“WHEN YOU CHANGE THE LIFE OF A WOMAN, YOU CHANGE A NATION”:
ANALYZING THE EXPERIENCES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS AND ORGANIZERS IN CANADA

By

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Abstract

Since the point of first contact, Indigenous women on Turtle Island have been actively resisting colonial gendered violence. Their organizing reached a watershed moment in the 1970s when many women came together to cohesively resist the enshrined racism and sexism within Indian Affairs policy and legislation. This early organizing was seen as Indigenous women “waking up to their [traditional] responsibilities” (Maracle, 2003, p. 75), which ultimately spurred the creation of organizations that specifically support Indigenous women and their issues. Today, Indigenous women’s organizational and organizing work continues to grow at rapid rates, which underscores the important role that they play in advancing the rights of Indigenous women and promoting the well-being of their communities. Yet, despite the significant amount of work Indigenous women carry out, they continue to experience intricate challenges organizing due to the settler colonial state they are operating within, where they have been persistently excluded, silenced and surveilled.

This thesis will interrogate these challenges that Indigenous women face when they organize. This will be done through exploring Indigenous women’s experiences through a settler colonial governmentality lens that centres Indigenous women’s perspectives. The utilization of this framework will reveal that the settler colonial state is threatened by the existence of Indigenous women and therefore uses governmentality tactics to maintain power and control over them and their work. At the same time, it will also be demonstrated that Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers courageously confront these challenges so that they can continue to support Indigenous women, girls and their communities.
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I would like to dedicate this thesis to the women who are courageously fighting for a better world for their communities. I hope that this thesis can contribute in some small way to the invaluable work you are all carrying out.
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AANDC</td>
<td>Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFN</td>
<td>Assembly of First Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Chiefs of Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td>FNCCCEC</td>
<td>First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSIS</td>
<td>Families of Sisters in Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAC</td>
<td>Indigenous/Indian and Northern Affairs Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFN</td>
<td>Independent First Nations and Chiefs of Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITK</td>
<td>Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Mawi</td>
<td>Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMIWG</td>
<td>Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls</td>
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<td>MMIWG2S</td>
<td>Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit Peoples</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Métis National Council</td>
</tr>
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<td>NWAC</td>
<td>Native Women’s Association of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFIFC</td>
<td>Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONWA</td>
<td>Ontario Native Women’s Association of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCMP</td>
<td>Royal Canadian Mounted Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIS</td>
<td>Sisters in Spirit Program</td>
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<td>SWC</td>
<td>Status of Women Canada</td>
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<td>TBS</td>
<td>Treasury Board Secretariat</td>
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Chapter One

Introduction

In the wake of the Liberal government’s commitment to renewing a nation to nation relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada, there has been an influx of announcements to “make progress on issues most important to First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit communities” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2017). This commitment involves the implementation of landmark initiatives to support Indigenous women and girls. In September 2016, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) was launched (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2017), and this past February (2017) the Ontario government announced its Walking Together strategy, a hundred-million-dollar, five-year strategy whose mandate is to end violence against Indigenous women (Government of Ontario, 2017). Trudeau’s promise to renew Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples is refreshing, especially when compared to the previous Conservative government’s active muzzling of Indigenous people and their rights.

Yet, as Trudeau is nearing two years into his term, Indigenous women’s faith in the Liberal government’s promises has dissipated because the Canadian state continues to miss key opportunities to meaningfully engage and collaborate with them. The National Inquiry into MMIWG has been widely critiqued for its lack of communication and meaningful consultation with families and Indigenous women’s organizations, which has even prompted certain organizations to withdraw their support to the Inquiry in its “current format and approach” (ONWA, 2017b). Moreover, despite the Ontario government’s large allocation of funds towards The Walking Together Strategy, Indigenous women’s organizations are receiving the least amounts of funding (Interview XII). Unfortunately, for many Indigenous women these outcomes
are not surprising seeing as they have consistently come up against substantial challenges that are inherent to organizing within a settler colonial state, no matter how progressive the current regime may seem.

Since the point of first contact, Indigenous women on Turtle Island\(^1\) have been actively resisting colonial gendered violence, as the institutionalization of racist and sexist colonial values has led to Indigenous women experiencing a double discrimination for being both Indigenous and a woman (Monture-Angus, 1995). Their organizing reached a watershed moment in the 1970s when many women came together to cohesively resist the enshrined racism and sexism within Indian Affairs policy and legislation. This early organizing was seen as Indigenous women “waking up to their [traditional] responsibilities” (Maracle, 2003, p. 75), which ultimately spurred the creation of organizations that specifically support Indigenous women and their issues. Today, Indigenous women’s organizational and organizing work continues to grow at rapid rates, which underscores the important role that they play in advancing the rights of Indigenous women and promoting the well-being of their communities. Nonetheless, despite the significant amount of work Indigenous women carry out, they continue to experience intricate challenges organizing due to the settler colonial state they are operating within, where they have been persistently excluded, silenced and surveilled.

This thesis will interrogate these challenges that Indigenous women face when they organize. This will be done through exploring Indigenous women’s experiences through a settler colonial governmentality lens that centres Indigenous women’s perspectives. The utilization of this framework will reveal that the settler colonial state is threatened by the existence of

\(^1\) Based on Indigenous creation stories, Turtle Island refers to the area encompassing North America, where the names Canada and the United States are colonial constructions and boundaries of Turtle Island (Newcomb, 2011).
Indigenous women and therefore uses governmentality tactics to maintain power and control over them and their organizing. Yet, it will also be demonstrated that Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers courageously confront these challenges so that they can continue to support Indigenous women, girls and their communities.

This study fills significant gaps in the literature as Indigenous women’s organizing and organizational work is largely under-researched and underreported. Though there have been a growing number of succinct studies that analyze Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing in Canada in the scholarly literature (Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Culhane, 2003; Culhane, 2009; D’Arcangelis & Huntley, 2012; Fiske, 1996; Harper, 2006; Harper, 2009; Janovicek, 1989; John, 2015; Suzack et al., 2010), there remains very few studies that tackle this topic in an in-depth manner. Bourgeois’ (2014) doctoral dissertation is the most exhaustive study that has been completed to date, in which she specifically analyzes Indigenous women’s anti-violence engagement with the Canadian state. In fact, the need for comprehensive research on Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing is so great that I was requested to undertake this topic by a number of Indigenous women, as will be further discussed in Chapter Two. Ultimately, this thesis responds to critical feminists’ call for analyses that centre the activist work that women, and particularly women of colour, working-class and Indigenous women, are spearheading in their communities, as these analyses tends to be overlooked in favour of an explicit focus on electoral and legislative work, where men’s influence typically dominates (Craven, 2016).

Chapter Outline

My thesis will be divided into six chapters, including this introductory first chapter. In the second chapter, I outline the questions guiding this research and the methods I have taken to
complete this study. I explain my use of a storytelling methodology that is based on relationality, accountability and reciprocity to allow for a respectful listening of Indigenous women’s stories. In this chapter, I also discuss subjectivity and the significant limitations and risks of completing this research as a white settler, and the subsequent steps I have taken to mitigate these risks.

Chapter Three presents the settler colonial governmentality lens I employ to comprehensively analyze what happens when Indigenous women organize. I first review the literature on imperialism and colonialism to highlight how Canada is a settler colonial state that is founded upon the notion of “terra nullius” or “nobody’s land”, whereby the existence of Indigenous peoples therefore threatens the legitimacy of the state. I also draw on Said and Fanon’s work to develop a deeper understanding of how Orientalist ideologies are rationalized and employed in settler colonial contexts. I then use Foucault’s work to theorize how the settler colonial state expresses power and control, where I argue that an amalgamated settler colonialism and governmentality framework effectively reveals how the Canadian state uses governmentality tactics to suppress Indigenous women’s organizing and organizations.

The fourth chapter offers a detailed “herstorical” analysis of Indigenous women’s experiences and resistance to underline the gendered and sexualized nature of settler colonialism. I build on this herstorical analysis in Chapter Five through listening to Indigenous women organizers and organizations’ contemporary experiences and interactions. The stories I gratefully share in this chapter illustrate the challenges inherent to existing and working within a settler colonial context, in addition to Indigenous women’s strength in overcoming these challenges.

Finally, my conclusion draws together my findings, where I ultimately problematize the settler governmentality tactics employed by the Canadian state to maintain power and control over Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing. I conclude the thesis by offering key
points and recommendations to stakeholders who wish to meaningfully support the fundamental work Indigenous women are carrying out.

**Notes on Terminology**

It is important to explain the language I will be using within this study because as Bourgeois (2014) notes, there is a “politics of language surrounding indigenous peoples” (p. 15). As a non-Indigenous person, I strive to remain conscious of the language I use, yet I recognize that there are surely mishaps I will make. I use the term “Indigenous”, as it is a less controversial and more inclusive term to describe the original peoples of Canada, though they are certainly people who take issue with the homogenous and generic nature of this term. I acknowledge that Indigenous peoples have their own proper nouns and names based on their nations to refer to themselves such as Anishinaabe and Nehiyawak. I therefore do my best to be as specific as possible when identifying Indigenous people and have taken the time to try to respectfully represent the women who collaborated with me. Though I genuinely hope this is not the case, I sincerely apologize and take full responsibility for any possible misidentifications I may have made.

I use the colonial term Indian when referring to Indian Act legislation or the operations and/or implications of the Indian Act. Aboriginal is also considered problematic as it is a “legal and social construction of the state, and it is disciplined by racialized violence and economic oppression to serve an agenda of silent surrender” (Alfred, 2005, p. 23). As a result, I follow Bourgeois’ (2014) use of the term Aboriginal in that I only use it to “preserve the integrity of the original quoted material or where it is integral to the analysis” (p. 16). However, as of recent, the Canadian state now utilizes the term “Indigenous” to describe the first peoples of Canada, a
change made under the incoming Liberal government in November 2015 when they renamed Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) to *Indigenous* and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) (Csanady, 2015). Thus, the argument can be made that the term Indigenous has also been coopted and appropriated by the colonial state.

Finally, an imperative distinction needs to be made between Indigenous women’s *organizations* and Indigenous women’s *organizing*. The original goal of this study was to analyze solely Indigenous women’s organizations (as is evident when reading my letter of information and consent form, see Appendix C), yet as I progressed in the research process, and particularly when I was conducting primary research, I noticed that many of the collaborators were speaking to Indigenous women’s organizing and activist work, versus Indigenous women’s organizations. Therefore, this study looks at both Indigenous women’s experiences organizing *and* working for organizations.

I describe *organizations* as an organized body of people with a specific and defined purpose, goal or mandate. I consider organizations to be a more a formal and systematized unit of people. Organizations have a management structure that determines the relationships between different members of the organizations and roles are often assigned, where various team members have the responsibility to carry out different tasks. I define organizations as bodies that typically have institutional funding, no matter how marginal it is. Examples of organizations in this study are the Native Woman’s Association of Canada, the Ontario Native Women’s Centre and the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre.

In comparison, I refer to Indigenous women’s *organizing* as the coming together of a people in order to attain certain objectives. Organizing is much less formal than organizations, and often the Indigenous women who organize are doing so without a specific organizational
“mandate” or funding. Organizing can be as large as a protest of up to 250 people or as small as one person fighting for justice for a family member. Examples of organizing are Idle No More, Families of Sisters in Spirit and other community-based initiatives that are not funded or run by institutions. It is important to note that I recognize that organizations can effectively use community-based approaches, as will be seen in Chapter Five, though I differentiate these organizations from community organizers who advocate for causes without a salary and an office whose mandate is to support said causes.
Chapter Two

Methods

Methodological Approach/Methodology

Research Questions

This study aims to understand what happens when Indigenous women organize, whether that be at a grassroots or a national level. It analyzes the crucial work Indigenous women are carrying out and appreciates the significant impact this work has had on Indigenous women and their communities. The two key questions guiding this research are: 1) What are Indigenous women’s experiences and opinions on organizing and/or working for organizations in Canada? 2) What are their interactions with various actors, and how do these interactions impact Indigenous women’s organizing and/or organizational work?

To explore these larger questions, the research is structured around two sets of more precise research questions. The first set of questions analyzes Indigenous women’s opinions and experiences in relation to organizing and/or working in organizations that focus on issues specific to Indigenous women. Generally, these set of questions analyze how and why Indigenous women have organized from the 1960s to the present, and what has resulted from this organizing. This timeframe has been chosen because it has the most amount of documented literature on this topic and many Indigenous women’s organizations were created around this time.

The second set of research questions concentrates on Indigenous women’s experiences with various actors such as the Canadian state, other Indigenous organizations and their communities. In turn, there is an attempt to comprehend said actors’ perceptions of Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing, which is done through an analysis of news sources,
literature, social media accounts, speeches, statistics and Indigenous women’s stories. The implications and consequences of these actors’ perceptions on Indigenous women is then examined.

**Literature Review**

To answer my research questions, I began the methodological process by completing an extensive review of the literature focused on Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing, where I made concerted efforts to review literature that was written by Indigenous women. When analyzing the literature, I was specifically looking for information on: 1) the history of Indigenous women on Turtle Island, 2) the traditional roles and responsibilities of Indigenous women; 3) colonialism and its impact on Indigenous women in Canada, and; 4) Indigenous women’s organizations, organizing and community-based work. The secondary data I analyzed includes academic articles, books, organizational reports, conference reports, dissertations, policy research reports, working group reports, talks, interviews, and podcasts. This search for documents was done primarily through the Internet, where I used key search terms I developed based on my knowledge of the topic, such as: Indigenous, Native, Indian, women, organizations, organizing, missing and murdered Aboriginal/Indigenous/Native women in Canada, the Native Women’s Association of Canada, and the Ontario Native Women’s Association. I also examined primary documentation such as *The Indian Act, The Constitution Act, The Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, as well as the minimal funding statistics I received on certain Indigenous women’s organizations.
Listening to Indigenous Women’s Stories

Since this research centres on Indigenous women’s organizing and organizations, it is fundamental to privilege the knowledge Indigenous women have, as they are the experts on themselves, their experiences and their communities. Accordingly, the women I interviewed are: Indigenous women who organize, whether that be around issues specific to Indigenous women or not; work for Indigenous women’s organizations, and/or; work as academics that study Indigenous women specific issues and organizing (where many of these identities intersect for several of the women I spoke with). Consequently, I selected women who do very different work and lead very diverse lives. Though this approach could be critiqued as creating a lack of consistency, I chose this method because it enables me to listen and understand the varying perspectives of people who identify as Indigenous and female to demonstrate the heterogeneity of Indigenous women. A key purpose of this study is to highlight the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, lived experiences of Indigenous women, as it is a reality that is often overlooked in policy making, project implementation, and academia.

After I obtained ethics approval from Queen’s University’s General Research Ethics Board (GREB) on June 29, 2016 (see Appendix D), I began conducting primary research in August 2016. Prior to beginning primary research, I reviewed several similar dissertations and met with one of my committee members Robert Lovelace, a member and former chief of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, to discuss how to respectfully initiate relationships. As a result, I sent twenty invitation letters in the mail explaining my research and who I was. If I received no reply after three weeks I sent a follow-up e-mail or call ensuring the letter was received. I also completed the “snowballing” technique where I asked collaborators who I interviewed in the earlier months (September - October 2016) if they knew of anyone who identified as an
Indigenous woman that they think would be a good person for me to speak with, which led to the sending out of four additional invitation letters (Guest et al., 2013).

In total, I ended up collaborating with twelve Indigenous women. The women range from a Manitoba Legislative Assembly Member, Executive Directors of Indigenous organizations, academics who specialize in Indigenous women’s issues (and are activists themselves), employees of organizations, and grassroots organizers/activists at the community level. I tried to speak to an eclectic group of Indigenous women to reflect the different experiences they all have based on their work and educational experience, as well as their personal background and identity (e.g. status, non-status, two-spirit, etc.).

Once the women agreed to participate I offered to send them a gift of medicine to thank them for meeting with me. Since the gift was offered after collaborators expressed their interest to participate, it was not a research incentive but a gift of gratitude. This fact is being noted for other settler researchers, because many university institutions tend to advise against incentives when recruiting potential participants. Nonetheless, it is fundamental that researchers determine appropriate ways to sufficiently acknowledge and appreciate the time and labour people take to participate in their studies.

Interviews were conducted in person or through telephone or Skype. The letter of information and consent form (see Appendix B) gave the option for participants to either participate confidentially or to waive their right to confidentiality and be identified in name and connection with their comments made, with the option to change their mind at any point throughout the research process. Some collaborators waived their right to confidentiality and wish to be recognized in name and others chose to remain confidential. For the collaborators that
chose to remain confidential I either refer to them simply as a collaborator and/or do not directly quote or connect them to their comments made.

