

Pedagogy of Indifference

State Responses to Violence Against Indigenous Girls

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La récente décision de la Cour qui a acquitté Raymond Cormier accusé du meurtre de Tina Fontaine, une fillette de 14 ans, a provoqué un tollé général et déçu les autochtones qui y ont vu un exemple probant de la violence coloniale qui sévit toujours. Pour plusieurs cette décision sert à confirmer que le Canada est une société où la violence envers les jeunes autochtones n'est pas seulement occultée mais elle est sanctionnée. Dès la naissance de Tina, le Canada a constamment douté de la compétence de sa famille et de la communauté pour la protéger et la soigner, alors qu'il ne lui en donnait pas les moyens. La petite Tina était sous la tutelle juridique, donc sous la responsabilité du Canada qui devait voir à sa sécurité dans les espaces privés et publics. L'étude de la Gendarmerie Royale sur « Les femmes autochtones disparues et assassinées : un aperçu opérationnel national » publiée il y a quelques mois avant la mort de Tina a révélé que le Canada avait failli à sa tâche. Les documents rapportés et les histoires sur la violence sexuelle et sexiste envers les femmes et les jeunes filles autochtones prônaient une éducation publique qui soutenait la violence plutôt que de la prévenir.

The recent court decision acquitting Raymond Cormier of the murder of fifteen-year-old Tina Fontaine has been met with the anguished outcries of Indigenous peoples who have derided this verdict as a sterling example of ongoing settler colonial violence. For many, this court decision serves as confirmation that Canada is a society where violence against Indigenous girls is not only socially condoned, it is state sanctioned. As with most Indigenous girls, from the moment of Fontaine's birth, Canada has continually interfered with her family and community's ability to raise Fontaine while, at the same time, failing to provide her with adequate care and protection. The fifteen-year-old was a ward of the state and, for this reason, Canada had a responsibility for ensuring her wellbeing and safety in both public and private spaces and areas of life. This study reveals one of the ways that Canada not only fails in the task of protecting Indigenous girls, but also enacts harm. Specifically, the article focuses on the *National Operational Overview on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women (NOOMMIW)*, an RCMP-led report released just

months prior to Fontaine's death, to explore how state-produced and supported documents and narratives on gender and sexual violence against Indigenous girls and women presents a form of public education that sustains rather than prevents such violence.

This article highlights three key aspects of this kind of state-led public pedagogy. The analysis begins by placing violence against Indigenous girls, as well as state documents addressing it, within the context of the settler colonial terrain that is "Canada." Next, the article unpacks how the NOOMMIW state report fosters public education that situates Indigenous girls outside the realm of girlhood. The document further teaches Canadian publics that Indigenous girls and women experience sexual and other forms of violence, and are disappearing and dying, because of their high-risk lifestyles and so-called dysfunctional cultures. The state document's final public lesson through this report suggests that, since Indigenous girls and women are already dying, these losses are inevitable, hence the refusal to allocate resources to investigate

these crimes, apprehend and punish the perpetrators, or support survivors. These state-supported lessons present a public site of education that has remained understudied and unappreciated in relation to gender and sexual violence against Indigenous girls and women in Canada.

Canada as a Colonial-Scape

When the twenty-two-page report *National Operational Overview on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women (NOOMMIW)* was released on 16 May 2014, it was boasted as, “the most comprehensive and accurate account to date of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada” (RCMP). Compiled by the state police forces, the report relied primarily upon findings from the Native Women’s Association of Canada’s (NWAC) Sisters in Spirit research project and database, Maryanne Pearce’s 2013 dissertation titled *An Awkward Silence: Missing and Murdered Vulnerable Women and the Canadian Justice System*, as well as a range of state statistics and figures related to the disappearance and death of Indigenous women and girls. Through the use of quantitative methods, the state-led study confirmed the longstanding and well-defended argument by Indigenous families, activists, and researchers that Indigenous women and girls have been disproportionately targeted with racialized, gendered, and sexual violence in Canada, as evidenced by their vulnerability to disappearance and murder. This finding, however, positioned the state report as the outcome of a benevolent and concerned Canadian state and police force, thus erasing Canada’s colonial realities and the fact that the settler state and police are actually the root of this violence.

