However, until the non-Indigenous people of Canada accept the horror of the situation, justice remains slow in coming for the hundreds of missing and murdered women. Blaney believes that "true healing must involve everyone in the community – young and old, men and women" in order to bring the victims and their families peace (*Finding Dawn*). This, I would argue, is only possible if the entirety of a larger Canadian community participates; that is, while the Indigenous populations of Canada must find healing through justice, the Euro-Canadian populations must also come to a realization of the continued atrocities inflicted upon Indigenous women. As long as non-Indigenous Canadians ignore the continued victimization of the nation's Indigenous women and communities, the violence will continue with the impunity that has been seen for decades. The situation in Canada is similar to

the situation in the United States that Erdrich represents in *The Round House*, and both Indigenous communities must work with the Eurocentric society in order to bring about lasting and real social change.

### Giving Voice to the Voiceless

*Finding Dawn* sets out on a mission to change the perception of the women who have gone missing or been murdered. While the documentary acknowledges that “the majority of these women live on the fringes of society, resorting to prostitution and drugs for survival” Welsh seeks to change the stereotypical perception of these women (Fieras 47). Fieras goes on to state that

in addition to honoring those who were rendered invisible and undervalued and subject to violence because of historical, social and economic reasons, Welsh emphasizes how the living (from survivors of sexual violence of family and community members of the murdered and missing) are taking life-affirming steps to commemorate the forgotten, communicate beyond the silence of the silenced, and construct a society that respects Aboriginal women’s rights to dignity and safety. (47)

Welsh’s goal in creating her documentary was to give voices back to the voiceless by illustrating their individuality in the face of the violence that ties the Indigenous victims together.

Anne Stone and Amber Dean explore the implications of representations of missing and murdered women in their introduction to a collection of articles addressing the representations of missing and murdered women. They write that they were guided by two thoughts when putting the collection together: “The first is that the social problem of violence against women is ongoing, perhaps even deepening (and this despite a good forty years of feminist activism in protest). The second is that representations of this violence are starting to proliferate like never before” (9). Stone and Dean address the pervasive nature of representations of violence against women to continue to enter society as a whole – through art, literature, and memorials – and question the ongoing problem of violence against women despite decades of protest and feminist

movements working to give women back their rights to safety and protection from violence. The representations of violence against women that Stone and Dean refer to are not limited to stories in books or magazine, but also to memorials intended to honor the victims. They briefly describe a stone memorial in Vancouver to the missing Indigenous women as well as “concerns about how local history is eclipsed by a nearby circle of fourteen stone benches, designed primarily to memorialize the fourteen women killed at L’Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989” (Stone and Dean 10). This suggests that the “local history” of Vancouver’s missing and murdered Indigenous women is not as worthy of memorial as the women killed in Montreal, nearly 3000 miles away, who were not considered members of the fringes of Canadian society. That Vancouver’s missing and murdered Indigenous women would be overshadowed by a memorial to Eurocanadian women from the other side of the country. Such disparity in memorialization and representation reflects the unequal footing that Indigenous women have with their non-Indigenous Canadian counterparts. Even within communities seeking to memorialize victims of violence against women, there remains a hierarchy of “worthiness.” As minorities, Indigenous women represent a second-tier piece of society – one that deserves neither equal protection nor equal memorialization. The tensions between memorials for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women often mirror the tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canadian society. There is a tension between the memorials to Indigenous women and the memorials to non-Indigenous women that reflects ideals held by a settler colonial society that places Indigenous people in general and women in particular in a place outside of being worthy of being protected. It is no wonder that Canada’s Indigenous populations feel they are not taken seriously when even the memorials to missing and murdered women are not given the respect that the victims so deserve.

Other efforts to honor missing and murdered women are more successful, and more focused on the women's individual stories than the more generic memorial Stone and Dean mention; however, Indigenous communities need memorials for missing and murdered Indigenous women in order to attain the psychological healing that such memorials would provide through validation of the rights of Indigenous identities. Monique Woroniak believes that the stories of the victims are truly important for their communities as telling the stories makes the victims seem more human to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. Woroniak references the report "Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview" which "contains an updated count [as of 2013] of the number of women who were lost to their communities between 1980 and 2013: 1,181" (20). Woroniak goes on to reflect the report offers statistical data about the women, but "is devoid of the stories of the women and their lives" (20). For Woroniak and many others, these stories are the aspect of the missing and murdered women that should be the area of focus. Rather than dwelling on the statistical data that would rob these women of their individuality and humanity, many believe that the women should be named and allowed to have their personal stories told. Welsh notes in *Finding Dawn* that "there's something about numbers," and that the numbers tell their own story separate from the names of the victims. While numbers are important, and draw attention to the problems faced by Indigenous women, these women should not be relegated to statistics that would allow them to be overlooked as homeless, drug addicted, or prostituted women, instead, these victims should be illustrated as the daughters, wives, mothers, sisters, and friends that they were in life. Neither should communities erase the victim's right to have their stories told because they were survivors of harsh living conditions that – in many cases – forced them into

dangerous lifestyles that some would argue meant they were “asking for” their abductions, rapes, and murders.

### Naming the Victims

Part of the work of *Finding Dawn* rests in naming the victims of violence against Indigenous women in an effort to reassert their individuality. Welsh opens the documentary describing the link between DNA and identity, but believes that DNA only tells half of a person’s story. As she claims, she “set out to find Dawn,” and found the stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women throughout Canada (*Finding Dawn*). Dawn’s story is but one in several that share unfortunate circumstances: her father died, leaving her mother unable (or unwilling) to care for Dawn and her siblings, leaving them in foster care where Dawn was abused before leaving foster care for the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver where she was left with few options to make a living. The circumstances that led to Dawn Crey’s presence in the Downtown Eastside occur so often that Canadian law enforcement is content to write these women off as unsavory citizens who “ask for” their eventual treatment, kidnappings, and murders. As Jiwani and Young work with in their article “Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse,” too many people are willing to ignore the mistreatment of Indigenous women working in the sex work profession because they are “others” in the eyes of polite society (901). *Finding Dawn* and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement that it references refuse to allow these women to be lumped into a single category of victims who deserved how they were treated. Instead, they both seek instead to celebrate the individuality of all of the missing and murdered Indigenous women while also drawing attention to the recurring nature of their disappearances and murders.

Just because many of Canada's Indigenous women share unfortunate circumstances that essentially erase them from the attention of Canada's non-Indigenous population does not mean that they are all the same. As *Finding Dawn* shows, three of the missing and murdered women tell vastly different stories. One was a sex worker from the Downtown Eastside, one was a high school student from a stable family, and one was a wife, mother, and university student. Dawn Crey, Ramona Wilson, and Daleen Kay Bosse represent all aspects of society – the accepted and the unaccepted, the positive and the negative – yet each of them met the same fate, and each of their attacks received the same treatment from law enforcement agencies. That their status as Indigenous women effectively erases many other differences between in the eyes of Eurocanadian society them shows that, no matter one's status in Canadian society, an Indigenous identity trumps all other identities in the eyes of the settler colonial society. In the settler colonial mindset, Indigenous people are not separated by individual tribal ties, cultures, or histories; rather, all Indigenous peoples are separated from Eurocanadian society because they are Indigenous. The RCMP would ignore the individual stories in favor of viewing these women as Indigenous victims and nothing more.

Dawn Crey's story was ignored for a long time, like Ramona's, because she did not fit the image of an upstanding Canadian citizen. In her past, she had used drugs in order to live with her choice to be a sex worker in order to survive. What authorities and media were too willing to overlook was that she had been in a methadone program for nearly a year at the time of her disappearance in an effort to clean her life up and find new options for her continued survival (Fieras 47). Despite the media portrayal that Dawn received, she was not a deprived, drug addicted woman but rather a woman attempting to make her life better. Welsh tells Dawn's

true story in order to show her audience that Dawn, and other Indigenous women, are not simply objects to be victimized but human beings to be appreciated, respected, and loved.

Augie Fieras, in a review of *Finding Dawn* suggests that the documentary does its work by “highlighting a worldwide culture of impunity that allows the murder of women who are poor, indigenous, and in high-risk occupations to go unsolved and unpunished” (48). What Fieras suggests is that this documentary brings worldwide attention to the plight of poor indigenous women who would otherwise be left unremembered and their murderers unpunished by telling their stories and by giving them back their names and their agency. Fieras closes the review with a call to action, one that can many Indigenous women and their families would agree with – “Women can march and demonstrate. But it is men who must change” (48). Until there is a collective call for change, the Indigenous women of Canada and the world will not be able to feel safe. And, as Fieras suggests, until men – who are usually the perpetrators in these acts of violence against women – change their mentality and respect Indigenous women as the vibrant, strong, independent individuals that they are, the violence against Indigenous women will continue. Through their individual representations of the violence against Indigenous bodies and identities, Erdrich’s novel and Welsh’s documentary begin to engage their audiences in a conversation about victimization, the function of memorials, and the changes that must occur in order to provide justice for the Indigenous communities that these individuals come from.

## CHAPTER THREE: QWO-LI DRISKILL'S *WALKING WITH GHOSTS*

### Introduction and Explanation of Terminology

The need for inclusive pronouns to describe individuals who do not fit into heteronormative and gender-binary identities that allow “he,” “she,” “his,” and “her” to completely capture their self-defined identity requires more inclusive and gender neutral terms. In an effort to be inclusive, throughout this chapter, I will be operating with the belief that pronouns must reflect the individual’s own identity rather than the identity that society would force upon them. While there are several different sets of gender-neutral pronouns that are used with varying degrees of popularity, in this thesis I use “ze” as the gender-neutral subject pronoun, “hir” as the gender neutral object and possessive pronoun, and “hirsself” as the gender-neutral reflexive pronoun (American University, Gender Neutral Pronoun Blog). Further, Driskill uses “hir” to refer to hirsself, as evidenced by hir published works (Driskill back cover). In order to show deference and respect to individuals who identify as queer, I make use of these pronouns rather than forcing individuals into heteronormative identities that they do not claim. Use of gender-neutral pronouns works to validate queer and non-gender binary identities.

