

**MISSING FROM POLITICS: THE MISSING CHILDREN OF CANADA'S
INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS**

by

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Abstract

This paper explores The Missing Children Project of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and examines the responses of communities and families of children who died or went missing in the residential school system from the 1870s to 1996. It uses Jenny Edkins' discussion of how responses to missing persons and demands for information about their whereabouts, or in some cases, the circumstances of their deaths, represents a different kind of politics, one that acknowledges the person-as-such. Edkins' framework is used to analyze comments from family and friends of some missing students and to examine family and community commemoration efforts. The paper also examines some of the Canadian federal government's responses to the broader demand of recognition and to the Missing Children Project. The residential school system as a whole exemplified a type of politics that sought to reduce its victims to bare life; this is particularly evident in the way that deaths within the schools were handled: families were often not informed about the deaths of their children, and if they were, they were provided no details on the circumstances of their death and location of their burial. By demanding answers from the federal government, the families and communities of the missing insist on recognition, reclaiming the personhood of these victims, and seek a different type of political relationship with the Canadian state, a relationship which has at its centre an acknowledgement of the person-as-such.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, E. Sammons.

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Introduction

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada recently confirmed the deaths of 4,100 children in the residential school system (Barrera 2014b). As research on the Missing Children Project continues, and as additional records are made available to the researchers, that number is expected to greatly increase. Most of these children died of disease, though some died in accidents or fires, and some committed suicide. Though no official records confirm such instances, some former students have shared memories of violent ends, including children that died after a beating from a staff member or another student (Grant 1996, 134).

There is strong evidence that the poor conditions of the school buildings and the hard physical labour that students were required to perform, combined with inadequate clothing and nutrition, contributed to many of these deaths (Miller 1996, 130-133). There is also evidence that the government was aware of these problems and ignored the calls of those that asked for changes (Milloy 1999, 51-52; Furniss 1995, 28-29). Beyond that, the tragedy of these stories is not simply that these children died at school, but that as far as many of their families were concerned, these children were, and in some cases, still are, missing. It was common that parents were not informed right away about their child's death; in some cases, the school officials never informed the parents and they learned about the death when their child did not return home with the other children of their community (Grant 1996, 133). Parents were not consulted about where or how their child should be buried, and often were not told where their child's body was laid to rest. Parents often learned little or were told conflicting details about the end of their child's life. Even when the parents knew of their child's death, the details of their death, the closure that comes from a funeral, a burial, viewing the body, were still missing.

Communities and families that lost children are demanding attention to this issue. They ask for answers and information, set about the work of commemorating burial sites and, in some cases, demand that the bodies of their loved ones be returned. Some families searched for answers for many years, sometimes with very little success. In recent years, the TRC Missing Children Project has drawn more attention to the concerns of these families, but many questions and gaps in information remain. A demand for recognition of the personhood of these children and their families can be seen in the efforts of families and communities to learn the details of their loved one's death. This demand goes beyond a call for government or public recognition of the wrongs done, and demonstrates a demand for a new political relationship. In families' and communities' calls for answers, there is a demand for a different sort of politics, a politics that recognizes the value, personhood, and political agency of individual persons.

In her book, *Missing: Persons and Politics*, Jenny Edkins develops the argument that movements that demand answers regarding missing persons also demand a different kind of politics. Loved ones of the missing reject a biopolitics model which reduces persons to bare life and sees individuals as part of a population to be managed, and instead demand a type of politics that recognizes the person-as-such, or recognizes the unique value of each individual. Edkins' uses her framework to discuss missing persons in a variety of contexts, but does not apply it to the Canadian case. Nor does she use her framework to explore a case of colonial violence.

Aboriginal people are often objectified by mainstream Canadian society and the Canadian state – whether in the paternalistic policy decisions made by the Canadian government, or in the sensationalized images put forward in Canadian history and in the Canadian media. The idea of an Aboriginal person as a person with political views and desires of their own is rarely put forward in the public consciousness (Saul 2008, 22). European Canadian society has tended

to view Native peoples as a “child-like, savage race, having only a rudimentary degree of social organization” (Furniss 1995, 15). And despite some grand gestures toward the idea of reconciliation: notably, the Settlement Agreement of 2007 which established the TRC and included reparations for Survivors of residential schools, and the 2008 federal government apology for residential schools, I argue that some of the attitudes toward political relationships that underpinned the residential school system are still very prevalent. The search for answers regarding missing children represents an approach to politics that differs vastly from that advocated by the Canadian state. Thus, Edkins’ framework allows an opportunity to analyze and understand a part of the movement to address the wrongs of residential schools and challenge the historical relationship between the Canadian state and Aboriginal Peoples. As well, the Canadian case serves as an interesting case study to further Edkins’ analysis.