Indeed, Canada has carefully constructed itself as a peacekeeping, multicultural nation established

through friendly negotiations with the original inhabitants (Mawani; Murdocca; Razack, “When Place Becomes Race”). If settler colonialism is acknowledged in state narratives or history textbooks, it tends to be framed as a violent occurrence in the nation’s past, not as a structure that continues to shape this white settler society (Couthard; Palmater; Razack, *Dying from Improvement*). In contrast, Indigenous feminist scholars have demonstrated convincingly that state-inflicted systematized gendered violence against Indigenous girls and women has been an integral part of Canada’s settler colonial regime.¹ In Dian Million’s words, addressing ongoing settler colonialism, “requires that we understand the increasing gender violence perpetuated against Indigenous women as more than an attack on individuals, and as a mobile but durable feature of colonial power relations” (7). Therefore, the rape, torture, murder, and disappearance of Indigenous girls and women in Canada are the colonial instruments by which the settler Canadian state has constituted itself.² Yet violence in the lives of Indigenous girls is often overlooked and under-examined (Downe 2).

Scholarship across disciplines tends to conflate Indigenous girls with women or as simply children when discussing colonial violence. In either instance, the unique social location and legal minor status of Indigenous girls remains unaddressed. An emerging research focused on the relationship between violence against Indigenous girls and the production of Indigenous girlhood in Canada points out that colonial violence must be addressed at the intersections of age, gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, and other social locations.³

In fact, for Indigenous girls, the settler state’s approach to managing Indigenous peoples is by using instruments of violence especially

against Indigenous girls and women. Indigenous girlhood, therefore, must be understood as a socially constructed category informed by mutually constitutive systems, including colonialism, race, gender, sexuality, and class (Batacharya 36).

Furthermore, as a contextually, nationally, and historically specific category, Indigenous girlhood is a lived identity with material implications. Such understanding of Indigenous girlhood dovetails notions of gendered and sexual violence resting upon interlocking colonial, racial, class, and other oppressive structures; hence these notions challenge normative Eurocentric and western notions of ‘girlhood’ (de Finney “Playing Indian” 170). Performing the work of normative and “hegemonic femininity,” this normative notion of girlhood sustains white racial supremacy in settler colonial locations, such as Canada (de Finney “Playing Indian” 170). Sheila Batacharya elaborates that, “hegemonic femininity simultaneously signals a subordinate gender position that defines women as objects and property without agency, and is celebrated as integral to the transmission of bourgeois morality and respectability that defines white settler nationalism” (45). In establishing this connection, Batacharya emphasizes the significance of “girl” to Canadian nation-building. Specifically, settler states like Canada regard white girls as (re)producers and gatekeepers of the future of the nation. Indigenous girls, by contrast, are perceived as threats that must be carefully managed or eradicated. One of the ways that settler states manage this so-called threat is through discursive representations depicting Indigenous girls as uncivilized, promiscuous, and immoral (Batacharya 46). Indigenous girls are thus ‘bad girls’ or not really girls at all; hence state narratives construct her as a promiscuous female adult whose behavior and culture predispose her

to sexual forms of violence, murder, or disappearance (Batacharya 48).

Although Indigenous girls are discursively and materially denied access to the privileges and protections of modern girlhood, as legal minors they are subject to the laws governing this category. This includes the fact that as legal minors, Indigenous girls are always held in some form of custody.

Indigenous children were enrolled in these schools. Within these schools, many children became fatally ill due to poor living conditions and malnutrition (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 3). These children either witnessed or experienced verbal, mental, emotional, spiritual, physical, and sexual abuse by staff.⁴ As well, they were subject to forced

individuals described their personal experiences as positive, the practice of severing Indigenous children's connection to respective families and communities had the overall effect of fracturing individual senses of identity and disrupting Indigenous sociopolitical governance structures.

