Amber Dean
Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women: Settler Colonialism and the Difficulty of Inheritance. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, 216 pp.

The disappearances of countless indigenous women have only recently made their way into mainstream political discourses. Over the last decade, significant efforts have been made to raise awareness and inform the public about the legacies of settler colonialism and how these ongoing processes constitute certain disappeared lives as ungrievable (see Butler 2009). Amber Dean's timely book, *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women: Settler Colonialism and the Difficulty of Inheritance,* critically examines the discursive and material practices that allow both settlers and indigenous people to bear witness to the ongoing injustices that many vulnerable groups face, including the criminalization of sex workers and the racialization of those living and working in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Through a critical analysis of visual representations of disappeared women in Vancouver, including memorials, paintings, films, and photographs, Dean critiques the politics of *witnessing* injustices of colonial and gendered violence (a remarkably passive and distant subjectivity) and, instead, offers the possibilities of "inheriting what lives on from the violent loss of so many women, which [she argues] requires us to recognize and grapple with the wider social context of settler colonialism that underpins these events" (7). Exploring the various ways of remembering and memorializing disappeared and murdered women, Dean not only weaves a feminist re-telling of personal experience with her own observations, she also pulls the reader towards this affective project of inheritance—employing the pronouns "we" and "us"—and examines how some of the techniques of humanizing and remembering disappeared and murdered women actually reproduce the very colonial narratives they seek to challenge.

The book begins with a historical mapping of the DTES as a space that is inextricably linked to the regulation and governance of indigenous women's lives. This serves as the theoretical underpinning for examining how the disappearances of marginalized women in one of Canada's most vulnerable neighbourhoods is governed through the regulatory practices of policing, development, and gentrification—mechanisms implicated in the ongoing processes of settler colonialism. Linking these modalities of colonial power to how settlers constitute the grievability of certain lives, Dean invokes the work of Sunera Thobani to explore how certain kinds of deviant femininity—including those in proximity to addiction, vagrancy, poverty, and sex work—effectively (and affectively) situate the subjectivities of disappeared women in contradistinction to the "exalted subjects" of the Canadian imaginary. This imagination, however, is mediated by representations of the DTES as historically linked to criminality and often imagined, both through media and print discourses, as a site of unrestrained criminality—a frontier that is always open to ongoing processes of colonization.

The imagery of a frontier that is always being (re)made through various techniques of governance, regulation, and representation sets up what Dean refers to as the city's *haunting* colonial past (52). The haunting specters of the city's deep colonial history shape the ways settlers remember Vancouver's disappeared women.

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Drawing on the seminal works of Avery Gordon, Dean argues that "the following of ghosts is a practice of inheritance that requires a different approach to doing academic research" (59), one that draws our attention to the affective relations brought on by injustice, trauma, disappearance, and violence.

Chapters two and three centre on the ways photographs intersect with criminological discourses surrounding indigeneity, sex work, and drug use, and ultimately create a ghostly imaginary of deviant behaviour that underscores the subjectivities of these missing women. For example, many of the police posters Dean examines and includes in the book are aesthetically framed as mug shots (and many of them are in fact mug shots), casting a shadow of criminality that haunts the viewer. But perhaps the most fundamental theoretical point Dean makes in her book rests in the notion that the visuality of murdered women signals a fundamental temporal positionality of both the victim and viewer. The viewer is situated temporally between the woman in the photograph, who is at the time of her picture still alive, and the poster, which marks her death or disappearance. This memorializing of disappeared women invites the reader to reflect and think critically about their own relationships to the ongoing projects of settler colonialism.

To counter the narratives that situate the women of the DTES as criminals, addicts, and sex workers, activists and organizers take up memorializing efforts to highlight disappeared women as mothers, sisters, and daughters, which serve, as she argues, to reinforce normative femininity (108). Dean warns, however, that inheriting normative tropes of femininity has the potential for reifying identities characterized by "civilized" womanhood. Instead, her analysis includes a radical critique of some of these identity politics, which have the potential of reinforcing the exclusion of sex workers and other non-normative identities within the consciousness of memory. Acknowledging that the law remains a central site for regulation of these normative identities, as noted with the governance of indigenous femininity through the *Indian Act*, Dean expresses her skepticism for mobilizing legal reform to decolonize the identities that are inextricably linked to processes of criminalization—an extension of settler colonialism.

Moving away from these theorizations, Dean closes the book by drawing on memory scholars Roger Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert, arguing that it is not enough to simply dwell on or live in the past; rather, we must always live in *relation* to the past—a way of enacting memory in what she calls a "difficult return" (120). In attending memorials, viewing photographs, and creating posters, we must not claim witness to the disappearances and violence vulnerable women face. Rather, Dean suggests that the visuality of photographs and memorials should return the observer to a subject position that actively inherits what lives on from these losses.

So why might Dean's contribution be important to the work of socio-legal scholars? While her analysis is grounded in the exploration of these memories, Dean offers a fundamentally practical message that compliments her theoretical stance quite well. Situating the reader within the project of inheritance, Dean explicitly calls upon us to take up the individualized and collective projects of disrupting these forms of settler colonial violence and addressing the very injustice "we" inherit. But the "we" that Dean calls upon is not always clear. Though she stresses the

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importance for settlers to take up the project of inheriting the injustices against disappeared and murdered women, these identities are not so parsed out in the Canadian landscape. Who counts as settler and who is defined as colonizer requires further unpacking. At the same time, the project of shaping the positionality of the reader as an inheritor of injustice changes the way settlers engage not only with the text, but also with the issues of colonial and gendered violence.

The politics of remembrance both reimagine the lives of those disappeared and contribute to the passivity and distancing of settler subjectivities from being implicated in a long history of colonialism. I am left wondering whether and how these memorializing techniques offer the same politics for all who inherit. In other words, can settlers inherit what lives on from these women in our own different ways, and are we not affectively oriented towards disappeared and murdered women based on our own unique experiences and subjectivities? And, in asking these questions, how do settlers inherit what lives on without reproducing the silences that have historically marginalized indigenous women?

The intertextual framework underpinning the intersection between settler colonial regulation and its accompanied representations makes this book a valuable resource to activists and those interested in the fields of socio-legal inquiry, criminology, settler colonial studies, and cultural studies. Perhaps one of the most timely texts addressing the phenomenon of disappeared and murdered women, *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women* is a serious and meaningful call to inherit what lives on from the injustices of these colonial legacies and to act on what haunts us in the present.

Reference

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