I will first situate this research within the relevant literature, including in terms of Edkins’ argument, summarizing her framework. I will then use the framework to work through the history of the residential schools and to analyze the political thinking that shaped the system, and then move to some examples of how people have responded to missing children in their families or communities, and will illustrate that these movements represent a demand for a different sort of political relationship. Next, I will turn to assessing the response of the Canadian government to these demands, and then offer some concluding remarks.

Theoretical Background

For many years, Indian residential schools garnered little attention amongst non-Aboriginal Canadians. There is now a growing scholarly and public attention toward the residential school system and to its role in Canadian history and politics (Furniss 1995, 30-31). Though not universally agreed, there is a growing recognition that the story of the residential schools and their effects are not only a story for Aboriginal people to tell or analyze, but that this is an important aspect of Canadian history and Canadian policy for all Canadians (Milloy 1999, xviii; Reagan 2010). The TRC Interim report, speaking of the work of a national conversation about reconciliation, declares: “All Canadians need to engage in this work” (TRC 2012, 6).

Much of the current research has focused on understanding the ongoing legacy of colonialism (Regan 2010), the broader Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship (Saul 2008), or the history of the school system or specific schools (Milloy 1999; Haig-Brown 1991; Miller 1996). Though some of the historical accounts provide some information, thus far, little to no scholarly work exists that specifically focuses on the topic of the missing children or the movement to recognize them. This is an important area for research not only because it is a less known and largely unanalyzed aspect of Canadian history, but also because it provides some clear insights into the need for Canada to re-think political relationships.

As stated above, Edkins does not examine a Canadian case, nor does she explore a case that involves a group of persons that are structurally and symbolically excluded from politics based on their racial or cultural identity. And while she acknowledges in her introduction that colonialism has a legacy of objectifying persons, the cases she analyzes in detail are not examples of colonial violence. She explores such case studies as those missing after 9-11 in the U.S., those missing after the subway bombings in London, missing and displaced persons after

WWII, and soldiers missing in action. She also examines the case of the disappeared that were kidnapped and in many cases murdered by the military junta government during the Dirty War in Argentina. She argues that missing individuals, and the response from families and friends of those missing, calls into question many of our modern political processes. Many governments, in their attempt to manage their populations, disregard individuals, and in most cases, treat citizens as though *what* they are matters significantly more than *who* they are (Edkins 2011, 2). A person is valued only for their role, or their economic contributions, and is readily replaceable, as far as the government is concerned. However, when a person goes missing, it is that person that their family and friends are looking for. They will not be satisfied with a person who is comparable as far as the government is concerned; nor will they be satisfied with compensation that will make up for the economic role that that person played (*Ibid*, 12; 197). She writes:

Relatives of the missing do not just accept what they are told. They do not just go home and wait. They walk the streets, they put up missing posters, they protest the injustice to anyone who will listen. They know what is at stake. Those in political authority assume that their task is that of dealing with people as objects to be governed, not as persons (*Ibid*, 105-106).

Therefore, exploring the movements around those that have gone missing in cases of government kidnappings or killings, during war or terrorist acts, can be a way to explore a different kind of political understanding. She emphasizes that when families seek those who have gone missing, no one else will do – and thus this theme creates an interesting viewpoint into the idea of biopolitics. Governments are concerned with populations, not particular people, and while some may think that this distinction has little real life impact, in cases of missing persons, this distinction becomes painfully obvious (*Ibid*, 56). When a loved one is missing, there is an ongoing uncertainty. There is a desire to understand not just whether they are dead, but to become familiar with how their life ended, to know their story, to know them. There is

something in the closure of knowing what happened that allows families or friends to know that their loved one did exist, did matter: “to reclaim, if not the lives, at least the deaths of those who perished” (*Ibid*, preface). It is about reclaiming and declaring the humanity, the personhood of the missing; confirming not only their existence but also their uniqueness. Writing of the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, Edkins explains that the families are not simply asking for information, rather they “protest against the injustice of the disappearances” and “demand that the disappeared be restored to their existence as fully political beings—beings who lived lives, fought political battles, had children and families” (*Ibid*, 174). This is especially true as families respond to actions of terrorists or governments that ignore or deny their personhood.