With the turn of the twentieth century came fundamental legislative

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Increasingly, Indigenous girls are removed from the care of parents to be placed in state custody, whether in foster care, boarding school arrangements, or youth detention centres. With an increasing number of Indigenous girls entering into state custody, it is important to consider the historical and contemporary ways in which targeting Indigenous children has always been a distinguishing feature of Canada's colonial regime. This approach to colonial management is most clearly seen through Canada's Indian residential school system (IRS), the largescale apprehension of Indigenous children through the mid-twentieth-century commonly referred to as the "Sixties Scoop," and contemporary manifestations of these two institutions. With inquiries such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and, more recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the assimilatory and genocidal intent of residential schools is coming squarely into view. These government-sponsored, church-operated institutions first opened in 1879 and remained in existence until the final state-sponsored school closed in 1996. During this time, over 150,000

labour under the guise of education, all the while being stripped of their rights to learn about their respective cultures and nations (Chrisjohn and Young; Furniss; Haig-Brown; Miller; Milloy). Although greater light has been shed on the horrors of Indian residential schools, the full extent of the violence can never be known.

The Canadian state has been deeply invested in producing official narratives to frame systematized violence against Indigenous children, girls or women as a past occurrence. However, the winding down of residential schools coincided with the expansion of Canada's child welfare system as well as the emergence of contemporary boarding school arrangements, thus stands to suggest otherwise. While the structures changed, the ideologies giving rise to residential schools continue to govern Canada's approach to Indigenous child welfare management, including violence against Indigenous girls. For example, throughout the mid-twentieth century, Indigenous children were removed en masse from families and placed into white homes across Canada, the United States, and even some parts of Europe (Sinclair 66). Although some

changes to Canada's child welfare system, but, as scholars have noted, Indigenous children remain prime targets of colonial violence (Blackstock "Residential Schools" 74; Kline 390; Timpson 536). As Cindy Blackstock observes, the alarming rates at which Indigenous children are placed in state care is more closely linked to racism and systemic inequalities than child abuse or negligence. She contends, "First Nations children were not being removed because their families are putting them at greater risk, but rather because their families are at greater risk due to social exclusion, poverty and poor housing" ("Residential Schools" 75-76).

For those who are not placed in foster care, there is yet another institutional practice, wherein Indigenous children and youth are relocated in great numbers to urban spaces to attend public schools, while living with a local family. Still needing to fulfill the educational clause outlined in many of the numbered treaties, the federal government implemented a practice of temporarily relocating Indigenous youth to nearby towns and cities to reside with local families while pursuing secondary school. More often than

not, youth were relocated to racially hostile, mostly white communities that did not welcome Indigenous presence and actually perceived it as a threatening encroachment (Talaga 141). Indigenous students living in these towns and cities were subject to overt and covert forms of violence by community members and this othering was further reinforced by municipal/provincial segregation laws. The infamous case of the murder of Helen Betty Osborne shines light on how boarding arrangements for the purposes of schooling have been dangerous for Indigenous teenage girls (Hamilton and Sinclair). Yet the Canadian federal government has refused to build schools on northern remote reserves so that Indigenous children and youth could be educated within their own communities. Where schools have been built, their structuring and organizing did not prevent violence against Indigenous girls (Angus 59). Colonial ideologies and state thinking that devalues the lives, wellbeing and safety of Indigenous girls and children in educational spaces underlines the continuous violence.

The remaining sections of this article return to the *National Operational Overview on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women (NOOMMIW)* to document and analyze how these broader historical colonial technologies of violence are manifested in the document and how these manifestations constitute public pedagogies that normalize gendered and sexual violence against Indigenous girls and women.

Not Really Girls

A significant proportion of persons featured in the report were legal minors, yet the document consistently referred to these individuals as “women” or “females.” This articulation of Indigenous girls as women must

be seen as a discursive maneuver intended to cast these individuals outside the realm of girlhood into the category of adulthood with all of the social expectations and responsibilities, yet none of the legal rights of this category. The exclusion of Indigenous girls from this category allows the report to shift the burden of responsibility for violence from state to individual. The exclusion further invites the public for which the report is intended to perceive the Indigenous girls who were victims as individuals responsible for protecting themselves. Simultaneously, Indigenous girls and the violent conditions of Indigenous girlhood in Canada, addressed in the report, presents a kind of absent presence. Pictured on the cover of the report is a blurred photograph of an Indigenous teenage girl in a jingle dress on a prairie landscape with the horizon in the distance (RCMP). The silver cones bounce from the young person’s dress as she dances towards the frame suggesting movement and temporality. Although the blurred effect obscures the teenage girl’s face, her slight frame along with her small, smooth face reveals an undeniable youth. The narrative of the report is much like the cover image and text. That is, Indigenous girlhood is never named despite the fact that Indigenous girls populate the violent landscape depicted in this study. As well, like the cover image, much detail is deliberately obscured and omitted throughout the document. It is important to emphasize that this is not some careless mistake. The refusal to name Indigenous girlhood is a deliberate strategy intended to evict Indigenous girls from the category of modern girlhood in an effort to facilitate ongoing settler colonial objectives.

