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Invested Indifference

How Violence Persists in Settler Colonial Society

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Preface

I HAVE HEARD IT IS often the case that, by the time a book like this is published, it is out of date and so fails to fully deliver on what it set out to do. In this case, the majority of the research for this book was conducted between 2005 and 2008, so in some ways it arrives too late, although in other ways it arrives too soon.

What I describe as the production of an affect of societal indifference in this book does not look the same now as it did prior to the eventual onset of a national inquiry into the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada in 2016. Although I do not argue that the initiation of this inquiry marked the beginning of an era of deep and generalized concern over the issue of violence toward Indigenous women and girls – since it is true that such a concern both preceded this introduction and has never really materialized as a kind of national sentiment as a result – it is still the case that, with the introduction of this official inquiry, a kind of line was drawn that is relevant to the ideas addressed in this book. Rather than resolving the problem of what I pose as a deep national investment in ongoing colonial violence, the inquiry has been effective in transforming and reconfiguring affect even though it is not likely to prove to be very effective at moving the nation toward producing decolonial and material conditions of greater safety for those rendered materially vulnerable as a basic operation of settler colonialism. Although it is in many ways too soon to assess the impact of the inquiry, which released its final report and recommendations in April 2019, while

this book was still in production, criticisms of the inquiry's shortcomings were already being expressed by advocates, Indigenous leaders, Indigenous organizations, and family members (see Canadian Press 2017a, 2017b; Galloway 2017; and Palmater 2016).

Over the past decade, excellent work has been produced that aims to address and intervene in ongoing settler colonial violence in Canada – much of it by Indigenous scholars, writers, and activists. Staying abreast of such a burgeoning field has been among the challenges of working within teaching, research, and service contexts where one is stretched always thinner. The pressures I describe are all too familiar to academics today and have resulted in movements toward a slower, more thoughtful form of scholarship. At the same time, and given the specific issues that concern me, perhaps more time is not necessarily what is needed.

The concerns expressed in these pages took root for me in 2004 through news stories that would occasionally interrupt my quiet life. As I struggled to find my footing as a doctoral student and to establish this work as a proper "study," these concerns functioned for me as an intervention into what I saw as the Eurocolonial trend in the social sciences of finding *the object* of and for analysis *elsewhere*. This elsewhere found different forms, sometimes in the past and sometimes in the "less civilized" and the less sophisticated, always being presumed inferior in relation to the place from which the social scientific gaze emanated. I sought to escape that tendency and wanted to address an issue of local concern: the occurrence of violence in the city where I lived. For this reason, prior iterations of this book began with the following quotations as epigraphs:

> This is a socially authorized death, mundane and unaccounted for, and we partook of it in our foreign and native gazing, in our blend of learned indifference, sense of intolerability, and failed witnessing. (Biehl 2001, 134)

> Of course that's elsewhere, always elsewhere, you'll want to say, not the rule but the exception, existing in An-Other Place like Northern Ireland, Beirut, Ethiopia, Kingston, Port au Prince,

Peru, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Santiago, the Bronx, the West Bank, South Africa, San Salvador, Colombia, to name but some of the more publicized from the staggering number of spots troubling the course of the world's order. But perhaps such an elsewhere should make us suspicious about the deeply rooted sense of order here, as if their dark wildness exists so as to silhouette our light, the bottom line being, of course, the tight and necessary fit between order, law, justice, sense, economy, and history – all of which them elsewhere manifestly ain't got much of. (Taussig 1989, 3)

These anthropologists' words spoke volumes to me when I began this work, and they are still important reminders to critically examine who and what we think we are here. They directed me to look around the city where I lived in order to recognize how I had learned *not* to see the "dark wildness" that "silhouettes our light" here so that I too might maintain the story of my field of study (sociology), a story that is often about desperation and cruelties elsewhere. This book thus became about the elsewhere *here* through which the mirage of a benevolent Canada gets produced again and again.

But even as I turned my gaze to what was occurring where I lived, I had no guarantee of the effects of my work. We know good intentions are as suspect as the rest. This book is a result of my experience in the neoliberal institution that is the modern university in Canada. It is shaped by over a decade of training in sociology as a student in three postsecondary institutions in Canada. Although this training was often exciting and exhilarating, it was also narrow. With some important exceptions, it was primarily a training in learning to read, interpret, and respond to texts written by the fathers and forefathers of the discipline, all of whom themselves cite a remarkably uniform history within the discipline. To some extent, with this work, I have been successful in fulfilling the imperative of my disciplinary heritage. I have learned to read, interpret, and write through institutions, and in turn, I have fortified these institutions. I build upon the lineage of the same writers whom I have been taught to read, understand, and cite. In its earlier stages, this book was

full of settler scholars. It still carries the heritage of their work onward. But now, more than a decade after I began this project, it begins to draw on scholarship produced by Indigenous, feminist, anti-colonial, and queer writers, too, whose work also sometimes uses, radically challenges, and undermines the authority of those enduring figures. So, although I had originally hoped to investigate the tenacity and seemingly infinite flexibility of settler colonial practices, this work is itself also an expression of that tenacity and flexibility. That I write, with security, as a socially recognized and affirmed subject, and that I write with citizen rights, in a national language that is also my first language, English, are circumstances ensured by settler colonial conditions. These conditions are inescapably woven into this text.

When beginning this book, I took anthropologist Michael Taussig's (1989) words literally and decided that I needed to build a bridge to the elsewhere here that denied me my usual sense of safety and protection. So I started to volunteer at a drop-in centre for women, transgender, and two-spirit people involved in street-level sex work in Edmonton. I was interested in proximity, specifically in whether physical distance had anything to do with my sense of having some safety from danger and in whether it perhaps explained the larger trend that was being called "societal indifference" to violence. If I was indifferent to violence happening in the city where I lived, was this affect due to a lack of awareness and/or the distance between me and the elsewhere here? Was this distance provided by the river valley between Mill Creek (where I lived) and Jasper Avenue in Edmonton? Was the affect of indifference due to the distance between my basement apartment and the spaces of danger I had imagined to be somewhere else in Edmonton, like along 107th Avenue? To begin to consider these questions, I started volunteering one day a week at the drop-in centre. Women who sold sex on the street already had a place in my imagination – a place in part informed by materials like those I examine in the upcoming chapters. Each day when I arrived to volunteer, I hoped there would be no violence. And each day when I left, I had learned again and again that such unsubstantiated fears were what hid the ongoing social abandonments that produced the real dangers for the women with whom I had spent my day. The violence was not already

present there, but actually emanated from the much greater certainty of safety elsewhere.

My time at the drop-in centre was immensely important to me, although this is the first time I have written about it, and it does not find its way in explicit form into this book beyond this preface. I know now that the director allowed me to be there not because I was needed but because she is a profoundly compassionate and generous person who knew I had a lot to learn. I was remarkably unnecessary. I was nonetheless tolerated – another middle-class white woman with "a research interest." I wasn't the first and wouldn't be the last. While I was there, I swept the kitchen, did the dishes, cooked, or watched episodes of *Ellen* in the common room. In general, the place was characterized by a sense of immediacy. It was a place where needs were met, whether the need for sleep, warmth, and food or the need for a reprieve, laughter, comfort, and friendship; and it was a place where people shared their lives, sometimes for days, weeks, or months and sometimes for years.