Edkins is critical of the prevalent political relationship between government and citizens that sees citizens objectified and used for the political purposes of the government. Her book “was prompted by an anger at the way prevalent forms of political or biopolitical governance both objectify and instrumentalize the person” (*Ibid*, preface). This objectification and instrumentalization of the person happens in undemocratic regimes, such as the Argentinean junta that refused to provide information about the political prisoners they had kidnapped and in many cases tortured and killed, the “disappeared” (*Ibid*, 155). It also happens in democratic countries. For example, Edkins discusses the way that the bombings in the London transit system had governments much more focused on discerning *what* the dead were – terrorists or victims – rather than considering them as persons with concerned and frightened families. She writes, “[e]veryone was treated as a suspect; the priority was the search for the ‘perpetrators,’ not the needs of the ‘victims’” (*Ibid*, 87).

Some key concepts in the book include the notion of *bare life* and the *person-as-such*. The two ideas represent two very different notions of personhood. To reduce someone to bare

life means to strip away their political agency. It is based on the writings of Giorgio Agamben and describes a “form of life with no part in politics, a form of life that belongs to the home, not the public sphere” (Ibid, 11). Agamben characterizes bare life as a natural aspect, or the logical extension of the political order of the West (Ibid, 11). People are reduced to the simplest elements of their day to day life, a life “with no political voice” (Agamben 1995, 132). In some cases, this occurs in a very extreme way, such as in a concentration camp where nearly all unique identifiers have been removed and there is very little ability to express any sort of political notion or dissent, where a person’s identity is essentially stripped away, and they are reduced to their basic functions (Ibid, 171-173). There are also less extreme cases, such as after 9-11, when many of the victims were profiled in obituaries in the *New York Times*. The emphasis was on the “simple” parts of their life, such as family or hobbies, with no acknowledgement of their political or social views or desires, and no acknowledgement of whether or not they would want their memory and their death to be used to fuel the fire for an international war (Edkins 2011, 29-33). The emphasis here is on *what* the person is, whereas the person-as-such acknowledges *who* the person is. Edkins contrasts *bare life* with the concept of the *person-as-such*, which she defines as “always the subject of a lack, never complete, always relational, never fully known, never ‘at home’” (Ibid, 11). She writes that the “person-as-such can be approached only through paying attention to particular actions in particular places at particular times; the person-as-such is not generalizable” (Ibid, 194). Acknowledging the person-as-such is acknowledging the political agency and the political value of the individual and recognizing their unique identity. It is acknowledging that a person’s identity is a complex thing, built of their own individuality, but also their connections to family, to community, to social groups and political causes.

The residential school system in general, but also specifically the way that deaths were handled within the schools, represents one of the ways the Canadian state reduces Indigenous Canadians to bare life. The residential school system attempted to strip its victims of their identities, to deny the existence of the person-as-such, and reduce the students to bare life, so that they could be assimilated into Canadian society. Many residential school Survivors and groups established to support them have promoted a rediscovery of language, culture, and identity – a refusal to be reduced to bare life, and a demand that the person-as-such be acknowledged. This insistence on reclaiming culture and identity is a demand for a different kind of political relationship. This can be seen in attempts by Aboriginal people and communities to gain recognition and compensation for the suffering that took place in residential schools, but also specifically in the demand for resolution regarding students who never returned from residential schools – a demand for answers regarding their deaths, and a demand that their lives, and their personhood be acknowledged by the government and churches that previously denied it.