The report also features statistical figures and research studies that provide an equally powerful pedagogy casting the issue at hand. Statistics

have the ability to transform individual concerns into a societal matter, showing how an overall population is affected by a common issue. That said, statistical representations can also be manipulated to conceal information and confuse matters as much as providing insight. It is important to remember that the statistics are not incontrovertible facts but, rather, can be interpreted to tell all kinds of stories. Although the state-led study discussed here drew extensively from the findings of NWAC and Dr. Maryanne Pearce’s work, NOOMMIW uses these figures to tell a dramatically different story than its key source material (RCMP 6). In what appears to be a tactic to dismiss conclusions that Indigenous women and girls are exceptionally vulnerable to colonial violence, it is stated from the outset that gender violence is a societal issue that, “affects one-third of women around the globe” (RCMP 6). Shifting from violence against Indigenous girls in Canada to violence as a global issue denies readers details about colonial histories in Canada and the effects of these histories of violence in Indigenous communities. Moreover, framing gender violence in this manner has the effect of absolving the Canadian state of responsibility. By articulating the disproportionate rates of gender violence in the lives of Indigenous people as part of a global phenomenon, the Canadian state can more readily deny existing genocidal frameworks. As elaborated below, Canada has predominantly targeted Indigenous children, including girls, through so-called child welfare and educational institutions, wherein gender and sexual violence has been present.

For decades, Indigenous communities have tirelessly raised awareness of gender violence in the lives of Indigenous peoples. The work of individuals and organizations such as the NWAC has proven particularly

effective in conveying the systemic nature of gender violence while, at the same time, attending to the individual humanity of those disappeared. Following the release of the report, Bob Paulson, then RCMP Commissioner, insisted that, “Every file we reviewed represents a mother, grandmother, daughter, sister, aunt or friend.... We cannot lose sight of the human aspect

youth, despite the fact that these age categories are over-represented in the statistical data anchoring the report.

Providing this information is more than satisfying one’s curiosity; details about individual identities and lives are critical for producing comprehensive public knowledge of the issue. Take for instance the location of Indigenous girls’ homi-

A similar move is made through the absence of discussion within the report on those individuals thought to have runaway. Like the previous example, enough information is omitted to conceal the fact that many girls are represented within this category. Only near the end of the report is it revealed that individuals included within the runaway category are un-

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of these incidents” (qtd. in Sthankiya). In spite of the former Commissioner’s assertions, considerations of Indigenous humanity are not apparent in the twenty-two-page report. Instead, throughout the document, Indigenous girls and women are stripped of social markers and frequently reduced to the biological classification “female.” Personal names of Indigenous victims and life or death stories are not provided in the report. For example, the report introduces readers to the subject of gender violence as follows, “Police-reported incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal female investigations in this review total 1,181. This number includes 1,017 Aboriginal female homicide victims between 1980 and 2012, and 164 Aboriginal women currently considered missing” (RCMP 7). Described in this manner, the report leaves little room to reflect on the magnitude of loss, as terms like “female” and “victim” tend to foreclose considerations of individual identity or one’s humanity. Readers are being led to believe that the Indigenous victims under consideration are adults and certainly not infants, children, girls, or

cides. It is shown that most homicide victims are murdered in a residence defined in the report as single homes, houses, townhouses, residential dwellings, and apartments. Forms of living arrangements that exist within any given household obscure the fact that many Indigenous girls, children, and youth are entangled in Canada’s child welfare system, and that these girls died by violence while in the care of the state. Without this background, readers might assume that those murdered within residences had previously existed within a normative nuclear familial household which, in turn, lead one to believe that the assailant is a family member. The failure to indicate the ages of these homicide victims is a significant gap within this study that effectively conceals the reality that, as wards of the state, many Indigenous girls are held in dangerous living arrangements. The insinuation that individuals are dying at the hands of family members as opposed to dying within state-mandated living arrangements is a powerful rhetorical move that effectively shifts the burden of responsibility from the state onto the individual.