**Story Telling & Relationship as a Research Method**

I utilized largely qualitative methods for my research, where I completed semi-structured and unstructured, in-depth interviews with the twelve collaborators. I chose to follow a story telling methodology that is based on relationality, respect and reciprocity (Wilson 2009). Being relational demands that I am accountable to my relations, who are: the women I collaborated with, the people I organize with, and the land and the water, to name a few. Being accountable to my relations means comprehending that I, the researcher, am a part of the research, which therefore makes me inseparable from the subject of the research (Wilson, 2009, p. 77). I tried to be as relational, respectful and reciprocal as possible by treating the research process as I would any personal relationship.

I chose to use a story telling methodology because it allows for the interview to be “fluid and conversational” (Bourgeois, 2014, p. 85), where the informant largely guides the conversation (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Kovach, a Cree/Saltaux scholar, regards storytelling as a method that is “grounded within a relationship approach to research”, because “for story to surface, there must be trust” (2009, p. 98). For the researcher, this also means recognizing the “deep responsibility of requesting an oral history” and accepting “a responsibility that the story shared will be treated with the respect it deserves in acknowledgement of the relationship from which it emerges” (Kovach, 2009, p. 97). Thus, a storytelling methodology better allows for a conversation that is led by the collaborators, while at the same time pressing the researcher to
respectfully share the story and remain circumspect of appropriation and exploitation of such stories (Bourgeois, 2014; Kovach, 2009).

In following a storytelling method, I offered the collaborators the option to speak about anything they wish concerning or relevant to Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizing. If they wanted more direction they had the opportunity to utilize the guiding, open-ended questions I created (see Appendix A). Almost all (nine out of twelve collaborators) suggested to use the guiding questions, hence making those interviews semi-structured. The other three interviews were largely unstructured, where the collaborators knew about my study topic (the role of Indigenous women’s organizing and organizations) and spoke to whatever they wished to share concerning this topic. The interviews range from thirty minutes to two and a half hours in length. Nine collaborators chose to waive their right to confidentiality, and three chose to remain confidential. I offered the opportunity for the collaborators to review their transcripts, and many took me up on this offer. The extra review of the transcripts held me accountable as a listener, as it better ensured that I was portraying the women’s stories as they desired.

It is important to note that I do not question the “validity” or “reliability” of the interview data, like many other qualitative studies do (Guest et al., 2013). The collaborators are the experts on their own experiences and I respect the women’s stories and the knowledge they chose to share with me. Yet, I still search for patterns in the stories to determine consistent themes. I coded the interview transcripts utilizing themes such as: Indigenous women’s organizing; Indigenous women’s organizations; Indigenous women’s experiences with the state; Indigenous women’s experiences with other Indigenous organizations; and Indigenous women’s experiences with communities. These larger themes were broken down into smaller sub-codes, where I utilized: 1) descriptive coding: a coding style that summarizes the primary topic of the excerpt,
and; 2) in vivo coding: a coding style that quotes directly from the collaborator/participant (Saldaña, 2009). Using these two coding styles, I formulated various sub-codes from my interviews such as surveillance, “at the table”, funding, violence, “silenced”, traditional roles and responsibilities, and “systems of oppression”, which aided in understanding and refining the common ideas that frequently arose from the discussions.

Quantitative Analysis of Funding Figures

I also employ a mixed-methods approach to my qualitative analysis, where I draw on limited statistical data, such as funding figures, to support interview conservations had between August – December 2016. The small amount of funding numbers I was able to attain support the concerns raised in my conversations with the Indigenous women. Despite the use of quantitative figures being in contradiction with Indigenous methodologies (Bourgeois, 2014; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008), numerous collaborators were interested in me searching for and attaining funding numbers in order to underscore how severely underfunded Indigenous women’s work is. Though the collaborators and I acknowledge that employing numbers and quantitative figures to substantiate claims goes against Indigenous ways of knowing, they were ultimately considered to be useful figures to support this truth, especially for a settler audience, and specifically for settler funder institutions.

Limitations

Like any research, there are methodological limitations to this study. Though I discuss valuing a relationship based approach and the steps I took to reduce and mitigate the negative effects of research, I recognize there are severe constraints to sufficiently recognizing and
respecting relationality due to completing research within the frameworks and time constraints of a colonial institution. Some collaborators I knew better than others, and certain interviews were completed over the phone versus in person, which all affects the depth and breadth of the relationship between myself and each woman with whom I spoke. Since these women lived across the country, it was unfeasible for me to travel to each location. These limitations underline how academic institutions create significant roadblocks for those who aim to complete research in a respectful, relational and meaningful way- as person to person, rather than as researcher to informant.

It is also important to emphasize the restriction of statistical data made available in relation to the funding of Indigenous women’s organizations in Canada. I sent Access to Information (ATI) requests to both the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and worked consistently with both departments to receive said statistics. TBS ended up providing me with no information, and at the point of this writing I have still not received data from INAC despite concerted efforts. I am fortunate to have found limited information on funding numbers through carrying out in-depth research and due to the kindness of certain collaborators who provided me with some funding statistics. The quantitative data I was able to obtain is supported by and consistent with my in-depth interviews.

A final limitation is that this research lacks in-depth, nuanced perspectives from key groups of Indigenous women, which may unintentionally homogenize Indigenous women’s experiences. I understand that there are various Indigenous cultures and nations and this research cannot adequately depict each nations’ experience regarding Indigenous women’s organizing. In particular, the research is lacking an Inuit perspective. I reached out to an Inuit women’s organization, however, they are extremely busy doing groundbreaking work with minimal
resources. Additionally, the research largely looks at gender from a colonial, heteropatriarchal perspective (i.e. the gender distinction between men and women), where the implications of settler colonialism on two-spirit and trans peoples is unfortunately missing in this study. These issues deserve a thorough, independent assessment and was regrettably beyond the scope of the research.

Subjectivity

Considering my positionality in this research is necessary. I am a white settler and therefore I am not the expert on the topic I am writing about. I understand the need to “accept as legitimate the specificity of non-white experience” and to avoid utilizing “white solipsism through a tunnel vision” that centres my experiences at the expense of other women (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 67). There is an historical and contemporary colonial context of white women writing about Indigenous women, where several white women’s representations of the “Indigenous woman” are problematic in that they oftentimes create a binary opposition of traditional versus contemporary that privileges certain groups of Indigenous women as culturally and racially authentic (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Stevenson, 1999). I do my best to avoid such racist and colonial representations, yet, despite my best efforts, my subjectivity will remain inherently reflected throughout my explanation and analysis, where my representations will only offer a “partial truth” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 93). Consequently, I went to great efforts to try to reduce problematic, colonial power dynamics and complete my study in a culturally appropriate and respectful way.

Throughout the research process I consistently asked myself: who benefits the most from this research? I understand I am the most likely answer to this question and as a result have tried
to make sure I am not the only one gaining from my research, or worse, causing harm to others solely for my benefit. The research topic of analyzing Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing was developed in collaboration with some Indigenous women, where I initially reached out to Indigenous women organizers and organizations to ask them what research topic would be useful for their work. I chose to reach out to these Indigenous women because I want to bridge the gap between academia and the rest of the world, so that non-profit organizations, activists and community members can have access to the kinds of research that are relevant to their needs (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). As a result of this collaboration, the topic of analyzing the experiences of Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers was developed.

As was briefly mentioned, prior to beginning the research I met with Robert (Bob) Lovelace, my committee member, well-respected elder and former chief of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation. I met with him to discuss the possibility of completing this research and the best way to do so in a respectful manner. My discussions with Bob led me to send personalized letters in the mail to invite the Indigenous women to participate in this study. I also spoke with some Indigenous women who I organized with to garner their thoughts on my proposed research, where they graciously advised on culturally appropriate ways to thank the collaborators for their time and knowledge sharing. These conversations helped me realize that I should offer to send one of the four sacred medicines (tobacco, sage, sweet grass and cedar) after the women agreed to participate, so as to ensure that this gesture was not viewed as a research incentive, but a gift of gratitude. I also sought the participation of Janice (Jan) Hill, member of the Turtle Clan Mohawk Nation and Executive Director of the Four Directions Aboriginal Centre at Queen’s University, as the external examiner on my thesis committee, as I recognized that her knowledge, direction and guidance would be crucial in completing this research.
Nonetheless, no matter how participatory or collaborative this study has strived to be, I recognize that I will be the one receiving a Master’s degree due to people’s generosity. This is a realization I had once entering my Master’s and it was deeply unsettling. Despite trying to follow a more decolonial methodology for my research through grounding it in relationality, respect and storytelling, this research design is still operating and being incorporated within the settler colonial university, which ultimately sustains colonial rule (Morgensen, 2012; Wilson, 2009).

It is undeniable that there are significant issues with completing research within a colonial institution, especially while being a white researcher writing about topics concerning Indigenous women. The deeper I went into the research process, the more I realized this may not be my story to tell. The process of creating my thesis really allowed me to critically reflect on my positionality and the exploitative nature of research as a whole. Though it is essential to critically self-reflect I am also cognizant that it is unbeneficial to stagnate at the stage of deeper self-examination, where looking towards organizational change of the institutions that sustain colonialism and white supremacy is fundamental (Srivastava 2005). As a result, if I were to complete a doctorate I would build on this current work by specifically focusing on settlers and/or settler colonial institutions, and how their central ideas, attitudes and organizational structures need to fundamentally shift or be entirely abolished in order to dismantle the vastly unequal power relations that exist.

Overall, my hope for this research is that it allows me to “take up responsibility in the spheres of influence” that I have access to (Graveline, 2012). Though my primary objective is for the research to be useful for Indigenous women and support their organizing and organizational efforts, my intention is also to reach an audience that has historically and presently invalidated Indigenous women’s experiences, in particular settler funders, institutions, organizations,
academics, students, and people. Thus, a key goal of this study is to adequately highlight to these groups the groundbreaking work Indigenous women are doing every single day and emphasize how this work needs to be respected, supported and celebrated, as Indigenous women do not need my research to tell them this.
Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework that guides this research. This framework offers a comprehensive way to analyze what happens when Indigenous women organize. This section will lay the foundation to examine the key questions guiding this research:
1) What are Indigenous women’s experiences and opinions on organizing and/or working for organizations in Canada? 2) What are their interactions with various actors, and how do these interactions impact Indigenous women’s organizing?

To do this, I will first utilize the scholarly literature on settler colonialism to theorize how the Canadian state was and continues to be a settler colonial nation that uses eliminatory and Orientalist logic to justify the domination of Indigenous peoples. Afterwards, I will describe Foucault’s theory of governmentality, which will aid in an understanding of how the Canadian state expresses power and exerts control over Indigenous peoples. Then, I will propose moving towards a combined settler colonial and governmentality approach for understanding issues facing Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Ultimately, the goal of this chapter is to lay a strong theoretical foundation that will provide a comprehensive analysis of Indigenous women’s experiences and interactions when they organize. The following chapter (Chapter Four) will go into an in-depth historical analysis of the racist and gendered colonization Indigenous women experience. My hope is that readers will use the settler colonial governmentality framework laid out in this section to examine this history, and the rest of this study, in order to lead to a more holistic interpretation of the
historical and present context in which Indigenous women have organized, and continue to organize in.

Settler Colonialism: Understanding Orientalist Logic & The Domination of Indigenous Peoples

A settler colonialism framework offers a more nuanced and intricate examination of the historical and current realities facing Indigenous women in Canada. Understanding settler colonialism is fundamental to understanding issues that affect Indigenous women, as there are certain types of violence that are rendered invisible “in the context of ongoing colonialism in a white settler society” (Holmes, Hunt & Piedalue, 2014, p. 540). Further a settler colonial analysis effectively incorporates “the specificities of racisms and sexism” affecting different racialized groups, including Indigenous women, while at the same time underlining the “structural and cultural factors that undergird and link these racisms and sexisms” (Glenn, 2015, p. 54). A settler colonialism framework is intersectional in that it recognizes and accounts for how colonialization has structured gender, race and sexuality.

Imperialism & Colonialism

It is appropriate to begin an analysis of settler colonialism by first defining imperialism. Said defines imperialism as “the practice, theory and attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (1993, p. 9). Imperialism is driven by ideologies that certain people are inferior, and as a result require domination.

Colonialism is the consequence of imperialism. An initial and widely cited definition of colonialism is one created by Horvath, who aims to fill a key gap in what he calls the “postcolonial” literature through attempting to define colonization in his 1972 article, “A Definition of Colonialism.” He explains how colonialism is generally a form of domination,
where a group of individuals exerts control over the bodies, land and/or behaviour of other groups of individuals. Building on Horvath’s definition, colonialism is the implementation of imperialistic ideology through exerting domination and control over other groups of individuals through territorial expansion and occupation (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2011; Said, 1993). Since colonialism is the continuation of the initial act of colonization (e.g. the moment when European colonists arrived and “discovered” North America), renders it a structure rather than an event. As Wolfe (2006) describes it, colonialism operates “both as complex social formation and as continuity through time” (p. 390).

**Extractive Colonialism & Settler Colonialism**

There are key differences between various types of colonialism. Extractive colonialism’s central aim is a “permanent condition of management and exploitation”, where colonizers are more preoccupied with reaping the labour and resources of the colonized to benefit the metropole (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012, p. 22; Veracini, 2008; Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). Whereas, settler colonialism aspires to acquire land so that colonizers can settle permanently (hence the term settler) to create settlements that emulate the structural systems of the settler’s homeland, therefore establishing an independent state (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2013; Bourgeois, 2014; Crosby & Monaghan, 2012; Veracini, 2008; Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 2006).

Extractive colonialism focuses on the exploitation of colonized bodies for labour. Glenn (2015) argues that in extractive colonialism the colonized also serve as consumers, as they expand the economic market for goods produced by the colonizers. In comparison, in a settler colonial context, colonizers “were far more attracted to the opportunities of native land than to the surplus value of native labour” (Harris, 2004, p. 173). Thus, settler colonialism is focused on
displacing, disposing and/or assimilating Indigenous peoples so that colonizers can acquire the inhabited land and permanently settle (Bourgeois, 2014; Glenn, 2015; Veracini, 2011). However, like extractive colonialism, Indigenous peoples may too “engage in unequal labour relations to guarantee their survival as distinctive peoples” in the context of settler colonialism (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2013, p. 29). Importantly, settler colonialism, in combination with capitalism and the imposition of patriarchy, created a gendered division of labour (to be discussed in further depth in the next chapter) that specifically disadvantaged women, where they were not given access to land or independent harvest, hence drastically shifting traditional gender relations (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2013).

**Settler Colonialism & The Logic of Elimination**

Settler colonialism operates on the notion of inhabiting unoccupied land. As Veracini (2011) notes, “the very idea of settling the land, an act that is inevitably premised on the perception of ‘empty lands’ is based on the systemic disavowal of indigenous presences” (p. 4). The idea of empty lands comes from the notion of “terra nullius”, which is a Latin expression literally meaning “land that belongs to no one” (Vowel, 2012, para. 8). The idea of terra nullius relates backs to Papal Bulls and specifically the Doctrine of Discovery. Papal Bulls are public proclamations, letters or charters issued by the Pope or Roman Catholic church, named after the bulla, or leaden seal, that was traditionally used at the end of an order to authenticate it (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, n.d.). The Papal Bull issued in 1493 played a fundamental role in the Spanish conquest of the “New World.” On May 4, 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the Papal Bull “Inter Caetera”, which stated that any land that was not owned or possessed by Christians was available to be discovered, hence the land being classified as empty
This Papal Bull initiated the notion of the Doctrine of Discovery and fostered the exploration of many Explorers to the “New World” to claim lands that were not in fact empty, but were rationalized as such.

Similar to Veracini, Wolfe (2006) contends that settler colonialism is governed by a “logic of elimination” that seeks the erasure of Indigenous peoples to secure Indigenous lands for white settlement, where he calls these “contests for land” as contests for life (p. 388). Therefore, settler colonialism is inherently violent, as it is premised on the violent replacement and/or displacement of Indigenous peoples. Yet, at the same time, settler colonialism has a continual need to disavow its violence through its denial of being a colonial state, therefore, it simultaneously embraces and rejects violence (Veracini, 2008; Wolfe, 2006).

Settler colonialism’s key objective is to “destroy to replace” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388), whereby the forcible erasure of Indigenous peoples necessitates violence. Its principal goal is to acquire land to permanently settle and gain control of resources. Settler colonialism develops violent practices to achieve its principal goal, whether it be through genocide, forced removal from lands, confinement to reservations, and/or assimilation. Assimilation can be either: biological, for instance, when settlers set out to marry Indigenous peoples to “dilute” the Indian blood, or; cultural, such as the forced sending of Indigenous children to residential schools to “kill the Indian in the child” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, n.d., para. 4).

