

**Indigenous Women as the Other:  
An Analysis of the Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry**

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I discuss the ways in which Indigenous women are Othered by the proceedings of the Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry (MWCI). First, I give a basic overview of Beauvoir's theory of women as Others, followed by Memmi's analysis of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. I use these two theories to describe the way Indigenous women are Othered both as Indigenous peoples and as women, focusing on the context of the twenty-six who were murdered in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). The original murders were the result of the cultural reduction of Indigenous Women to their bodies. The negligent police investigations, as well as the misogynistic attitudes of the police, also demonstrate how Othering can operate within these institutions. I claim that the violence against women in the DTES was due to their status as Other. Notably, the MWCI, which is supposed to be a process that addresses the Othering-based negligence of the police, also includes instances of Othering in its structure and practice. From this, I conclude that we cannot rely on Othering institutions or legal processes to correct Othering as a practice. In the context of the MWCI, I suggest building alliances that support those who face this Othering as violence in their everyday lives.

*Key terms:* Othering; Indigenous Women; Downtown Eastside Vancouver

**Introduction**

Many scholars have discussed the emergence in the West of the self/other binary, with the ideal self as European, white, male, and upper class. Meaning and worth are primarily located in bodies that hold these specific characteristics. Within this binary, meaning and worth were not granted, for instance, to Indigenous women. Indeed, as Andrea Smith has written in *Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples*, the foundation of colonial societies is predicated

on the subjugation of Indigenous women's bodies: "Native women are also threatening because of their ability to reproduce the next generation of peoples who can resist colonization" (Smith, 2003, p. 78). A contemporary example of this gendered colonial violence is the murdered and missing women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) (amongst hundreds of other missing Indigenous women across Canada). This atrocity is compounded not only by police negligence—an almost non-existent investigation into their disappearances—but also the provincial government's exclusionary Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) that now appears to be little more than a public spectacle used by state institutions to regain legitimacy.

The MWCI began in October 2011. The Inquiry was established in 2010 as a response to public demand for scrutiny of the negligent investigation of the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in the disappearances and murders of twenty-six women in the Robert Pickton case. As the hearings unfold, it has become increasingly apparent that the same dismissive attitudes displayed by the VPD and the RCMP in the original investigation are still very much alive in the inquiry process. These attitudes have arisen in the context of a violent colonial Canadian state that led to the production of Indigenous bodies as disposable. In this article I discuss Simone de Beauvoir's theory of Woman as the Other, and connect its insights to the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized described by Albert Memmi. Through the lens of these two theories, I explain how Indigenous women in the DTES are Othered in the MWCI and Pickton Case. To conclude, I explore the idea of Indigenous and non-Indigenous alliances specifically in the context of the MWCI.

### **Indigenous Women as the Other: de Beauvoir, Memmi, Allies**

In this paper, I use theories developed by Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Memmi to shed light on the gendered colonial violence that constitutes the lives of many Indigenous women. It may be asked why these two authors are utilized, given the limitations of their analyses (such as Beauvoir's middle class and Eurocentric framework and Memmi's androcentricity). Although these two theorists could be at odds with one another due to their limitations, in this article they complement each other's work. Beauvoir provides a basic gender analysis that is relevant to the MCWI, while Memmi situates the MCWI in the ongoing process of colonialism.

The intent is to present the importance of feminist analyses to colonial struggles and vice versa.

It should also be noted that this article affirms the necessity of non-hegemonic methodology and does not attempt to produce a “universally valuable narrative” (Day, 2004, p. 720). Instead, I think it will be fruitful to cast Beauvoir and Memmi as allies, particularly because of the limitations of their analyses. As I address near the end of this paper, the Othering of Indigenous women in the DTES requires both those who are non-Indigenous and those who are not women to work as allies in the struggle against colonialism. Joining in the struggle in the DTES beyond the supposedly clear lines of identity politics is something that I believe is important, as a self-identified female and Métis person. In this respect, I use Beauvoir’s idea of Woman as the Other with Memmi’s examination of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as a means of situating myself within this struggle. I, like Memmi, have grown up between the binary of the colonizer and the colonized. My knowledge of the MWCI and continuous disappearances of Indigenous women from the DTES comes from my knowledge of feminism and as such, it was also important for me to use Beauvoir. Being raised by a single mother, who is also Métis, feminism has been a source of strength in understanding how women are Othered. This process is clearly explained by Beauvoir’s analysis.