der the age of eighteen and, even then, these individuals are never identified as girls (RCMP 32). The refusal to discuss underlying motivations that compel girls to run away from home, foster home, or group home must be seen as an abdication of responsibility. As legal minors, these girls are supposed to be protected by someone, whether a parent or guardian. With an increasing number of Indigenous girls apprehended by child welfare agents, it is the Canadian state that has failed to provide these girls with care and protection. Yet, this failure is not reflected in the discussions on residential homicides or runaways.

Tina Fontaine, like approximately 40,000⁷ other Indigenous children in Canada, had been living under the custody of Canada’s child welfare system at the time of her death. Leading up to Fontaine’s disappearance, the teenage girl had been residing in a Winnipeg hotel where she was placed by Child and Family Services (CFS). According to media reports, Fontaine’s great-aunt and previous guardian, Thelma Favel, expressed concern regarding her niece’s well-being and safety to CFS, as Fontaine was known to run away from the

downtown hotel (see Lambert). As revealed by Fontaine's encounters with Winnipeg Police Service, health-care providers, and child welfare staff hours prior to her death, state officials approached the teenage girl's disappearance with what can only be described as gross indifference and negligence. The apathy displayed by state officials towards Fontaine's

Women contains a section entitled 'Understanding certain risk factors of murdered Aboriginal females,' wherein the report addresses Indigenous girls' and women's employment status, use of intoxicants, and involvement in the sex trade (RCMP 17). Whereas the report suffers from vagueness and glaring omissions in other aspects of Indigenous history

but white settlers are less willing to acknowledge the complex governance structures and social systems that pre-exist settler arrival in what became "Canada." Racializing Indigenous peoples performs an important function in service of Canada's ongoing settler colonial regime (Million 6). It strengthens Canada's original claim that these territories were previously

The report's intense scrutiny of Indigenous women's and girls' behaviours seems to suggest that the high rates of homicide among Indigenous girls and women is attributable to their high-risk lifestyles and dysfunctional cultures instead of interlocking structures of oppression that have been well-documented by Indigenous and racialized scholars and feminists.

circumstances can further be seen in the lack of discussion on runaways in the RCMP-led study. Of what little is written, it is stated that an individual "may have disappeared voluntarily for personal reasons" (RCMP 8). It is important to scrutinize such dismissive statements depicting Indigenous girls running away from undesirable and violent living arrangements as normal, hence explaining the disappearance of numerous Indigenous girls and women. Instead, the practice should be read as an act of survival amid the violence of negligent child welfare arrangements. Oftentimes, child welfare services will justify the apprehension of runaway Indigenous children and youth by claiming that they are in danger of abuse or neglect at home; however, once taken into custody, these kids are often placed in dangerous situations arranged by the state and police authorities (Sinclair "Identity Lost" 66).

Raced and Gendered High-Risk Lifestyles and Dysfunctional Cultures

The National Operational Overview on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal

and experience, this section examines Indigenous women's so-called risky behaviours with an uncharacteristic fastidiousness. The section begins with a warning that, "Any discussion of victim characteristics is vulnerable to the accusation that blame is being assigned to the victim. There is no such intent here" (RCMP 17). Yet the report's intense scrutiny of Indigenous women's and girls' behaviours seems to suggest otherwise, that perhaps the high rates of homicide among Indigenous girls and women is largely attributable to their high-risk lifestyles and dysfunctional cultures instead of interlocking structures of oppression that have been well-documented by Indigenous and racialized scholars and feminists. This discursive maneuver positions state agents, such as the RCMP, as protagonists charged with the difficult task of protecting self-destructive Indigenous females who are foremost victims of their own cultural backgrounds and communities. Moreover, throughout the report, Indigeneity signifies racial or ethnic characteristics that appear as reasons for violence.