**Settler Colonialism & Othering: Interpreting Through the Lens of Said & Fanon**

Said’s theorizing on the “Other” and Fanon’s psychological analysis on recognition of the “Other” can aid in understanding how settler colonialism operates as a violent process. Edward Said, professor and leading literary critic, is largely considered to be the founder of postcolonial studies due to his 1978 book, *Orientalism*, which is a critique of how Westerners, who he terms
the Occident, view Easterners, or the Orient. As Leela Gandhi explains, “Orientalism is the first book to unmask the ideological disguises of imperialism…it proposes that Orientalism has always been an essential cognitive accompaniment and inducement to Europe’s imperial adventures in the hypothetical ‘east’” (1998, p. 67). In this text, Said (1978) explains how the West has created racist, imaginative perspectives of the East, such as exotic and dangerous, which fosters the notion that Orient is subordinate to the Occident. Said views Orientalism as a discourse, specifically as: “modes of utterance or systems which are both constituted by, and committed to the perpetration of social dominant systems” (Gandhi, 1998, 77). Thus, Orientalism serves as justification for the colonizer to violently maintain power over the colonized through their classification of the Oriental “Other” as impoverished, inferior peoples that need to be controlled and/or erased.

Frantz Fanon, psychiatrist, social philosopher, and revolutionary, developed a psychoanalytical theory of colonial identity that is extremely useful when interpreting Said’s theorizing on “Othering”, as Fanon’s work has had substantial influence on and largely informed Said’s theory of Orientalism. In Black Skin, White Masks (2008), there is a well-known passage in which Fanon writes about his experience when a young, white child saw him on the street and then told his or her mother: “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!”, which leads to Fanon discovering “my blackness, my ethnic characteristics and I was battered down by tom toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships…” (pp. 84 – 85). Fanon’s assertion here confirms that being recognized as Other left him feeling violated, imprisoned and devalued. Instead of being recognized as a “man among other men” (p. 85) he was reduced to an object.
An analysis of Said’s and Fanon’s work demonstrates how colonizers utilize Orientalist perceptions of “Others”, including Indigenous peoples, to justify the attempted, ongoing violent displacement and erasure of Indigenous peoples globally and in Canada. In Canada, a discourse of settler superiority and Indigenous inferiority is employed. Settler colonialism effectively “Others” Indigenous peoples through framing their bodies as fragile and vulnerable, and therefore less than and disappearing (Bourgeois, 2014; Veracini 2011). This typifying of Indigenous peoples as Other and inferior works to solidify the humanity of white settlers: where Indigenous peoples are savage and backwards, the settler is civil and progressive.

This Othering of Indigenous peoples is two-fold for Indigenous women, as they are often dehumanized through settler colonial, Orientalist discourses that are racist and sexist, where they have consistently been portrayed as savage, dysfunctional, and morally, socially, and sexually deviant (Acoose, 1995; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Bourgeois, 2014; Green, 2007; Kelm & Townsend, 2006; Monture-Angus, 1995; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Razack, 2000; Razack, 2002; Razack, 2012; Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006; Stevenson, 1999; Suzack et al., 2010). The Orientalist discourse employed by the colonizer on the colonized creates tangible, negative and enduring consequences on Indigenous women that have lasting impacts on their lives and their organizing to this day.

Consequently, a settler colonial framework that incorporates Said and Fanon’s work effectually demonstrates how Orientalist discourses are rooted in imperialist ideology, and how these ideologies are then rationalized and applied in settler colonial states like Canada. Further, it allows for an in-depth analysis on the structural effects of colonialism, such as the interactions between the colonizer and colonized and the shifting relations within Indigenous communities. Integrating a governmentality lens within this framework will contribute to a thorough
understanding of how the settler colonial state uses governmentality tactics to express power and maintain control over Indigenous peoples in Canada, and in particular Indigenous women.

**Governmentality: Analyzing the Canadian State as an Expression of Power & Control**

Now that a settler colonial analysis has been laid out, the use of Foucault’s theory on governmentality will be examined to create a comprehensive framework when exploring Indigenous women’s organizing and organizational work within the Canadian state. Robyn Bourgeois, a self-identified mixed-race Cree activist, academic and author, presents an excellent analysis of Foucault’s work on governmentality. Her examination is particularly useful for this research as her PhD dissertation focuses on “Indigenous women’s anti-violence engagement with the Canadian state,” rendering her analysis extremely relevant as this research aims to propose a theoretical framework that better conceptualizes Indigenous women’s organizing and organizations. As my work intends to privilege Indigenous women’s writing throughout, she will be cited frequently; however, it is important to note that her work stands on its own merits, where she expertly crafts critical, innovative and incredibly insightful analyses that interweave governmentality, settler colonialism and Indigenous feminism.

**Power**

Michel Foucault, French philosopher and social theorist, was interested in analyzing how governance and government operated as expressions of power. In his acclaimed text, *History of Sexuality*, he calls power: “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their organization” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). He explains how power “is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or
allows to slip away”, rather, it “is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). Therefore, Foucault defines power as something intangible or as Bourgeois (2014) calls it, “omnipresent” (p. 20). Bourgeois defines Foucault’s conception of power as omnipresent because Foucault views power as “everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Bourgeois, 2014, p. 20; Foucault, 1978, p. 94). In line with this thinking, Foucault cognizes the dynamics of power between those who have power and those who do not as never being fixed or permanent, where the ability to rule others can always shift. As a result, Foucault (1978) contends that “where there is power, there is resistance”, as power relationships are contingent on “a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations” (p. 95). Thus, there are a “plurality of resistances” that are present everywhere in what Foucault terms the “power network” (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95 – 96).

Consequently, power is not solely something that is enforced directly by subject A onto subject B, but rather, power can be situated and expressed within academic fields, domains and constitutions (Bourgeois, 2014; Foucault, 2007). Foucault focuses his analysis of governmentality on the “objects of knowledge” (2007, p.118), which are those bodies or forces that produce and disseminate knowledge that give the state its ability to govern. Governments often attempt to control what is “truth”: the discourses and knowledges produced that are considered to be valid and legitimate, or invalid or illegitimate (Bourgeois, 2014; Gordon, 1991).

Foucault explains how government used to hone its power through more traditional forms of discipline in the Middle Ages, where the government held direct power over the life and death of its citizens (i.e. in monarchies the monarch had the right to take life or let live). Foucault (1978) names this type of government power as *power of death* (p. 137). He considers this power
of death to be negative, as it focuses on what “thou shalt not do”, where a person will be condemned to death if they complete an action that is restricted by the state. Foucault (1978) explains how this form of power is now replaced with *power over life*, which he refers to as biopower (p. 140). In comparison to power of death, biopower is positive as it focuses on what “thou shalt”, therefore it has an emphasis on what persons should do, or how their freedom should manifest itself. Thus, governmental power shifted from an overt exertion of power through forbidding, condemning and even executing its citizens, to a much more covert exertion of power through attempting to learn, control and normalize citizen’s lives in the state’s interests (Foucault, 1978). Governing how we live, versus how we die, became an object of power for the state. Accordingly, Foucault argues that modern states now enforce power and regulate citizens through biopower.

**Biopower**

Foucault defines biopower as: “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (1978, p. 140). He posits that biopower takes two forms: 1) the discipline of the body, and 2) the regulation of population (Foucault, 1978, p. 136). He considers the discipline of the body to be the human body and mind being treated like a machine in that it should be productive, efficient and economically useful. He explains how the disciplining of bodies is “a mode of individualization of multiplicities” (Focault, 2007, p. 12), which is the idea of ruling everybody through controlling individual actions and behaviours. Since it is impossible to coerce or exert control over each individual person, governmental power instead “operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs” (Bourgeois, 2014, p. 25; Li, 2007, p. 275). This form of biopower is
prevalent in the present-day context, where there is an evident disciplining of the body in the military, in the workplace, and in the education system. The ultimate goal of disciplining the body is to create a more controlled and effective population in a neoliberal society (Foucault, 1978, p. 141). Foucault accurately postulates that ideals such as productivity, effectivity and efficacy, which are held to be the pinnacle of Western society, are merely social constructs that have formulated through a long process of power relations.

To complement this first form of biopower, Foucault (1978) explains how there is also a strong regulation of the population through population controls (p. 140). I would add to Foucault’s analysis through arguing that this form of power and control focuses specifically on the reproductive capacity of the human body, resulting in the explicit governing of women’s bodies. This form of biopower is evident when analyzing the settler colonial state’s attempts to regulate Indigenous women’s reproduction. Between 1971 and 1974, the Canadian state enforced the regulation of the Indigenous population through coercively sterilizing 580 Indigenous women at federal hospitals (Stote, 2015).

Thus, a fundamental weakness of Foucault’s theory of biopower is that it fails to recognize that the “target of governmental power” (Bourgeois, 2014, p. 23) is not always the entire populace. In reality, governmental power often targets certain groups of people over others. Tania Murray Li, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, recognizes this shortcoming when she writes how discipline “may operate on a population in the aggregate, or on subgroups divided by gender, location, age, income or race, each with characteristic deficiencies that serve as points of entry for corrective interventions” (2007, p. 276). This is often the case for racialized and gender bodies, as is exemplified in the coercive sterilization of Indigenous women in Canada. Indigenous women’s race and gender, in addition to other factors
such as income and location, contributes to them being highly governed by the Canadian state and other actors, such as the wider Canadian populace and Indigenous organizations that are run by men.

In sum, despite its limitations, Foucault’s theory of biopower contributes to an in-depth understanding of how modern day governance is more so concerned with governing individuals’ bodies and behaviour to benefit the state (Bourgeois, 2014; Foucault, 1978; Gordon, 1991).

**Governmentality**

Foucault effectively explains how the state uses governmentality to operate. Foucault’s theory of governmentality creates opportunities for a more nuanced apprehension of how the state interacts with and impacts Indigenous peoples. A simple definition of governmentality is: the way that the state exercises control over and regulates the populace. However, Foucault (2007) does not confine governmentality to solely states or political structures, where he makes note that it is “at the same time both external and internal to the state” (p. 109). He emphasizes how it is crucial to not confine one’s inquiry of governmentality to government institutions and interventions, but also the methods and strategies that governments use to govern citizens. Governmentality is more all-encompassing than the traditionally viewed conceptions of government and governance in that when Foucault (2001) refers to governing, he means to control “the possible field of action of others” (p. 341). The fundamental goal of governmentality is to create a governable subject; therefore, it is imperative to investigate the “whole network of alliances, communications, and points of supports”, in addition to discovering what may be constituted as “technologies of power” (Foucault, 2007, p. 118). As Li (2007) notes, it is helpful to understand governmentality as an assemblage, as it “break[s] down the image of government
as the preserve of a monolithic state operating as a singular source of power and enables us to recognize the range of parties involved in attempts to regulate the conditions under which lives are lived” (p. 276). Therefore, governmentality is not solely centered in the state, but operates through several other actors such as private companies and non-profit organizations.

Foucault views governmentality to be the reason behind state survival. He explains how: “its tactics of government that allow the continual definition of what should or should not fall within the state’s domain, what is public and what is private, what is now within the state’s competence, and so on” (Foucault, 2007, p. 109). Therefore, the state’s central concern is its ability to govern the “conduire des conduites” or the “conduct of conduct” of its subjects, as that is what permits its survival (Foucault, 1994, p. 237). The following section will explain how this research will utilize Foucault’s theory of governmentality combined with a settler colonial framework to highlight how the Canadian state governs the “conduct of conduct” of Indigenous women who organize and/or work for organizations.

**Towards a Settler Colonial Governmentality Analysis for Understanding Indigenous Women’s Experiences Organizing in Canada**

Using an amalgamated settler colonialism and governmentality theoretical framework efficaciously reveals the historical and present realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Combining these two frameworks provides a strong analytical lens to view and understand the experiences Indigenous women have when they organize.

Bourgeois (2014) argues that “settler colonialism is an **expression of power** [my emphasis] that targets indigenous bodies (alongside other racialized and gendered bodies that comprise the settler colony) in order to secure unfettered access to indigenous lands, which then become settler territory and, thus, the source of wealth and security for settler societies and
states” (p. 30). Similarly, Crosby and Monaghan (2012) describe settler colonialism as: “the particular rationalities of governance that animate Canada’s relationship with, and governance of, Indigenous peoples” (p. 422).

Crosby and Monaghan (2012) are scholars who comprehensively analyze the interlinkages between governmentality and settler colonialism and its effects on Indigenous peoples in Canada. They use the term settler governmentality to describe their intersectional analysis, which they define as “pursuing an endgame that aims towards a negation of colonial status”, hence necessitating the implementation of “techniques to eliminate indigenous life-worlds as a requirement of eliminating the conditions of colonial formation itself” (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012, p. 423).

Since settler colonialism is premised on a “logic of elimination” (Bourgeois, 2014; Veracini, 2008, Veracini, 2011; Wolfe, 2006), settler governmentality operates on an eliminatory rationality, resulting in the Canadian state employing “a host of adaptable and flexible modes of governance interventions against indigenous populations” (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012, p. 423). Crosby and Monaghan (2012) make note that settler colonial rationalities and practices have “governing effects on colonial conduct” (p. 422), where Canada aims to control the Indigenous body politic using governmental tactics.

As previously mentioned, there is an imminent threat to the power of the state because power relations are never fixed or permanent. Since the Canadian state is founded upon the genocide, assimilation and removal of Indigenous peoples, the existence of Indigenous peoples serves as a risk to the survival of the state, even more so for those Indigenous peoples who seek self-determination and decolonization. Subsequently, there are often high surveillance and security responses to Indigenous organizing and movements (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012). When
Indigenous peoples fight for their rights to land, the respect of treaties and self-determination, this justified organizing is often treated as a “national security” issue by settler colonial institutions such as the police force and intelligence agencies. These responses to Indigenous existence and resistance demonstrates the settler colonial state’s governmentality tactics that “frame indigeneity as an existential threat to the legitimacy of the settler state” (Crosby & Monaghan, 2012, p. 423).

Seeing as settler colonialism is an inherently violent process, violence against Indigenous peoples is an essential component of settler colonial governmentality. Bourgeois (2014) explains how in addition to there being physical, emotional and/or ideological violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples in Canada, there are also “structural forms of violence as exemplified by settler societies use of Western law as biopower to identify, control and eliminate Indigenous populations” (Bourgeois, 2014, p. 35; Morgensen, 2011, pp. 62 - 63). In settler colonial societies, governmentality operates through various mediums such as security agencies like the police and army. Nonetheless, expressions of governmental power also function through the violence of settler citizens who regulate and surveil Indigenous peoples into compliance in support of the Canadian law (Bourgeois, 2014).

Recent evidence of settler colonial governmentality can be seen through Canada’s reconciliation agenda and the Canada 150 celebrations. Bourgeois effectively explains how the politics of reconciliation are a prime example of the Canadian state’s use and reinforcement of settler governmentality. She illuminates how reconciliation:

Elides the Canadian state’s ongoing reliance on colonial domination and violence for its power and authority and makes it extremely difficult for Indigenous people to name and
resist this colonial domination and violence… it masks the operations of colonialism in order to reinforce them. (Bourgeois, 2014, pp. 47 – 50)

Similarly, the employment of settler governmentality tactics can be seen through Canada’s celebration of 150 years of nationhood. The Canadian state is allocating millions of dollars to commemorate and celebrate the nation state; yet at the same time, there is ongoing colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, where the effects of settler colonialism results in several Indigenous communities in Canada to live in extremely dire circumstances (CTV, 2017; Resistance 150, 2017). Thus, the Canadian state is on one hand rejecting colonial violence through celebration, while on the other hand is directly enforcing violence by failing to reallocate its celebration funds to provide Indigenous communities with a quality of life that is on par with the rest of Canadians.

Overall, a Foucauldian governmentality lens situated within a settler colonial framework allows for a more comprehensive analysis through adequately underlining and complicating Indigenous peoples’ history and present in Canada. Moving forward, it also provides a strong theoretical foundation to comprehend Indigenous women’s experiences and interactions when they organize.
Chapter Four

Historical Connections to Current Context:
The Racist and Gendered Colonization of Indigenous Women and their Resistance

To artificially separate my gender from my race and culture forces me to deny the way I experience the world... such denial has devastating effects on Aboriginal constructions of reality- Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 178

Introduction

This chapter will engage with the historical and contemporary literature on Indigenous women in Canada to provide a comprehensive historical analysis of Indigenous women and the particular types of colonial oppression they confront. Ultimately, this historical analysis centres Indigenous women and their perspectives, and privileges the use of sources that Indigenous women have written. It will assess Indigenous relations with colonists, as well as Canadian laws and policies created about and “for” Indigenous peoples, with a specific concentration on Indigenous women to illuminate the unique types of discrimination they face compared to Indigenous men.