### Two-Spirit and Queer Native Identities

Issues of sexuality, gender identity, and one’s right to live the identity one chooses are not limited to Native American or Indigenous people. However, when we consider that Native Americans are often targeted for their ethnic and cultural identity within a European dominated society, it follows that queer Native Americans would face an even harsher reaction from any mainstream, heteronormative, white dominated society. When one identifies with both queer and Native American identities, the opportunities for mistreatment increase. Often, queer Native Americans become the target of drastic violence from other Indigenous people as well as non-

Indigenous members of a “dominant” society that pushes for heteronormativity and fitting in above all else. In these cases, violent acts are meant to erase the divergent identity from society, and surviving Native Americans are left to endure the aftermath of such violence. This violent history stems from the original period of colonialism and European settlement, with Europeans struggling to accept any Native non-heterosexual or non-gender-binary identity that did not fit into their heteropatriarchal mindset. Gregory Smithers describes the origin of the term *berdache* as it came to describe queer Native American identities, claiming

*berdache* became in the European (and ultimately Euroamerican) imagination a way to both designate and denigrate Native American cross-dressers (or what modern readers might recognize as “gender benders”) “transvestites,” “hermaphrodites,” “androgynes,” and homosexual behavior. (631)

The majority Eurocentric mindset required a single term with which to describe all non-“traditional” gender and sexual identities, which resulted in the derogatory term *berdache* which was originally associated with sodomites in European culture – particularly in France, where it was a term for male prostitutes (Smithers 630). With a colonial history of denigration and subjugation tied to the very term that the heteropatriarchal society used to define gender non-binary and non-heterosexual identities, it should come as no surprise that these queer Indigenous people were often made the objects of violence due to these queer identities. It was not until 1990 that the term Two-Spirit was coined to refer to Indigenous people whose gender expressions and sexualities did not conform to the heteronormative “standard” of the dominant white society.

The recent act of reclaiming Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous identities can be traced to the rejection of the term *berdache* and all of its negative connotations in favor of the term Two-Spirit. According to Smithers “the term *two-spirits*, in its simplest form, defines a person with ‘both a male and female spirit,’ whose sexual behavior is –with occasional exceptions –

predominantly homosexual” (633). While the term “Two-Spirit” is understandably imperfect in its attempt to define all Native identities beyond the Eurocentric heteronormative binary of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, it is valuable for its effort to give agency back to the Indigenous people who claim the identity for themselves. Two-Spirit, unlike other terms coined by the dominant American society, is a term to describe Native people created and defined *by* Native people. This renaming of the self and practice of self-identification is but one step toward healing damaged senses of self and personal identity caused by colonial violence and the continued denigration of identities that exist counter to the heteronormative and accepted binary of dominant American society. In fact, Lisa Tatonetti furthers the argument for the strength and power of “Two-Spirit,” describing its coinage and purpose:

Thus the term “Two-Spirit” was coined at the 1990 Native American Gay and Lesbian Conference in Winnipeg as a way to resist the history of colonization and homophobia tied to “*berdache*,” a derogatory term historically employed by non-Native anthropologists and missionaries to refer to Indigenous people whose sexualities did not fit within the dominant heterosexual matrix. (150-1)

Like Smithers, Tatonetti highlights the origin of the term “Two-Spirit,” and places importance on its creation by Native queer people as a way to self-identify. The term addresses colonialism and the violence associated with the previous term *berdache* while seeking to create a non-negative term with which to define a non-heteronormative and non-gender-binary identity in a way that returns power and agency to those who self-identify in this manner. Through self-identification and a term that allows its claimer a sense of self-worth and voice, Two-Spirit Native Americans can begin the task of healing their understanding of themselves after centuries of colonial disenfranchisement and current homo- and transphobia – both within and without Indigenous communities – that would continue to attempt to erase these identities. This mirrors the work of *Finding Dawn* to name the victims in an effort to reestablish their fundamental humanity while denying their oppressors and attackers’ efforts to erase their identities. Often, such targeted

violence against a minority within a minority – these queer Native identities – suggests that the perpetrators wish to erase the “divergent” identity entirely. The resilience of queer Indigenous people like Qwo-Li Driskill is that they refuse to be erased, and memorialize the victims of such sexuality- and gender-driven violence. Through hir poetry, Driskill memorializes victims of targeted violence in an effort, like Erdrich and Welsh, to spark social response and social change. The representations of violence that Driskill writes serve to draw attention to the violence perpetrated against 2GLTQ people in the real world, and through careful representation of such violence, Driskill means to bring about social change through public response both to hir poetry and real-world injustice.

### Healing Through Poetry

One part of such change comes from writers’ attempts to make sense of such targeted violence – violence driven by lingering colonial mindsets as well as homo- and transphobias - in their works. While many Native writers address this situation, one poet in particular addresses questions of queer identities and the violence that is often inflicted upon such Indigenous people. Through hir poetry, Qwo-Li Driskill not only draws attention to the violence against Two-Spirit and queer self-identifying Native Americans, but offers a chance for healing from such violence and social change for a larger Indigenous community.

Qwo-Li Driskill, a self-identified “Cherokee Two-Spirit/Queer writer and activist also of African, Irish, Lenape, Lumbee, and Osage ascent,” embodies the importance of claiming one’s own identity in the face of a larger heteronormative society that would deny Native Americans this right (Driskill back cover). Driskill is an active writer, poet, and activist who explores the complex political nature of Two-Spirit identities through hir poetry and scholarly writing. Hir work seems determined to draw attention to Two-Spirit identities and the injustices that are often

inflicted upon those identities while also offering solace and healing. Driskill, through his poetry, addresses the violence that often becomes a part of a Two-Spirit or queer Indigenous identity and the effects that such violence has on the people who are subjected to it. Queer Indigenous people must work to overcome the treatment that their minority-within-a-minority identity often garners from the dominant white American society. It is this challenge that Driskill addresses throughout his collection *Walking with Ghosts*. Rather than allow Two-Spirit and queer Native Americans to remain objectified and ignored in their chosen identity, through his poetry Driskill returns voice and power to queer Indigenous people by telling their stories, making them human, and validating their self-chosen identities. The ultimate outcome of such poetic attention is the opportunity for healing to come in the aftermath of terrible acts of violence so that survivors can honor the memories of the victims while continuing to find validation for their own identities within the larger culture. By exposing the targeted violence, Driskill also seeks social responses and change. Like Erdrich, who views *The Round House* as a crusade, Driskill's effort to memorialize and represent victims through poetry is part of a larger social and public effort.

Throughout the collection *Walking with Ghosts*, Driskill explores varying Indigenous identities and the intersections of Indigenous identities with sexual and gendered ones. The collection's title embodies some of Driskill's goals in writing this collection. As he explores queer identities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and the violent attacks that are often directed at these identities, Driskill writes in order to address the ancestors – memories, hauntings, and shadows – of the past in order to survive the present. These ghosts give power and voice to Driskill's poems because they carry the poems, stories, and experiences he writes about beyond the pages of the collection and into the broader past, present, and future of queer

Indigenous bodies. By walking with the ghosts of hir personal past as well as the ghosts of other Indigenous and/or queer people who have been victimized, Driskill offers others a chance to heal from the violence and to reclaim their identities as human beings rather than mere objects.

This larger context is crucial because it provides insight into the broader range of experiences that Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people face. Because literature exists in the world and – often – as a reflection of the world, the barriers between literature and real life are often blurred. In Driskill’s case, literature engages the real world in an effort to draw attention to continued injustice and to bring about change. There is not a single Native community, yet, within the white/Caucasian dominated heteropatriarchy, all Native and Indigenous people are Othered from the majority white society. Just as there is no single homosexual, Two-Spirit, or genderqueer community, yet all queer identities are Othered from the majority heteronormative community. The combined “otherness” of a Two-Spirit *and* Native identity leaves individuals separated both from the larger Euroamerican heteronormative and gender binary community *and* the heteronormative and gender binary Native community. As stated before, not only do Indigenous people who identify as queer have to fight for recognition of their Indigenous identity, they also must fight for recognition of their queer identity. Both Indigenous and queer identities are often made the subject of violence. This violence often exists as an effort to erase the “undesirable” identity that many members of the heteronormative, dominant, white society find abhorrent. The very idea that an Indigenous identity or a queer identity would be abhorrent reflects our Eurocentric heteronormative society, and the necessity of writers like Driskill to tackle the cost of such an idea on the Indigenous bodies that suffer from it.

Driskill addresses the inherent damage that comes from Native Americans living within the confines of a white, heteronormative patriarchal society in hir essay “Stolen From Our

Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic,” wherein ze describes the necessity of First Nations people to redefine their own understanding of their identity, with a focus on sexual identities. Driskill suggests that, for Native Two-Spirit people, like himself, “healing our sexualities as Indigenous people is braided with the legacy of historical trauma and the ongoing process of decolonization” (“Stolen from Our Bodies” 51). That sexual identity and acceptance of divergent sexual identities is tied to the “ongoing process of decolonization” highlights the degree to which European colonization harmed Native identities. Decolonization is an ongoing process because of the pervasive and continued influence of non-Native ideologies on Native mindsets. Even though the colonial period is considered over, the colonized population – Native Americans – must continue to re-establish their personal sovereignty in the settler colonial society that remains. Driskill suggests that, prior to colonization, Indigenous tribes were accepting of Two-Spirit/Gay/Lesbian/Trans/Queer people without the homophobia and transphobia that infiltrated their culture after contact with the Europeans. The damage of this infiltration leads to Native people feeling that they were “stolen from [their] bodies” and unable to self-define their gender or sexual – and therefore personal – identities (“Stolen from Our Bodies” 50). Only through consciously addressing the situational violence that exists as a result of colonization of Native identities can Native Two-Spirit/Queer people begin the long healing process that faces them. It is the denial of Native Americans’ right to define their own identities that leads to much of the violence against Indigenous bodies that Driskill addresses in *Walking with Ghosts*. Because their self-professed identities deviate from dominant society’s definitions of acceptable, 2GLTQ Indigenous people become targets of violence designed to erase these deviant identities.