Indigenous peoples are recognized as the original inhabitants of this land,

unoccupied. Racialization processes make it possible to attribute violence inflicted by state and social structures onto the Indigenous body herself (de Finney "Under the Shadow" 16). Pathologizing of Indigenous bodies and cultures occurs through descriptions of Indigenous women and girls as vulnerable due to their risky behaviours attributed to Indigenous families and communities. Thus, Indigenous girls and women are depicted as more reckless than their white counterparts and, importantly, drinking, using drugs, and selling sex are seen as outcomes of Indigenous cultural systems where these immoral behaviours are supposedly normal and accepted. In other public realms, however, such as among white youth, binge drinking and sexual activity are represented as normal stages of maturing and growing up. The report thus relies on pre-existing public assumptions about Indigenous peoples and cultures. One of these assumptions is that Indigenous peoples, while once noble and strong, have become weakened by the demands of modernity (Razack *Dying from Improvement* 9).

According to Sherene Razack, "in a racist society any discussion of

culture and violence in immigrant communities can be interpreted by white society as ‘another sign of backwardness.’ That is, violence in immigrant communities is viewed as a cultural attribute rather than a product of male domination that is inextricably bound up with racism” (*Looking White People* 57-58). Indeed, similar appropriations of Indigenous cultures by settlers also occur. A close examination of the way in which NOOMMIW deploys notions of culture is critical to an understanding of how Indigenous peoples become constructed as disposable in settler life. Razack argues that there are two dominant narratives of Indigenous masculinity and femininity, the savage and the squaw, that shape events and outcomes of rape trials involving Indigenous offenders and victims. Indigenous men, depicted as the ‘bloodthirsty Indian,’ are considered bestial, violent, and criminal. On the other hand, their feminine counterpart, the squaw, is presented as sexually available. As Razack concludes, “race never absents itself from the rape script, and...the savage and the squaw continue to regulate what is seen and acknowledged” (*Looking White People* 69). Similar to rape trials, the NOOMMIW faithfully conforms to dominant narratives that depict Indigenous peoples as less than human.

While it does not explicitly identify these perpetrators as Indigenous, the report has produced a vividly detailed image of a hypermasculine Indigenous caricature. According to the report, 90 percent of female homicide victims had some sort of previous relationship to the perpetrator (RCMP 12). Because it has already been established within the report that the murder of Indigenous women takes place within Indigenous spaces, it is reasonable for readers to assume that the perpetrators are also Indigenous, especially if they

ignore the longstanding practice of heterosexual intermarriages amongst Indigenous women and white men (Lawrence 48). The insinuation that the perpetrators are Indigenous is further entrenched by the intimate and brutal manner in which Indigenous women tended to be murdered. According to NOOMMIW, Indigenous female victims were more likely to die as a result of a physical assault, whereas non-Indigenous female victims were less likely to be subjected to such brutality (RCMP 10). Without adequate contextualization, these violent actions can easily be assumed as Indigenous cultural attributes. Even more damning, the report decontextualizes the data in a manner that gives implicitly suggests Indigenous girls and women are responsible because they are unwilling to dispense with dysfunctional relationships that are killing them. This is seen in the report’s assertion that there is, “often...a known history of previous family violence (which may or may not have been reported to police)” (RCMP 13). Framed in this manner, Indigenous women and girls are presented as complicit in the violence in their lives.

Dancing Toward the Horizon of Death

Discursively and materially situating Indigenous peoples on the verge of death is an important process of disposability within settler society. As the previous lessons have shown, depicting Indigenous girls as always already dying involves an eviction from modern girlhood, which ultimately gives the impression of preternatural maturation and aging. Once evicted from this protected category, Indigenous girls are portrayed as vulnerable due to their so-called high-risk lifestyles and dysfunctional cultures. In this scenario, officials cannot provide care and protection

because Indigenous girls undermine their guardians while pursuing a path of self-destruction. Along these lines, lesson three elaborates on the ways in which Indigenous girls become depicted as perpetually on the verge of death. It calls into question the underlying logics that construct Indigenous girls’ deaths as tragic, yet inevitable. As well, no one seems to ask why Indigenous girls, unlike most other children, are never thought to have had their whole lives ahead of them.