Historical Background

Indian Residential Schools were mandated and funded by the Canadian state beginning in 1874, though most of the schools were actually operated by churches (AANDC). The schools were established across Canada in each of the provinces and territories except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, although Aboriginal children from these provinces were also required to attend residential schools, and were sent to residential schools in other provinces (Ibid). More than 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children went through these schools (TRC 2012, 1). The last school did not close until 1996. Though some students have reported some fond memories of school or were able to obtain a useful education through the residential school system, the majority of students had a negative experience in residential schools. The living conditions at many of the schools were very poor. Students were forced to do hard labour, were under-nourished, and were given harsh punishments (Haig-Brown 1991, 58-86). Many schools had poorly trained teachers and overall academic outcomes were poor (Miller 1996, 174-176). Students were separated from their siblings and were forced to live in uncomfortable and unwelcoming institutional settings (AFN 1994, 30-33). The poor living conditions caused rampant illness amongst the students in many schools (Miller 1996, 131). There were also many cases of sexual, physical and verbal abuse (Collison 1995, 37; Fontaine 1995, 51-52; AFN 1994, 41-54; Grant 1996, 225-232). As one Survivor writes, “we were made to endure all kinds of physical, verbal, and mental pain” (Charland 1995, 30). Abuses within the schools have been well documented, and it is clear that the government and the church organizations running the schools were in many cases aware of the terrible conditions and cases of abuse and their inaction allowed such abuses to continue unchecked in many circumstances (Chrisjohn et al. 2006, 47-51).

A major part of the story of residential schools is the legacy of abuse and violence that they have produced. Aboriginal people live with higher rates of impoverishment, incarceration, suicide and alcoholism than the general Canadian population. Many believe that the roots of these problems can be traced back to the abuses of the school system (Jaine 1995, x). The residential schools were a major element in the colonization of Aboriginal people by the Canadian state. The schools left “an intergenerational history of dispossession, violence, abuse, and racism that is a fundamental denial of the human dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples” (Regan 2010, 5).

As the mainstream Canadian public has become more aware of the reality of life in residential schools, there has sometimes been a tendency to rationalize the school system by understanding it as a series of mistakes by individuals who either did not know better, or took advantage of the system. Some want to understand the residential school system as a well-intentioned program that simply went wrong (Chrisjohn et al. 2006, 27-30). In reality the schools were a blatant attempt to assimilate Aboriginal children into European Canadian society, leading John Milloy, who wrote the first extensive history of the residential school system based on government records to argue that “the system was, even as a concept, abusive” (1999, xv).

A study of the history of the schools makes it clear that the Canadian government wanted to strip the children of their cultural and family identity. Duncan Campbell Scott (Indian Affairs Minister) speaking of the schools, said in 1920: “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. That is my whole point. Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question” (quoted in Grant 1996, 273). An official from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs visited Canada in 1945 and noted that “‘the extinction of the Indians as Indians is the ultimate end’ of Canadian Indian policy” (quoted

in Miller 1996, 184). He continued, “[b]y the cultural assimilation it would bring about, education in residential schools would prove ‘the means of wiping out the whole Indian establishment’” (Ibid, 185).

Children were removed from their families, in some cases by force. They were taken from their home communities and everything that they knew, and were told that their traditions, culture and language were forbidden and wrong (TRC 2012, 1; Haig-Brown 1991, 38). Many of the children came from backgrounds that emphasized holistic learning, within a supportive and loving family environment and the schools’ emphasis on force and order was unfamiliar and frightening (Haig-Brown 1991, 39-44; AFN 1994, 24-26). Survivors give heartbreakingly moving testimony:

The most long-term and hurtful effect I have experienced as a result of my early years is the inability to show love to my mom, brothers, and sisters. I feel that having grown up away from Mom and Dad, I have grown up without love (Bell 1995, 13).

My spirit was broken by the age of nine. I didn’t know where I belonged. ... I was ashamed of who I was (Charland 1995, 30).

At residential school I was part of an institution. I learned that I was no more or no less than the next person. They didn’t account for any differences in personality, and we were all treated as just one part of a big machine (Fontaine 1995, 53).

All that went on in the schools was really designed to deny us our existence. We never heard anything about our community or parents except in the most negative way (Fontaine 1995, 54).