The *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir analyzes what it means to be a woman and develops the idea of Woman as the Other. Beauvoir states that “man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas Woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria” (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 115). To explain this further, Beauvoir states that dominant institutional discourses produced about Woman focus on what they are not (using what Man is) as a basis for evaluation. The discourses Beauvoir describes are centered on the historical context of Woman being reduced to the body. In this light Beauvoir discusses Aristotle, a founding figure in Western thought, who claimed “we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness” (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 115). She also references St. Thomas Aquinas who describes Woman as an “imperfect man” (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 115). Beauvoir argues that the concept of humanity in these discourses are 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. Beauvoir argues that this is the prominent way that dominant discourses construct women<sup>1</sup>.

Just as women are Othered on the basis of gender, Othering happens on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, including “Jews” and “Negros” (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 117).<sup>2</sup> “Jews” became Others through the Nazi-Germany Holocaust and “Negros” became Others through American slavery. The proletariat became Others in their relationship with the bourgeoisie. Beauvoir states that women do not have a distinct historical or social context in which they became the Other (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 117). Women are not seen as a minority because they are not part of a minority population whose Othering can be clearly traced to a historical period. This results in the naturalization of Woman as object. Because the historical Othering of women is not readily visible, women do not have an event (such as the Holocaust or Slavery) to organize around, just their daily lives. In this sense, it is harder for women to organize as women around these experiences because without this event, it is difficult to embrace the sense of unity that drove the change characterized by the other historical Others.

Beauvoir’s analysis of woman as the Other can be connected to Albert Memmi’s analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Working as allies, their analyses can illuminate how Indigenous women are Othered, both as women and as Indigenous people. Memmi best describes the privilege of the colonizer in his essay *Does the Colonial Exist*:

Every act of his daily life places him in a relationship with the colonized, and with each act his fundamental advantage is demonstrated. If he is in trouble with the law, the police and even

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<sup>1</sup> Beauvoir focuses on the classical founding texts of Western thought but these productions are still present. As Green states “[e]ducation, religion, the workplace, the family, state structures - all, with many others, play their part in the process of socialization and societal control, however it is explained” (Green). Much feminist discourse analysis is still conducted in these fields today.

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned before, Beauvoir is limited in her analysis. The second wave feminist movement has been critiqued by anti-colonial feminists such as hooks (2000).

justice will be more lenient toward him. If he needs assistance from the government, it will not be difficult; red tape will be cut; a window will be reserved for him where there is a shorter line so he will have a shorter wait ... Jobs and positions will be reserved for him in advance; the tests will be given in his language, causing disqualifying difficulties for the colonized (Memmi, 1965, p. 11-12).

This relationship between the colonizer and the colonized was produced through a long history of genocide and land theft which is described in detail by Churchill (1997). For Beauvoir, Woman is the Other making Man the only referent; Woman is reduced to her body and therefore dehumanized. For Memmi, the colonizer is the only referent and the colonized are defined by how they do not 'measure up' to the standards of the colonizer. The colonized are dehumanized when they are described as lazy, dependent and even a burden. It is the colonizer's role to 'help' the colonized; the colonized are taught to believe that they need the colonizer. Memmi also describes the 'depersonalization' of the colonized by stating that they are seen as a group, not as individuals. He states the "colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity" (1965, p. 85). Indigenous peoples are described as a collective group that, because of their own laziness and lack of motivation, are willing to subscribe to their role as the colonized. This places any Indigenous suffering solely on their own shoulders and ignores an entire history of land theft and genocide perpetrated by the Canadian state. Beauvoir echoes this idea in her argument that women are reduced to their reproductive functions centered on male pleasure, which erases male responsibility in female suffering. It is in this relationship that the colonized (including Indigenous women) can be seen as the Other.