I do not address these experiences except here in the preface because I do not want such experiences to be read as though they somehow absolve me of accountability as a producer of texts and knowledge. My time there was not research, but it shaped my thinking and kept me feeling. What I offer here are pieces; to be certain, they are partial and flawed and will have effects that I have not predicted and that may work precisely against the very politics I hope to advocate. Having paused for a moment prior to the publication of this work, I think now that there is no way to do this work without also doing damage. As I am a person whose life and career are literally made to matter in part through the attention I give this issue, my attempt to address how settler colonial violence routinely positions people as living lives that matter more or less than the lives of others feels impossibly paradoxical and highly unethical. But not attempting to draw further attention to how settler colonial violence operates as a flexible, tenacious, and ongoing series of everyday forces also presents a problem. At best, I see what I am doing in this book as working always from within a problematic position, one that I cannot sidestep but must attempt to face in order to try to understand the history and thus the contemporality of this position. In the work of social critics

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2004, 101), I find words to guide my practices:

> It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, *to be in but not of* – this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university. (Emphasis added)

Before turning to the book itself, I reiterate that it fails on many fronts. Its intervention into "contact zones" is best characterized as an accumulation of pieces that do not convey a coherent story. Perhaps it is something of a plaiting of strands. I hope, however, that together these pieces or strands tell us something of the flexibility and tenaciousness of investments in settler colonialism – of the facade of order and justice *here* – so that we might begin to produce something that interrupts the relationship between everyday acts of settler colonial violence and what is too easily dismissed as a widespread indifference to it.

Introduction

IN 2004 THE NATIVE WOMEN'S Association of Canada (NWAC) reported that more than 500 Indigenous women had gone missing or been murdered in Canada since the mid-1980s (cited in Amnesty International 2004, 4). That year, Amnesty International reported that in the city of Edmonton, Alberta, alone, there were eighteen ongoing investigations of "unsolved murders of women in the last two decades" and that these murders were disproportionately of Indigenous women (Amnesty International 2004, 4). In 2009 NWAC (2009, 88) stated that the number of Indigenous women missing or murdered in Canada was 520. The organization's 2010 report states that 582 Aboriginal girls and women were missing or had been murdered (NWAC 2010, 18). And by 2013 it had "documented over 600 cases where aboriginal women have been murdered or gone missing between 2005 and 2010" (cited in CBC 2013). The numbers are imprecise but growing. In 2014, after decades of social activism to draw attention to the issue and numerous calls for such an accounting, Canada's national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), reported 1,181 Indigenous women and girls as either missing or murdered in this country since the 1980s (RCMP 2014, 7). In 2016 Canada's federal minister of Indigenous affairs characterized the actual number of missing or murdered women as significantly larger than reported by the RCMP (cited in Kirkup 2016). Still considered an underestimation, these numbers, and the degree to which their accuracy has been obscured, are provoking increasing alarm in Canada (see NWAC 2015, 2019).[1]

In 2016 the newly appointed Liberal government of Canada, under Justin Trudeau, launched a national inquiry to investigate the "unacceptable overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls as victims of violence" in Canada (Government of Canada 2016, 135). In its 2016 budget, the government proposed to invest $40 million over two years in this inquiry. This federal recognition of the problem and the dedication of significant funds to its redress marked a radical departure from the approach of the outgoing Conservative government, under Stephen Harper, which for years had refused numerous pleas for such a national inquiry and had in fact cut funding to the Native Women's Association of Canada approved by the prior government (Chase 2014).[2] This prior funding, first provided in 2005, had been directed toward several NWAC initiatives to address the problem of disappeared Indigenous women. The report *Voices of Our Sisters in Spirit* (NWAC 2009), for example, was the outcome of $5 million allotted for a five-year research project. The NWAC's broader Sisters in Spirit initiative was established to work with the Canadian government and with Aboriginal women's organizations in order to improve the provision of human rights, and it included working to protect Indigenous women from disproportionately high rates of murder and abduction.[3] Part of the initiative was also directed at ascertaining a more accurate tally to determine the extent of this emergency in Canada. Such a comprehensive assessment, however, was not possible given the limited political support for this project.

The NWAC's website explained that the objectives of the Sisters in Spirit initiative were "to address violence against Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) women, particularly racialized and/or sexualized violence, that is, violence perpetrated against Aboriginal women because of their gender and Aboriginal identity." The NWAC noted that "this type of violence typically occurs in the public sphere, where societal indifference often leaves Aboriginal women at greater risk."[4] "Societal indifference" is the phrase used to characterize a notion of the public sphere in Canada and to explain the disproportionate danger faced by Indigenous women. With this idea of societal indifference, the Native Women's Association of Canada referred to a kind of violence that is targeted at Indigenous women, and it articulated a perceived

lack of public concern or apathy as instrumental to the perpetuation of this violence.

This claim of Canadian societal indifference was not made exclusively by the NWAC. The same year that it reported its estimate of 500 missing or murdered Indigenous women and a full decade prior to the RCMP's report and the announcement of a national inquiry, the international human rights organization Amnesty International (2004) published a thirty-seven-page report entitled *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada.* Describing nine incidents of racialized and gendered violence, all of which occurred in the country's western-most provinces, this report suggested that Canadian authorities were failing to provide the protections that would keep Indigenous women safe (Amnesty International 2004, 2). The report went on to outline four factors that have long played into the "heightened – and unacceptable – risk of violence against Indigenous women in Canadian cities":

> [1] The social and economic marginalisation of Indigenous women, along with a history of government policies that have torn apart Indigenous families and communities, have pushed a disproportionate number of Indigenous women into dangerous situations that include extreme poverty, homelessness and prostitution. [2] Despite assurances to the contrary, police in Canada have often failed to provide Indigenous women with an adequate standard of protection. [3] The resulting vulnerability of Indigenous women has been exploited by Indigenous and non-Indigenous men to carry out acts of extreme brutality against them. [4] These acts of violence may be motivated by racism, or may be carried out in the expectation that *societal indifference* to the welfare and safety of Indigenous women will allow the perpetrators to escape justice. (Amnesty International 2004, 2; emphasis added)

With these factors, Amnesty International set up a broad and historically situated consideration of how and why, and apparently with little social

concern, some people are disproportionately subject to discrimination and violence in contemporary Canada. Yet, despite all the issues (e.g., social, economic, and historical) that these factors seem to address, they also obscure. Words always operate to both express and conceal, and I propose that in this context what is hidden is highly relevant to the idea that a nation, or city, or citizen might have the capacity to care for or to fulfill an obligation to protect those already rendered "Other" from within.