We got into trouble when we spoke our minds, expressed our feelings, or dared to question anything. And on top of all that is the constant message that because you are Native you are part of a weak, defective race unworthy of a distinguished place in society, and that is the reason you have to be looked after. (Address by Chief Bev Sellars, Soda Creek First Nation, to the First National Conference on Residential Schools, June 1991, reprinted in Furniss 1995, 125)

The students were left to feel that they did not matter as individuals, and many became ashamed of themselves and their background (Miller 1996, 205). The children were “treated as objects to

be controlled and steered in the ‘right directions’. Their background was considered close to that of animals” (Funk 1995, 78-79). Thus we can see that the intentions of the residential school system were to reduce Indigenous people to bare life.

The personal and political identities of these students were so unimportant, and to some, so offensive, that *who* they were needed to be removed in every possible way. Their culture, their names, their language, their traditions, their families were taken away from them – they were to be reduced to bare life. Who they were as individuals, who any Aboriginal people were, was unimportant. Rather *what* they were – Aboriginal people, ‘savages’ to be tamed, controlled, changed was all that the system saw. They were reduced to bare life and the person-as-such was ignored or suppressed. This is further evidenced in the fact that the parents of these children were denied the right to any political say. For instance, for many years, Aboriginal peoples could not vote in Canada without renouncing their status. Parents were given few avenues to voice concerns with the school system, and were denied the right to make decisions about their children’s future (Niezen 2013, 27).

The TRC Interim report documents the deep sense of loss that students experienced regarding their cultural and personal identity, sometimes immediately upon entering the schools they attended:

People spoke of the immediate losses they experienced at school. Traditional, and often highly valued, clothing and footwear, handmade by loving mothers and grandmothers, were taken from them and never seen again. Long hair, often in traditional braids that reflected sacred beliefs, was sheared off. Many people had bitter memories of being deloused with lye or chemicals, regardless of whether they had lice. Children lost their identity as their names were changed – or simply replaced with a number. The Commission has heard of how students lost their individuality, were forced to wear uniforms, to march in lines, to wash in communal showers – treated, as several former students said, like they were animals in a herd. In the words of countless students, it was a frightening, degrading, and humiliating experience. (TRC 2012, 5)

These experiences and feelings demonstrate the political structure that was underlying the residential school system. The Canadian state and the churches involved in running the schools may have had a variety of motivations, and certainly in some cases, things went bad beyond the original intent. However, the very core of the way that the school system was structured and imagined was that it would strip away the unique identities of these children. It would wash away, or teach away, or discipline away their ‘Indian-ness’, and then have them remade into meek, manageable citizens. The schools were certainly successful in many ways at ripping away and destroying children’s identities, leaving children feeling ashamed of themselves, their parents, and their culture, unable to speak their own language (TRC 2012, 5-6). However, in the responses of Survivors and their families, in the calls for recognition and in the steps taken toward healing by so many Indigenous people, we see a rejection of this understanding of politics, a refusal to be reduced to bare life, and a demand that a new political reality exist.

The deaths within the schools, as well as the way that they were handled, further demonstrate this approach toward the political and individual value of the students. School deaths were accepted by administrators as part of the school reality, and plans for many of the schools included cemeteries (Warick 2013). In most cases, the deaths were due to disease. Poor nutrition and poor living conditions made the children especially susceptible to tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough and influenza outbreaks (Grant 1996, 134). There are no official records that indicate that children died from violence or abuse in the schools; however, there are students who have memories of classmates who died from a beating from a fellow student or a staff member (Grant 1996, 134; 270; TRC 2012, 5). The death rates in the schools were much higher than those in non-Aboriginal schools (Grant 1996, 133). The high rates of death can be attributed to the poor conditions in the schools: mixing unhealthy and healthy students in the

same quarters, keeping students in cramped sleeping quarters, not providing adequate food, sealing children in dormitories overnight to save on heating bills (Miller 1996, 130-131). The Federal government treated the deaths not as tragedies to be concerned by, but rather as mere statistics. The deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs reported, rather blandly about schools on the prairies, around 1900: “It is quite within the mark to say that fifty per cent of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education which they had received therein” (quoted in Miller 1996, 133). Researching the deaths of students is difficult because of the poor records kept regarding the specifics of many deaths. Indian Affairs seemed to treat the deaths in “a very casual fashion” (Funk 1995, 82, endnote 26). Explanations of different reporting standards in previous generations would help to explain some of the missing/incomplete reports, however this is not a full explanation as “when a non-Indian died, the reporting was much different” (*Ibid*).