Driskill's work in *Walking with Ghosts* is to offer healing and justice for Two-Spirit Native Americans who have experienced colonial gender and sexuality-driven violence against their identities. The healing comes from giving a voice and agency back to a part of the population that has long been denied the right to speak for themselves. Through this healing process, Indigenous people with divergent sexualities and gender identities are able to come face to face with the impact that violence has on their identities. The violence faced by queer Native identities is inflicted upon the Native bodies in an effort to subvert the humanity and dignity of the victims. While violence is often directly tied to Native identities, Natives with divergent sexual and gender identities face even more attempts to erase their identity through violence. Driskill describes attacks against homosexual and Two-Spirit Native Americans and non-Native Americans in order to draw attention to the risks of claiming a homosexual or non-gender binary identity. However, despite the violence that is often inflicted upon these identities and these Indigenous bodies, Indigenous people remain willing to claim their divergent identity in order to remain true to themselves and to heal their understanding of their identity after years of colonial denigration. In this way, the very act of claiming a queer identity becomes an act of protest against a colonial system that seeks to deny Indigenous peoples' right to exist and claim the gender and sexual identities they wish.

Driskill writes about the issue of sovereignty with an emphasis on identity and the nature of identity. Driskill claims "sovereignty is an issue of vital importance to Native people, not only as a right we have as independent nations within the borders of colonial governments, but also as a struggle to define ourselves outside of Eurocentric and racist notions of our lives as First Nations people," suggesting that, with regard to sovereignty, each Native person should be allowed to claim the identity that fully describes them ("Call Me Brother" 222). For Driskill, the

question of sovereignty regards the inherent right of Native people to live the lives that they choose – free from racism, homophobias, violence, and attacks on the sovereign self. Since so many queer indigenous bodies have been victimized, Driskill turns to hir poetry in order to address the question of sovereign bodies and the process of healing that these victims deserve. The poetic form that Driskill uses often seems to mimic memorial prayers, and in the poem “Chantway for FC,” pays homage to Navajo Chantways, a form designed to bring about balance and healing. Through mimicking social acts – prayers and chantways – Driskill engages with hir readers and brings them into the conversation driving social change and justice.

Furthermore, Driskill addresses hir belief in the importance and power of poetry in the article “Call Me Brother: Two-Spiritness, the Erotic, and Mixedblood Identity as Sites of Sovereignty and Resistance in Gregory Scofield’s Poetry,” stating in no uncertain terms that “poetry is a tool for social change and healing,” a function that ze makes explicit use of throughout the collection *Walking With Ghosts* (222). The poems in this collection explore the themes of colonialism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, murder, violence, and fear as they intersect with the identities of Native Two-Spirit gay, lesbian, transgender, and queer (2GLTQ) people. Moreover, through hir careful exploration and attention to the violence inherent to living as a queer Indigenous person, Driskill begins the task of healing from this violence while memorializing the victims in such a way that addresses their individual identity and their inclusion in a larger collective consciousness. Driskill’s poetry serves to represent the experiences of queer Indigenous people, and, through this representation, to rehumanize victims. By drawing public attention to the stories of these victims of violence targeted against their gender and sexual identities, Driskill seeks social change, believing that hir readers will continue the work ze started.

## “Love Poems for Billy Jack”

In “Love Poems for Billy Jack” ze presents a series of four love poems dedicated “*in memoriam: Billy Jack Gaither,*” both to honor the memory of Billy Jack Gaither and to offer a chance for healing to other queer people. Gaither was not a Native American, but he was still a member of a minority group in his small town of Sylacauga, Alabama as a closeted gay man. His murder in 1999 made national headlines and opened a national conversation about redefining the term “hate crime” in Alabama to include attacks against individuals based on sexuality as well as the already covered “crimes committed due to race, religion, ethnicity and disability,” according to a *New York Times* article that described Gaither’s death and his parents’ shock over learning of his sexual orientation (Firestone). In the media, Gaither’s murder was compared to Matthew Shepard’s murder, and its media portrayal a few years prior due to the similar motive for the murders. Interestingly enough, Driskill also offers a poem in memory of Matthew Shepard, titled simply “For Matthew” in *Walking with Ghosts*, as well as other poems offered “*in memoriam*” of homosexual Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who were victims of extreme violence due to their personal identity. Gaither and Shepard, while ethnically different, share a queer identity that led to their attacks and murders. For many Native Two-Spirit people, Billy Jack Gaither and Matthew Shepard are painful reminders of their own potential to face violence and the different treatment that their attacks may receive from the media and the public.

“Love Poems for Billy Jack” offers insight into the man that Billy Jack Gaither might have been, painting a loving individual who was comfortable in his skin despite his fear of “coming out” in his small Southern town. The poem opens with an invitation to Gaither:

Let’s laugh down  
the Alabama sky  
warm and moist as  
mouths on cocks

that serves a dual purpose (“Love Poems for Billy Jack” 1-4). First, the invitation to “laugh down” the sky carries connotations of an enjoyable encounter, despite the knowledge that the poem is a memorial rather than a suggestion of future possibilities. The tension created by this juxtaposition suggests the multiple uses of memorials – not only to mourn the lost, but to enjoy the memory of time spent with the lost – and the mixed nature of Driskill’s poem. Driskill seeks not only to mourn Gaither, but to celebrate a life lived. The second purpose of the opening stanza is to immediately address any questions of sexuality that may arise from the poem’s title. As the poem continues, the tone shifts from the initial invitation to a mournful description of what was lost when Gaither was murdered. Driskill writes,

I could have kissed  
your face  
pulverized by fists  
legs  
splintered by ax handle  
folded into you  
like your living body  
in the trunk of your car (9-16)

In these lines, Driskill describes the horrific violence inflicted upon Billy Jack Gaither while mourning that he “could have [been] kissed” rather than destroyed. This juxtaposition of language describing acts of love with acts of extreme violence harnesses the situation of many 2GLTQ people who live between a desire for love and a fear of becoming victims themselves of the kind of violence that destroyed Gaither and Shepard. The words themselves portray the violent nature of this hate crime: “pulverized” and “splintered” show how the murderers attempted to completely erase Billy Jack Gaither from the world before burning his body. Such violence within a “love poem” further serves to marry the complexity of a homosexual identity within the larger heteronormative society. That a “love poem” should contain such violent imagery in order to fully capture the victimization of the homosexual body and the attempted

erasure of the homosexual identity suggests that violence, love, and homosexuality are mutually constituted – especially in the eyes of a dominant heteronormative society that would deny the validity of love that does not conform to the heteronormative expectation.

Driskill’s poem, with its sensual imagery and message of love despite the violence that Gaither succumbed to, offers a richer representation of Gaither and his murder than any of the newspaper reports published shortly after his death. The tone of the newspaper articles tended toward simplistic presentation of facts rather than an exploration of the humanity of the victim. This, hopefully unintentional, denial of a gay man’s humanity hints at the larger heteronormative attitude toward homosexuality in general. A PBS *Frontline* article describes the circumstances of Gaither’s death without addressing his inherent right to be remembered as anything but a victim, stating, “his throat was cut, and his body was bludgeoned with an ax handle before being thrown on top of a pile of tires and set on fire” (“Life and Death”). The media’s use of the passive voice to turn Gaither into an object of violence suggests an almost passive acceptance of violence against queer people by denying Gaither an active part in his own life by denying him the right to be the subject of the media response rather than the object. Conversely, Driskill offers a different description that goes beyond mere fact and opens the situation for a more peaceful conclusion – a conclusion that positions Gaither as the subject of memorial and offers healing rather than merely loss:

These words will lick  
up your last breath  
You too hot in bones man  
You rough elegant ghost man  
You once alive man  
burn me  
to sky. (57-63)

Driskill describes Gaither as a “rough elegant ghost” who was “once alive,” and who deserves a memorial that will burn in the memories of those who knew him, those who knew of him, and those who share his sexual identity. The poem’s closing image of a funeral pyre continues Driskill’s work to memorialize and celebrate Gaither’s life, as the pyre is a final physical act of memorializing the dead.

Official reports of Gaither’s death also acknowledge that his murderers attacked him because of his sexual identity and according to Charles Monroe Butler, the “sidekick” in the murder, “Billy Jack started ‘talking queer stuff’ that set off a violent reaction in Butler” (“Life and Death”). Perhaps telling of the continued disrespect that the queer community receives is the presentation of the motive as a normal, nearly expected, outcome of Billy Jack Gaither’s sexual identity. Newspapers never suggested that this violent reaction could have come as a result of Butler and Mullins’s fear of the – possible – fragility of their own heterosexuality. The overly violent reaction to an interpreted come-on from Gaither suggests that this fear lurks in their own identities. Again turning to poetry, Driskill explores the possibility that Gaither’s violent demise reflects not his own identity, but his murderers’ fear of their own sexuality. Ze suggests that the murderers’ homophobia could stem from their own homoerotic thoughts and their refusal to accept this identity as a valid one – for themselves or anyone else. Driskill asks

Did your salty musk  
bring goose bumps[?]  
Did the way your ran your hand through  
hair make them catch their breath[?]  
...  
Were they afraid  
of wanting you soft as  
owl feathers brushing the stars  
of Coosa County[?] (24-35)

These questions address one possible explanation for the violence used to erase Billy Jack Gaither’s identity from the living world, while continuing to humanize him as the victim.