So the question is what (almost) disappears with the outlining of these four factors? Not Indigenous women. They are there, as they are in this introduction – written in as the missing and murdered, as "at risk," and as potential victims. Some police are there too; they have *neglected* those potential victims. Some Indigenous and non-Indigenous men are there too; they have *exploited the vulnerabilities of women* – known again as victims. And then there are the social, economic, and historical factors that have *pushed* Indigenous women (again, victims) into marginal, dangerous situations. But as might already be apparent, I wonder whether there is much more here. Is there something more to the clearly complicated contemporary emergency than some categorical distinction between the victims, the perpetrators, the indifferent, and a backdrop of "social and economic marginalisation" and problematic "government policies"? Such a scenario rings very familiar but leaves us with little ability to see or intervene in this violence as anything beyond the tragedy of individual cases, individual victims, and individual perpetrators. The account presents us with one-dimensional assessments of responsibility and with contextual factors construed as abstractions, namely social, economic, and historical maginalizations, but in conceptualizing them as such, it distances readers from realizing their salience as material realities and thwarts forms of action that might be taken against these realities.

The fourth factor identified by Amnesty International perhaps takes us furthest in our understanding of racialized gendered violence in Canada by pushing us to revise the oversimplifications implicit in the prior three factors. With this fourth point, we are drawn to consider the expectation or likelihood that violence against racialized women in a racist society might be met with indifference. Societal indifference, here, relates to and might be conflated with racist violence. But these are not the same things.

To repeat, Amnesty International (2004, 2) identifies the following as a final instrumental factor in the ongoing racialized and gendered violence in Canada: "racism" or "the *expectation* that societal indifference to the welfare and safety of Indigenous women *will allow the perpetrators to escape justice*" (emphasis added). Amnesty International's fourth point is extremely productive for thinking about racialized and gendered violence in Canada, not only for its attention to an expectation of indifference but also for the way that it moves thinking from expectation to considering the social contours of this phenomenon that Amnesty International names as *both* an expectation and an indifference. Something operating at or beyond the level of "the social" is obscured by such naming. But what is operational is not an absence or a lack. However imperceptible it may be, I suspect that it is something active, something at once beyond and inside of individual expectations, something too often referred to in sociological terms that also obscure its operations, terms like "power" and "structure," and something that demands a more thorough, local, and practice-based form of theorizing. If there is a learned expectation and indifference *here* in Canada, as there is in anthropologist João Guilherme Biehl's (2001) ethnographic account of social abandonment in Brazil, then perhaps we must consider how such an expectation and indifference materialize, how they are learned, who is implicated, and with what effects such affective realities are made.

It seems important to ask early on what it means to suggest that indifference might be considered *the* reaction to news of a person gone missing or found murdered. It also seems important to ask what it means to suggest that this indifference might even be *the message* in the news media about this missing woman's fate? Some academic work and media examples support Amnesty International's claim that, indeed, there might be some generalized indifference to the welfare of some Indigenous women and girls, particularly to violent acts against them (Ferris 2015; Jacobs and Williams 2008; Jiwani and Young 2006). Media headlines are especially known for their callous and alarming descriptions; one that ran in the *Edmonton Journal* (2009) read, "Murdered Aboriginal Women 'Not Garbage.'" This headline not only states the obvious but also requires us to imagine that it actually has an addressee who might already see

murdered Aboriginal women as just that. The statement requires at least a prior knowledge of some association between the two, or else it is unintelligible. If no such association yet exists, such headlines might function to instruct readers on this association. In her work, cultural theorist Amber Dean (2015) argues that the use of mug-shot-like images of women missing from Vancouver signals that these women are already criminal – "inherently bad or deviant persons" (Ferris 2015, 48) – and hence not worthy of care. There is something at work here beyond an *absence* of affect. There is a logic. Biehl (2001, 134) suggests that in Brazil some deaths are "socially authorized," and Michael Taussig (1989) describes the "terror as usual" of something that is happening in the *here,* and although neither is writing of Canada, both strike me as approaching what is disavowed in Canada and perhaps also in the NWAC's and Amnesty International's designation of a society-wide form of indifference. In this book, I argue that this logic is rooted in contemporary settler colonialisms at work both in the violence of disappearance and in the affective possibilities for responses to that violence in Canada. I suggest that this logic has been difficult to address outright but that it nonetheless can be made apparent through a consideration of what indifference means and how it might work to repeatedly secure a national (and nation-based) complicity in the ongoing disappearance of Indigenous peoples, lands, and nations. I think that the claim of societal indifference has worked to hide what is there instead of indifference and an absence of care. What if instead of such a lack, disappearance has been managed in particular ways, including on some occasions through (what have been defined as) protective or benevolent practices? This book takes up the concept of societal indifference as a question and probes the possible meaning and utility of the notion of indifference in relation to the actual disappearance of Indigenous peoples, specifically women and girls, and in relation to the contemporary and long-term project now called Canada. In the pages that follow, I cautiously critique the postulate of an absence of care at the level of the societal, questioning both the conditions for and the performative effects of Amnesty International's (2004) declaration of the possibility of a national sentiment – or, more accurately, the precursors and effects of the declaration of the *absence* of a national sentiment. I

claim that there is some kind of national sentiment here. In fact, it might be this feeling that undergirds projects undertaken to address disappearance more generally. In this way, I bring Amnesty International's four factors together, demanding that *specific* historical, economic, legal, social, and individual aspects of Indigenous and settler colonial relations be thought of in practical terms and brought to bear on the claim that there is *anyone* here who is indifferent to this particular kind of violence.⁵

It is important for me to state that I engage in this research and this writing summoned as I am by the very discourses I critique. Like all forms of discourse, the one that mobilizes societal indifference affords me particular positions as a subject of this discourse, just as it affords positions to those rendered victims through this discourse (Hall 1992). In part, what I have struggled to investigate in this work are the contours of my being situated both amid and at a distance from the forms of violence I examine.

Amiskwaciwâskahikan/Edmonton

I have tied my writing to places within the bounds of what has been officially designated Treaty 6 territory since 1877. My writing refers to places in the area asserted as the city of Edmonton by settlers in 1904. But these are places where people have lived and gathered for much longer; there have been people in or moving through these places for at least 10,000 years. Among the Indigenous nations that have gathered and lived in the surrounding areas are the Cree (Nehiyawak), Saulteaux, Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Tsuu T'ina, and Nakota Sioux.⁶ Edmonton is still contested terrain; the Cree word for the city is Amiskwaciwâskahikan, which means "beaver mountain house" (*Online Cree Dictionary* 2019). In its most recent history, the city has been called the provincial capital of Alberta, which is part of the country officially designated by settler colonial subjects as Canada, and it is home to nearly 1 million people (City of Edmonton 2019). It is a place thought of as economically rich as a consequence of a boom directly tied to the extraction of oil from the Athabasca oil sands, one of the largest reserves in the world, which is located just 500 kilometres north of the city and in Treaty 8 territory. Many people know Edmonton today for its festivals, its extensive green