Not only did the government seem to regard some deaths amongst students as inevitable or at least as not noteworthy, when they were called upon to improve conditions, they refused. The government was warned about some of the conditions which needed improvement in order to keep the students in reasonably good health. These reports seem to fall on deaf ears. After his reports as Chief Medical Officer of the Indian Department were largely ignored, Dr. P.H. Bryce wrote a pamphlet in which he charged: “[a] trail of disease and death has gone on almost unchecked by any serious efforts on the part of the Department of Indian Affairs” (quoted in Milloy 1999, 51). In his reports to the federal government, Bryce detailed the poor health conditions at the schools and made multiple recommendations regarding facility and procedural changes that could improve health conditions and reduce sickness and death within the schools; he published his pamphlet in 1922 because he felt his recommendations had been ignored. Dr.

Bryce concluded in his pamphlet that the federal government's failure to address the poor health conditions amounted to a "criminal disregard" of the government's "treaty pledges to guard the welfare of the Indian wards of the nation" (*Ibid*, 52).

Not only were the deaths of children cases of negligence as the government failed to provide the basic necessities and reasonable living conditions, but beyond that, the deaths were handled in such a way that families and communities were left to think that their children had simply disappeared. Even fellow students were kept in the dark as to what had happened in many cases. Typically, when a child died, it was not discussed by staff and students. Students were left feeling as though their friend or sibling had simply disappeared overnight (Grant 1996, 133). One former student from the Schubenacadie Residential School says: "For us, the infirmary became the place from which children vanished forever. Sometimes we heard that they had died and sometimes we didn't. To us, it seemed that these children just evaporated" (quoted in Grant 1996, 136). School administrators sometimes waited months before notifying the parents. In many cases, parents learned of their child's death when he or she did not return home for a school break (Grant 1996, 133). Parents were not allowed off the reserve without a pass from the Indian Agent, and therefore had little ability to be informed about the actual occurrences at the schools. "Given the high mortality rates that prevailed for much of the system's history, many parents spent their lives grieving, never having been given a proper description of how their child died or where they were buried, and not being able to hold an appropriate ceremony of mourning" (TRC 2012, 25).

Just as the residential school system was built upon a worldview that reduced Indigenous persons to bare life and denied their personhood and individual political agency, the way that the deaths were handled within the system shows a deep and pervasive disregard for the person-as-

such. Students were seen as dispensable; another student could be found to take their place within the school. The gap that the missing or dead child left in the lives of those that loved them was disregarded. As outlined above, families were given incomplete or conflicting information and were largely ignored when they made requests to see the bodies, have a say over the burial, or learn the full truth of what happened to their child and why. The paper turns to focus now on the way that families resisted this political understanding, this way of thinking that reduced their children and them to bare life. In this resistance, there can be seen a demand for a different political relationship. There is a demand for answers, for the acknowledgement that their child be understood as a unique person. In this demand for answers and for recognition of the person-as-such, there is a challenge to the political worldview that underpinned the residential school system.

Demands for a Different Type of Politics

Aboriginal individuals and communities resisted the school system throughout its existence. Some protested against the system as a whole, demanding Aboriginal control over the education of their youth, others protested against the reality of conditions within the schools, but for the most part these protests were ignored or downplayed by the government and unheard by the rest of the Canadian public (Milloy 1996, 298; Furniss 1995, 13-14). Laws against legal representation for status Indians that remained in place until 1951 meant that Aboriginal parents had essentially no access to the legal system to challenge school policies or decisions (Niezen 2013, 27). Despite the obstacles to resistance, many historians point to a variety of instances of it. Some parents and communities refused to send their children to the schools or protested against a specific staff member or specific circumstance within a school (Furniss 1995, 105). Some children fought back at particular moments or found quieter ways of resisting: refusing to change their beliefs, stealing food, talking back to authorities in the schools, running away (Miller 1996, 343-374; Haig-Brown 1991, 98-114).