Driskill presents Gaither's actions, scent, and sexuality as the natural and normal while the fear that his attackers felt is diminished in importance in order to humanize the victim and center him in the foreground of readers' understanding. This effort to place the humanity of the victim in focus, as well as to normalize the victim's identity and the actions associated with that identity begin to offer healing for Billy Jack as well as other homosexuals who are victimized due to their identity. Through his words, Driskill offers a chance to move beyond a space of victimization, and by moving away from victimization to begin changing social constructs that perpetuate the denial of deviant identities. For now, the continued dominance of heteronormative attitudes allows such homophobia to be an acceptable reason for unnecessary violence. It is this heterosexist attitude that makes Driskill's poetic memorials both necessary and poignant. The poetic representations and memorialization operate within a larger social push for change and add to social responses to real-world violence against queer Indigenous people. Like Erdrich's work in *The Round House* and Welsh's work with *Finding Dawn*, Driskill's work through poetry engages readers and pushes for a real-world response to his poetry.

#### "Chantway for FC"

The final poem in *Walking with Ghosts*, "Chantway for FC," is modeled after the Navajo ceremonial practice of Chantways. Written in memory of Fred "FC" Martinez, this poem is a fitting end to Driskill's collection as it again addresses a hate crime and offers the opportunity for the victim – FC Martinez - and the larger community to heal from such a wound. FC Martinez was a 16-year-old Navajo Two-Spirit person who embodied both feminine and masculine identities. The PBS documentary *Two Spirits* addresses Martinez's habit of choosing a masculine or feminine identity depending on how he felt each morning. While his family uses primarily masculine pronouns in the interviews in the video, they were also supportive of FC's

gender fluidity. It seems that, like Driskill himself, Martinez was willing to embrace a Two-Spirit identity and to live “out” in the community comfortably with that identity. However, such an openness to and acceptance of one’s personal identity cannot erase the homophobic attitudes of others. It is homophobia and transphobia, coupled with a complete refusal to accept Martinez’ Two-Spiritness that led to his murder in 2001.

Emery Cowan writes in a “look back” article ten years after Martinez’s death that “in the initial days after Martinez’s death, there were some tendencies in the community to ignore the murder” (Cowan n.p.). A community-wide refusal to acknowledge that a Two-Spirit teenager was murdered as a direct result of his identity suggests that our society remains broken and needs to be changed. Martinez was “murdered, bashed repeatedly with a heavy rock held by a man he met just that night” and left to die in a remote canyon in Colorado (Cowan). Like newspapers’ treatment of Gaither’s murder, Martinez’s death was reported in a matter-of-fact tone that *almost* gives the impression that such violence is to be expected. How can other Two-Spirit or queer Native Americans confidently claim their own identity when the media subtextually suggests that they deserve to die? Driskill responds by creating texts that offer healing, understanding, and affirmation of their right to embrace their identity within a larger culture that would seek to erase them.

Driskill’s “Chantway for FC” offers the healing, understanding, and affirmation that FC Martinez deserved in life. Further, Driskill’s choice to model this memorial poem after the Navajo Chantway ties his words to the ceremonial practices of Martinez’s tribe, creating an even stronger opportunity for the justice that Martinez, his family, and his memory need. Diane C. Van Noord defines Chantway as “the term used to refer to the Navajo ceremonial healing system based on creation myths, using a combination of singing, sand painting, prayer, and sacred

objects” (163). Driskill’s poem reads as a mixture of song and prayer, and presents Martinez’s body as a sacred object to be revered through the healing process. Since Van Noord claims that “the Navajo believe that the universe is interrelated, [and] all of Creation is maintained by a delicate balance of natural and supernatural elements that results in a state of harmony and well-being,” we can read “Chantway for FC” as an effort to restore the harmony and balance of the universe after Martinez’s death in order to heal the identities of Two-Spirit people in all Native communities, not just within the Navajo tribe (164). As a Cherokee poet, Driskill takes the Chantway system, which is “unique to the Navajo,” and broadens its application through a respectful usage of its format. By bringing his Cherokee and other self-defined identities to the Chantway form, Driskill creates a connection between multiple Native tribes in order to offer a chance for Two-Spirit/queer Indigenous people to heal their own identities and come back into harmony with themselves.

The poem opens with the mournful yet hopeful statement “From the heavy debris of loss / we emerge” setting up the survivor’s feelings of loss and continued movement. Despite the “debris of loss,” surviving Indigenous Two-Spirit people emerge from their mourning and suffering with hope that they will find healing through the poem’s ceremony. The remainder of the poem’s opening section describes a gathering of survivors who come

with giveaways of yellow and white corn  
to anoint the tip of your tongue  
feast on the memory of your first laughter  
sing an honor song  
to the slow heart beat  
of your final breaths (3-8)

The survivors gather to mourn FC’s death and to celebrate his memory through their offerings of corn. This image mirrors the offering of corn in the Navajo origin myth, and may be intended to draw supernatural beings into the mourning and memorial gathering, as the offering in the origin

myth was given to bring the Creators of mankind. Driskill brings the survivors together so that they may “emerge in beauty” and allow FC to “be our song” (11-12). That there is beauty found in the midst of mourning showcases the beauty of FC’s own comfort with his identity. Despite the horrific violence that led to his death, his memory remains a thing of beauty. Only by preserving the beauty of the victims’ life and identity can survivors hope to find any healing for themselves and for the victims of hate crimes; to deny the beauty in the face of violence is to allow the murderers to win. Through embracing memories and their inherent beauty and goodness, a Native homosexual community can find acceptance for their identities and the strength to face the oppression of the larger heteronormative society that would deny them this right. Driskill uses FC to represent a situation faced by many. Through memorialization of FC’s life and death, Driskill explores both the potential for violence and the potential for social change as public response to his poetry continues to demand justice for the real victims of such targeted violence.

The second section of the poem describes a mourning period and a survivor’s need to visit the site of Martinez’s death. The search for any remnant of his humanity leads the poem to find the spirit of the victim that remains alive in memories. Through acceptance of the loss and embracing the memories, survivors are able to begin their healing process. FC’s “spirit fingers push us / to incant witness to your body,” and demand to be remembered (28-29). Through the Chantway’s ceremonial healing, the spirit can be appeased as the survivors bear witness to the humanity of the victim rather than the violence that would reduce him to a mere object.

As the Chantway continues, Driskill and the other survivors that make up the “we” of the poem’s persona begin to see Martinez in all aspects of nature. Though removed from his living body, FC is not removed from the world. Driskill speaks to his spirit and his memory:

the shocking whirl  
of your hair and fingerprints  
mimics the wind that gives us breath  
You are the rustle of leaves  
whirlwinds of dust  
feathered smoke rising from sage (64-69)

The memory of FC Martinez, and indeed, the memory of any Two-Spirit Indigenous person murdered for living within a self-defined queer identity, remains a part of the natural world. Rather than disappearing, as Martinez's murderer would have wanted him to, FC Martinez becomes a part of the collective memory shared by Two-Spirit Native people. Martinez's death acts as a constant reminder of the life that he lived in the short time he was allowed to live it. The continued memory of FC Martinez prevents him from being erased from history, and erased from the world; the continued memory gives validity to his identity and the identities of other Two-Spirit people. It is imperative that survivors remember this, because when murdered Indigenous bodies are remembered, the larger Indigenous community is able to heal from the loss, eventually. And, through memory of and attention to violence, future violence may be prevented.

Sophie Mayer writes in "The Passionate Politics of Indigenous Erotica" about the importance of recognizing "the interdependence of our sexual choices and our social/political situations" (n.p.). Mayer suggests that a sexual identity – particularly a Two-Spirit/queer one – is both deeply personal and political. Further, a divergent sexual identity becomes even more political when the person claiming it is Native American, as FC Martinez was. Not only was FC an ethnic/cultural minority in the United States, he was also a minority in terms of his sexuality in much of the United States' heteronormative society. Both of these identities merged to create a beautiful human being who was truly comfortable with himself, a human being whom Driskill seeks to memorialize in poetry. Mayer writes about Martinez's death as compared to the

death of Mathew Shepard, the white homosexual man whose violent murder began the long process of improving Federal protections against hate crimes for homosexuals. She observes, “Martinez’ death did not create protests on Capitol Hill as did the death of Mathew Shepard just over the Colorado state line, but it did create this poem [“Chantway for FC”] – and as this work finds readers, it may have more effect than protests by touching the heart (and other body parts) with love as well as rage” (n.p.). As if it were not bad enough that queer people are often targets of violence, Mayer notes the contrast between the massive public outcry over Shepherd’s death and the lack of public outcry for a 2GLTQ Indigenous person. Even in a queer population, there is a perceived hierarchy of worthiness for victims – white queer victims remain the preferred recipients of social outcry and public change. The lack of attention that 2GLTQ peoples receive fuels Driskill’s writing as ze creates representations of Indigenous victims in hir effort to rehumanize them and focus on their identities as people rather than victims while pushing for social response to this violence as well as violence against white queer people.

Mayer captures the shifting tones of Driskill’s poem as they oscillate between love for FC’s memory and rage at the nature of hir death while highlighting the power that something as artistic as a poem can hold. Further, designed as a Chantway, the poem’s purpose as a healing tool is undeniable. A traditional Navajo Chantway brings harmony and balance back to an afflicted person, as Mayer explains, and “Chantway for F.C.” is designed to bring the memory of the murdered F.C. Martinez back into balance. Driskill, through hir memorial poem, attempts to bring harmony back to not only F.C. Martinez’s life, but also the lives of other Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people through the humanizing work of hir words.