spaces, and its world-renowned recycling program. In 2007 Canadian Heritage named Edmonton the Culture Capital of Canada (City of Edmonton 2007). But the economic boom has also been tied to a marked increase in things less celebrated, like an increase in the involvement of Albertans in sex work, including in Edmonton (Mahaffy 2007). More alarmingly, five years after Edmonton was crowned the Culture Capital of Canada, the *Edmonton Sun* named it the country's "murder capital" (Roth 2012). And indeed, in preceding years, the media had reported that the city was facing something of a killing spree. Describing a location where several women had been found dead, a front-page headline in the *Edmonton Journal* on June 13, 2004, reported the presence of a "Grisly 'Dumping Ground' Discovery" (Kleiss and Farrell 2004). This news story chronicled the fate of nine women whose "bodies [had been] found in rural areas around Edmonton" since 1988. Then, in 2005, the Canadian national newspaper the *Globe and Mail* ran the headline "The 'Killing Fields' of Edmonton" (Harding 2005a). Subsequent reports were more specific, identifying ten of Edmonton's unsolved murder victims as "women who had been found dead in fields near Edmonton in the preceding 16 years" (Pruden 2011). Indigenous women were considered to be at particular risk of violence in Edmonton, which had reportedly joined Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Vancouver as cities in Canada where there is a heightened danger of violence against Indigenous women (Ferris 2015; Jacobs and Williams 2008).[7]

I learned about these distressing aspects of Edmonton only after I turned my research to the topic of disappearance and indifference in the city. Initially, I focused on Edmonton because it was where I lived from 2002 to 2008 while engaged in doctoral studies at the University of Alberta in the Department of Sociology. During those years, I spent a lot of time alone. I walked or I rode my bike to school and back most weekdays. In those days, I was lucky enough to be inspired by wonderful friends and by thoughtful and generous scholars and mentors, like Drs. Sharon Rosenberg and Amy Kaler. At Sharon's urging, I fumbled through and eventually read feminist poststructural and anti-colonial theories for the first time. I had a strong interest in qualitative research, so I accepted a fellowship at an international institute for qualitative research and tried

to work through the ethics of research with human subjects and the politics of representation. These issues, in fact, became something of a fixation for me; and I continue to be caught up in the knots of how to come to know ethically, regarding it as a problem that should not be resolved but maintained. During a precious time that bridged my twenties and thirties, I was safe, doing what I liked, and looking for purpose in my work.

In those days, in my little basement suite just off 99th Street and 83rd Avenue, CBC Radio One was almost always on. Radio One was my primary source for news, so I did not see newspaper headlines, but I did occasionally hear of women found murdered or reported missing, and what I occasionally heard started to feel like a pattern. It was on my radio that I also heard of Amnesty International's (2004) account of societal indifference to violence against Indigenous women, and seeking an answer to the questions of how and why such apparently patterned forms of violence could persist, I read Amnesty International's online report *Stolen Sisters.* Then, one particular morning, awoken as usual by my clock radio tuned to CBC, I heard a report about a woman's body found just a few blocks away from where I lived.[8] Because I was in Edmonton and studying sociology when I heard this terrible news and heard about this apparently *social* phenomenon – an expectation of indifference – Edmonton became the site of my research activity. From then on, this place became the context for my scrounging around in search of what I now propose is something not at all like indifference but something that mattered enormously – historically, politically, socially, intimately, and affectively. This was something so deeply invested in the present that disappearance occurred *as usual,* so that some people seemed authorized to die in Edmonton, and the language of societal indifference was the best that Amnesty International could do to draw attention to a collective implication of the ongoing pain and murder of many.

As I worked, I came to theorize that if societal indifference was indeed actually a form of investment, it had to have features. Or, if not features, perhaps more accurately, it had to occur through practices. One might not *actually feel* indifferent; rather, one might feel momentary despair, outrage, or fear, or one might even feel the kind of contentment I allude to as I describe the purpose that I sought in my work. But if indifference

was in operation as a settler colonial investment or as a logic of complicity, it had to be enacted and re-enacted for patterns of violence to continue. And all the while, the features of its enactment may have had to apparently disappear so that all that seemed to be left (depending on where one was situated) was the notion of not caring much or for long or on any significant scale, while those in the *elsewhere of here* were apparently being abandoned, disappeared, or murdered. And so I began this work.

In the following chapters, I specifically address aspects of Edmonton's local context while both considering the claim of societal indifference and examining how social and historical practices operate with meaningful effects in relation to the issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls in the present. Debunking the individualistic factors often used to explain and address this violence (e.g., so-called high-risk lifestyles or the likelihood of a serial killer) as distractions productive to maintaining the violent status quo, I demonstrate how they effectively function as social and political strategies that very often disavow what I argue is an underlying and enduring social and colonial commitment to racialized and gendered violence in Canada, even as these commitments are expressed in different times and places and in different practices within the contexts of settlement, treatment or care, and violence or police control. In this book, I use research conducted at three moments in time to provide support for the controversial claim that, when examined at the socio-historical level, the perpetuation of violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada is not due to indifference at all, as Amnesty International (2004) suggests, but to precisely the inverse. Violence against Indigenous women and girls is state violence, and it is an effect of contemporary, entrenched, and enduring *commitments* to the perpetuation of racialized and gendered oppressions as part of attempts to maintain a settler colonial social order. Political anthropologist Audra Simpson (2016, 1) states it plainly, "Canada requires the death and so called 'disappearance' of Indigenous women in order to secure its sovereignty." The problem is not that individual people happen not to care or that they feel indifferent to this violence but that this violence occurs in myriad forms and is actually congruent with the much larger and much-celebrated project of making and remaking the nation-state as a legitimate and

sovereign entity (Simpson, 1). And in this book, I suggest that this project might *feel* for those who are bolstered by it – who are legitimized by it – very much like *comfort from the inside*. Part of home, after all, is its familiarity, repetition, reinstatement, celebration, and assurance.

Theorizing Societal Indifference

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "indifferent" as Latin in origin and as meaning either "having no particular interest or sympathy; unconcerned" or "not particularly good; mediocre." It notes that the word originally meant "making no difference." The *Oxford American Dictionary* adds that in its origins the word communicated an element of "being neither good nor bad." The word's definition thus presupposes an a priori subject who *has* no particular interest, sympathy, or concern and from whom indifference emanates. Based on this definition, a basic reading of Amnesty International's (2004) claim suggests that Canadians are people who might be expected to have no particular interest, sympathy, or concern when it comes to the occurrence of violence against Indigenous women and girls. Such events make no difference, are neither good nor bad, and provoke no particular concern among those living in Canadian society. There is an absence here – a lack. Read with this definition in mind, Amnesty International's claim of an expectation of societal indifference has particular effects. The discourse positions those who face racialized and gendered violence as on the *outside* of a society expected to be indifferent to this violence. Such an expectation of indifference is possible only if the indifferent subject sees the victim of violence as already *not* a member of this society. The claim thus signals the prior social exclusion of women and girls who were disappeared or who experienced harm. Moreover, it signals that those who know and love the kidnapped or murdered are also *not* contained within the idea of "Canadian society." That is, the utterance of "societal indifference" expels from a generalized notion of "the social" specifically those people who are not indifferent at all. In this case, as a national problem, those excluded by such an utterance are excluded too from a Canadian public whose members, by Amnesty International's assessment, are expected to be impervious to these particular acts of violence.