In critical conversation, Memmi and Beauvoir can complement each other well. Focusing on what I take to be their common target, the ideal Self of the West (male, European, wealthy), they could arrive at interesting conclusions. When Beauvoir claims that humanity is male centered, Memmi might suggest that this statement belongs to a universalizing colonial language that betrays an ignorance of matriarchal Indigenous societies. When Memmi speaks about the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, highlighting the destructive homogenization of entire ways of being, Beauvoir might remind him that previous

gender relations may be increasingly supplanted by the violence of colonial patriarchy. As such, the gender of the colonized should not be absent, but a crucial site of analysis and struggle. Against the colonizing male Western Self, Indigenous women could be understood as both Beauvoir's historical Others and daily life Others. The historical context in which Indigenous women are able to organize, that has the potential for political mobilization, is colonization and the colonial relationships described by Memmi, which has brought with it gendered violence that affects their daily lives.

I do not intend to essentialize Indigenous women or Indigenous peoples' experience of colonization as a whole. It is important to acknowledge that experience differs greatly and that I am not arguing for a homogenized Other category into which all marginalized peoples can be forced. In analyzing the theoretical engagement of Beauvoir and Memmi, broad similarities between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women are revealed. Male power in a settler society generates gendered violence in the daily lives of women.

### **The Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry**

On December 9th 2007 Robert Pickton was convicted of second-degree murder for the deaths of six women. Charges were stayed on an additional twenty outstanding murders because Pickton had already received the maximum sentence possible under the Canadian legal system (LePard, 2010). The extra twenty outstanding murder charges were said to be a heavy burden for the jurors as the trial was estimated to last two years. It had to first be proven that the women who made up the outstanding murder charges were missing and then that they were killed by Pickton. The Crown said there was insufficient evidence to further the charges and that they would have to call on over five-hundred witnesses just to prove the twenty women were indeed missing (Matas, 2010). Pickton was convicted of murdering six women and is not eligible for parole for twenty-five years.

Doug LePard of the VPD released the Missing Women Investigation Review outlining the negligence of the investigation by the VPD and RCMP. Though I do not go into legal details, I will describe some of LePard's key findings to explain both why the MWCI was established and outline the controversy surrounding the Pickton case. One of the most important findings of the review was that the VPD should have recognized there was a serial killer at work (2010).

This was due to a failure at the management level of the VPD. When the VPD did respond with an investigation, it was unsuccessful due to insufficient resources, continuity of staff and multi-jurisdictional challenges. The MWCI will be address the multi-jurisdictional issues specifically and making recommendations on how to successfully navigate multi-jurisdictional investigations in the future. According to the investigation review, “there was compelling information received and developed by the VPD and the RCMP from August 1998 to late 1999 suggesting that Pickton was the likely killer” (2010, p. 18). The DNA of the missing women was found at the Pickton property, but because it was located in Coquitlam in RCMP jurisdiction, it was difficult for the police from both departments to navigate an investigation between two different jurisdictions. The report states that the RCMP had pursued with intensity, the investigation surrounding Pickton until mid-1999 (2010). At this point, the RCMP was said to “abandon” the investigation while still holding the authority over it (2010, p. 9). Meanwhile, women continued to go missing. On February 4th, 2002, the RCMP obtained a search warrant for Pickton’s property because an informant had notified them that Pickton was in possession of an illegal firearm. At the time the search warrant was issued, the RCMP and the VPD was not targeting Pickton as a serial killer. However, during their investigation, the police found a piece of identification and an inhaler that belonged to two of the missing women. This did not lead to an official investigation of the Pickton property in the deaths of the missing women because a separate search warrant had to be obtained. The search warrant was obtained the next day and turned into the “largest serial killer investigation in Canadian history” (2010, p. 33). This resulted in the charges laid against Pickton described above.

The Missing Women’s Commission of Inquiry was established in 2010 as a result of the public outcry to investigate the negligence of the Vancouver Police Department and Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the Pickton case. There are four terms of reference that are the focus of the MWCI. These include 1) an analysis of the findings and facts obtained by the police between January 23rd 1997 and February 5th 2002 pertaining to missing women of the DTES; 2) an analysis of the decision of the Criminal Justice Branch on January 27th 1998 in which charges were stayed against Pickton that included attempted murder and assault of a weapon; 3) a recommendation on the conduct and initiation of investigating missing women and multiple homicide investigations in British Columbia; and

finally, 4) recommendations on changes to homicide investigations in which more than one investigation party is involved (Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, 2010). Notably, there is nothing in the Inquiry that even attempts to address the often-violent lived experiences of Indigenous women who comprise a significant percent of the population of the DTES.