### “Gay Nigger Number One”

As in the poems “Love Poems for Billy Jack” and “Chantway for F.C.,” Driskill turns his attention to the real-world violence against queer and Two-Spirit people in the poem “Gay Nigger Number One.” This time, Driskill describes the brutal murder of Steen Keith Fenrich at the hands of his stepfather. Driskill depicts the violence inflicted upon Fenrich while also addressing the lack of media attention that this murder received. Driskill claims that Fenrich’s murdered and mutilated body was

Too strange a fruit  
for the cover of Time  
the country collaborates  
bleaches your name off the page (25-28)

The comparison of Fenrich’s body to a strange fruit is powerful, as well, for its connection to violence against African American minority identities during the Reconstruction era in the South when African Americans were lynched and left hanging like “strange fruit” in trees (Holliday). That Driskill would choose this image suggests that he wishes to expand his address of violence beyond Native identities for a moment in order to suggest that the system of white American heteropatriarchy – which favors white heterosexual males above all other identities – has historically targeted all minority identities with an attempt to erase them from a Eurocentric worldview. The addition of violence against African Americans does not detract from the violence depicted against Two-Spirit and queer Native people, but rather serves to solidify the dominant society’s penchant for violence against those who do not fit into the accepted majority image. Further, that such violence exists within a larger history of American society would suggest that bringing voices to the voiceless would benefit even the perpetrators of such acts if they could be shown the humanity of their victims. Driskill’s poems exist in an effort to humanize the victims of racially and sexually motivated hate crimes so that our society

as a whole and Native Two-Spirit and queer societies in particular can come to an understanding and acceptance of their personal identities.

The suggestion that Fenrich's image was "too strange" – or grotesque as a result of his identity – to make national magazine covers following his death points to a collective ignorance of the treatment of queer identities. That the news media ignored the violence against Fenrich further calls into question the heteronormative Euroamerican acceptance of the validity of his identity in life. The collective choice of a mainstream society to ignore the death of Fenrich suggests a larger tendency to ignore violence when it is inflicted upon minorities – be those minorities racial, as Fenrich and Martinez represent, or sexual/gender identities, as all three people Driskill memorializes in these poems represent. That hate crimes against people – Native and non-Native alike – who identify with a gender and/or sexuality that does not line up with the dominant, heteronormative binary of gay/straight (and the implied bad/good that goes with such a binary) continue to be ignored is the very reason why Driskill's poetry, and the work of other Two-Spirit and queer writers matters. Through literature, surviving Two-Spirit and queer people can seek the opportunity to find a larger community with which to engage in order to heal their own understanding of their identity and bring social change through public attention and response to their works.

Despite the poem's power, Driskill also acknowledges its shortcomings with regard to healing Fenrich and other victims of violence because of their identity. Driskill writes, in "Gay Nigger Number One:" "I am just a poet / my words brittle / against the mad butcher's knife," suggesting that being "just a poet" is not enough (10-12). I would argue that being "just a poet" is a powerful position indeed, since it is through his words that he brings attention to the losses that Two-Spirit and GLTQ people face throughout their lives, often as a direct result of their

identities and how they choice to live out those identities. Driskill describes the physical violence against Two-Spirit Native people and queer Native and non-Native people in an effort to draw attention to the pervasive violence against queer Native identities. The physical violence against FC Martinez, Billy Jack Gaither, and Steen Keith Fenrich causes psychological and emotional pain for all surviving Two-Spirit people who are aware of the potential outcome of their identities. However, Driskill's poems validate the identities of Martinez, Gaither, and Fenrich in an effort to validate the identities of Two-Spirit Native people living with a fear of potential violence. The memorials offered in Driskill's poems begin to offer justice through validating the identities of the victims while at the same time re-humanizing them where their attackers would remove their humanity and identity.

### Conclusion

A history of settler colonialism and violence against queer Native identities has created a present in which claiming a Two-Spirit or queer identity invites violence from a heteronormative Euro-centric majority population. Settler colonialism denies the rights of existence to individuals who identify in ways that do not fit into the heteronormative and/or gender binary norms of the settler society. Two-Spirit people began the long task of healing their identities and finding value and self-worth again by coining the term that they use to describe themselves. However, the dominant heteronormative society continues to attempt to deny these identities their right to exist and to attempt to erase any divergent identity from the heteronormative one. Through hir poetry, Qwo-Li Driskill addresses the violence inflicted upon Two-Spirit and queer people in an effort to bring their humanity to the center of their identity. By humanizing and centering on the victims in the poems "Love Poems for Billy Jack," "Chantway for FC," and "Gay Nigger Number One," Driskill addresses the violence by describing its images while

focusing on the humanity of the victims rather than the divergent nature of their identities. Through engaging the violence and memorializing the victims ze comes to a space of celebration for the memories of FC Martinez, Billy Jack Gaither, and Steen Keith Fenrich; through engaging the violence inflicted against them, Driskill speaks the pain while moving beyond memories of violence alone. Driskill offers a compassionate memorial for the deceased and an opportunity for other Two-Spirit people to accept their own humanity and thus begin to heal their understanding of their own identity. Further, Driskill addresses the systemic violence against these individuals in a way that highlights the hunting of individuals who identify in ways that deviate from the heteronormative and gender binary norms defined by the settler society.

The dramatic contrast between the social responses to violence against Indigenous women and the violence against Native 2QLTQ people suggests that, even in Indigenous cultures, there remains a hierarchy of worthiness in regard to victims seeing justice brought to their attackers. There has not been a massive public outcry to the deaths of FC Martinez, Steen Keith Fenrich, or Billy Jack Gaither as there was to the death of Mathew Shepherd, which also suggests that to be both Indigenous and queer is to be somehow undeserving of justice. I will explore this lack of response in detail the final chapter of this thesis.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PUBLIC RESPONSE AND ACTIVIST MOVEMENTS

### From the Page and Screen to the Streets

The violence against Native American women, as well as against queer Native Americans remains an ongoing cultural and societal problem that must be addressed. The conversation regarding the systemic violence against Native American and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada has moved beyond the pages of novels and poetry collections and off of the screens of documentaries in a pursuit of true justice and healing fueled by public response to the problems represented in Erdrich's novel, Welsh's film, and Driskill's poetry. It is not enough for artists to acknowledge the problem of violence against Native and Indigenous people. In order for true justice to be served against the perpetrators and the larger society that continues to allow this violence to happen with impunity, everyone must accept that Indigenous women and 2GLTQ people are being hunted and begin to change the system that allows this hunting to continue.

In Canada, Indigenous people have called for a formal inquiry into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's treatment of cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Many indigenous people believe that the RCMP have not treated the disappearances and murders of Canada's Indigenous women as a priority and have let the perpetrators go unpunished for far too long. Even when the Canadian government appears to address the situation of missing and murdered Indigenous women, many question the legitimacy of such an inquiry and the outcome of the government's work (*Finding Dawn*, Holland, "Case of Ramona Lisa Wilson"). In the article "Missing and Murdered: The Canadian State's Solution," journalist Owen Toews addresses the Canadian inquiry and its handling of the continued problem facing Canada with regards to missing and murdered Indigenous women. Toews finds fault with the Canadian

government's handling of the situation and the repercussions that the inquiry may have on continued violence against Indigenous women. Toews describes the situation, addressing the fact that "the social movement in response to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women has been an important site around the interconnections between gender violence and colonialism. The energy of this struggle is one of many examples of Indigenous women's centuries-long resistance to colonialism and genocide in Canada" (28). Toews recognizes the continued struggle of Indigenous peoples, and the long-lasting effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous identities. Ongoing attitudes derived from settler colonialism allow Canada's non-Indigenous population to ignore the plight of Indigenous women rather than accept any responsibility for the systemic mistreatment of the Indigenous population. The settler colonial system allows the mistreatment of Indigenous people to be ignored by the agencies tasked to protect them.

The history of violence against Indigenous people, rather than showing an improvement, continues to highlight the forced domination of Indigenous bodies and lands by settler colonial violence. The continued repercussions of settler colonialism prevent Indigenous people from receiving equitable treatment under the law and within society that they demand. As such, the settlers' belief that Indigenous people "deserve" the violence against them continues to further perpetuate the situation. The work of literature and film is the work of representing – that is, presenting again – the validity of Indigenous identities through representations of actual violence in art. Public response to these representations reflects the necessity of such representations to spark social change. Niezen defines the process of rediscovery and revalidation, first addressing that

among those who have vital histories and memories of domination and dispossession, one process by which key features of collective identity are articulated is marked by *re*-discovery, recovering an essence seen to have once been a part of one's innermost being but that was temporarily lost, maligned, and

excoriated by outside forces, in some cases slated for elimination through state-sponsored policies of assimilation (xv-xvi)

Indigenous people have the history Niezen describes, and continue to live in settler colonial societies that seek to systematically remove Indigenous identities – especially those identities that deviate from those the Eurocentric heteropatriarcal society would privilege – by violently removing the individuals who do not fit within the dominant society’s prescribed identity norms.

#### The Canadian Government’s Inquiry

Mary Eberts acknowledges her place within a Eurocentric society and writes from this settler perspective to address the continued question of the role of settler colonialism in violence against Indigenous women. Eberts suggests that violence against Indigenous women will only be ended by a combined effort between Indigenous and settler Canadians through a combined acknowledgment of the pervasive nature of violence against Indigenous women. She claims that at Canada’s centennial year of nationhood, in 1967, there was a “moment of knowing” about the violence against Indigenous women that “was followed by many decades of unknowing, until Indigenous women themselves began their concerted advocacy to draw attention to the violence perpetrated against them” (Eberts 72). Eberts’s suggestion that settlers once knew, and then chose to forget, about the scope of violence targeted against Indigenous women highlights one of the many complications surrounding the current situation for Canada’s missing and murdered Indigenous women. Settler colonialism allowed for non-Indigenous Canadians to ignore the situation until Indigenous women were forced to stand up for themselves rather than wait any longer for justice to come from their non-Indigenous government and law enforcement agencies. Eberts goes on to suggest, “settlers knew, and then we unknow, about that violence. Unknowing what we once knew not only shields us from the unhappy reality of Indigenous women, it allows us to avoid confronting our own role in what has been happening to them and to continue to

think well of ourselves” (72). Non-Indigenous people in Canada and the United States are often unwilling to engage with their own contributions to ongoing violence against Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people. While being unwilling or unable to engage with this role does not automatically make one complicit, it does hinder justice as, until everyone engages in the conversation and demands change, justice cannot be fully realized.