Denise Ferreira da Silva illustrates a rich conceptual landscape through which to understand the processes that normalize the disappearance of Indigenous girls. Quoting Nietzsche’s madman, da Silva asks, “Is not night continually closing in on us? What he knows –and what his listeners do not care to hear –is this: that the great accomplishment, the culmination of the victorious trajectory of reason that instituted man, the Subject, also foreshadowed his eventual demise” (xvii). Here, da Silva brings into view the ‘horizon of death,’ a conceptual framework that facilitates greater understanding of the ways in which racial signification is deployed to produce modern subjects (29). The modern subject, also referred to as the *transparent I*, is, “the post-Enlightenment European subject, the only one to enjoy the privilege of transparency” (29). The emergence of this subject, da Silva explains, is made possible by the modern subject’s racialized counterpart, the *affectable I*. da Silva describes this as a violent, but necessary social configuration that produces this modern global order (29). Through this configuration, “the others of Europe gaze on the horizon of death, facing certain obliteration, the racial keeps the transparent I in self-determination (interiority) alone before the horizon of life” (30). In other words, modern subjects require a racial counterpart to exist. Interpreting da Silva, Chris Finley

further elaborates on this conceptual framework while keeping gender violence and settler colonialism in mind. She explains:

Native women in particular, are represented in modernity as ... affectable subjects facing obliteration by the horizon of death. When I say "affectable subject," I mean da Silva's conception of a racialized subject that acts on "natural" instincts exterior to the mind (what she calls "exteriority") rather than the rational and reasonable interior mind (what she terms the transparency thesis, and the subjectivity is called "transparent I's") ... affectable subjects and transparent "I's" face the horizon of death. Affectable subjects are closer ... because they do not have interior reason to protect them against the effects of nature like transparent "I's," and transparent "I's" have the power to affect the affectable subjects and take their lives. (193)

In the Canadian context, Indigenous girls are necessarily situated along the horizon of death. As da Silva's framework reveals, the production of white settler subjecthood requires a subordinate racial counterpart. Indeed, white settler society and its future depends entirely on extinguishing any and all Indigenous futures. The reason Indigenous girls are portrayed as on the verge of death within this study and elsewhere is because in actuality, the futures they embody pose a threat to the continued existence of Canada.

Indigenous girls are never thought to have their whole lives ahead of them. Instead, they are often depicted in official studies and media reports as never having a chance at life because they are born into dysfunction and trauma resulting from Canada's past

wrongs (Coulthard 109). Within the RCMP-led study, the dysfunction that leads Indigenous girls to the horizon of death is especially emphasized through a comparative analysis with their non-Indigenous counterparts. Here, we can think of Indigenous girls as the affectable I counter-positioned to white girls, the transparent I—both situated within the same global landscape where gender violence is endemic (RCMP 6). The difference between the two subjects is where things get interesting. Within this study, difference is evoked to demonstrate all the ways in which Indigenous girls are more likely to approach the horizon of death by engaging in risky behaviour compared to their white counterparts. The comparative figures that the report provides to readers show a stark contrast in lifestyles. It is reported that Indigenous homicide victims are less likely to be employed, more likely to support themselves through illegal means, and, also, more likely to be on some form of social assistance than non-Indigenous females (RCMP 17). It is also reported that Indigenous homicide victims were more likely to have consumed alcohol or other intoxicants prior to their death (RCMP 17). What is not discussed within this comparative analysis are the disparate structural conditions in which Indigenous girls exist as opposed to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Readers are not provided insight into the high rates of poverty, homelessness, or food insecurity among Indigenous girls or, more generally, Indigenous peoples. By placing emphasis on individual behaviours over systemic inequalities, the report implicitly assigns blame to Indigenous girls and women for the violence they experience. With all of the RCMP's institutional access and resources it is difficult to believe the claim that there, "is insufficient data relating to currently missing

Aboriginal women from which to draw reliable conclusions with respect to risk factors" (RCMP 17). Rather than view this scant discussion as a lack of data, I suggest that the report's refusal to meaningfully engage with the lives lost is a purposeful tactic intended to minimize the significance of Indigenous girls' deaths. Throughout the report, readers are led to believe that disappeared girls and women did not lead enviable or easy lives. By disallowing readers from imagining the lives lost, it is easier for them to accept these disappearances and deaths as inevitable.