The Inquiry has been called a ‘substitute’ for a full trial of the twenty outstanding charges that are still laid against Pickton (Walia, 2011b). It has been met with a great deal of criticism because of the lack of responsibility displayed by the government and the VPD. For instance, Wally Oppal, the Commissioner of the Inquiry, (paid \$1500 per day) displayed his indifference when stating that he did not think an inquiry was even necessary (Walia, 2011b). There are also at least fourteen publicly funded lawyers for the police, and only two lawyers hired by the Commission to represent the DTES, meaning the police are well represented and thus well protected in the Inquiry (Walia, 2011b). Moreover, the same dismissive attitudes and systemic normalized mistreatment of Indigenous women that the Inquiry should address, investigate and challenge are apparent in the Inquiry itself (Walia, 2011b). Notably the government refused funding to numerous groups that represented Indigenous women and community organizations in the DTES. Few of these organizations can afford legal fees by themselves, meaning that the Inquiry has failed to give the voices of Indigenous women from the DTES equal standing, when this is the very group who has the most at stake.

Beauvoir’s idea of woman as the Other is echoed in the MWCI where the women are reduced to objects of male pleasure cast simply as sex workers or ‘prostitutes’. Rae-Lynn Dicks, a former 911 operator, testified describing “an atmosphere of rampant bias that considered the women to be ‘just hookers’” (Canadian Press, 2012, para. 3).<sup>3</sup> This translates into a sense of disposability: “It is more comfortable to dehumanize and judge the women living in the DTES, to rob them of their dignity, to tell ourselves that the violence of poverty and abuse is their fault because “they are all hookers and lazy addicts”” (Walia, 2011b, para. 18). Walia’s statement also demonstrates the idea of the women seen as a group, not as individuals, which can be related to Memmi’s argument of the colonized seen as a

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<sup>3</sup> There has been much discussion on the usage of the terms ‘prostitute’ and ‘sex worker’. For a good discussion on this topic see Kempadoo, Sagnhere and Pattanik’s book *Trafficking And Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives On Migration, Sex Work, And Human Rights*.

group. He states “the colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity” (1965, p. 85). With this idea, Memmi argues that the colonized subject lives as a stereotype about all colonized people. Indigenous women similarly drown in the stereotype of “hookers and lazy addicts”. Dick also states that she was told that the missing women in the DTES were “scum of the Earth” (Canadian Press, 2012, para. 7). As objects, the police and justice system is not “more lenient” towards the women of the DTES (lenience being a privilege of the colonizer as described by Memmi), but the opposite. They are ignored. The blatant lack of inclusion of women from the DTES in the Inquiry process is a dismissal. This mimics the same institutionalized dismissal of Indigenous women and sex workers that was displayed by the police in the original negligent Pickton investigation. An Inquiry into missing and murdered women that silences their voices cannot hope to be effective.

Institutionalized Othering is also displayed in the imbalance of public funded litigations allocations. While the police agencies are represented by fourteen publically-funded lawyers, only two lawyers are available to represent the DTES. It is a clear demonstration of priorities. The Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre (DEWC) and the Memorial March Committee (WMMC) released a statement in which Harsha Waila of the DTES Women’s Centre states:

It is disgusting that the Vancouver Police Department and the Government of Canada- who are the ones on trial here- will have an army of publically-funded lawyers to defend themselves. Women in the DTES have their own voices and critical information to share, but this Sham Inquiry has shut those voices out and maintained the status-quo of inequality. (Kelly, Kendall, Walia & Martin, 2011a, para. 7)

The media release announced the DEWC and the WMMC withdrawal from participating in the MWCI because of the inadequate funding for lawyers. The DEWC was established in 1978 to empower and support the women and children of the DTES (Kelly, Kendall, Walia & Martin, 2011a). The WMMC began in 1992 when a woman’s body was found on Powell street (Kelly, Kendall, Walia & Martin, 2011a). Both groups have been active in organizing around the injustices for women in the DTES for over twenty years; the annual Missing Women’s Memorial March is an example of their crucial work. The lack of funding of lawyers for these groups demonstrates the power dynamic between the colonial

police and government stifling of the people who called the DTES home. The over-representation of the police can be seen as a means of intimidation and control as well as a way in which the police can be ‘let-off the hook’ for their lack of responsibility in handling the investigation into the missing and murdered women (Walia, 2011a).