In the early 2010s, Canada’s government – following requests from the families of its missing and murdered Indigenous women – began a formal inquiry into the treatment of cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women. While it is possible that this inquiry stems in part from settler colonial guilt and the beginning of change, many Indigenous people in Canada are unsatisfied with the inquiry. The inquiry, according to Toews, mirrors systemic mistreatment of Indigenous people that can be traced back to early colonialism. He argues that,

if we understand violence against Indigenous women as a function of ongoing colonialism – rather than somehow an exception to the regular functioning of Canadian society – rooted in land and resource theft and subjection to settler authority, then it makes no sense that we should pursue solutions to violence that strengthen colonial institutions such as the RCMP. (Toews 47)

Not only does the colonial system haunt the past of Indigenous people in Canada, the current system continues to place Indigenous people in a position of servitude and reliance on those descended from the European settlers who implemented the system of settler colonialism. By denying their own responsibility for the mistreatment of Indigenous women, Eurocanadians are able to continue to believe that they are not a part of the problem facing the Indigenous populations. The continued subjugation of Indigenous women works to keep all Indigenous people separated from the non-Indigenous, Eurocentric, settler colonial society that tried to eradicate their Indigenous identities for centuries. How can Indigenous women and their families believe in an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women that gives more power to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who refuse to adequately and promptly investigate

the crimes in the first place? The remains of colonialism continue to hold Indigenous people down and separate from their Eurocanadian counterparts, widening a gap in justice rather than working towards equitable treatment in the eyes of the law. Within such an inequitable and unjust system, the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada cannot hope to find justice because they are not valued as equal members of Canadian society – they continue to be perceived as the colonized other rather than an active participant in a modern, global society.

Toews goes on to suggest that the Canadian government's solution to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, rather than actually fixing the problem and bettering the lives of Indigenous women, is using the crisis "to expand police infrastructure and exclude Indigenous women from processes aimed at addressing the violence" (28). Instead of including Indigenous women in a task force and inquiry into the continued violence against them due to their identity, the Canadian government seems to be deliberately excluding these women from any active participation in finding a solution. Toews suggests that this inquiry, rather than a legitimate effort to improve a shameful situation, is instead yet another chance for a Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal government to exclude Indigenous women from a conversation that centers on their continued mistreatment.

Like many who question the legitimacy of the Canadian inquiry into the continued disappearances and murders of Indigenous women, Toews notices definite parallels between the current situation and centuries of colonial violence. Just as the abductions and murders of Indigenous women showcase the objectification of Indigenous people, the inquiry works to shut out the very women that it purports to support. Toews addresses the root of the situation when he writes

the Native Women Association of Canada's (NWAC) important Sisters in Spirit research project has been defunded in favour of a series of task forces and

initiatives which redirect money to the RCMP and local police forces, while Indigenous women's families, communities, and organizations have been shut out of new inquiries, databases, and investigations. The "solutions" developed by the Canadian state in response to missing and murdered Indigenous women have tended to reproduce and expand a set of colonial social relations that contribute to violence against Indigenous women in the first place. (28)

Rather than invest in programs to improve the situation of Indigenous women, Toews suggests that the Canadian government invests in the very law enforcement agencies that deny Indigenous women and their families justice. *Finding Dawn* also addresses the denial of justice for Indigenous women and their families and the necessity of social change to protect Indigenous women. The implications of such funding choices extend beyond a simple question of money and instead raise questions of value – what is the value of an Indigenous life when compared to a non-Indigenous life? If the current situation in Canada is any indication, Indigenous lives are not valued as highly as non-Indigenous lives.

Despite the outward appearances that the Canadian inquiry means to bring justice to the missing and murdered Indigenous women, as has been stated before, the inquiry instead continues to marginalize the Indigenous women and their communities. Jodi Beniuk explores Indigenous women's position as "Other" in Canada in the article "Indigenous Women as the Other: An Analysis of the Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry." This article defines women's position within a male/female binary culture, and references Simone de Beauvoir's suggestion that humanity is male-centered

because Woman is defined by what she is not, while Man is defined by what he is – and he defines woman. Man is the primary referent. Woman is not regarded as autonomous, but rather as dependent on Man for meaning, being, and existence. This makes Woman the object and Man the subject. In being the object, Woman becomes the Other. The Other, as object, is a fixed thing, while the subject has agency. Woman is reduced to a reproductive function, as a womb and as a means of male pleasure. (Beniuk 83)

It is easy to accept the injustice against Native women when they are perceived as *less than* their male counterparts. Rauna Kuokkanen suggests that “taking the gendering of power, and in this case, gendered nature of violence seriously, however, also requires asking frequent questions about racialization such as which women we are talking about – otherwise the female subaltern remains ‘even more deeply in shadow’” (218). We are not discussing *all* women regardless of race – though all women are subjected to violence in many ways – we are discussing Indigenous and Native American women and the relationship that their race plays in the violence that they face. Statistics show that “Aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 44 are 5 times more likely than other women of the same age to die as a result of violence,” suggesting that Indigenous women are specifically targeted as victims because of both their female and Indigenous identities (Kuokkanen 219). This disparity is not limited to Canada, in the United States, Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be targets of violence than women as a whole (“Maze of Injustice 2). There can be no question that Indigenous people are victims of racialized violence, racism, and mistreatment due to their racial identity. Furthermore, there can be no question that Indigenous women face violence and mistreatment due to both their status as females and their status as Indigenous peoples. In many ways, it would appear, Indigenous women are “double” victims due to the perception of their gender and racial identities. The intersections of exploited identities that Indigenous women inhabit result in further complications that they must face as they seek equitable treatment and respect. As women, they are perceived as weak and potential victims and as Indigenous people they are perceived as somehow “less than” their settler counterparts. As we see in *Finding Dawn*, Indigenous women in Canada are victims of violence and murder at an alarming rate, and their attackers and killers are not brought to justice in a timely manner, if at all. The disparity between violent attacks and

justice further solidifies an image that Indigenous people are not worth protecting in the eyes of the Canadian government. Until something changes, Indigenous women cannot expect to feel safe, protected, or valued.

Another barrier to justice for Indigenous women comes from the lack of prosecution. In the case of Ramona Wilson, her family believed that the RCMP did not take her disappearance seriously (*Finding Dawn*). In Erdrich's novel *The Round House*, Joe Coutts and his father felt that the law enforcement agencies were uninterested in pursuing Geraldine's rape and attempted murder due to questions of jurisdiction. Koukkanen offers insight into the situation in Canada, though it extends beyond the Canadian-United States border and affects Indigenous women in both countries, claiming that "considering the failure of state agencies to offer protection to indigenous women or even investigate violence against them, reluctance to report to police or deep distrust in the state system as a solution among indigenous women is not surprising" (223). The first step toward finding justice comes from acknowledging the violence as a part of a settler colonial system that would deny Indigenous women the right to exist at all. In order for Indigenous communities to heal from this systemic violence, they must be able to seek justice against the criminals who inflict violence upon Indigenous women; in order for justice to be served, the settler colonial society and government must accept that the violence against Indigenous people represents the colonial system and perpetuates colonial attitudes. Artists like Erdrich and documentarians like Welsh use their media to work to change the perception of Indigenous women as victims and to create a conversation within society as a whole that would allow these women to be seen as a priority. Until such a change of perception occurs, Indigenous women will continue to fight for safety, protection, and justice. Despite the outward appearance that the Canadian government is working to solve the problem of Indigenous women

going missing and being murdered, Indigenous people in Canada remain skeptical that any real change is happening. Many Indigenous women and their families believe that the inquiry is little more than a front to avoid deeper questions about the handling of cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women (*Finding Dawn*).

### Media Portrayals and Public Responses

The portrayals of Native victims of violence in the media range from sympathetic to accusatory, with some victims painted as deserving of their suffering. The attitudes reflected by such media portrayals continue to contribute to the system that has allowed Indigenous people to be mistreated and abused for centuries. Augie Fieras addresses the “conventional media stereotypes of Aboriginal women as passive or victims” in a film review of *Finding Dawn* (48). These stereotypes challenge outsiders to view Indigenous women as anything other than a victim waiting to be victimized; rather than being perceived as vibrant, empowered, and active community members, Indigenous women are perceived, through media portrayals that use old-fashioned and outdated images such as “squaws” and sexually available “victims” (*Finding Dawn*). The old-fashioned idea that an Indigenous woman is simply the parallel of the “savage” stereotype of Indigenous men makes it easy to justify violence against Indigenous women. As “squaws,” their perceived purpose is to be “lustful” and the object of sexual desire rather than individuals with the right to demand consent for the sexual acts committed with – or against – them (*Finding Dawn*). This perception, and “such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence... I believe that there is a direct relationship between these horrible racist/sexual stereotypes and violence against Native women and girls” (Archuleta 105). Racist and sexual stereotypes that

diminish the humanity of Native women to a simple caricature lead to continued violence against them.