Assuming that a person would not be expected to be impervious to violence that they themselves are subject to, this discourse points to a very clear conceptual divide regarding who is a citizen of Canada and thus worthy of protection and who is left out. This interpretation positions those disappeared as already excluded from "society" even prior to their disappearance. With this fairly basic reading, Amnesty International's fourth factor can be understood both as a condemnation of Canadians for violence and harm against Aboriginal women and as key to the construction of those subject to violence and harm and their social networks as existing outside of the context of "Canadians" and thus outside of a right to or requirement for protection and concern from the Canadian state. This construction in fact explains and justifies Amnesty International's (2004, 2) second factor: "police in Canada have often failed to provide Indigenous women with an adequate standard of protection." Those people not imagined as indifferent are also not imagined as members of the Canadian society, so in practice, they are perhaps the ones deemed not to warrant the protections otherwise apparently on offer by the state.

There is also the question of what a postulate of societal indifference does to those situated as of *the social*? What of those who (intermittently) hear reports of women or girls disappearing from Edmonton? What of those who also read Amnesty International's (2004) account of an expectation of general indifference? In this case, to be indifferent is perhaps also an indication of safety or protection from violence considered by Amnesty International to be "racist violence" (Amnesty International 2004, 2). Thus, in summoning an indifferent society, does Amnesty International speak specifically of and to a society that is *not* subject to racist violence, a society that has benefited from historical practices and politics that privilege its members' typically nonracialized status? How is it possible, then, for such a proclamation to provoke widespread concern?

None of the interpretations I put forth are in keeping with the mandate of Amnesty International. And my readings of this report are not those expected or intended. However, I suggest that the use of "societal indifference" to address a perceived lack of political or social

mobilization in the face of racist and gendered violence has implications that exceed, and perhaps even work counter to, Amnesty International's more explicit call to attention. I worry that these consequences might function to contain or limit the possibilities for how we think about and address racialized and gendered violence in the Canadian present. Perhaps more urgently, I worry that in its worst manifestation, the account works to name but also to maintain systems of structural state violence.

However, there is also a second interpretation, one that relates to "societal" as a modifier of "indifference."[9] With "societal" characterizing this type of indifference, and thereby distinguishing it from other types of indifference, there are more possibilities for theorizing what is happening. Distinct from, for example, a natural, learned, or individual indifference, "societal indifference" is specific only to the societal context. It is not what one feels or does not feel in relation to a report of violence. The individual is not its locus. Such an understanding cannot work in keeping with a definition that assumes the individual as the source and indifference as only a feeling. With this elaborated interpretation, Amnesty International (2004) might be attempting to discern an indifference that is contingent on the existence of a societal unit or level, an indifference that is unique from whatever apathy or sorrow is felt or not felt by single people, an indifference that has the social as its source. Indifference here is exclusively social. It cannot be otherwise. The claim of societal indifference, then, is not a chastisement but a claim through which to articulate a more elaborate understanding of how a particular affect (or lack thereof) can be social, tied to matters of life and death, and learned even though it remains unconscious or only part of the background to some experiences of daily life. But again, the "societal" relied upon here is an abstraction. And within a mainstream modernist discourse, such a "social" is hard to think with. Questions remain regarding what "the social" is and how we can intervene in social affect. Is the social that is made through this discourse realized only in and by virtue of such proclamations? Is this same social particularly attuned to its historical makings – in this case, to histories of violent settler colonization?

Additional questions abound regarding the capacity in which the social can exist at all and toward what ends. Is calling upon the societal

in effect like calling upon no one? Is doing so an escape from responsibility or a failure to assign blame to anyone in particular? Is an affective expectation of indifference (i.e., a moment of shared affect) one of the ways that a society might actually be said to cohere in discursive practice? With these questions in mind, and returning to Biehl's (2001, 134) description of a woman left to die of poverty and disease in Vita, Brazil, I wonder what the distinction is between language and practice – that is, between an apparent indifference to death and its social authorization? Is societal indifference a depoliticized version of, a prerequisite for, or perhaps the consequence of the social authorization of death? What does public belief in the postulate of indifference do? Are Canadian cities such as Edmonton, Regina, and Winnipeg, which have been noted for "clusters of activities" where Indigenous women and girls face heightened risks of violence (Jacobs and Williams 2008, 134), similarly depoliticized, their strangely neutral naming obscuring pasts that still presently inflict violence as something historically and socially usual?

There are so many of these questions. And so, in this book, I attempt to work against allegations of societal indifference that rely on a modernist distinction between the social and the individual, and I wonder what happens when the question of who is left to die is asked in alternative terms. What happens when an attempt is made to name societal indifference to violence outside of the language of modernity? What happens when violence is framed as a historical and colonial investment in particular practices that have predictable ends? Is this the historical authorization of present-day violence? Along the same lines, how does societal indifference work not as a response but as an idea with no real referent that can nonetheless actually neutralize what might otherwise arouse a reaction to violence? How does the circulation of the concept allow for certain deaths? And how does it work to potentially erase processes of violent colonization, past and present? Does the claim of societal indifference work to keep some Indigenous women and girls in vulnerable and past positions in relation to an unuttered *rest of the nation* by positing them as supposedly unloved and forgotten and perhaps, as this book warily considers, as either not fully living or already on the cusp of death?

If so, how might the claim of an expectation of societal indifference be thought to work the same as or differently from nationalist colonialist strategies of the past? Might it work differently from or in coherence with, for example, the passing of legislation like the Indian Act, which, for more than a century and until Indigenous women successfully fought its overt discrimination, functioned to systematically dissolve Indigenous women's status and rights in Canada (Lawrence 2003)? Is that how the past works – "as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity within the present" (Bhabha 1990, 308)?

Another question that incessantly nags is one that considers the relationship between the expression of a societal affect of nonresponse and the occurrence of actual incidents of violence. Although it would be overly simplistic to think that certain kinds of disappearances and deaths are entirely separable from various reports on reactions to these deaths, it is also problematic to assert a straightforward causal relationship between the two. Discourse and practice are inseparable. I attempt to decipher the contents and effects of this discourse in a Canadian contemporary context, questioning what societal indifference means in practice, how it appears or fails to appear, how it might authorize the deaths of some, and how it might function as an iteration not only of who is allowed to die but also of who is made to belong in Canada's present and who is made to belong only partially or only to the past.