It is significant to note that Indigenous women were not historically, and are not presently, passive victims of discrimination. They are extremely strong willed and have organized, partaken in, and led many activist movements that led to positive change, which will also be described in this section. Thus, though this historical analysis of Indigenous women outlines negative experiences to emphasize the need for urgent action and change, it also highlights the strength, intelligence, and success of Indigenous women who actively resist and thrive despite the circumstances colonization has thrust upon them.
The Need for an Indigenous “Herstorical” Analysis

Since the beginning of the colonial occupation of Indigenous peoples in Canada, Indigenous women have been discriminated against for being both Indigenous and a woman, hence Patricia Monture-Angus’ (1995), a Mohawk legal scholar, assertion that they encounter a double discrimination. There is historical evidence that Indigenous women were relatively respected prior to colonization, where their different roles and responsibilities were adequately acknowledged and appreciated (Green, 2007; Harper, 2009; Jacobs, 2000; Kuokkanen, 2012; Mann, 2000; Maracle, 1996; Monture-Angus, 1995; Monture & Maguire, 2009; Smith, 2005; Stevenson, 1999; Sunseri, 2011; Suzack et al., 2010). However, as will be discussed, once European settlers arrived the degradation of Indigenous women became rampant: women were regularly sexually and physically abused by colonizers, they were sterilized without their consent or knowledge, and they were marked in Canadian legislation as lesser than men (Bourgeois, 2014; Chenault, 2011; Fiske, 1996; Green, 1992; Green, 2007; Harper, 2009; Holmes et al., 2014; Hunt, 2015; Jacobs, 2000; Jamieson, 1978; Kuokkanen, 2012; Monture-Angus, 1995; ONWA, 2016b; Razack 2000; Razack, 2002; Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006; Stevenson, 1999; Stote, 2015). These discriminatory acts perpetuated by colonizers exacerbated and normalized violence against Indigenous women.

Smith (2005) is a Native Studies academic who outlines the gross violations that women face as a result of colonialism, where she was one of the first scholars to conceptualize and explicitly declare that “colonial relationships are themselves gendered and sexualized” (p. 2). The key thesis of Smith’s (2005) exceptionally insightful book, Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide, is that sexual violence is a tool of patriarchy and colonialism within

2 There are certainly other scholars that do touch on these topics, however, Andrea Smith’s Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide (2005) is considered revolutionary in that it openly calls out gendered, sexual violence against Indigenous peoples as colonial.
Indigenous communities. Subsequently, many Indigenous women scholars underscore the need for Indigenous women to be placed at the centre of analysis to efficaciously reveal how the colonial state perpetrates not only race-based, but gender-based violence (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2013; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013; Bourgeois, 2014; Goeman & Nez Denetdale, 2009; Green, 1992; Green, 2007; Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006; Sunseri, 2011; Suzack et al., 2010). Yet, Indigenous women’s organizing and organizational work in Canada remains drastically under researched and underreported within the scholarly literature, which is why an analysis on Indigenous women’s “herstory of resistance” is imperative (Bourgeois, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 152).³

Herstorical Analysis of Indigenous – Colonial Relations in Canada: 1497 – 18th Century

I would like to begin this section by giving thanks to and crediting Winona Stevenson, whose 1999 articulated titled “Colonialism and First Nations Women in Canada” largely inspired the beginning of this herstorical analysis. Stevenson’s article is exceptionally well-designed and written, where she excellently lays out the early history of Indigenous women in the area that we now call Canada. As a result, I chose to predominantly draw from her article for the beginning section of this chapter (until the Enshrining Racist & Gendered Colonization in Legislation: 19th – 21st Century section), as it remarkably outlines the herstory of Indigenous women on Turtle Island since the point of first contact.

³ I avoid the specific term “Indigenous feminist/feminism” because there are key tensions between mainstream feminism and Indigenous feminism. For many Indigenous women in Canada, including the women I spoke with, “feminism as an ideology remains colonial” (Monture- Angus, 1995, p. 171). As a settler and “outsider” it is not my debate to engage in, and I therefore to choose to refrain from using the term.
First Contact: 1497

In 1497 John Cabot (Giovanni Cabotto), an Italian explorer, “discovered” the East Coast of North America, specifically the Eastern seaboard and the St. Lawrence Seaway (Aldous, 1997). When Cabot returned home, the news of the seaboard fisheries in North America, or what was then considered to be the “New World”, drew in fisherman from several countries such as Portugal, Britain and France (Stevenson, 1999). At this point in time, relations between Indigenous peoples and Europeans were sporadic as European fisherman were only there seasonally to fish and then returned to Europe at the end of the fishing season. There were times when European fisherman required Indigenous peoples’ expertise, which in a way forced them to accept many Indigenous peoples (Stevenson, 1999). However, when Indigenous peoples were no longer needed, relations often became not only strained, but violent.

French & Indigenous Relations: 16 – 18th century

Throughout the 1500s fisheries grew in economic importance; however, by the end of the sixteenth century Europeans became very interested in beaver felt hats, which stimulated the fur trade. This led to a drastic increase in the number of French merchants who emigrated to “New France”, spurring the creation of permanent French colonies (Stevenson, 1999, p. 51). These recent immigrants became entirely dependent on Indigenous peoples for subsistence, survival and fur gathering. Marriages between French fur traders and Indigenous women soon became common practice, as winning the trade loyalties of Indigenous peoples was essential for the French to lay colonial claims on the land (Stevenson, 1999). Thus, interracial marriages were strongly promoted because it was a way for French colonists to create French nationals to populate North American colonies.
In the 17th century French-Indigenous marriages were further encouraged to increase an overseas French population in permanent settlements. This policy of trying to convert Indigenous peoples into French citizens was called “Frenchification” (Stevenson, 1999, p. 52). An example of Frenchification can be seen through Samuel de Champlain’s, the proclaimed “Father of New France”, statement to Huron chiefs, where he said to them: “Our young men will marry your daughters, and we shall be one people” (Dickason, 1992, p. 167). The French, Roman Catholic church approved of this Frenchification policy so long as the Indigenous brides became Roman Catholic converts. The French crown therefore relied on Roman Catholic missionaries to convert Indigenous peoples to Catholicism, as it was seen to have a “civilizing influence” on Indigenous peoples (Stevenson, 1999). Consequently, a key priority for the French was to regularize interracial marriages according to Christian practices.

However, this Frenchifying process led to racialized and sexualized discrimination against Indigenous women. French missionaries directly attacked aspects of Indigenous women’s lives that exemplified their personal autonomy and independence. For instance, in the 1650s Jesuit missionaries in Quebec attempted to destroy Indigenous culture and society by introducing European, patriarchal family structure that included male authority, female fidelity and the elimination of the right to divorce (Stevenson, 1999, p. 59). This was extremely disruptive to Indigenous nations as some followed matrilineal and matrifocal residence patterns such as the Iroquois, where the females were the heads of families, ruled the households and oversaw the allocation of work and distribution of all the goods and foods produced by their families (Mann, 2000; Stevenson, 1999; Ward & Edelstein, 2016).

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4 Matrilineal: based on kinship with the female line.
5 Matrifocal: based on the mother as the head of the family or household in a society, culture, etc.
Overall, the French-Indigenous relations throughout this time were largely framed by the French objective to assimilate Indigenous peoples into all aspects of French life (e.g. economically, spiritually, culturally) through incorporation into “civilized” society.

**English & Indigenous Relations: 16 – 18th Century**

In comparison, the relations between Indigenous peoples and English colonists south of New France, what was considered to be “New England”, were overtly negative soon after the point of first contact. Unlike the French, the English in this area were much less focused on the fur trade and more so on agricultural settlement (Stevenson, 1999). Indigenous survival skills were only required when the English colonists first arrived; however, once the colonists honed these skills they pushed themselves onto Indigenous lands by force. Winona Stevenson (1999) describes how this history was extremely violent, where English colonists’ central aim was to demolish and eliminate Indigenous peoples and their communities. Throughout the seventeenth century local colonization companies that were founded by English Royal charters were often given permission to: “Collect troops and wage wars on the barbarians and to pursue them even beyond the limits of their province and if God shall grant it, to vanquish and captivate them; and the captive put to death” (Charles I cited in Stevenson, 1999, p. 53). Ultimately, overtly violent means were used to dispossess Indigenous peoples within New England.

In the far Northwest relations were slightly different, where English interests in the North were primarily fur trade rather than agricultural settlement. The Hudson’s Bay Company, the principal fur trading business in Canada, was established in 1670 around the Northwest area (Stevenson, 1999). These English fur traders depended on Indigenous skills and lifestyle for fur production, and especially relied on the knowledge, skills and familial comforts of Indigenous
women. Like the French fur traders, there were many relationships between Indigenous women and English men, thus creating a larger “mixed blood” population (Stevenson, 1999, p. 55).

Initially, the fur trade was characterized by mutual exchange and interdependency. However, patriarchy and the commodification of Indigenous land and labour introduced by the fur trade began to deteriorate communal relations between Indigenous men and women (Stevenson, 1999). As the fur trade expanded, female labour, power and sexuality were commodified and male private property was introduced. Sometimes Indigenous women benefitted materially from their roles as intermediaries between their people and communities and the fur traders, but many more were exploited and abused (Stevenson, 1999). Then, as the fur trade extended further inland, traders depended less on the skills of Indigenous women and increasingly disregarded them as marriage partners in favour of their “mixed blood” daughters, who were either a mix of French or English and Indigenous ancestry (Stevenson, 1999, p. 55).

While colonists were waiting for the arrival of missionaries and Euro-Canadian women, these daughters were considered preferable because they were often more fair-complexioned, and when raised in the company of both Indigenous and European peoples were more acculturated to European norms and expectations (Stevenson, 1999).

**French & English Colonial Representations of Indigenous Women**

Despite the varied experiences between British and French colonizers, both European colonialists arrived with predetermined ideas of appropriate female behaviour and status, which ultimately became their lens for understanding the behaviour and status of Indigenous women (Acoose, 1995; Green, 2007; Kelm & Townsend, 2006; Stevenson, 1999).

The European ideal of womanhood revolved around female domesticity and emerged as the prime symbol of civility. This notion of womanhood was projected onto Indigenous societies
where it functioned as the single most important criterion for contrasting savagism with civility (Stevenson, 1999). Indigenous women were the antithesis to European women: where European women were relatively fragile and weak, Indigenous women were strong from sharing labour with men in their communities; where Indigenous women were economically independent and actively involved in the public sphere, European women were confined to the affairs of the household (Acoose, 1995; Green, 2007; Kelm & Townsend, 2006; Mann, 2000; Stevenson, 1999). Overall, Indigenous women pre-contact had considerable personal autonomy and independence. As mentioned in the French-Indigenous relations section, some Indigenous nations were matrilineal and matrifocal, meaning they were female led. Even for the nations that were not matrilineal, Indigenous women generally had more control over their own sexuality, had the right to divorce and owned the products of their labour, where they made substantial contributions through small animal, hunting, fishing and gathering, and some were full time horticulturalists (Green, 2007; Mann, 2000; Monture-Angus, 1995; Stevenson, 1999). The economic contributions Indigenous women made translated into considerable personal autonomy.

Indigenous women’s stark contrast to European women, in addition to the colonizer’s racist and patriarchal perceptions of Indigenous women led to two key, contradictory representations: 1) the “noble savage” which aligns with the archetypal “Indian princess”, i.e. a Pocahontas type who was considered to be virginal, childlike, and naturally innocent, or; 2) the “ignoble or dishonourable savages” who were lustful, ugly, a slave to men, and a “squaw” (Acoose, 1995; Stevenson, 1999). This binary classification of Indigenous women has its roots in the patriarchal Victorian era virgin-whore dichotomy, which was further intensified by Euro-patriarchal racism.
Janice Acoose (1995), an Anishinaabekwe-Métis-Nehiowé educator-activist, explains how negative images created in the past have an enduring quality that has dramatically impacted Indigenous women’s history and present. Such misrepresentations create very powerful images that perpetuate stereotypes, and foster dangerous attitudes that affect human relations and inform institutional ideology. Evidently, Indigenous peoples’ early encounters with both French and English colonizers led to a drastic shift in the representation, treatment and position of Indigenous women in society, where this racist and sexist discrimination continued not only in personal interactions, but soon became enshrined in regulations, laws and constitutions.

Enshrining Racist & Gendered Colonization in Legislation: 19th – 21st Century

In the nineteenth century, the colonial government (which then turned into the federal government), imposed a series of regulations and legislatures that enshrined racist and sexist colonialism through enforcing Indigenous women to conform to colonial regiments demanded by local missionaries and Indian agents. The last six generations of Indigenous women in Canada have suffered under or at the least have been impacted by the racist and paternalist imposition of Euro-Canadian ideals. The stereotypical, discriminatory representations of Indigenous women that were created by European colonists and the church, and then continued to be used by the colonial state pre- and post- Confederation, sustain a negative image of Indigenous women that blame them for their lot in life, ultimately justifying state intervention. The various discriminatory legislations and constitutions that specifically impact Indigenous women will be laid out and described in chronological order.
The Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes in this Province, and to the Amend the Laws Relating to Indians, 1857

The Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes in this Province, and to the Amend the Laws Relating to Indians, commonly known as the Gradual Civilization Act was passed on June 10, 1857. This Act, as evidenced by its title, was created to help “civilize” Indigenous peoples so that they could assimilate into Eurocentric Canada. As part of this process of civilizing, the Act introduced “voluntary” enfranchisement, meaning that “Indians” could surrender their legal, cultural and ancestral identities and receive a small amount of monetary compensation for doing so (Gradual Civilization Act, 1857). Selling their Indian rights allowed them to acquire the “privilege” of gaining full entry into Canadian society as “true” Canadian citizens. Sexism was also intrinsic to this Act because if an Indian man chose to enfranchise himself, his wife and children under the age of majority would automatically also be enfranchised (Jacobs, 2000; University of British Columbia, 2009b). However, this Act was not very successful as many Indigenous peoples were unwilling to voluntarily abandon their cultural, legal and ancestral identities and traditions.

An Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians, the Better Management of Indian Affairs, and to Extend the Provisions of the Act, 1869

Consequently, in 1869 An Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians, the Better Management of Indian Affairs, and to Extend the Provisions of the Act, more commonly known as the Gradual Enfranchisement Act, was assented, and it sought to more rapidly assimilate

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6 The term Indian will be used when referring to the legal identity of an Indigenous person who is registered under the Indian Act.
Indigenous people into Canadian society by aggressively enforcing enfranchisement. One of the ways they forced assimilation was through adding a blood quantum requirement to the definition of a status Indian, where Indigenous peoples now had to have had at least one-quarter “Indian blood” to be considered a status Indian (Lawrence, 2003, p. 9). This Act was also inherently sexist in that any Indian woman who married a non-Indian man would lose her Indian status and her right to band membership (Lawrence, 2003). The proportions of women who lost status due to enfranchisement became enormous. In 1955-1985 the enfranchisements upon application (by an Indian man) was 16%, whereas the percentage of enfranchisements due to marriage was 84%. Significantly, enfranchisements of both women and children increased from 70% from 1955-1965 to 98% between 1976-1985 (Holmes, 1987, p. 9). This loss of official, Indian status for many Indigenous women contributed to their diminishing power in comparison to Indigenous men.

The Indian Act, 1876

In 1876 the Indian Act was passed, which further extended the power of the state and allowed for stringent governing on Indigenous life and lands. The passing of the Indian Act also continued the statutory subjugation of Indigenous women, as regulations were passed that undermined the traditional roles, authority and autonomy they had (Green; 1992; Holmes, 1987; Jacobs, 2000; Jamieson, 1978; Lawrence, 2003; Monture-Angus, 1995; Stevenson, 1999). Arguably the most oppressive and controversial legal maneuver of the Indian Act was taking over the right to determine who was and was not an Indian (Lawrence, 2003).
1869 Amendments to the Indian Act

In 1869 there were amendments to the Indian Act, where at this point the government decided that “Indianness” would be determined by patrilineage. According to the 1869 amendment to the Indian Act a person was defined an “Indian” if their father or husband was a registered Indian. The Act stated that, “Any Indian women marrying any other than an Indian shall cease to be an Indian within the meaning of this Act nor shall the children issued of such marriage be considered Indians” (The Indian Act, 1869). The detrimental effects of this Indian Act amendment were: it reduced the number of status Indians the government was responsible for, and; it imposed a European patrilineage system and elevated the power and authority of men at expense of women and traditional lineage systems.