Conversely, many supporters of social change to the violence against Indigenous women are turning to social media in an effort to draw attention to the plight of Indigenous women in Canada, using the hashtag MMIW to link stories, images, and events together on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This social media movement makes use of media in a different way from the typical newspaper coverage of abductions, disappearances, and murders of Indigenous women. Through social media, Indigenous women and their supporters are speaking out against the continued violence against them and reclaiming their own voices in their lives. The #MMIW movement creates an ongoing conversation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike in an effort to bring awareness and change to the continued crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women. On Twitter, a search of the hashtag MMIW returns hundreds of recent results targeting the Canadian government, the 2015 Canadian election, and the continued lack of justice for the over 1200 missing and murdered Indigenous women reported in Canada (Twitter 10 Oct 2015). The ongoing conversation creates a space for supporters of the #MMIW movement to exchange ideas and information with one another in a way that reaches a wider audience than other public protests and memorials, such as the Valentine's Day marches and individual memorial marches for Canada's missing and murdered women (*Finding Dawn*).

Much like the Black Lives Matter movement, a Native Lives Matter movement spread through social media geared at drawing attention to the continued mistreatment of Indigenous peoples. However, the Canadian government continues to ignore the importance of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement; Twitter user l e i n a (@leina\_\_) shared a photograph of a political tract reading "If you're having Native problems I feel bad for you son.

I've got 99 problems but missing aboriginal women ain't one. ...Vote for the Conservative Party of Canada" along with her assertion that she was "unimpressed." This Tweet highlights an ongoing lack of attention and willful ignorance that the Canadian government offers to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Native Lives Matter movements. This willful ignorance and denial of the situation faced by Indigenous peoples further illustrates the widespread and systemic mistreatment – from the government that purports to protect all Canadian citizens – of a population considered "other" from the dominant, settler colonial population. These types of social responses demand change and reflect in the real world the work of artists' representations. Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill use their artistic representations of violence against Native women and queer Native people to engage the real world violence that Native peoples face. These artists portray violence in an effort to spark change that must come from public response.

#### Protests, Marches, and Memorials

Public response is not limited to social media, however, and social movements often extend beyond social media into public movements. All of these responses are fueled by a common goal – to change the situation of violence against Native women and queer peoples. In Toronto in 2014, a memorial march managed to shut down Lakeshore Drive - "one of Toronto's main transportation arteries" - as marchers moved from a stationary demonstration through the city (Nahwegahbow 8). The march, while infuriating the very authorities it meant to protest, also brought attention to the continued lack of justice for Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women. The participants met to remember and celebrate the missing and murdered women while protesting against the RCMP's lack of effort to bring the perpetrators to justice. One of the protestors, John Fox, stated "sometimes you have to take drastic action," offering an explanation

for the impromptu march (qtd. in Nahwegahbow 8). Another supporter of an inquiry into the Canadian government's handling of the situation of missing and murdered Indigenous women, Bridget Tolley, argues, "in Vancouver, they've marched for 23 years. How many more generations do we have to march? [...] It's really hard for us to keep fighting against a government that refuses to help" (qtd. in Narine). Canada's Indigenous population has participated in memorials for missing and murdered Indigenous women for more than two decades, yet the situation has not changed. However, the memorials draw attention and become larger each year, suggesting that more people are becoming aware of the ongoing situation faced by Indigenous people in Canada. The memorials continue their work to engage the larger communities even as the list of missing and murdered continues to grow, and Indigenous people continue to feel that they are being ignored by the government; many individuals and families wonder how much longer the violence against Indigenous women will be allowed to continue. Tolley refers to the inquiry, which gives more power to the RCMP rather than to the Indigenous communities that truly need the protection. Instead of serving justice, the current Canadian inquiry instead reinforces the inequitable power structures that keep Indigenous women in a marginalized position.

In Canada, the Valentine's Day Memorial March brings together the families of many of Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women for a time of remembrance and celebration of the lives lost and removed from their families. Men, women, and children carry posters, flowers, pictures, and quilts to represent the wives, mothers, sisters, and friends who have gone missing or been murdered (*Finding Dawn*). This memorial march has been going on for more than two decades, and each year the event grows in unfortunate proportion to the list of missing and murdered Indigenous women grows. The march attempts to at once celebrate the

individuality of the missing and murdered women while also acknowledging their common Indigenous identity that likely led them to be preyed upon.

Similar public events exist to both memorialize and celebrate 2GLTQ people. In California, the Bay Area American Indian Two Spirit powwow celebrated its fifth annual public powwow in February of 2016. This event is designed both for the purpose of celebration of Two Spirit people and the “reintegration of Two Spirit people into broader Native community” (BAAITS). This event is a time for queer Native people to come together to celebrate their identities that are so often targeted for violence and to educate the public about the situation faced by 2GLTQ Indigenous people in the United States. Like the marches and protests in Canada, this powwow exists as a means of representing a marginalized population in a way that celebrates their vibrant identities and their inherent right to life.

#### Justice for the Women

One resounding purpose of the literature, film, social media, and political inquiry is to bring justice to the Indigenous victims of violence. Amnesty International defines justice while stating

all victims of violent crime have the right to justice. Under international human rights laws and standards, justice is not limited to the prosecution and punishment of the person who carried out the crime. Justice also includes a public acknowledgement of the crime, the opportunity and the ability for the victims of violence and their survivors to heal and to rebuild their lives, and assurance that the crime will not be repeated. (118)

This definition of justice allows for the victims and their survivors to heal from the crimes against them knowing that their attackers will face punishment and their suffering will be acknowledged. As of yet, justice has not been performed for the missing and murdered Indigenous women of Canada because not only have their attackers not been punished, but the Canadian government refuses to acknowledge the scope of the crimes and to assure Canada’s

Indigenous women that the crimes will not be repeated. Over the course of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement and political inquiry, violent crimes against Indigenous women have not stopped. There has been no justice, or even a promise of justice, for these women, and until there are changes – be they from the public and political inquiry, public acknowledgement of the crisis or punishment of the perpetrators – there will be no justice or healing for the Indigenous women of Canada and the United States. Likewise, there has been no true justice for queer Indigenous people in part because their divergent identities relegate them to a space that much of dominant society would refuse to acknowledge at all, let alone to acknowledge the targeted violence against them.

Justice will come for the Native women who are victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, abduction, and murder when their allies stand up against the continued mistreatment from the government, descendants of European settlers, and other non-Indigenous individuals. Jodi Beniuk clearly defines this requirement and its power to change the situation due to “the Othering of Indigenous women in the DTES [Downtown Eastside which] requires both those who are non-Indigenous and those who are not women to work as allies in the struggle against colonialism” (82). Indigenous women, alone, cannot bring about the change that they so desperately need and deserve – it is only with a collective movement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and men against the continued Othering of this population that justice may be served.

#### Justice for Queer Indigenous People

While Erdrich and Welsh have seen massive public responses to their representations of violence against Native women, Driskill’s representations of violence against queer Indigenous people has not received the same public outcry. As stated before, this hierarchy of victims’

perceived worthiness speaks to a larger social system that continues to place heteronormativity and gender binary gender expressions as the only socially acceptable identities. Within the Eurocentric heteropatriarchy's domination of societies, Indigenous peoples in general are often targets of violence. In this construct, female victims of this violence are perceived as more deserving of justice than their queer counterparts. As such, we see a higher number of public protests and social activists pushing for justice for Indigenous female victims of sexual violence than for queer victims (*Finding Dawn*). While the works of Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill share a common goal of bringing public attention and social change to the violence against Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people, Driskill's work has seen less response so far. The social constructs that continue to position queer Indigenous people as somehow inferior and undeserving of justice are the very constructs that Driskill writes against. Through his poetry, he offers insight into the treatment of queer people and seeks to bring public response – like the protests and marches that memorialize and demand change for Indigenous women – to the situation of 2GLTQ people.

## CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD

From poetry to prose, and from literature to documentary to social movements, there can be no question that violence against Native American and Indigenous women and queer people has a far-reaching effect on Native people as a whole. Louise Erdrich writes her prose to draw attention to the jurisdictional issues that prevent justice and healing for Native American women who are victims of gender charged violence. Erdrich herself calls *The Round House* “a suspense novel masking a crusade,” which shows her true intent in writing the novel (Luscombe n.p.). Erdrich’s crusade draws attention to the issues that prevent sexual assault crimes committed against Native American women from being prosecuted. She personalizes the stories through her rich characters and uses her status as a respected author to spread awareness of the ongoing situation that allows this mistreatment of Native women to continue. Like Driskill and Welsh, Erdrich “dares to ask questions with open answers; to start stories that don’t have tidy endings” (Hooley n.p.). Certainly, *The Round House* does not have a tidy ending, yet the questions that the novel asks – questions of jurisdiction, justice, family, and healing after trauma – are open to conversation. Indeed, Erdrich claims that her goal was to begin a conversation that would lead to change (Luscombe n.p.). This conversation spans Native and non-Native communities in order to bring the social change necessary to change the perception of Native women as potential victims of sexual violence.

Christine Welsh creates her documentary to represent the real and personal stories of just a few of the Indigenous women who have gone missing and been murdered in Canada as victims of racial and gender charged violence. *Finding Dawn* asks questions along the lines of those asked in *The Round House* and Driskill’s poetry about what it means to be Indigenous and what the value of an Indigenous life is within a settler colonial society. Through her on-screen

portrayals of a few of these missing and murdered women, Welsh opens a conversation within Canadian society about the violence that plagues Canada's Indigenous population, and her humanizing representations provide a more meaningful look at the lives of Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women than typical newspaper or media responses offer. The personal aspects of these victims make the situation more "real" to Welsh's viewers and brings them into a conversation to spark change.