Conclusion

As it began, this article closes with a reflection on the brief life and tragic death of Tina Fontaine, a 15-year-old Indigenous girl who is missed by family, friends, and communities extending well beyond Sagkeeng First Nation and Winnipeg, Manitoba. By invoking Tina Fontaine's memory, I do not wish to sensationalize her suffering and death. Instead, my intention is to acknowledge Fontaine's enduring legacy while, at the same time, give a name and a face to a matter that tends to be overly focused on statistics, figures, and charts. This article has endeavoured to provide a more expansive understanding of colonial violence by shifting focus from bodily harm toward considerations of the everyday violence of state documents. Moreover, I have sought to emphasize the tremendous impact these documents have on individuals and communities. Although we could only ever speculate, it is worth asking how might the *National Operational Overview on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women* have sculpted a sociopolitical landscape where it was possible to acquit Raymond Cormier for the murder of Fontaine in a case overdetermined by the teenage girl's actions. It is worth asking once

more what a critical examination of official documents can reveal about the connection between gender and sexual violence and Indigenous lives in Canada's ongoing settler colonial regime.

Through a critical reading of one state document, this article has encouraged readers to explore the underlying pedagogical functions of the RCMP-led study. In doing so, readers are invited to contemplate the subversive ways in which state documents reify oppressive ideologies about Indigenous girlhood while purporting to do otherwise. As this critical analysis has revealed, there are three integral lessons offered within the RCMP-led study. First, we are taught to conflate Indigenous girls with women. In doing so, readers are encouraged to understand Indigenous girls as responsible for their disappearance or death, thus shifting responsibility from the state onto the individual. The second lesson readers take from the report is that Indigenous girls are dying because of their supposed high-risk lifestyles and dysfunctional cultures. Again, such narratives serve to place blame on Indigenous girls, which allows structural inequalities to remain undisturbed and intact. Ultimately, such narratives are circulated to uphold the third lesson imparted within the RCMP-led study, that when an Indigenous girl disappears it is unfortunate, but inevitable. Through the final lesson, readers are taught that although these disappearances and deaths are sorrowful, these occurrences are not altogether surprising because these girls are not thought to have their whole lives ahead of them. While it is difficult to identify lessons that reify colonial ideologies that cause harm to Indigenous girls, such critical explorations allow for greater understanding of the interlocking systems of oppression we hope to dismantle. As a closing

thought, it is important to remember that the persistent narrative deployed to discursively disappear Indigenous girls belies the fact that Indigenous girls reflect many Indigenous futures and worlds outside of Canada's vision.

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Endnotes

¹The following scholars theorize the links between racialized gender violence and settler colonialism: Barker; Deer; Goeman; Hunt; Lawrence; Maracle; Million; Tuck and Collet; Smith; Yee.

²Writing from the United States, Sarah Deer offers an in-depth analysis on the relationship between gender and sexual violence and settler colonialism. See also Million.

³The following theorists have made critical contributions to this emerging field: Batacharya; de Finney "Playing

Indian" and "Under the Shadow"; Dhillon; Dion; Downe "Aboriginal Girls in Canada" 1.

⁴The following texts offer firsthand accounts by former residential school students: Fontaine; Fournier and Crey; Grant; Knockwood; Sellers.

⁵See Blackstock "Residential Schools," "Occasional Evil," "Canadian Human Rights Tribunal," and "Should Governments"; Fournier and Crey 33; Monture 3; Sinclair 65; Spears 83.

⁶Hortense J. Spillers initially argued that Black women are stripped of social markers and reduced to sexual classifications as part of the Atlantic Slave Trade and its Afterlife. See Spillers 67.


⁷Figure retrieved from Crawford.

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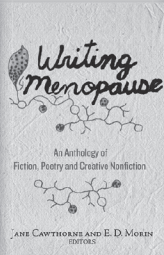


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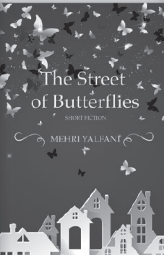
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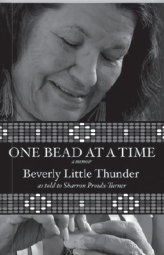







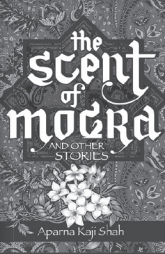


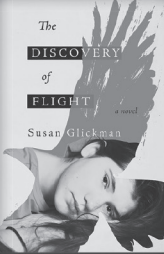
















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