1951 Amendments to the Indian Act

The 1951 amendments of the Indian Act further intensified the oppression of Indigenous women. These amendments led to the creation of section 12(1)(b) which declared that: “12. (1) The following persons are not entitled to be registered, namely…(b) a woman who married a person who is not an Indian” (The Indian Act, 1951). The enactment of section 12(1)(b) meant that these women who lost status from “marrying out” (which also included if she married a non-status Indigenous man from Canada or the United States) would have to leave the reserve, be prohibited from owning property on the reserve, and had to dispose of the property they did hold (Jamieson, 1978). Additionally, many women were prevented from inheriting property left to them by their parents and other relatives, and their children would not be considered “Indian” legally, therefore denying them access to their social and cultural heritage. Even if separated
from their “non-Indian” husbands, these women who lost their status could not return to the reserve to live with their children, no matter how dire the circumstances (Jamieson, 1978).

Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act is a prime example of the double discrimination Indigenous women experience in Canada. It is racist as Canadian women who were not Indigenous did not face such penalties for marrying someone of their choosing. They were able to return to their parent’s home as they pleased, they were not subject to restrictions on property, and if they married a citizen from a foreign country their children were still given status as Canadian citizens. This clause is also sexist because it solely applied to Indigenous women, thus meaning if an Indigenous man were to marry what the Canadian state classified as a non-Indigenous woman the same rules would not apply to him. Many Indigenous women were unsurprisingly appalled by the colonial racism and sexism imposed within Canadian legislation, and therefore began to resist, organize and work avidly to get it appealed.

Indigenous Women’s Organizing and Resistance: 1960s - Present

Though Indigenous women’s resistance and organizing has been occurring since the first colonist arrived on Turtle Island in 1492, this section will focus on Indigenous women’s resistance and organizing from approximately the 1960s to the present day, as this timeframe has the most amount of documented literature. This section will also provide an historical context on Indigenous women’s organizing and organizations to offer a more comprehensive analysis for the following chapter, where the discussions I had with Indigenous women about their present-day organizing and/or working in Indigenous women’s organizations will be explored.
“Tea & Talk”: 1960s – 1970s

A lot of Indigenous women’s organizing in Canada started in kitchens and basements (Interview III, V, IX, Maracle, 2003). Here they would cook and offer their support to other women and children as needed. Indigenous women created informal support groups for other women, where they would offer their homes for hospitality and shelter for newcomers. All this work was done on a volunteer basis, where women would try to receive some small funding through bake sales, and selling their art work and beading (Interview III, Interview V, Interview IX, S. Maracle, 2003). Many Indigenous women view this early organizing as a waking up to their traditional roles and responsibilities. As discussed, in many Indigenous nations on Turtle Island, the roles and responsibilities of women were cherished, respected and upheld (Green, 2007; Harper, 2009; Jacobs, 2000; Kuokkanen, 2012; Mann, 2000; Maracle, 1996; Monture-Angus, 1995; Monture & Maguire, 2009; Smith, 2005; Stevenson, 1999; Sunseri, 2011; Suzack et al., 2010). Therefore, the work that women were doing during this time frame was largely seen as a reclamation of these original roles and responsibilities. They see this coming together, or organizing, as the outcome of a shared vision that allows Indigenous women to express who they truly are (Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Maracle, 2003).

Creation of Indigenous Women’s Organizations: 1970s – 80s

The racist and sexist Department of Indian Affairs legislation encouraged Indigenous women to band together and cohesively organize in large numbers as it created a common area of concern. Unfortunately, when many Indigenous women were organizing to fight the enshrined

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7 This sub-title is inspired from a phrase used on page 72 of Sylvia Maracle’s 2003 article: “The Eagle Has Landed.”
colonial-heteropatriarchy in the 1970s and 80s, they did not receive the support of predominantly male-led Indigenous organizations, such as the Indian Brotherhood (now called the Assembly of First Nations), to press for changes to the Indian Act and advance other issues important to Indigenous women (Fiske 1996; Interview I; Interview II; Interview III; Interview X). Moreover, during this time, colonial government policies and laws only allowed men to hold leadership positions and titles such as chief, band administrator and band councillor (Maracle, 2003).

Subsequently, Indigenous women decided to organize autonomously because they had specific needs that were not being addressed and they wanted their voices to be heard and respected (Fiske, 1996; Green, 1992; Maracle, 2003; Janovicek, 1989). This decision led to more organizing and the rapid creation of many Indigenous women’s organizations, such as the Ontario Native Women’s Association, established in 1971, and the Native Women’s Association of Canada, established in 1974 (ONWA Strategic Picture, 2016; NWAC Annual Report, 2016). These organizations were built to challenge the colonial hetero-patriarchal laws and policies that enshrined the double discrimination Indigenous women were facing and resisting.

**Resistance to the Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act: 1970s and 1980s**

Analyzing in-depth the resistance to section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act is crucial as it was the central goal of Indigenous women’s organizing during this period, and spurred the creation of several Indigenous women’s organizations. Lavell and Bedard were two prominent women who tried to appeal the 12(1)(b) clause of the Indian Act (Holmes, 1987). In 1970 Lavell married a non-Indian man and lost her Indian status. As a result, she filed action against subsection 12(1)(b) in 1971, stating that section 12(1)(b) was in violation of the equality cause within the
1960 *Canadian Bill of Rights* (Canadian Bill of Rights, 1960, Section 1). Lavell lost her case at trial, but won it on appeal (Holmes, 1987).

Soon after was the case of Bedard, who also lost her Indian status when she married a non-Indian man in 1964. When she separated from her husband and tried to return to the reserve she grew up in, she and her children were not allowed to live on reserve because she did not have Indian status, and thus could not inherit reserve land (Holmes, 1987). The band she previously had membership rights in gave her one year to leave the property. Fearing eviction for her and her children she filed legal action against her band. Due to the Lavell precedent Bedard won her case (Holmes, 1987). However, the Lavell and Bedard cases were jointly appealed by the Minister of Justice to the Supreme Court of Canada, and the women lost their cases because the Supreme Court ruled that *Indian Act* did not discriminate against Indian women who married non-Indian men. Moreover, the leading Indigenous organisation in Canada, the Canadian National Indian Brotherhood, intervened against Lavell and Bedard when the case was heard at the Supreme Court, thus contributing to their loss (Green, 2007; Holmes, 1987).

It is important to highlight the harsh resistance these women faced when going through the legal process to fight for their rights as Indigenous women, and to realize that this resistance was not only from the settler colonial state, but also their own communities. Coulthard (2014) notes how Indigenous men viewed Lavell and Bedard as being: “complicit and even conspiring with the kind of ‘colonialist, assimilationist and racist ideologies’ propagated by government bureaucrats and Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) administrators” (p. 85). Lavell and Bedard’s appeals were portrayed as in alignment with “baseline feminist norms regarding gender inequality rights”, which many male Indigenous
community leaders, such as the men in the National Indian Brotherhood, perceived as “culturally inauthentic” concerns (Coulthard, 2014, p. 85).

Subsequently, the case of Lavell and Bedard demonstrates how Indigenous women’s rights are often pitted against the larger, collective rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Scholars such as Smith (2005, 2006) and Jamieson (1978) have noted that this is a common occurrence for marginalized communities of colour, as these communities often advocate that women keep quiet about sexualized, physical, and emotional violence in order to maintain a united front against other struggles such as the fight against racism and colonial oppression. Yet, remaining silent about these acts of discrimination is extremely problematic as it is in direct violation of Indigenous women’s rights and well-being.

Despite the undesirable results from the Supreme Court, as well as the negative backlash these women received, the Bedard and Lavell cases were successful in that they effectively underscored the sexism within the Indian Act. These cases led to a shift in Canadian society, where many women’s groups, both the newly created Indigenous women’s organizations, as well as non-Indigenous women’s groups, started banding together to pressure the Canadian government to eradicate the sexism within the Indian Act (Interview II, Bourgeois, 2014; Holmes, 1987). For instance, Sandra Lovelace petitioned the United Nations over the Canadian government’s discriminatory treatment of Indigenous women and children within the Indian Act. Lovelace was in a similar situation to Bedard, where she married an American man and lost her Indian status. When the marriage ended she and her children tried to return to the reserve she previously lived on and they were denied admittance (Holmes, 1987). In 1974 she went to the Supreme Court of Canada to try to gain access to her fundamental cultural and social rights and was unsuccessful. As a result, she took her case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee.
(UNHRC), and in 1981 the UNHRC found Canada in breach of section 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as Lovelace was banned from living in her “ethnic community” (Holmes, 1987, p. 5).

Canada also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981, where at this point the Canadian government explicitly stated its commitment to amending the discriminatory sections of the Indian Act (Government of Canada, 2017). Additionally, in 1982 the Canadian Constitution was amended to include The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (CCRF), which contained section 15 that states: “every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” (The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). Section 15 of the CCRF further encouraged the government to address the gender discriminatory sections within the Indian Act.

**Bill C—31 Amendment to the Indian Act, 1985**

Due to the immense work completed by Indigenous women organizers, organizations and the allies they found in non-Indigenous women’s groups and the UN, in April 1985 the Indian Act was finally amended through Bill C-31, also called the Bill to Amend the Indian Act, in attempt to rectify the sexist 12(1)(b) clause. Bill C-31 proposed modifications to various sections of the Indian Act that enabled significant changes to Indian status and band membership. There were many Indigenous peoples who were eligible to have their status restored under Bill C-31:

Women who lost status because they married a man without Indian status and any children enfranchised along with them; children born outside of marriage to a status
woman, whose registration was protested because the alleged father was not a status
Indian; women and men who lost status because the alleged father was not a status
Indian; women and men who lost status because both their mother and paternal
grandmother had gained status through marriage; women and men who were
enfranchised upon application or under various sections of pre-1951 Indian Acts.
(Holmes, 1987, pp. 12-13)

Consequently, the 1985 amendments tried to address the gender discrimination within the *Indian
Act* by permitting “Indian” women who lost their status through marrying a “non-Indian” man to
restore their status and right to band membership. Bill C-31 also abolished enfranchisement and
offered to restore status to those who had their status removed through enfranchisement (Indian
Act, 1985).

These revisions to status registration were put under section 6 of the revised *Indian Act*
titled “Persons Entitled to be Registered”, and resultantly created two classes of status Indians,
which is demonstrated in section 6, where there are: section 6(1) Indians- those who can pass
Indian status to their children, and 6(2) Indians- those who have Indian status, but cannot pass
their status to their children, unless the other parent is a registered 6(1) Indian (Indian Act, 1985).

Though these revisions initially appear positive, Indigenous women’s organizers and
organizations have effectively highlighted how the *Indian Act* remains fundamentally sexist
because prior to the 1985 amendments status Indian men in Canada were able to pass their status
to their wives, meaning that their children are considered 6(1) Indians. Whereas, if Indian
women “married out”, their children are now considered 6(2) Indians, and are thus unable to pass
their status to their children. Therefore, the Bill C-31 amendments continue to uniquely
disadvantage Indigenous women today.


**Indigenous Women’s Organizations: 1980s - Present**

The resistance to the Indian Act created an opportunity for Indigenous women across Canada to come together and work on issues specific to Indigenous women and their communities. This cohesive organizing in the 1970s and 1980s was a watershed moment for Indigenous women and led to the rapid increase in and expansion of Indigenous women’s organizing and organizations. In the 1980s organizations that were established kept expanding, and numerous other organizations were being created. These organizations ranged from more grassroots organizations like Families of Sisters in Spirit based in Ottawa, established in 2011, to No More Silence in Toronto, established around 2004, to larger community based organizations like Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Winnipeg, established in 1984.

Indigenous women’s organizations continue to keep growing and increasing in numbers because their work is vital. The literature strongly indicates that Indigenous women’s organizers and organizations are the key actors who incessantly work to effectively reach out to communities to determine their needs (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermoal, 2016; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003; Bourgeois, 2014; Fiske, 1996; Gunn, 2014; Green, 1992; Janovicek, 1989; John, 2015; Kelm & Townsend, 2006; Kuokkanen, 2012; Maracle, 1996; Martha, 2013; Monture-Angus, 1995; Monture & Maguire, 2009; NWAC, 2016; ONWA, 2016; Oulette, 2002; Sunseri, 2011; The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014). An example of this can be seen with the work of the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA). In the 1980s and 1990s, ONWA recognized that Indigenous women in the urban areas of Thunder Bay required access to more culturally-specific services (Janovicek, 1989). As a result, they worked on getting Indigenous women in urban areas access through lobbying the federal and provincial government, where they demanded that the government provide funds to Indigenous organizations to plan and build
healing lodges and shelters. They insisted on Indigenous control over Indigenous services, and specifically to have the ability to provide status blind services (Janovicek, 1989).

Indigenous women’s organizations are some the few organizations in the country to provide status blind services, meaning that any person can have access to their services regardless of their Indian Act identity (e.g. ONWA, NWAC, Mama Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, etc.). In comparison, predominantly male-led Indigenous organizations that were created out of federal Indian policy and legislation typically require that Indigenous peoples have status in order to access their services. Overall, Indigenous women’s organizers and organizations have been and continue to be the principal people carrying out inclusive, community-based work. They are consistently connecting with communities and addressing the root and/or structural causes behind many issues that affect Indigenous women, children, and peoples at large.

**Conclusion**

Completing an historical analysis of Indigenous women in Canada demonstrates the need for substantial consideration of their perspectives and well-being. In particular, the tensions Indigenous women experience from being both racialized and sexualized within a settler colonial society marks the necessity of centring Indigenous women and their unique needs, because within a colonial hetero-patriarchal society the default perspective incorporated is always white, straight, able-bodied and cis-gender male. Fortunately, Indigenous women organizers and organizations can provide these crucial perspectives. As this historical analysis has demonstrated, Indigenous women are the experts on their lived experiences and they are extremely knowledgeable on how to help their communities, as they are the ones who have been carrying out the indispensable, on-the-ground work in their nations for decades, if not centuries.
The next chapter will go into depth on Indigenous women’s current experiences and opinions on organizing and/or working in organizations within Canada, as well as their interactions with several actors, such as the Canadian state, the Canadian public, and other Indigenous organizations.
Chapter Five

Analyzing Contemporary Indigenous Women’s Organizations and Organizing in Canada: Indigenous Women’s Stories

Introduction

In my previous chapter, I examined the history of Indigenous women in Canada from the point of first contact to the present day, in addition to Indigenous women’s experiences organizing and creating organizations (from the 1960s on). This chapter will build on the previous chapter through exploring Indigenous women’s experiences and opinions on organizing and/or working for organizations in the present day, which will be done by listening to and respecting their stories.

As discussed in Chapter Two, I aim to follow a storytelling methodology that is based on relationality, respect and reciprocity. I am fortunate to have the permission of the collaborators to share their stories, and I hope readers will empathetically read and listen to them. I have done my best to represent these stories; however, I acknowledge that despite my earnest efforts to meaningfully listen, engage and consult, it is impossible to eliminate my inherent subjectivity (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). There will be many direct quotations used throughout this chapter to mitigate this concern and best portray the stories and knowledge shared. This way, readers can better understand and appreciate exactly what Indigenous women’s experiences and opinions are. Privileging how the women expressed their stories, versus my paraphrasing, allows for a telling of the story that is more reflective of the collaborators’ truth. Many collaborators expressed the desire to have their insights credited and recognized, so for those women their names are identified in connection to their comments. For those women who chose to remain confidential, there are less direct quotations and more paraphrasing to ensure confidentiality.
Challenges Operating within a Settler Colonial State

The predominant theme that arose from my discussions was how challenging it is for Indigenous women to work, organize and advance Indigenous women’s issues within a settler colonial state. Since Indigenous women are viewed as a direct threat to the Canadian state’s power and legitimacy, their “conduct of conduct” (Foucault, 1994, p. 109) is excessively governed, which has direct impacts on their organizing and/or organizational work. Within this larger theme lays several sub-themes: Meaningful Inclusion/ “At the Table”; Overworked and Underfunded; Surveillance, and; Community. All these themes will be thoroughly explored, and case studies will be included to provide readers with a clear picture of how these themes play out in Indigenous women’s organizing and organizational work.

As discussed in Chapter 2, it was extremely challenging to attain statistics on the funding of Indigenous women’s organizations; however, I was able to gain access to some funding numbers by completing in-depth research and having discussions with a couple of the collaborators, which will be addressed in the “Overworked and Underfunded” theme.

Meaningful Inclusion/ “At the Table”

The Indigenous women I spoke with persistently mentioned the lack of meaningful inclusion, where the most prevalent phrase vocalized in discussions was being “at the table.” Several collaborators talked about: who is not present or missing “at the table”; demanding to be “at the table”, or; asserting that being “at the table” requires coming to it in a meaningful and inclusive way as partners, where Indigenous women’s experience and knowledge is respected and valued (Interview I; Interview II; Interview VII; Interview VIII; Interview IX; Interview XI; Interview XII).
The women expressed how inclusion is such a fundamental issue for them because “women’s issues” and/or “women’s work” often “gets coded as social rather than political”, which results in them being considered “less important”, “fall[ing] off the tables”, and “get[ing] forgotten” (Interview III; Interview VIII). For example, Alex Wilson, Neyonawak Inniniwak community member, organizer and Associate Professor of Educational Foundations at the University of Saskatchewan, explains how she thinks Manitoba Moon Voices, the NWAC Provincial Territory Member Association representing Indigenous women’s interests in Manitoba, is marginalized as they are seen as doing the “taking care of work” (Interview IIII). Thus, the impact of settler colonialism instituting the racial and gendered oppression of Indigenous women has been the entrenching of Western social binaries. A fundamental consequence of the Canadian state’s imposition of heteropatriarchy is the exclusion of Indigenous women at all tables they attempt to sit at, whether they be Canadian government tables or tables within their own communities.