Qwo-Li Driskill writes hir poetry to memorialize and heal Two-Spirit victims of sexuality charged violence. Driskill writes hir memorial poems in an effort to begin a healing process that has been necessary since colonization because, as ze states, the "lines between historical memory and contemporary lives spiral into one another" as colonial attitudes continue to influence the treatment of Native people today ("Stolen" 60). Driskill shows that colonial violence against Two-Spirits is not a matter relegated to history, as the situation continues today with the violent attacks and murders of Two-Spirit people due to their sexual and gender identities. Through poetry, ze offers solace for the larger Native population as well as the private victims and their families of such targeted violence. Driskill shows that only through awareness and a demand for change – which starts with readers accepting the humanity and rights of these victims – can the situation faced by Two-Spirit people change.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and other social movements bring together Native and non-Native people in an effort to draw attention to the deplorable situation in the Americas, and particularly in Canada. As Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together to spread awareness and demand social change for missing and murdered Indigenous women – and the continued violence against Indigenous people in general – Indigenous communities are able to begin the process of healing from systemic settler colonial violence.

However, there remains a distinct lack of balance between the responses to violence against Native women and violence against queer Indigenous peoples. The continued lack of justice for 2GLTQ people remains problematic even as social responses are beginning to demand justice for queer Indigenous people as well as Native women. This hierarchy of victims' perceived worthiness of justice continues to complicate an already complex problem within varied Indigenous communities.

One way to begin to move away from this hierarchical mindset regarding victims' worthiness of justice, memorial, and healing is to engage with bell hooks's ideas of feminism and its purpose "to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression," all three of which are not limited only to Indigenous women, as we see queer Indigenous people are also victimized by sexism, exploitation, and oppression (viii). Further, such a definition of feminism includes males and females in an effort to end the sexism that nearly everyone experiences or exhibits at one time or other. hooks goes on to add to her definition of and goal for feminism as being "to end patriarchy (another way of naming the institutionalized sexism) we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action" (vix). As Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill provide representations of violence against Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people in an effort to go against the Eurocentric heteropatriarchy that dominates the Americas, hooks states that, in order to move away from a society that privileges men as being more valuable than women, we must move away from a patriarchal system that positions women and queer people below men. I would add that, until we let go of racist *and* sexist thoughts and actions, there can be no true justice for Indigenous women and queer Indigenous people; so long

as the system perpetuates the settler colonial violence against Indigenous identities, there can be no true justice and no communal healing for these victims, their families, and communities.

Taken individually, the work of Erdrich, Welsh, and Driskill as well as public participants' actions, highlight an individual subpopulation that has been made a target of violence. As a unified whole, these works suggest a larger social problem that must be stopped. The commitment of the participants in this conversation – people like Driskill, Erdrich, Welsh, and countless real-world activists – sparks interest in the situation from people who are not directly involved with the situation because they refuse to be ignored. The Valentine's Day March through Vancouver draws the city's attention to the women who have gone missing and been murdered, and the efforts of the families and friends of those women encourages others to get involved (Carlton and Green 2; Aiello 34; *Finding Dawn*). In the 2015 Canadian election, social media posts focus on candidates' stances on the MMIW movement, calling into question candidates' dedication to ending this ongoing situation.

### The Ongoing Conversation

The work of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's movement goes beyond seeking justice for the Indigenous women of Canada, just as the work of Driskill's poetry goes beyond memorializing 2GLTQ victims of violence, and just as the work of Erdrich's novel *The Round House* goes beyond highlighting the plight of Native American women who are victims of sexual assault. Each of these works, movements, and situations sparks a conversation between the victims, their communities, and the larger settler society as a whole.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's movement comes from a place of shared communal pain and desire for justice – Canada's Indigenous population as a united coalition suffers each time another Indigenous woman goes missing or is murdered because, as a

coalition, the Indigenous people of Canada believe that these women are attacked for their Indigenous identities and, as such, feel that their very identities are being attacked. Erdrich's novel touches a similar vein for Native American women in the United States – each time a Native woman is raped or murdered, the larger community of Native American people view the attack as an attempt by the settler society to erase Native identities. Queer Indigenous people are part of two very diverse coalitions and communities – the queer community which transcends racial boundaries in favor of recognizing similar queer identities, and the Indigenous community – and as such experience the communal pain of both coalitions when a member is murdered or attacked. This communal pain is the very reason why artists create their representations of violence against Native women and queer people – in an effort to share in the communal healing and to demand justice for the victims of this violence.

Louise Erdrich wrote *The Round House* due to her distaste in the treatment of Native American women who have been victims of sexual assault and violence. As a political statement, the novel works to begin a conversation with Erdrich's audience about the plight of Native American women and the difficulties they face finding justice after their assault. As a work of literature, the novel presents the story of a loving family torn apart by violence; this fictional family personalizes the situation faced by countless Native American women who are victims of sexual assault and rape. As a call to action, "*The Round House* essentially makes a witness of the reader, inviting a consideration of the legal complications, social history, and far-reaching effects of violence that have made justice on the reservation a rare and dearly purchased commodity" (Tharp 25). Native American victims of sexual assault are left without justice – in any part of Amnesty International's definition – due to the complicated nature of prosecution of crimes and the victims' own hesitation to report their assaults. Erdrich's novel serves its purpose

of creating a space for conversation about the mistreatment of Native American women as she continues to be a guest on radio and television spots speaking out against the jurisdictional issues that lead to justice being overlooked.

Just as Erdrich seeks to create a conversation, so does Driskill in his poems about the victims of violent attacks and murders due to their Indigenous and queer identities. Driskill creates a poetic space from which to begin a conversation about the humanity of the victims and their right to justice. The poems speak to the humanity of the victims – their capacity to love, to hurt, to live – and choose to highlight this humanity rather than to focus on their murderers. Like the criminals who attack Native American and Indigenous Canadian women, the criminals who murdered Billy Jack Gaither, F.C. Martinez, and Steen Keith Fenrich acted out of a desire to erase their identity from the face of the earth. As Native and queer people, these individuals were attacked because they did not fit into the “normal” picture of what a person should be, like the Indigenous women in Canada who work outside of the “normal” lifestyle. As “abnormal” examples of Native and Indigenous lifestyles, the victims are perceived by their attackers as somehow less than human. Driskill memorializes the humanity of the victims in an effort to begin a conversation about the inherent humanity of all queer and Native American people. This conversation must continue in order to achieve justice for the queer Indigenous victims.

The conversation has been going on for decades in Canada, and is picking up steam through the inclusion of social media as a means of transmitting the outrage against the continued victimization of Indigenous women. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement is more than a political statement, it is an affirmation of the humanity of the victims and their inherent right to life and justice. The women and their families continue to demand that

the Canadian government engage with them in a conversation that will lead, eventually, to justice and healing for the victims and their families.

The ongoing social media conversation calls for attention from Canadian government, especially with an election cycle upon them. The hashtag #DenounceHarper calls for Canadian voters to oppose Stephen Harper, a 2015 candidate for Prime Minister in Canada, because, according to Twitter user PatOndabak (@PatOndabak), “he said murdered & missing women weren’t on his radar, then denied saying it”. The Twitter user PatOndabak is but one example of an outraged social media user weighing into a conversation about the importance of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement and the situation in Canada. This ongoing interaction between social media users across the globe creates global awareness and allows a space for users to interact with one another and share information, outrage, and attempts to heal. The conversation calls for change, though change may be slow coming until the Canadian government acknowledges the severity of the situation. However, as Christine Welsh claims in *Finding Dawn*, there remains a “huge project of attitudinal shift” that calls for us “to turn our whole worldview completely upside down” in order to fully appreciate and begin to solve the problem facing Canada’s Indigenous women (*Finding Dawn*).

### Moving Forward

In order for lasting social change and enduring justice for Native women and queer Indigenous people to be possible, Native and non-Native communities must come together to demand an end to the hunting of Native people. It is only with a larger social awareness that the hunting of Two-Spirits and Native women will end. Driskill, Erdrich, Welsh, and all of the participants in Canada demand national attention from Native and non-Native peoples alike. By bringing attention to the situation through artistic representations, and telling the personal stories

of a few of the victims, these artists begin a conversation about the effects of violence against Native bodies. Personalizing the stories and emphasizing the humanity of victims gives them back their personalities and makes them seem more “real” for an outside audience.

The social media movements guided by the hashtags Native Lives Matter and MMIW are making strides with bringing the plight of Native peoples to the attention of an international community. Like the hashtag Black Lives Matter in the United States, Native Lives Matter and MMIW bring together separate individuals who share a vision of change for Native people. The movements also offer points of entry into the discussion for non-Native allies who seek change for the larger population as a whole. Through careful reading of Driskill’s poetry, Erdrich’s prose, Welsh’s documentary, social media posts, and public protests, audiences are given a point of entry into the difficult conversations that must occur in order to bring about change.

Both Native and non-Native populations must be educated about the situation at hand in order for the situation to change. In order to any real change to occur, all participants in the ongoing memorials, protests, and social movements must engage with “difficult knowledge” that “extends beyond simply learning the ‘terrible fact’ of historical or present violence to the ‘problem of *what to do* with such knowledge when it triggers our fears, confusion, aggression and/or hopelessness, bringing us up against the limits of what we may be willing or capable of understanding” (Stone and Dean 148). The “difficult knowledge” that Native Two-Spirits and women are hunted for their identities leaves many Native and non-Native people alike feeling hopeless that the problem can be overcome. Instead, we must decide what to do in response to the artistic representations in order to *end* the problem by changing the situations and mentalities that allow such violence to occur without punishment. We see people engaging with this difficult knowledge through their responses to Welsh’s documentary, Erdrich’s novel, and

Driskill's poetry, but even more we see this conversation extending into the real world through politically motivated protests, memorial marches, and social media trends. As participants continue to engage with this difficult knowledge, and the artistic representations of the violence against Native women and queer people, the conversation will continue until the Native and non-Native participants alike demand social change to put an end to the systemic violence. Moving forward, the difficult conversations must continue; we must remain uncomfortable with the situation in order to demand that it change.

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