Ultimately, I theorize that if we are interested in protecting women and girls of Indigenous heritage, then an uncritical acceptance of Canadian societal indifference is a constraining place to begin. A postulate of societal indifference would be appropriate only if it were intended to simplify and depoliticize what are otherwise complicated and time-honoured, yet ostensibly reprehensible, parts of the Canadian national story. Despite how the discourse is used by Amnesty International and the Native Women's Association of Canada, I argue that we must be very careful with the term "societal indifference." As an expression of regulatory powers, the idea of societal indifference might actually neutralize contemporary violence toward Indigenous women and girls and erase or ease the Canadian state's and its citizens' historical and contemporary roles

in this violence. Amnesty International nonetheless provides a place to begin, and throughout the analysis that it conducts, its four factors prove highly relevant to pursing an understanding of the present as standing *in* the past since these four factors prove relevant to the structured vulnerability that some women and girls might face in a contemporary colonial Canada due to indifference and otherwise.

My thinking about how some lives are made to matter more or less than others is deeply informed by the work of poststructural social theorist Judith Butler. In the context of wars instigated by the United States since September 11, 2001, Butler's (2009, 50) work has been concerned with examining what she describes as a "differential at the level of affective and moral responsiveness" to violence. All lives are not valued equally, and this differential valuing is not explained only by individual relationships to the dead – these relationships are not the only thing that makes lives matter – but also by an affect that is communicated and shared. As Butler writes, "Affect is never merely our own: affect is, from the start, communicated from elsewhere. It disposes us to perceive the world in a certain way, to let certain dimensions of the world in and to resist others" (Butler 2009, 50). Butler describes affect as regulated and as dependent "on social supports for feeling" that are embedded in particular practices (Butler 2009, 50), such as the claim itself. That is, the claim of an expectation of indifference not only names but also prepares and instructs. However, beyond this observation, I have begun to theorize that the notion of societal indifference actually contains its inverse, which suggests that it contains a primary and basic interest in the production of particular subjects for subjugation. In Butler's (2004, 148) terms, I am suggesting that the claim of societal indifference might function as a basic support for the production of particular subjects for "dehumanization." This support, I suggest, actually necessitates what I identify as racialized state violence.[10] Societal indifference, in this case, becomes a practice and outcome for the achievement of dehumanization and is perhaps itself the evidence of successful racialization.[11] As such, societal indifference to an act of violence may be akin to what Butler describes as "the derealization of loss – the insensitivity to human suffering and death [as] the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished" (Butler

2004, 148). But if insensitivity to human suffering is a mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished, I wonder how we might examine it. How do we examine affect as more than our own? How do we find the social supports that Butler (2009) identifies?

In this book, I analyze a variety of texts toward understanding what I have come to see as the historical logics of recent violence in Edmonton. I postulate that practices of dehumanization occur through claims of societal indifference and that these practices seem to share a number of consistencies. I propose further that these consistencies are in fact supported, maintained, and reproduced by the metaphysics of a settler colonial logic and context. The world defined by this ontology has specific components, including that it is singular, that it is Euclidean and inert, that it has a linear and progressive model of history, and that it has a "natural" and hierarchical organization, such as in terms of the Great Chain of Being, gender and "race," or biology (Law 2004; L. Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Theorized as a social support for feeling (indifferent), dehumanization might therefore occur with an implicit acceptance of actual violence when specifically tied to socially constructed categories of biological distinction and hierarchy; that is, by virtue of these distinctions, some people are positioned as a priori dehumanized victim subjects. A temporally singular rather than historically embedded or entrenched theory of time also supports this idea since what bears upon us in the present is considered to be dislocated from an equally singular and prior time. A Euclidean and naturalized conception of space as empty and inert – which determines that, in realist terms, there *is* actual proximity to violent events that occur in certain spaces – means that we do not need to examine the meanings made in and attached to human places and that we do not need to see these places as themselves active as social supports. Accordingly, distance is purely geographical. And finally, a progressive social teleology means the endurance of a narrative of history in which the nation is articulated as morally good or, perhaps more accurately, as having once made mistakes but as now redeemed – often by apology or just by the passage of time.

If dehumanization is a predecessor or companion to enactments of societal indifference, and if it occurs, in part, through these four

mechanisms, each a feature of our contemporary and recent historical episteme (Foucault 1970; Law 2004) – that is, through the consistent invention and naturalization of biologized categories *for* the relative valuing of life, through a historical forgetting en masse, through the invention and binding of spaces of safety and danger, and through a national storyline that functions to create the present as an always improved upon version of the past – then I expect that there are historical materials as well as symbolic indicators of such coalescences. That is, these features are latent in material conditions and indeed haunt practices of dehumanization as they occur in the contemporary context. I expect that these social mechanisms produce certain absences and presences that are indicative of such hauntings (Gordon 1997). If an apparent societal indifference to the disappearance of Indigenous women in Edmonton is haunted by (or occurs via) the features outlined above, then I suppose not only that these features of the colonial present can be assessed empirically but also that these features have made some prior appearances as more or less tried and true repetitions. Although I suspect that these characteristics are often not explicit in our practices – neither in official memory nor in official historical productions of the past such as history texts and museum exhibits – they are nonetheless there. They are discernible in careful analyses of cultural productions of and from the past. Therefore, to examine these four as they haunt contemporary moments and the disappearances now occurring, I isolate and take up several moments in the making of violences in particular places in the city known as Edmonton.

There are many ways to conceptualize violence, but it is perhaps most common to think about violence while assuming a basic victim-perpetrator dyad. Such conceptions permeate everyday understandings of violence and function as justifications for various forms of policing and police institutions. But understandings of violence are asociological when limited to assessments of individual motives or events and when conceptualized as existing in a vacuum of social meaning. Violence, like affect, is never merely individual. Rather, when examined sociologically, violence is always found to have certain social, historical, and relational precedents.[12] In the context of this book, I examine violence beyond the

limitations of a dichotomous and individualized definition and in much more expansive terms, addressing both targeted and specific aggressions against particular bodies in particular places as well as the sometimes impalpable, and nearly impossible to study, damages of historical objectification and erasure. Although typically conceptualized as physical harm committed by one person against another, violence here is instead understood as existing in individual experience but also as exceeding individual experience since it exists in and surpasses the moment of its most apparent manifestations, with always a much more complicated story to tell.

Sociological conceptions of violence have addressed how violence operates in ways that transcend the individual, often framing violence as a structural feature of a social and historical context (Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969). Violence, too, has social supports. Anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004, 307) describes violence as an outcome of multiple axes of oppression, with combined effects that cannot thoroughly be discerned using a linear, modernist, and individualist approach. Attempts to understand violence only in the present historical moment and only in terms of individual experience and positions will always fail to capture what is operating as a social force: "Structural violence is exerted systematically – that is, indirectly – *by everyone who belongs* to a certain social order" (Farmer 2004, 307, emphasis added). As structural, not individual, the concept offers no relief from implication in violence. There is no retreat to some false distinction between a victim and perpetrator. Instead, the concept of structural violence defies "moral econom[ies] still geared to pinning praise or blame on individual actors" (Farmer 2004, 307). Structural violence thus describes a kind of general or collective implication in the particular violent practices occurring in a certain social order, partly through *belonging*. Within that order, there is no position of freedom from responsibility for violence.