**Canadian Government Tables**

A central concern that many collaborators voiced was Indigenous women’s exclusion from Canadian government tables. Sarah Nickel, a Tk’emlupsemc, French Canadian and Ukrainian historian and Assistant Professor at the University of Saskatchewan, illuminates how historically the government was quite dismissive of Indigenous women and their organizations and organizing. She underscores how she has seen “lots of fairly damning evidence from all levels of government that really dismiss women’s roles” (Interview III). As previously noted, understanding the historical context is necessary as history has a direct impact on the present. Indigenous women today still feel the repercussions of institutional colonialism, racism and sexism, where exclusion remains a prevailing issue for them, no matter if they are a politician or
a grassroots organizer (Interview I; Interview II; Interview III; Interview IV; Interview V; Interview VI; Interview VII; Interview VIII; Interview IX; Interview X; Interview XI, Interview XII). The following analysis of NWAC’s exclusion at federal government tables will reveal how Indigenous women’s organizations face extreme challenges when endeavouring to be included in discussions and invited at “constitutional tables” (Interview II).

Case Study: The Native Women’s Association of Canada’s (NWAC) Exclusion at Federal Government Tables

As thoroughly explained in Chapter 4, Indigenous women were historically marginalized from constitutional tables. However, NWAC, the representative organization of all Indigenous women in Canada, is still experiencing marginalization from federal government tables today. Under the current Liberal government, Prime Minister Trudeau has announced his commitment to a renewed “nation-to-nation” relationship with all Indigenous peoples (Liberal Party, 2017). Yet, despite this claim, NWAC remains to be excluded from federal government tables. Nahanni Fontaine, an Ojibway woman from the Sagkeeng Anishinaabe First Nation and Manitoba Legislative Assembly member, describes how the Liberal government’s exclusion of NWAC is setting a “disrespectful” and “scary” precedent:

Since this new government came along there has been a push from AFN [Assembly of First Nations], the National Métis Council and ITK [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami], but primarily from I think AFN and the MNC that NWAC wouldn’t sit at the table anymore. So there’s this push to have the national Indigenous women’s organization that has been lobbying on behalf of all Indigenous women since the early 1970s and even before that. Because the founders of NWAC were some of the first women that were kind of engaged
in the Indigenous women’s movement here in Canada. So the predominantly male NAOs [National Aboriginal Organizations] were trying to get NWAC to not have a seat at the table… so this new government only meets with AFN, ITK, MNC. (Interview 1)

What Nahanni is referring to in this passage is NWAC’s exclusion from meetings with Prime Minister Trudeau. NWAC was not invited to the first ministers meeting on March 2, 2016 (NWAC, 2016). At this meeting, the Prime Minister met with the premiers, the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. These groups were invited as they are the “title holders” to rights granted under the Indian Act and are Indigenous peoples whose rights “are enshrined in the Constitution” (CTV, 2016; McSheffrey, 2016). Yet, NWAC is one of the five national indigenous organizations, in addition to the Congress of Aboriginal peoples, but neither of these groups were invited this meeting (CTV, 2016; McSheffrey, 2016; NWAC, 2016). NWAC publicly expresses their disdain with this decision in a media statement: “Choosing to exclude the Native Women’s Association of Canada from the first ministers meeting was unfair, and speaks volumes to the ongoing lack of respect for Indigenous women and girls’ voices in Canada” (NWAC, 2016).

Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette, an Anishinaabe woman from Lake Superior and Executive Director of the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA), explains how Trudeau’s “nation-to-nation building” is concerning for Indigenous women because it still inherently focuses on engaging with “nations” that were created out of the Indian Act. She states that the fundamental issue with the new federal government is:

There is no definition over what nation to nation is, and there are definitely different interpretations within that as they exclude women’s voices typically from this nation to nation building. They say that for instance you know other political territory
organizations, Indigenous political territory organizations, state that they are the voices of the women, and so therefore they don’t need to be inviting agencies like NWAC and ONWA and other Indigenous women’s agencies to the table for discussion, because they say that they’re First Nations government… so they’re talking really specifically [about] Indian Act systems and Indian Act governance, and essentially then Indian Act chiefs.

(Interview XII)

In this passage, Cora-Lee describes how despite Trudeau’s seemingly ambitious and impressive commitments to Indigenous peoples, the ambiguity of his commitment to a nation-to-nation relationship is inherently problematic as he merely follows the status quo of defining Indigenous nations as Indian Act nations, as is evidenced when analyzing NWAC’s recent attempts to be included within federal government tables. Continuing to follow the colonial status quo of Indian nationhood is extremely problematic for Indigenous women, because the implementation and enforcement of the Indian Act “completely removed Indigenous women leaders” from Indigenous communities (Interview I). Therefore, a serious pledge to renewing a nation to nation relationship would require a complete re-evaluation of who is a nation.

Ultimately, this exclusion of the national Indigenous women’s organization at federal governmental tables sets a dangerous precedent, where Indigenous women feel the trickledown effect of this marginalization at various tables, including Indigenous government and/or organizational tables.

**Indigenous Government/Organizational Tables**

Numerous collaborators stress how colonialism has had negative effects on gender relations within Indigenous communities (Interview I; Interview II; Interview III; Interview IV; Interview VI; Interview VIII; Interview X; Interview XII). When settler colonists first arrived they
often refused to speak to Indigenous women who tried to trade and negotiate with them and demanded to speak to men (Interview II; Interview VII). Further, colonists used sexual violence against Indigenous women as a tool of colonial conquest and genocide, as it was a way to dominate Indigenous peoples (Interview II; Smith, 2005). These actions all led to the undermining of Indigenous women’s sacred, traditional roles and responsibilities within their communities (Interview VIII).

Then, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Indian Act of 1867 officially solidified the subaltern status of Indigenous women in Canadian legislation. Robyn Bourgeois excellently elucidates how the Indian Act has had detrimental impacts on Indigenous women’s inclusion at not only Canadian state tables, but also Indigenous tables:

And it goes back to 1867, it goes back to the Indian Act… not only could women not participate in band elections, couldn’t vote, but they couldn’t be members of that band governance, which meant until 1951 when that was appealed- so almost 100 years- Indigenous women were basically outlawed from any form of leadership or organizing. That’s the start of this hostile Canadian state attack on indigenous women leadership and organizing. And it’s continued since, so that’s kind of you know… we haven’t recovered from that still. I mean our governance systems are dominated by men, still. You know we have very few female chiefs for example. Our organisations like NWAC have had to fight so many times to even be put on par whether financially, politically, whatever legally, with the male led organisations, specifically the AFN [Assembly of First Nations]. Which I like to remind people is that that organization was birthed out of the Indian Brotherhood. Like this is a male dominated organization and NWAC can’t even be
at the same constitutional table. It floors me that that they have to fight for funding, they have to fight to count. (Interview II)

Bourgeois explains here how the settler colonial state’s imposition of patriarchy has created rifts within Indigenous communities and posed serious challenges for Indigenous women organizers and organizations, where they have to actively work to try to be “on par” with male-dominated Indigenous organizations that have been birthed out the Indian Act. As Tasha Spillett, a Nēhiyaw and Trinidadian educator, organizer and PhD student states: “I would see any body that is constructed as a result of the Indian Act as being an Indigenous organization that is predominantly male-centered. Because we know that the Indian Act inherently undermines Indigenous women’s political presence” (Interview X).

Several of the women I spoke with highlighted Indigenous women’s experiences of marginalization at Indigenous government and organizational tables (Interview I; Interview II; Interview III; Interview VII; Interview VIII; Interview X). Taking an historical perspective based on her community-based research, Sarah Nickel describes how in the late 20th century there was a “discourse of respect and value that often wasn’t seen in practice” by Indigenous men (Interview III). Further, Kim Anderson, a Cree and Métis Professor, discusses her time working for the Chiefs Ontario in the late 1980s to early 1990s, where she was “perplexed by the way in which it was so male dominated just in terms of the leadership and the way the hierarchies work and how they are gendered” (Interview VIII).

Tasha Spillett discusses a recent meeting that she attended that was focused on water protection and women, and she describes how all the panellists were men. When talking about this experience, Tasha echoes Sarah’s sentiments that Indigenous male leaders more so use a discourse of respect, rather than tangibly and actively supporting Indigenous women: “I don’t get
how we [Indigenous women] get to be the center point in this kind of metaphorical, existential, we honour women way…but in the like acting out of these things it’s still really saturated in patriarchy” (Interview X). Correspondingly, Nahanni Fontaine speaks to Indigenous women’s experiences of exclusion when she describes how she has seen:

A shift where [the male] leadership are now asked to speak on MMIWG [missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls] but that’s in some respects upsetting certain family members. I will always argue that Indigenous women have the right and authority and autonomy over their own voices and place and space, and that Indigenous men should stand in solidarity and should support Indigenous women to do it (Interview I).

Ultimately, Indigenous women have various experiences of being unable to “sit at” Indigenous tables, even when the issues directly concern them. Bourgeois summarizes these experiences when she articulates that “male dominated organizations have minimized and silenced Indigenous women’s interests, their needs, their knowledge, all of that” (Interview II).

Yet, it is significant to note that the collaborators are more so critical of the patriarchal structure that several Indigenous organizations operate within, rather than Indigenous men themselves. For example, Nahanni Fontaine articulates her experience working as Director for the Southern Chiefs Organization in Manitoba, where she explains that the leadership was predominantly male, but that they were “really good people that are trying to make the best out of a really bad situation and very minimal resources” (Interview I). In a similar vein, Robyn Bourgeois explicates how she knows Indigenous men who act as great allies, “who you know supported what we’ve done and or you know have been there and stepped back and been like ‘you know I own my privilege and I’m going to use it to advance your work’” (Interview I). Yet, due to ongoing settler colonialism the fundamental issue remains, where “[Indigenous]
leadership is still entrenched in patriarchy” (Interview II). Therefore, a key goal for many of the collaborators is to actively work on breaking down the settler colonial imposition of patriarchy in order to restore their traditional roles and responsibilities within their communities (Interview I; Interview II; Interview III; Interview IV; Interview VII; Interview VIII; Interview X; Interview XII).

**Surveillance**

Another key sentiment conveyed in conversations is the exceptional surveillance Indigenous women organizers and organizations experience. Various collaborators express how the Canadian state has actively surveilled both their professional and personal lives, which has had adverse effects on Indigenous women’s leadership, well-being, and survival. For instance, Diane Redsky, kookum⁸, mother, First Nations woman from Shoal Lake, and Executive Director of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Ma Mawi), explains how Ma Mawi has had to consistently “over propose… be over accountable, over report, and then lots of times at the end of the day we don’t get the money either” (Interview VII). Moreover, many grassroots organizers, who receive very little to no funding, are often personally surveilled by settler colonial institutions, where some organizers have police records and experiences of being followed by police officers due to their organizing work (Interview V).

Indigenous women’s work is highly surveilled as it seen as a direct threat to the settler colonial state. Crosby and Monaghan (2016) describe the policing of Idle No More and other Indigenous movements as “a continuation of colonial governance practices that target- with the objective of eliminating- indigenous movements that challenge the legitimacy of the settler state”

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⁸ Cree kinship term for grandmother (Vowel, 2012).
(p. 37). Canadian settler colonial institutions’ use of surveillance as a disciplinary tactic has resulted in the blurring of boundaries between activism, protests and terrorism, where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Force (RCMP) have been classifying Indigenous protests as “Aboriginal extremism” since 2007 (Crosby & Monaghan, 2016, p. 40). Therefore, the surveillance of Indigenous people’s organizations and organizing is a crucial aspect of settler colonial governmentality, where a key example of surveillance can be seen through an examination of the Native Women of Association of Canada’s (NWAC) Sisters in Spirit Program (SIS).

**Case Study: The Surveillance of the Sisters in Spirit Program**

The Sisters in Spirit (SIS) program was implemented in 2005 by Paul Martin’s Liberal government to address violence against Indigenous women and girls, where the attention brought to this issue was the result of Indigenous “women and organizations being relentless and calling for attention” (Interview VIII). SIS was a five-year research, education and policy initiative funded by the Status of Women Canada (SWC). For this program, NWAC conducted research on the deplorable rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and created a database to have statistics on all the missing and murdered women (NWAC, 2017). It was an extremely successful initiative in that it effectively reached out and engaged the families of those missing and murdered. However, the program faced many challenges due to the constant surveillance they experienced while trying to run the program (NWAC, 2009). Bourgeois (2014) argues that the initiative was so heavily surveilled because of the program’s “strong anti-colonial, anti-violence

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9 The SIS program was chosen as a case study because it was the most in-depth example provided in interviews, as one of the collaborators, Robyn Bourgeois, was permitted to observe the SIS program during 2009 and 2010 (Bourgeois, 2014, p. 185).
response” (p. 181) that threatened the Canadian state’s legitimacy and existence, ultimately leading to the annihilation and de-funding of NWAC’s SIS program.

Since its inception in 2005, the SIS program was highly governed by the settler colonial state. However, when Stephen Harper became Prime Minister in 2006, Bourgeois explains how the surveillance drastically increased, where:

He [Harper] surveilled them for that entire 5 years of that funding because literally they got the agreement and [then] Harper was elected. So he literally imposed through Status of Women high level surveillance on the funding. The annual reports were outrageous. Most annual reports are what 40 pages maybe? Um for NWAC it was at least 4-5 three inch binders, documenting everything they had done. When I talked to the Director about it in 2009, [she] said to me ‘I spent the vast majority of the year just putting together the documentation they need.’ So clearly the government was surveilling what was going on they really wanted to know everything that NWAC was doing. (Interview II)

Bourgeois discusses how the Canadian state’s extreme surveillance of SIS during the Harper era fostered a negative climate at NWAC. She describes how,

Working at that time [at NWAC] was one of the most pathological and crushing…and really like people got sick during that time because of how bad the government was dealing with this situation and how hostile they were. How unwilling they were to negotiate, all the kind of tricks they were playing and all the strategies just made people sick, literally. (Interview II)

To make matters worse, in 2010 the Canadian government fully suppressed the SIS project through defunding it (Toews, 2011). In its efforts to replace the SIS program, the Canadian government announced that new initiatives would be implemented, including another
database on missing and murdered Indigenous women, but that would be run by the RCMP (RCMP, 2014; Toews, 2011). This was a strategic governmentality move and direct attack on Indigenous women’s leadership by the Canadian government because it dissolved the capacity of NWAC to run the database and house the statistics on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG). It was incredibly detrimental for NWAC to lose the ability to maintain a database that demonstrates the depth and breadth of MMIWG “in a country that’s so Western and quantitative and wants those statistics” (Interview II).

Overall, Bourgeois effectively summarizes how the Canadian state used governmentality tactics to surveil and ultimately silence NWAC:

He [Harper] absolutely ensured that the power of that organization to really explode the issue and make meaningful change was hindered to the absolute degree…. That government with its colonial agenda fought a movement that was making meaningful social change that had the potential to change the lives of indigenous women and girls and their nations and communities, and they silence it. They [the government] went after it and they obliterated it. (Interview II)

Analyzing NWAC’s SIS program thus exemplifies how the Canadian state expresses and maintains power through the excessive surveillance of Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing.

Overworked & Underfunded

In addition to Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing being exceptionally surveilled, they are also severely overworked and underfunded. The underfunding of Indigenous women’s work poses grave challenges to Indigenous sovereignty and well-being because women are the backbones of their nations. They are the ones doing work around the clock in their
communities to ensure that people are healthy and living a good life (Interview I; Interview II; Interview VII; Interview XII). For example, Tasha Spillett explains how if a family is experiencing a crisis or needs assistance they:

Aren’t going to call the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs because their office hours are until 4:30. They are going to call a woman in the community who does this work because they know that their office hours are continual. And that’s one thing that’s frustrating about being ummm… kind of like watching the kind of work that my mom and aunties have done is that it is so endless, and it’s so undervalued. (Interview VII)

In line with Tasha’s comment, several of the collaborators described the immense amount of time they spend with community members and advancing issues that are important to Indigenous women. Diane Redsky, Executive Director of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (a large Indigenous-led community-based organization in Winnipeg), demonstrates how her work “is the extension of my life and so there are many twelve to fourteen hour days without a doubt to serve my community” (Interview VII). Likewise, Alex Wilson, explains her extremely hectic schedule, where last year alone she completed “sixty-three community talks in different communities. I did like twenty or thirty radio interviews, so it’s… it’s pretty much every day there is something” (Interview IIII).