One of the most shocking pieces of evidence that has surfaced during the hearings of the Inquiry was that the police had enough evidence to obtain a search warrant for the Pickton farm in 1999. Between 1999 and 2002, Pickton murdered fourteen more women while the police remained inactive (Fourinier, 2001). Memmi’s analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the Other is visible here. The fact that the police had enough evidence to search the Pickton farm and did not do so is a clear display of the colonial relationship that Memmi describes. The colonized Others are unworthy of an investigation. If it had been 26 women that had gone missing from a middle class area of Vancouver, it is likely that the police response would have been far quicker and better supported than it was in the case in the DTES. The VPD officer’s privilege is the result of the Other’s lack of privilege. To the police department, women who live in the DTES do not live stable, respectable lives. The women in the DTES are also said to be hard to keep track of because they are often moving between locations. Rae-Lynn Dicks, the former 911 operator in the DTES said “if callers had no fixed address for the person they were reporting missing, the file could get blown off” (Canadian Press, 2012, para. 4). It is also repeatedly seen as sex workers fault that they are abused or violated because of their ‘choice’ of lifestyle. Sex workers are often assigned fault by police for being raped or abused due to this supposed choice of lifestyle; this inevitably lets the real culprit off the hook. Instability, transience, or a non-normative income derived from sex work is used not only to justify the rape, abduction, and murder of women in the DTES, but also justify police negligence. It is no accident that increasing vulnerability is met with increasing indifference, when one would hope that increasing vulnerability would be met with increasing attention. Memmi’s understanding of the colonizer-colonized relationship is all the more pertinent when recognizing that most of the sex workers who were murdered were Indigenous – along with the stigma of sex work, racist, colonial and classist power relations are present. All of this demonstrates an important point, that

colonialism is not simple a historical event; it is an ongoing process in Canada, and the police are a key part of its continuation.

In a recent testimony, Corporal Galliford of the VPD explains how the dehumanizing attitudes towards women of the DTES were also apparent in the Missing Women Task Force as she describes what one fellow male officer said to her: “They wanted to see Willie Pickton escape from prison, track me down and strip me naked, string me up on a meat hook and gut me like a pig” (Fourinier, 2011, para. 19). While the focus of the Inquiry and the resistance around it is on the marginalization of Indigenous women, this comment is significant in displaying the misogynistic attitudes of some of the officers involved in the Missing Women Task Force that can further explain the lack of urgency on behalf of the missing women. Galliford’s testimony suggests that women as a whole can become Othered. As such, misogynistic attitudes are not an issue exclusive to Indigenous Women or white women. This insight could be the starting point to a conversation about struggling together, which I will return to in the final section.

Galliford’s comments demonstrate that it is not simply the marginalization of Indigenous women, the comments that Galliford made about her experience being involved in the Missing Women Task Force are crucial in order for the police to be held accountable by non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people alike by exposing the underlying sexism and racism, and as such revealing a basis for struggle. Galliford’s testimony is an example of how women can relate to each other and at times use privilege (such as Galliford’s testimony) to help support women who are fighting to overcome the Othering that has occurred through colonization and patriarchy.

The MWCI is still unfolding in Vancouver as resistance to it increases. The DTES Women’s Centre and the Women’s Memorial March Committee made submissions to the UN Committee on the Eliminations of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) because of the failures of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. As of October CEDAW has “initiated a significant official inquiry process into the murders and disappearances of women and girls across Canada” (Kelly, Kendall, Walia & Martin, 2011b, para. 1).

### **Creating Alliances**

The marginalization of Indigenous women in the DTES is something that requires collective action. The police and government benefit from institutional barriers in what is presented as an inclusive and resource-accessible process. Given how the MWCI reproduces an Othering attitude towards Indigenous women, this demonstrates the need for respectful allies who attempt to ensure that violence is not reproduced in an alliance. The institutions that produce Othering discourses of Indigenous women, Indigenous people, and women, cannot be trusted to address the violence associated with these very constructions. In situations such as the Inquiry, it is up to the general public to hold the police and government accountable, but the primary task is to work in solidarity with Indigenous women. In creating alliances between people with different privileges and lived experiences, creating a shared sensibility in standing up against the violence is crucial. However, it is even more important that those individual experiences that unite us do not become homogenized. To quote Memmi, this homogenization could be another form of “drowning in an anonymous collectivity” (1965, p. 85).