Yet this is an extremely challenging way to think about violence. In part, that is because achieving belonging has included collective practices of forgetting or denying all but an individualized implication in violence (Farmer 2004). Farmer's work addresses "the erasure of historical memory and other forms of desocialization as enabling conditions of structures

that are both 'sinful' and ostensibly 'nobody's fault'" (Farmer 2004, 307). Making a specific tie to the founding of settler colonial societies like Canada, historian Lorenzo Veracini (2010, 80) writes that "only a sustained disavowal of *any* founding violence allows a seamless process of settler territorialisation" (emphasis in original). The arrival of settlers and their attempts at the permanent takeover of land have required an ongoing denial of the violence in these processes. Thus, for an analysis of patterned forms of racial and gender violence and of what appears as "societal indifference" to such violence in Canada, structural violence offers the beginning of a way to think through how harm occurs without overt recognition and historical memory – and hence without reproof. How violence may occur in everyday contexts without being recognized as violence, how it might even be socially condoned and supported in some contexts, how it eludes redress or how it changes, and how it escapes anything more than the individual assignment of responsibility can be elucidated only with a concept of violence that operates at a distance from, yet remains directly tied to, people's experiences.

Neither structural violence nor the notion of a societal indifference can be considered without addressing settler colonialism in Canada as a form of colonialism characterized by the intention of settlers to stay and make "a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5; Vowel 2016).[13] This assertion of sovereignty is most centrally an assertion of control and ownership of land, and it is a control that radically disrupts vital relationships between Indigenous peoples and the land (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5; Watts 2013). For this reason, scholars of settler colonialism have identified violence as inherent to the structure of settler colonialism and to its daily iterations (Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006). This violence not only exists at the level of incongruent worldviews and relations with land but is also fundamentally about the elimination of the Indigenous subject, *constructed* as "Other," through whom colonial sovereignty is achieved and maintained (Mbembe 2001; A. Smith 2005; Tuck and Yang 2012; Veracini 2010; Vowel 2016; Wolfe 2006). Philosopher, political scientist, and public intellectual Achille Mbembe (2001, 25) enumerates three forms of violence embedded in the kind of claims to sovereignty made

through settler colonialism: "the founding violence of conquest; the legitimating violence of transforming conquest into moral authority; and the ordinary and banal violence necessary for the maintenance of colonial sovereignty." Although the last of these forms appears most obviously aligned with the questions of concern in this book – such as how violence against Indigenous women is constructed as though it were original and banal, provoking no response – I suggest that, even though disavowed, the founding and the legitimating of violence, here postulated as historical forms of state violence, remain in operation in ways that eventuate the perception of some violence as ordinary and banal. Settler colonial sovereignty is deeply invested in making some forms of violence ordinary for the maintenance of sovereignty, and among these types of violence, gendered and sexualized violence are key mechanisms through which settler colonial power and entitlements are visualized and re-enacted (Deer 2015; Hunt 2017; Razack 2000, 2016; A. Simpson 2016; L.B. Simpson 2014; A. Smith 2005; Watts 2013).

In this book I address settler colonial violence as manifest in the disappearances of people, specifically of women and girls, and in the emergence of a notion of indifference to these occurrences. But among the major limitations of this work is my failure to elaborate on the full complexity of the power relations in operation in relation to these specific events. Societal indifference and racist and state violence against Indigenous women and girls are not predetermined occurrences. The perpetuation of, or continual return to, violence in Canada is not inevitable, and the events that I theorize as part of a structural state violence are not without multiple, active, and effective modes of Indigenous defiance, resistance, strength, and transformation. These stories, however, are not the stories that many Canadians hear (see A. Simpson 2014; L.B. Simpson 2016, 2017; L.B. Simpson, Nanibush, and Williams 2012; Tuck 2009). Kwakwaka'wakw scholar Sarah Hunt (2017) critiques the too common representations of Indigenous peoples as "at risk" rather than as strong, resilient, and powerful. This book does not describe the multiple, active, and effective modes of defiance, resistance, strength, and transformation within Indigenous communities. Here, I concern myself with the question of *how* it is communicated that some lives are not

considered full and legitimate within a Canadian nation and hence are subject to disregard and violence. This is a question of how. It is not a question of which specific lives and their particular matterings. The practices that I examine in the book do produce a uniformity of *type,* but they do so precisely, I argue, so that those lives made "typical" can also be rendered less than fully human. The phrase "societal indifference," however, only falsely asserts that the disappeared were not loved or cared for and that their disappearances are not deeply mourned. Yet with this phrase, a Canadian constituent is being produced and told of "disposable" lives or of lives that matter less than others; the practices that support this instruction are what I am most interested in discerning. It is these practices that I hope to unsettle. I do not take up this research in relation to particular accounts of lived human experiences, and I neither interview or talk to people as though they were subject to racial and gendered oppressions nor speak with them as active agents of resistance, subversion, or modification of such forces. Instead, my focus is on discourses, those discernible in mostly public texts. I examine how such texts position us and how we might position ourselves, how we are made through discourses in relation to one another, and how these processes occur in ways that subsume some realities and produce others, largely in keeping with implicit settler colonial understandings and with narratives of progress, individualism, and history. Nonetheless, I will continue to argue that disappearances and the supposed "societal indifference" to such profound losses in Canada are not the inevitable present but are made possible only by ongoing practices that are part of the project of making a supposedly modern benevolent version of this nation in what we consider *the present* time and place.

Names and Places

In this book, I overgeneralize and distort. One of the ways that I do this is when I refer to diverse peoples in very homogeneous terms. This is a practice I both critique and perpetuate in this book. This homogenization occurs most problematically in relation to how I refer to different nations of peoples whose kinship networks and stories extend for millennia in parts of what is now commonly called North America. However, as legal

scholar and member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Sarah Deer (2018) describes in her work on the relationship between violence and settler colonialism, there is no consensus on one set of appropriate terms to refer to the great diversity among Indigenous populations. In the book *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto,* Mohawk activist, scholar, and writer Taiaiake Alfred (1999, xxv) situates the problem of naming as a contemporary one, stating that "as Native people relearn the languages stripped from us in the past, we are coming to realize the gross insult of most common 'Indian' names." Many of these are names that early settler colonizers used to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, and their contemporary repetition can re-enact a kind of colonial entitlement to name, to appropriate, and to know, and it can continue the legacy of colonization. Alfred outlines the use of these various terminologies:

> "Indian" (it should be noted that the area now known as "India" was still called "Hindustan" in the fifteenth century; the term "Indian" as applied to indigenous Americans is derived from Columbus's original name for the Taino people he first encountered, "una gente in Dios," or "Indios," meaning "a people in God"; "Indian" is also a legal term, and in common use among indigenous people in North America), "Native" (in references to the racial and cultural distinctiveness of individuals, and to distinguish our communities from those of the mainstream society), "American Indians" (in common use and a legal-political category in the United States), "Aboriginal" (a legal category in Canada; also to emphasize the primacy of the people who first occupied the land), and "indigenous" (in global contexts, and to emphasize natural, tribal, and traditional characteristics of various people). All are quite appropriate in context and are used extensively by Native people themselves. (Alfred 1999, xxvi)