Moreover, Indigenous women’s organizations are some of the only Indigenous organizations to be status blind, meaning any Indigenous person can access their services, regardless of whether they are a status Indian or part of a specific band or not (Interview VII; Interview XII). The Indian Act has had such detrimental impacts on Indigenous women’s lived experiences that they are acutely aware of the intrinsic discrimination that Indian Act legislation can pose. Subsequently, they are in the vanguard of a movement paving the way towards
eliminating this colonial barrier, so that all Indigenous peoples can have equal accessibility to programs and services.

Yet, despite the immense amount of critical work Indigenous women are carrying out, their efforts remain severely underfunded. The funding situation is so dire that Tasha Spillett describes Indigenous women’s search for resources as a “fight over scraps” (Interview X). Additionally, Nahanni Fontaine notes how: “you know Indigenous women’s organizations are constantly trying to make do with the very little that they have and yet they deal with the most-the magnitude of issues that Indigenous women face: housing, poverty, all of these different issues” (Interview I). Nahanni explains how it is viewed as acceptable for Indigenous women to complete many jobs for free because their work is “considered you know a woman’s space” (Interview II), where it is coded as social rather than political, and therefore less important. She highlights the inherent contradiction to this rationale as “women are in many respects the primary financial contributors to their families”, which leads her to conclude: “why is it that they get paid less than their male counterparts in other PTOs [provincial territorial organizations]? And why are we asking them to do more work for less money than their male counterparts?” (Interview I). Similarly, Sarah Nickel outlines how many Indigenous women’s organizations try to be “on par with a lot of the very male dominated organizations, which tend to often receive more support and certainly more money than women’s organizations have historically received” (Interview III). Ultimately, these stories reveal that Indigenous women are funded at much lower rates than Indigenous organizations that are predominantly male-dominated, such as the AFN and chief’s organizations, despite the substantial work they do.

The funding of Indigenous women’s organizational and organizing work is especially imbalanced when compared to non-Indigenous organizations that focus on Indigenous people’s
issues. Diane Redsky explains how “we are still not at that stage where Indigenous-led organizations are the successful recipients of resources helping Indigenous people. We still have a whole bunch of non-Indigenous ones that are… they are the ones getting the funding to work with our people” (Interview VII). Additionally, Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette, Executive Director of the Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA), mentions how “we receive probably not even a quarter of the funding compared to some of the other agencies, and that’s not even compared to non-Indigenous agencies. The funding disparity is drastic and huge” (Interview XII). The following analysis of ONWA’s funding situation will demonstrate how Indigenous women’s organizations are gravely underfunded, especially when considering the great amount of work they do.

**Case Study: Ontario Native Women’s Association’s Fight for Funding**

The Ontario Native Women’s Association of Canada (ONWA) will be used as a case study to emphasize how Indigenous women are simultaneously overworked and underfunded. This case study was chosen as I have the most qualitative and quantitative data on the funding of this organization; however, it is fundamental to underscore that this is a persistent, long-standing issue for Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizers across the country.

On February 23, 2016, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne announced a 100-million-dollar commitment to help end violence against Indigenous women and girls (Benzie, 2016; Leslie, 2016; Government of Ontario, 2016). The commitment is being actualized through a three-year strategy titled: *Walking Together: Ontario’s Long Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women*. The strategy was developed in collaboration with Ontario’s Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women, which includes Indigenous partners such as ONWA, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, (OFIFC), the Métis Nation of
Ontario (MNO), the Independent First Nations and Chiefs of Ontario (IFN), and the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) (Government of Ontario, 2016). *Walking Together* has six key priorities areas: 1) Supporting children, youth and families ($80 million); 2) Community safety and healing ($15.75 million); 3) Policing and justice ($2.32 million); 4) Prevention and awareness ($1.15 million); 5) Leadership, collaboration, alignment and accountability ($500,000), and; 6) Improved data and research ($750,000) (Government of Ontario, 2016).

Though this strategy is undeniably a commendable commitment to Indigenous women and girls in Canada, in reality the amount of money from this strategy that actually reaches ONWA, the province’s leading Indigenous women’s organization, is miniscule. Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette, Executive Director of ONWA, explains how this announcement and funding commitment by the Ontario government has put Indigenous women’s issues on a wider radar, which in turn has led to various organizations proclaiming that they are in support of Indigenous women and their causes. These recent declarations by other organizations has unfortunately made it more difficult for Indigenous women’s organizations, like ONWA, to receive sufficient pockets of strategy funding, despite the decades of work, expertise and lived experience they have on these issues. Cora-Lee explains how:

> The Ontario government has listed it has dedicated funding to address Indigenous women’s specific issues, and because there is funding attached to it you have…the Indigenous women’s agency has received the least amount of funding out of the 100-million-dollar announcement. And now suddenly everybody is declaring they are the voice of Indigenous women without even talking to the women in their communities. (Interview XII)
ONWA also conveyed this point to the public in a recent media release (March 2017) that spoke to the one year anniversary of the Walking Together Strategy. The release highlights the work that ONWA has been completing for over forty-six years in this area and emphasizes the necessity of respecting, promoting and supporting Indigenous women’s organizations (ONWA, 2017a). ONWA also encourages a continual evaluation of the Government of Ontario’s strategy to ensure it recognizes that “Indigenous women’s leadership, as is ONWA’s mandate, is a crucial element to success” (ONWA, 2017a).

Cora-Lee explicates how the severe underfunding of ONWA has been a persistent issue for several years. Despite the organization’s longstanding work on Indigenous women’s issues and representing Indigenous women in the province they receive “the least amount of funding across the province compared to other provincial agencies. We get the least amount consistently over and over again. And even for Indigenous women specific programming we are also still receiving the least amount of funding” (Interview XII). Thus, even when there are grand commitments made to Indigenous women specific issues, the historical patterns repeat themselves and Indigenous women’s organizations continue to receive the least amount of funding. This is notwithstanding the fact that they are the ones who are regularly reaching out to communities and have up to “year long wait lists” for access to their services (Interview XII).

The acute underfunding of Indigenous women’s organizations can be further exemplified by the fact that ONWA received 28 percent more core funding in the 1994/95 fiscal year than it did in the 2006/07 fiscal year. When inflation costs are considered the funding discrepancy is even more drastic, where ONWA was actually receiving 44% more funding in 1994/95 than in 2006/07. This enormous decrease in funding is already alarming, but even more so when considering the organization’s increase in programs, services and members from 1994/95 to
2006/07 (ONWA Core Funding Yearly Analysis). Further, compared to other Ontario provincial territorial organizations (PTOs), ONWA does not receive funding for membership agencies, even though they have over forty members (C.L McGuire-Cyrette, personal communication, July 5, 2017).

Analyzing the case of ONWA portrays how extremely overworked and underfunded Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers are in Canada. Despite these dire circumstances, Indigenous women adamantly work to create a healthy future for all Indigenous peoples. Yet, the dangerous consequence of Indigenous women being so overworked and underfunded is spiraling into burnout (Interview VI; Interview XII; Interview XI; Interview XII). Thus, there is an urgent need for Indigenous women’s leadership to be adequately recognized and respected, which includes providing them with sufficient funding so they are in a secure position to continue their groundbreaking work in communities.

Community

A final key theme that arose out of discussions was the need to acknowledge the essential link between organizing and/or organizational work and communities. All the women I spoke with emphasize the importance of working by, for and with communities to create culturally-relevant, sustainable solutions to issues affecting Indigenous women (Interviews I; Interview II; Interview III; Interview IV; Interview V; Interview VI; Interview VII; Interview VIII; Interview IX; Interview X; Interview XI; Interview XIII). As there was a consistent mention of recognizing the difference and creating a distinction between Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing (where this distinction was explained in the first chapter), this theme will be

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10 This source will not be included in the references as it was personally given to me.
structured by first analyzing Indigenous women’s organizations and community, and then Indigenous women’s organizing and community.

Indigenous Women’s Organizations & Community

Claudette Commanda, Anishinaabe grandmother, mother, Professor and Executive Director of the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres (FNCCEC), explained how Indigenous women’s organizations have helped women reclaim their voice (Interview IX), which underscores their fundamental importance to their communities. Similarly, Sarah Nickel discusses how she has spoken with various community members in British Columbia about the BC Homemaker’s Association, a historical Indigenous women’s organization. She notes that community members had “a very personal interaction with some of the women in these organizations that sticks with them for a very long time, and often these are around the political work women are doing to safeguard their communities” (Interview III). Tasha Spillett also describes how Indigenous communities “feel it [Indigenous women’s work] is very necessary because they are the ones who are feeling the most direct impact from that work” (Interview X). Subsequently, Indigenous women’s organizations are highly valued by Indigenous communities, where the succeeding case study of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba will offer further insights into the imperative work Indigenous women are doing to support their communities.

Case Study: Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre & Its Community-Based Approach

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre is a profound example of an organization that follows a “by community for community” approach (Interview VII). Diane Redsky, kookum, mother, First Nations woman from Shoal Lake and Executive Director of Ma Mawi Chi Itata Centre (Ma
Mawi), is widely respected as an Indigenous women leader because of her focus on and commitment to community, where in 2015 the organization served just under 25,000 community members (CBC, 2016; Interview VII; Status of Women Canada, 2016). Her unwavering passion and dedication to supporting community is apparent throughout our discussions, but is made particularly evident when she describes Ma Mawi’s mandate: “we are working with community, we are working for the community, but we don’t do things to the community” (Interview VII). Diane explains how Ma Mawi’s focus on giving voice and building strengths is what makes them so relevant to community members.

Diane also emphasizes how Ma Mawi is Indigenous-led and their services are based on relationships, where she differentiates Ma Mawi from what she terms as “mainstream organizations”,

We don’t call our families clients for examples. They are people. They have a name. We are not… we don’t want to create that us and them. We are mentors, like as staff people we are mentors, teachers and helpers. That’s what we are. We are not better than, smarter than, you know than our own community. So it puts us in a humble role instead of a uh… some kind of hierarchy. And so the organization has become community people helping other community people. We’re all in this together, and we’ll all figure it out. And we’ve done some pretty remarkable things where we have created some innovation…. well the outside world calls it innovation we call it going back to our traditional values of how we care for another. (Interview VII)

Diane provides a specific example of Ma Mawi’s “community people helping other community people” approach when she discusses the organization’s involvement in the Aboriginal Head Start Program (Interview VII). The Aboriginal Head Start program is a community-based early
childhood education program for Indigenous children who are three to six years old (DeRiviere, 2016). When discussing her initial work in 1997 on developing the now extremely successful Head Start program she embodies her community centered approach:

One of the other things I learned early on, and this I just accidently did… the Aboriginal Head Start program I had no idea what I was doing. And so I thought, I am going to pull together all the … Moms know what to do. They will know what they want for their kids when they are coming to any program. Why don’t I just gather up the leaders in the community, the woman leaders in the community and ask them: “What should we do? What should this look like?” So, my community… my program development process always, always, always to this day has the group of experts who are going to either benefit or would have appreciated benefitting from a specific program. So for the Aboriginal Head Start program, which at the end of the day, which is still the same today, is still the best in Canada. I still credit that to the power of community overseeing that program, because it’s always relevant. It’s not people fitting into a program, it’s the program built around the people [my emphasis]. (Interview VII)

Thus, Diane attributes the success of the Aboriginal Head Start Program to Indigenous community members’ full engagement in the program as key collaborators from start to finish.

Another testament to the organization’s positive impact on the Indigenous community can be seen through the 750 people who volunteer for the organization. Diane notes how many volunteers end up becoming employees:

Most of those volunteers will end up working for us. And so whether you are fifteen and a half or fifty Ma Mawi is most likely your very first job. And that is still the status, like the state of where our community is at. We have an emerging group of young leaders that
are coming forward and that we are investing time in. But we also have people who have
not had the opportunity because nobody else would give them the opportunity for
employment. So, we do have quite a few older people where this is their very first job. So
that is a… that also has huge impact on how you meet the needs of the community.

(Interview VII)

Ultimately, Diane Redsky’s leadership at Ma Mawi and her focus on “running an organization of
community people helping other community people” signifies how Indigenous women’s work is
crucial (Interview VII). As Diane describes it: “when you have more Indigenous women leading,
you are having huge impact on the community surrounding” (Interview VII).

Indigenous Women’s Organizing & Community

Within the larger theme of community, it is important to distinctly note the significant
work Indigenous women’s grassroots organizing has on the Indigenous community. Several
women mention that Indigenous women’s organizing is the most important, groundbreaking
work being done to advance Indigenous women’s issues and restore their traditional roles and
responsibilities, and therefore needs to be fully supported (Interview II; Interview V; Interview
VI; Interview IX; Interview X). What’s more remarkable is that these community organizers are
often doing this work with zero funding. As one collaborator asserts: “A lot of women leaders
and women’s advocacy is done by grassroots [organizers] in this country that have no mandate
and no pay in this country. It’s exhausting work” (Interview XI).

Robyn Bourgeois emphasizes the importance of community work when discussing the
steps a community in Antigonish, Nova Scotia took to counter sexual violence in their
community, which she describes as “incredible” (Interview II). She explains how:
In all of my years of doing this now I’ve never seen a community so prepared to address the topic of sexual violence and to do so in ways that were brain stormed and created by the community. And in fact it’s become such a strong model that it’s now being moved to another community. (Interview II)

Another collaborator expresses how Indigenous women in the community were crucial towards her healing journey:

When I was a really young mom, I was turning my life around from being a great big mess and I was learning and regaining my culture and my strength. And in those early years there were times when I really struggled. And there was only a couple programs at the Friendship Centre that were official programs and then there were things just done by the community: people who knew how to bead, how to sew, openly ran groups. Youth just openly ran their own youth programs. Mothers joined together and started a play group following the pre-natal program because we had other children, and umm… so when people like myself struggled, the community came in and helped. (Interview V)

Thus, it was the work of Indigenous women organizers, rather than organizations, that really impacted her life in a positive way. This same collaborator also notes how Indigenous organizations, whether they be male or female led, are all rooted within a hierarchical colonial structure, which creates power structures that never used to exist within traditional Indigenous community structures. She explains how:

Although I think all these organizations do good work, I think the problem that we’re lacking to see is that it is teaching us two very dangerous things: we need to organize according to the colonial format in order to function, and that our salvation lies in the government. And I think this is the dangerous aspect of Indigenous organizations,
whether its Indigenous women’s organizations or Indigenous peoples’ organizations: they are teaching us to become post-colonial and to accept colonization as a structure by which we must function and to fight for our rights, which is ridiculous! Because if you have to ask somebody for your rights, it’s a privilege and they can deny it. A right is something you take and you use. (Interview V)

Ultimately, there are key tensions between Indigenous women organizers and organizations, where several organizers feel that their views are not reflected within larger Indigenous women’s organizations. Certain collaborators strongly feel that Indigenous women need to go back to grassroots organizing, where one woman claims: “I think we need to go back to the kitchen. I think we need to go back to the kitchen and back to the basements and back to um... gathering and doing stuff on our own” (Interview V). Similarly, Claudette Commanda refers to going back to traditional organizing when discussing her grandmother’s homemakers club and how these grandmothers effectively organized as a woman’s group to share knowledge and support community (Interview IX). She also asserts that respecting the leadership of grassroots organizers is vital: “Why does it have to be organizational led? Community led and driven, period. For MMIW [missing and murdered Indigenous women] it should be led by families, for Indian Residential Schools it should be led by survivors. It’s all about people” (Interview IX).

Therefore, it is essential to recognize and account for the fact that Indigenous women are not one homogenous group. Identities and experiences within Indigenous women’s circles are extremely diverse and complex, especially within a settler colonial state. This is why efforts must be made to not only respect Indigenous women’s organizations, but Indigenous women who are grassroots organizers.


Conclusion

Listening to Indigenous women’s stories reveals how they face significant challenges organizing and/working for organizations, which is evidenced by their interactions with the Canadian state, non-Indigenous organizations, Indigenous organizations and communities. The settler colonial state’s use of governmentality tactics has resulted in the attempted silencing, criminalizing, undermining and destroying of Indigenous women’s leadership, with the detrimental consequences being the severe exclusion, underfunding and surveillance of Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers.