As a self-identified female and Métis person, I believe it is crucial to highlight how colonialism and patriarchy was evident in the state’s investigation into the continuous disappearances of women from the DTES (most of whom are Indigenous). Further, holding law enforcement and government accountable for police discrimination is not something that is solely an Indigenous women’s or an Indigenous community’s responsibility. Cultivating alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is paramount, especially pertaining to the missing and murdered women of the DTES and along the Highway of Tears. I have been involved in organizing support around this struggle in attending countless marches and protests including the Annual Missing Women’s Memorial March (2007-2010) and co-organizing the Panty Drive in 2009 and 2010. The Panty Drive was originally started by Professor Christine Welsh, was co-organized four years ago by myself and three fellow students and is now annually organized by the Women’s Centre at the University of Victoria. The Panty Drive collects sanitary feminine hygiene products, underwear and chocolate every year to coincide with the Annual Missing Women’s Memorial March. The Annual Missing Women’s Memorial

March was started in Vancouver and is held every year in cities across Canada on Valentine's Day to raise awareness on the increased numbers of missing women. The Panty Drive donations are split between the DTES Women's Centre in Vancouver and PEER's in Victoria. The Panty Drive is a means of alleviating the costs of these products from the operating budgets of the DTES Women's Centre and PEERS. In 2010, the Panty Drive donated 243 panties, 705 sanitary feminine products, and 8467 grams of Chocolate and Candy to the DTES Women's Centre alone and the numbers continue to grow each year.

This MWCI and Annual Missing Women's Memorial March held on February 14th are ways in which alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women are created. Not all of the women who have gone missing from the DTES or Highway of Tears are Indigenous. The Inquiry was met with 200 women protesting on the first day of the hearings (Walia, 2011b). The women were calling for "a new fair, just and inclusive inquiry that centre's the voices and experiences and leadership of women, particularly Indigenous women, in the DTES" (Walia, 2011b, para. 2). The systemic marginalization of all women is something that affects society as a whole, men included. However, as activists, community members and women, those who are the most affected by these systems of oppression should be the ones whose voices are most prominent in organizing resistance around this issue. We need to situate ourselves within a struggle and to be aware of how our own privilege can translate into a sense of entitlement. In creating alliances, there will be times when an activists' primary role will be to support others; the Missing and Murdered Women of the DTES is an example of this. Furthermore, women continue to disappear from the DTES and the rest of Canada. This did not end with Robert Pickton's arrest. Building a strong alliance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is paramount. The naturalization of violence towards women is something that we must resist together. The evidence that has been exposed during the Inquiry and the history of the VPD and RCMP's negligence in the disappearances of women from the DTES clearly display how as women, we cannot rely solely on systems such as the police and the government for protection. There are numerous resources for non-Indigenous people who want to gain insight into becoming effective allies. To conclude this article, I offer three starting points for further discussion on the creation of alliances to combat Othering by hegemonic institutions.

The Ally Bill of Responsibilities by Lynn Gehl (2011) is an excellent resource for understanding how to be an effective ally to Indigenous people. Gehl wrote the sixteen point Bill of Responsibilities to “help allies and Indigenous people from falling into the trap of good intentions” which can often be harmful (Gehl, 2011, para. 3). While the bill is too long to list in its entirety, I will focus on a few points that are essential to think about before working towards ally-ship with Indigenous people. As I have previously stated, an ally must understand that their needs “are secondary to the Indigenous people that they are working for” (Gehl, 2011, para. 5). Allies must not do the talking, but rather the listening (Gehl, 2011). A second point that is essential in becoming an effective ally is to be able to situate yourself and your family history within the colonial context. As I have mentioned before in this paper, I am a light skinned Plains Cree Métis woman. My family was originally from the Red River Settlement. However, something that I have struggled with in the past is understanding my own family history while also understanding the privileges that I experienced growing up and continue to experience today. Being aware of one’s own privileges and being able to openly discuss them without being defensive is also another point that Gehl lists (Gehl, 2011). Gehl states that by being aware of privilege, this will “also serve to challenge larger oppressive power structures” (Gehl, 2011, para. 7). With this understanding, being aware of how privilege is constructed is essential in also understanding why Indigenous women from the DTES face such a high level of violence. It is also necessary to critically think and reflect upon your own actions as well as the actions of people around you. This process will enable allies to better understand “larger oppressive power structures” thus also ensuring that allies are not perpetuating those power structures during political work (Gehl, 2011, para. 7). The final key point of Gehl’s Bill is ensuring that the needs of those that belong to oppressed groups– “women, children, elderly, young teenage girls and boys, and the disabled – are served in the effort or movement that [the allies] are supporting” (Gehl, 2011, para. 13). Gehl continues by stating that if these needs are not met, the actions can serve to “fortify the large power structures of oppression (Gehl, 2011, para. 13).