There is no route to purity here. There is no possible assurance of correct or ethical use of language here. We cannot step outside of the

language histories through which we communicate and act today. In this work, in attempting to adopt a context-specific approach, I primarily use "Indigenous peoples." The plural here is important, as it indicates that there are many different nations of Indigenous people and that similarities between diverse groups should not be assumed (Vowel 2016). My frequent use of "Indigenous peoples" emphasizes the primacy of the land's First Peoples and of their relations, and reflects a common usage in a variety of Canadian texts, including those generated by Indigenous communities as well as by scholars, governments, and activists. In some parts of the book, I also use the terms "Aboriginal," "First Nations," "Métis," and "Inuit." "Aboriginal" was used as a legal designation in Canada in the Constitution Act, 1982 (Vowel 2016), is a very general term, and does not indicate legal Indian status (27). The terms "First Nations," "Inuit," and "Métis" are also commonly used in government publications and are the three Aboriginal groups recognized in Canada's Constitution. I occasionally use these terms when referring to a group that has historically been demarcated as such. I use the term "Native peoples" to refer to a multitude of different communities whose members identify them as distinct from what are now commonly considered mainstream Canadian communities. I also use the term "Indian" when such usage reflects the language used in historical texts.

When I have been able to access the traditional or chosen names of important territories or figures, I have used them in this book. When I have been unable to do that, I have attempted to make reference to the territories and figures in ways that nonetheless undermine Eurocentric naming practices and assumptions and foreground the diversity and complexity of humans and groupings. However, it is the case that language changes, names are contested, and the boundaries that seem to be demarcated by particular namings are always blurred. The language I use in this book does reflect my own social positions and ignorance; I do not always know – nor perhaps, importantly, *should* I always know – the traditional, contemporary, or chosen names of the places and peoples that feature as significant in this work. I recognize that I cannot know all of the implications of my writing. Such a knowing seems anyway to be too much aligned with the certainties that a Eurocentric ontology

might guarantee. I take some reassurance in the idea that this particular politically oriented historiography of violence in a settler colonial contemporary context could not be written without some collapsing of diverse peoples into more homogeneous groupings. This simplification also applies to those people I broadly characterize as settler colonial subjects, as white settler subjects, or as colonizers. This work suffers from a lack of specificity there, too, although in this case it works quite differently. I know few details of the early settlers. I argue, however, that the construction of the Native-settler dyad has been a crucial and ongoing component of the making of a Canadian national history and that these two categories have been instrumental to the (provisionally) successful making of a particular Canadian nation (Mackey 1999; Veracini 2010). A most essential exclusive dichotomy produced through settler colonialism is "the one separating the coloniser and the colonised" (Veracini 2010, 16). Thus part of the work includes at once a use of and an interrogation of those terms. But the uses of these two overly general categorizations are not equivalent in their effects since all of the terms I use to describe those who arrived in this place and established Canada from French and British colonies are terms used by Euro-Canadians to write and speak of themselves, they are not historically derogatory, and although certainly overly general (as with the term "Euro"), they serve to locate the movement and spread of a certain form of Western power and knowledge that accompanied the footsteps of (various) settler colonial subjects. Among settler colonizers, I name fur traders, explorers, settlers, and immigrants. Notice that the array of terms used to describe those who colonized the country function to distinguish between people based on their activities, not on their *being* or their bodies, and thus function differently from terms that suggest or emerge from a notion of ethnic or racial difference. I use the term "white" when speaking specifically of a racial politics that has effectively naturalized the privilege of one group by situating its members as in opposition to or as inherently different from an "Other."

Throughout this book, the language used in reference to the missing and murdered women and girls of Edmonton and elsewhere in Canada is deliberate and requires particular attention. As has been done thus

far, I often refer to these cases as instances in which people have been "disappeared." This is a dangerous reference and an allusion to those more commonly known as the *desaparecidos,* those who were disappeared from a number of Latin American countries from about the mid-1960s to the early 1980s (Gordon 1997). The disappearance of people in countries like Guatemala, Chile, and Argentina was an exercise of state power to deter public resistance. Sociologist Avery Gordon (1997, 72) describes these processes as consisting of "illegal abduction by the police, military and paramilitary squads, detention in secret centres, torture, usually death and improper burial and denial by the authorities ... These were the horrifying characteristics of the organized system of repression known as disappearance." In Argentina 30,000 people were disappeared between 1976 and 1983, but disappearance has also occurred as an exercise of state power in other places, such as Nazi Germany, where 7,000 people were disappeared under the Night and Fog Decree of 1941 (Gordon 1997, 72).

Using disappearance to frame what is happening in Edmonton risks suggesting that the type of state repression and violence exercised in Latin America or Nazi Germany is comparable to what is happening in Canada. This is neither the point nor the case. Rather, Gordon (1997, 72) is clear that disappearance is a "worldwide phenomenon." I follow anthropologist Dara Culhane's (2003) use of the term in her account of how Vancouver activists adopted a strategy famously implemented by the movement Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina to draw attention to the disappearances of loved ones. In 2001, during an annual procession held on February 14 to draw attention to Vancouver's missing and murdered women, participants carried pictures of the missing, just as was done by members of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Culhane 2003). The terms "disappearance" and "the disappeared" are used in this book for several reasons. First, they circumvent what has in recent years become the arguably too easy iteration of the phrase "missing and murdered Indigenous women," which is found specifically in Canadian media and social media – a repetition that I argue has something important to do with what has been identified as the "societal indifference" to violence against those identified as Indigenous women. Second, they radically

redefine the cases of missing and murdered women as public and political rather than private occurrences and thus implicate the nation-state in these violences. Third, they lack the abstract meaning of the word "missing" and instead point to real actions taken by real people to effect another's disappearance (Gordon 1997, 75). Fourth, their use as a theoretical tool in one of the historical moments I analyze in this book seems only to illuminate their applicability to the other two, thereby contributing to how we might understand the possibilities that temporally drawn-out, highly obscured, but nonetheless systematic forms of disappearance were occurring across colonial time in Canada. Finally, this use of "disappearance" and "the disappeared" operates to refuse death for those whose lives have been taken away, whether through kidnapping or murder. "Death exists in the past tense, disappearance in the present" (Gordon 1997, 113). Whereas death in the modern moment marks a life as though it were past, disappearance does not (Gordon 1997, 113). "Disappearance" can in fact ward off death, and in so doing, the term also keeps at bay a tendency or desire or imperative to mourn, to forget, or to get over the violence of a life taken.

So, although the disappearances occurring in Canada are not at all equivalent to those that occurred in Latin America, at least in the most immediate present, and although the state roles in these violences may not appear to be direct, immediate, or obvious, I argue that the use of disappearance as a framework reveals some startling and important parallels (Culhane 2003; Dean 2015). Since I argue that the implication of the state in Edmonton's disappearances is particularly nuanced, hidden, or – as will be discussed – recognized as existing only in the past, the analysis here does much to further our understandings of disappearances and how they might work to produce a settler colonial nation of the present.