Though Indigenous women persistently fight for a positive relationship and partnership with the abovementioned stakeholders, the governmentality tactics employed by the settler colonial state and state apparatuses fosters a strained relationship. Robyn Bourgeois purports that even when Indigenous women manage to get a seat “at the table”, the relationship between Indigenous women and the Canadian government remains hostile:

It has been a government collectively that has been hostile, that has surveilled and that has been silencing. That has done everything in its power to really undermine that leadership and I really want people to know that. The government is not our friend. You know we aren’t coming to this table as partners. We aren’t coming to this table as people on par with each other. We are coming to the table in this inquiry as abuser and abused. We cannot forget that. (Interview II)

Yet, despite these challenges, Indigenous women have not thrown in the towel. They continue to organize, whether that be at a grassroots or national level, and use their voices within the spheres of influence they have access to to meaningfully impact the lives of Indigenous communities (Interview I; Interview II; Interview III; Interview IV; Interview VI; Interview VII;
Interview VIII; Interview IX; Interview X; Interview XI; Interview XII). Though this work has not come without its own obstacles, where Indigenous men’s organizations still tend to code Indigenous women’s work as “social” and therefore less significant, and certain Indigenous women organizers feel that they are being inadequately engaged and represented within the hierarchical structure of Indigenous women’s organizations.

Nonetheless, the very existence of Indigenous women organizers and organizations efficaciously challenges settler colonialism because, as Tasha Spillett notes, “the first elements of the colonial project were to undermine the cultural, spiritual, economic leadership, and the presence of Indigenous women” (Interview X). Therefore, their diligence, strength and perseverance is not only commendable, but remarkable. What Indigenous women in Canada have accomplished, in such a short amount of time, offers critical hope.
Conclusion: Critical Hope

Throughout my thesis, I have contributed to the literature on Indigenous women’s organizational and organizing work in Canada from a theoretical and empirical perspective. The settler colonial governmentality lens I develop in Chapter Three provides a critical base for understanding Indigenous women’s experiences organizing and/or working for organizations. The framework illuminates how the settler colonial nation is founded upon the notion of occupying inhabited lands, whereby the existence of Indigenous peoples threatens the legitimacy of the state, ultimately resulting in the Canadian states’ use of governmentality tactics to maintain power and control over Indigenous peoples, and, for the purposes of this research, specifically Indigenous women.

Using a settler colonial government lens to analyze the “herstory of resistance” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000) outlined in Chapter Four underscores the gendered and sexualized nature of settler colonialism, which leads to Indigenous women experiencing a “double discrimination”, and in turn excessive governmentality in their organizing and organizational work (Monture-Angus, 1995). Listening to Indigenous women organizers and organizations’ contemporary experiences and interactions in Chapter Five further illustrates the complexities inherent to existing and working within a settler colonial context, and uncovers how the extreme surveillance, underfunding and exclusion of Indigenous women is a direct result of settler colonial governmentality.

Ultimately, this research reveals that settler colonial governmentality tactics are employed by the Canadian state and state apparatuses to silence, undermine and diminish Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers, thereby creating a severe lack of recognition and respect for their work. I therefore call for more studies, writing and activist work that
critically identifies, interrogates and problematizes the settler colonial governmentality tactics used against Indigenous women in Canada, and around the world.

Though my theoretical framework offers a critical lens to analyze Indigenous women’s historical and contemporary experiences organizing and working for organizations, this study also empirically explores the invaluable work Indigenous women are completing. The “herstorical” analysis laid out in Chapter Four demonstrates Indigenous women’s accomplishments towards resisting settler colonial violence. In Chapter Five, I continue to explore the role of Indigenous women’s organizing and organizational work, where every single collaborator I spoke with emphasized how fundamental Indigenous women are to their communities. Thus, despite the tremendous challenges Indigenous women confront, they continue to successfully reclaim their traditional roles and responsibilities through grounding their work in Indigenous epistemologies and focusing on responding to and supporting community needs (Interview II; Interview VII; Interview X; Interview XII).

On the whole, this thesis provides insights into the experiences Indigenous women have when they carry out organizing and organizational work within Canada. The purpose of my research is to gain a diverse range of perspectives to provide a complex picture of Indigenous women’s organizations and organizing so that future research can use this study as a starting point to delve into specific case studies in Canada and other settler colonial states, such as the United States and Australia.

In an effort to take up responsibility in the “spheres of influence” that I have access to (Graveline, 2012), I will conclude by highlighting the key points that can be drawn from this inquiry to inform new avenues for meaningfully supporting the work Indigenous women are carrying out. My hope is that readers, and particularly readers who were previously unaware of
the significant work Indigenous women are undertaking, will thoughtfully reflect on these key points and strive to actualize the recommendations made, because “once you are aware, once your eyes are open they can never be closed again” (Interview VII).

**Key Points & Recommendations**

1. A settler colonial governmentality framework reveals the intricate tensions and challenges Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers face operating within a settler colonial context.

   Historical and ongoing settler colonialism in Canada has led to the institutionalization of a power structure that places Indigenous women at the bottom of the hierarchy, causing them to experience a double discrimination for being both Indigenous and a woman. A settler colonial governmentality lens further reveals that Indigenous women’s existence is portrayed as a direct threat to the Canadian state’s power, as settler colonialism justifies its nationhood on the notion of inhabiting “unoccupied” lands, thereby necessitating the elimination of Indigenous women. The dire consequence of this logic of elimination is the excessive disciplining of Indigenous women and their work.

   Ultimately, the settler colonial context Indigenous women operate within generates complex challenges. Traditionally, Indigenous nations were non-hierarchical; however, the imposition of settler colonialism created hierarchies outside and within Indigenous communities, which formulates key tensions not only between Indigenous men and women, but between Indigenous women themselves. For instance, one collaborator explains how the colonial, hierarchical structure of certain organizations fosters a climate where “some Indigenous women are so marginalized that it creates a power vacuum where only certain voices are emphasized” (Interview VI). There are many Indigenous women who are critical of the structure of larger
Indigenous organizations as they view the establishment of these organizations to be the “taking [of] Indigenous creations and making them government paid foundations and organizations” (Interview V). Further interrogation of these intricate tensions is recommended in future activist, organizational and academic work, so that these challenges can be effectively identified, addressed and resolved.

2. Indigenous women’s organizational and organizing work is extremely important and needs to be respected, valued and sufficiently funded.

The significance of Indigenous women’s work is overwhelmingly noted within the literature and my interviews, where many women spoke to the indispensable role Indigenous women play in promoting and advancing the well-being of their communities. Almost all the women I spoke with underscored the absolute necessity of Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers as they bring forward Indigenous women’s perspectives, which is especially crucial in light of the “pervasive hetero-patriarchal structure” of a settler colonial society (Interview III). Diane Redsky powerfully explains the significant role Indigenous women’s leadership has on the surrounding community:

They [Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers] are critical. When you change the life of a woman, you immediately change her family, and then you change the community that she belongs to, and you change a nation. It all starts when you change a woman’s life. There is no doubt. And so, when you have more Indigenous women leading, you are having huge impact on the community surrounding. (Interview VII)

Diane’s above sentiments reveal how invaluable Indigenous women’s work is. They are the key people working around the clock by, for and with communities, and their work deserves to be adequately respected, supported and celebrated. Yet, this is currently not the case. Indigenous
women’s organizations and organizers continue to receive miniscule amounts of funding, causing them to be tremendously overworked, so much so that many spiral into burnout (Interview VI; Interview XII). Subsequently, when there are new announcements and commitments being made to support Indigenous women, Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers should be the *major* recipients of institutional funding, research grants and other sources of funds so that they can have a stable foundation to carry out their extremely significant work, rather than having to experience the instability of working from project to project.

Valuing Indigenous women’s organizing and organizations also entails ensuring that *all* Indigenous women, including women who are marginalized within Indigenous women’s circles, are meaningfully included at *all* tables. This means that when there is any topic being discussed that involves Indigenous women, such as water protection or missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit peoples (MMIWG2S), Indigenous women are respectfully invited and accommodated to come speak. This recommendation applies to all events, whether it be a government consultation, an organizational roundtable, an academic symposium, a lecture, or a community gathering.

3. *Indigenous women organizers and organizations undermine settler colonialism’s legitimacy, and can therefore lead to decolonization.*

    Indigenous women’s reclamation of their sacred roles and responsibilities creates opportunities for them to revert to “our [Indigenous peoples’] traditional values” (Interview VII) and Indigenous governance systems, thereby contributing to decolonization (Interview II; Interview VI; Interview VII; Interview IX; Interview X; Interview XII).

    Decolonization is a highly contested term and a settler’s interpretation of it will surely be incomplete. Broadly speaking, decolonization is as “much a process as a goal” (Walia, 2012,
para. 2), whereby the process of decolonization is two-fold: first, it involves dismantling the colonial systems of oppression, which will ultimately require the dramatic shifting of relationships between the land, people, and state and non-state apparatuses, and; second, it involves a resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing, learning and living, and on Indigenous peoples’ terms (Bourgeois, 2014; Alfred, 2005; Simpson, 2008; Simpson, 2011). As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, Indigenous women’s organizations and organizers are typically grounded in traditional ways of believing, seeing, and doing, and are thus working towards decolonization, which is why the work of Indigenous women directly supports, rather than contradicts, the goals of decolonization.

**Final Words: Moving Forward in a Good Way**

In the face of extremely violent attempts to erase Indigenous women’s existence, the presence of Indigenous women organizers and organizations in Canada demonstrates their phenomenal resilience. They have avidly fought the governmentality tactics that the settler colonial state has thrown at them to unwaveringly support their communities. Robyn Bourgeois, a powerful Indigenous women leader, eloquently speaks to the inherent strength of Indigenous women:

If I could give any message to women who are reading your thesis and are going to wonder about this: they are afraid of us and that they should be because we are fierce. We are the hearts of our nation and if we come together they won’t be able to stop us. They will have to respond and they will have to change. There is no way the world can stay the same when we stand together as women. When we collectively organize, when we talk
and we take a stance. When we go out in mass numbers and we occupy public spaces.

We have the power and we are fierce. (Interview II)

Overall, Indigenous women’s fearless leadership offers substantial hope for their future organizational and organizing work. It is now time for the rest of us to critically evaluate the challenges Indigenous women encounter organizing within a settler colonial state so that we can all move forward in a good way and meaningfully support Indigenous women, on their terms, to give them the space to continue to do what they do best: leading efforts in creating a more peaceful, just and equitable world for Indigenous women, girls and their communities.
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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07256860802372246


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2011.10648799


### Appendix A: Interview Guide and Sample Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Information</th>
<th>o How did you come to your current role (work/life/etc.)?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o What is your educational experience?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o What is your work experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o If you are comfortable, may you please let me know how you identify yourself? (gender, ethnicity, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>o Describe a typical week at your work (or in your life).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions between Indigenous Women and/or Indigenous Women’s Organizations and Other Bodies</td>
<td>o Describe your interactions with the provincial government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Describe your interactions with the federal government</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Describe your interactions with predominantly male Indigenous organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Describe your interactions with other Indigenous organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Describe your interactions with Indigenous communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Role of Indigenous Women’s Organizations and/or Organizing</td>
<td>o How do you feel about the role of Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizing?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o How do you perceive other actors feel about the role of Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizing:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o How do you perceive the provincial and federal government feel about the role of Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o How you feel the broader Canadian public feel about the role of Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o How you feel other Indigenous organizations feel about the role of Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o How you feel Indigenous communities feel about the role of Indigenous women’s organizations and/or organizing?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|                        | Is there anything else you may wish to discuss concerning the historical and present role of Indigenous women’s organizations (or more broadly, organizing)?
Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent Form

ANALYSING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS IN CANADA

You have been invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Laura Myers from the Global Development Studies Department at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. It has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen’s policies.

This project focuses on understanding the history and role of Indigenous women’s organizations in Canada. I will be interviewing key Indigenous women academics and activists to understand their experiences with and/or opinions of Indigenous women’s organizations in Canada. You have been asked to participate in this study because of your involvement with Indigenous women’s organizations and/or expertise in this area.

The interview will comprise of questions about your involvement with and/or research on Indigenous women’s organizations in Canada, as well as your experiences and opinions about the role and impact of these organizations. The estimated time for the interview is about sixty to ninety minutes. Interviews will be audio-recorded, with the participants’ consent.

If you choose to participate, you have the right to refuse any question you do not want to answer without providing any reason. You have the right to refuse to be audio recorded. Your participation is voluntary and you can discontinue your participation in the study at any time by informing the researcher. You may withdraw by speaking with the researcher in person or by contacting the researcher by telephone or by e-mail (contact information below) following data collection. If you wish to withdraw, all data relevant to you will be destroyed.

It is possible that you may experience emotional discomfort as a result of participating in this study, as the questions or discussion topics may inadvertently trigger negative and/or traumatic experiences. However, you have the right to refuse to answer any question or discuss any topic without explanation. Additionally, a list of support resources will be provided to participants at the time of the interview.

Despite the possibility of such risks, I hope you will see the benefits of participating in this research study. This study is intended to assess the historical and present role Indigenous women and their organizations have in Canada, and I sincerely hope that the findings will positively contribute to Indigenous women’s organizing and activism by demonstrating the impact that these organizations have on their surrounding communities.

Throughout the study participants’ right to confidentiality will be prioritized, respected and upheld. Any personal information will be stored in a password-protected, encrypted file or in a locked cabinet in a secure location. Participants have the option to be known by a pseudonym, and/or have their comments used without direct reference to the individual. Details that might reveal the identity of participants will be altered or omitted to ensure confidentiality. Participants may also consent to forgo confidentiality and be fully represented within the research project.
At any time during the study participants may choose to edit or remove comments, and/or request that certain comments be used anonymously. If interested, participants may request to receive transcription copies of the interview for the purposes of editing or removing comments. Interview data will be properly secured. The interview recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be stored on my computer in a password protected, encrypted file, and only I, the researcher, will have access to the data. The participants’ personal information will be destroyed when it is no longer needed to authenticate the research results (unless the participant chooses to waive confidentiality). Information stored on my computer in password protected, encrypted files will be retained for a minimum of five years. After this point, the research data will be retained indefinitely, or until the researcher feels she has exhausted the data and that the original data is no longer needed. At this time, the data will be destroyed.

The data will be used to complete my master’s thesis, and may also be used to formulate journal articles and conference presentations. If you are interested in learning the results of the research you may request for copies of the findings.

Should you have further questions about the research study please feel free to contact me (Laura Myers) via e-mail (15lm1@queensu.ca) or telephone (613-790-4952).

If you have any ethical concerns regarding your participation in the study or how the study was conducted please contact the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

**Participant Consent**

*I certify that I have read and understood the project information, asked questions and received answers concerning areas I did not understand, and have reached satisfactory answers to these questions. I willingly give my consent to (please select one):*

- [ ] Participate confidentially in the interview.

- [ ] I waive my right to confidentiality and agree be identified in name and in connection to comments I make.

*Please initial next to each of the following statements that you agree with:*

- [ ] I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time.

- [ ] I understand that at any time during or after the interview, I may request that certain comments or information be kept confidential.

- [ ] I agree to have this interview recorded.
### Appendix C: List of Semi-Structured and Unstructured Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #</th>
<th>Name of Collaborator</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview I</td>
<td>Nahanni Fontaine</td>
<td>Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba</td>
<td>September 12, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview II</td>
<td>Robyn Bourgeois</td>
<td>Senior Program Instructor, COADY Institute</td>
<td>September 26, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview III</td>
<td>Sarah Nickel</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, University of Saskatchewan</td>
<td>October 14, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview IV</td>
<td>Alex Wilson</td>
<td>Community Organizer &amp; Professor, University of Saskatchewan</td>
<td>October 14, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview V</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>October 17, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview VI</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>October 17, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview VII</td>
<td>Diane Redsky</td>
<td>Executive Director, Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre</td>
<td>October 17, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview VIII</td>
<td>Kim Anderson</td>
<td>Associate Professor, University of Guelph</td>
<td>November 3, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview IX</td>
<td>Claudette Commanda</td>
<td>Executive Director, First Nations Caring Society</td>
<td>November 4, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview X</td>
<td>Tasha Spillett</td>
<td>Community Organizer &amp; PHD Student, University of Saskatchewan</td>
<td>November 7, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview XI</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview XII</td>
<td>Cora-Lee McGuire-Cyrette</td>
<td>Executive Director, Ontario Native Women’s Association</td>
<td>November 18, 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Ethics Approval

June 29, 2016

Ms. Laura Myers
Master’s Student
Department of Global Development Studies
Queen's University
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GDEVS-043-16; Romeo # 6018726
Title: "GDEVS-043-16 The Role of Indigenous Women’s Organisations in Canada"

Dear Ms. Myers:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GDEVS-043-16 The Role of Indigenous Women’s Organisations in Canada" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is ‘completed’ so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or an unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies". Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

John Freeman, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Villia Jefremovs, Supervisor
Dr. Richard Day, Chair, Unit REB
Ms. Barbra Brousseau, Dept. Admin.