The webpage, *Unsettling America: Decolonization in Theory and Practice*, is another excellent resource on how to be an effective ally to Indigenous people and how to move towards decolonization. In the “about” section on this page, the

collective lists six points of unity that guide the collective members ally-ship and activism. A crucial point of reference provided by *Unsettling America* is understanding that not all settlers benefit “equally from the settler-colonial state, nor did all settlers emigrate here of their own free will. Specifically, we see slavery, hetero-patriarchy, white supremacy, market imperialism, and capitalist class structures as among the primary tools of colonization” (*Unsettling America*, para. 7). In this point, the collective is suggesting the importance of fully understanding the tools of colonization that work to create division between communities and people. Bonita Lawrence (Rutherford, 2010) has done excellent work on this topic as well, specifically focusing on the way in which anti-racist struggles have been appropriated and reduced to representation within the framework of colonial nation-states. The collective states that “anti-oppression solidarity between settler communities is necessary for decolonization” and as such, allies should address the many interconnected forms of oppression (*Unsettling America*, para. 7).

Finally, Harsha Walia’s article *Decolonize Together: Moving Beyond a Politics of Solidarity Toward a Practice of Decolonization*, contributes to the discussion on solidarity with Indigenous people through the use of a decolonizing lens. She distinguishes between working in support with Indigenous people and working in solidarity with Indigenous people by quoting bell hooks “support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment” (Walia, 2012, para. 10). This means that you cannot work in solidarity with Indigenous women only when it is convenient to do so. It requires changing your daily life, thought processes and priorities.<sup>4</sup> Walia continues by drawing out the complexities of creating alliances, stating that “decolonization can require us to locate ourselves within the context of colonization in complicated ways, often as simultaneously oppressed and complicit. This is true, for example, for racialized migrants in Canada” (Walia, 2012, para. 15). Walia concludes by saying “decolonization is the process whereby we create the conditions in which we want to live and the social relations we wish to have. We have to commit ourselves to supplanting the colonial logic of the state itself” (Walia, 2012, para. 16). Here, she echoes the work of Bonita Lawrence in

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<sup>4</sup> Imagine if a portion of the time spent in academic work, reading about these issues was spent doing important decolonizing solidarity work.

identifying the state itself as colonial, and therefore a common target for critique and resistance.

Creating alliance is something crucial – but also crucial is realizing that there can be no abstract blueprint followed for creating an effective and respectful political movement. This is to say that the responsibilities of allies outlined in this section is not an exhaustive list. It is the Indigenous women in the DTES who should have say over their lives. The role of allies is not to go in with a plan and tell people what their politics are and how to carry them through. The role of allies is one of solidarity, self-reflection, and commitment.

### **Conclusion**

Beauvoir's theory of Woman as the Other and Memmi's explanation of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer allows us to position Indigenous women as the Other in order to analyze the MWCI. Beauvoir and Memmi were placed in a critical conversation to demonstrate how their works can complement each other. Placing them in conversation reveals both their privileges and that they each can be read in solidarity with Indigenous women (as Gehl references above). The social construction of Indigenous women as the Other allowed Pickton to treat them as less than human and devalue their lives. This process of Othering was continued in the investigation of the murders where the police also devalued the women's lives by not acting on evidence such as a possible search warrant in 1999. This allowed Pickton to continue murdering women for another three years. Now, in the Inquiry, women's lives are being devalued through the lack of government funding thus excluding their voices. In examining the Othering of Indigenous women, space is created for the cultivation of alliances between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women to challenge the systemic marginalization and oppression of women, while still allowing individual differences to be prominent.

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