In some of the literature, demands for recognition and acts of resistance are categorized as opposing or distinct responses to the school system and Aboriginal colonization (Simpson 2014). Some critics of the politics of recognition have expressed concern that the current focus on recognition is used to try to placate Aboriginal people or distract from affecting real change (Mackey 2013, 48-49). Some are critical of the politics of recognition, where recognition is something that is given or bestowed upon Aboriginal people by the Canadian state or majority (Coulthard 2007, 442). I acknowledge these critiques, and the emphasis on resistance to the school system in much of the literature. In interpreting the calls of family members and communities for answers regarding their children's deaths as calls for recognition of the person-

as-such, I do not mean to imply that mere acknowledgement of the government's mistakes will be sufficient to satisfy these family members. I believe that these calls for recognition of the person-as-such represent a demand for a changed politics and therefore represent a form of resistance to the current political structure which continues to attempt to reduce Aboriginal individuals to bare life, and tries to deny their political agency. I do not mean to imply that the families and community members that loved the missing children are waiting for recognition to be bestowed upon them by the Canadian state. Instead, I would argue that these people are resisting a continuation of more of the same. They are refusing a political worldview that reduces their children to bare life and through their demand for answers, they are demanding a new kind of politics. These demands have come in several forms. First, I examine the TRC's Missing Children Project, and then I turn to some individual family and community responses.

The TRC and the Creation of the Missing Children Project

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is a multi-faceted agreement between residential school Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, church organizations and the government of Canada which came into effect in 2007 (Niezen 2013, 43). The Agreement resulted in the establishment of the TRC, and the Commission has held many events, including small local events, as well as events aimed at gaining a national audience (TRC “Our Mandate”). The mandate of the TRC is largely focused on recording and preserving the truth of what happened in the residential school system. They focus on hearing and recording Survivor testimony, but also research government and church records in order to establish the reality of life in the schools, and in order to share and preserve that truth to inform current and future Canadians and to promote reconciliation within Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (Ibid).

Around the time that the TRC was first created by the Settlement Agreement, the issue of the missing children was gaining some public attention (TRC 2012, 17). Not knowing what happened to their children and not knowing where they were buried, or knowing that culturally appropriate burial rituals were not followed caused ongoing suffering for Survivors and families. In 2007, at the request of Jim Prentice (at that time Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada), the TRC established a working group to examine the issue (Ibid). The working group met several times in 2007 and 2008 and was comprised of representatives from national Aboriginal organizations, the churches, the federal government, and former students (Working Group on Missing Children and Unmarked Burials 2008, 3). Their report to the TRC argued that “[o]ne significant aspect of this [residential school] history should include an examination of student deaths in, and disappearances from, the residential schools” and included several

recommendations about how the disappearances and deaths could be researched (*Ibid*, 1). The TRC accepted the recommendations of the working group in 2009 (Boiteau 2013). This decision resulted in the establishment of The Missing Children Project, which is tasked with researching government death records and school records in order to establish accurately not only the number of students who died within the school system, but also, where possible, to learn the circumstances of their deaths and to learn where they are buried, and to ensure that the families of those students have that information made available to them (TRC 2012, 17). The TRC recognizes that the lack of information or conflicting information in some cases may make it difficult to establish a complete record; however, it is seen as important to find and commemorate the graves, and to make recommendations for how the project can be continued once the TRC's mandate has ended (Paul 2011).

This paper considers the TRC Missing Children Project as a part of the movement to challenge the political order that allowed the school system to exist. Therefore, it is appropriate to acknowledge and engage with those that are critical of the TRC and see it as ineffective or as a tool of the state. There have been concerns regarding the relationship between the government and the Commission. The TRC is funded by the Canadian government and is staffed by the public service (TRC 2012, 2). According to the Settlement Agreement, decisions regarding the selection of Commissioners were to be approved by all parties to the Agreement. As well, the Commission is to be guided by the Indian Residential School Survivor Committee, made up of ten former students (*Ibid*). There are concerns regarding the close relationship between the federal government and the TRC. However, as will be outlined in greater detail below, on the issue of the Missing Children Project and obtaining records in order to find answers, the TRC has been at odds with the Canadian state. The TRC's decision to focus not only on establishing

accurate death statistics, but to emphasize finding answers and closure for families, reflects a desire to reject the governance model that allowed these children's deaths to be dealt with so callously. It demonstrates a desire to acknowledge and recognize the person-as-such, to recognize how much families and communities felt the loss of these young people.

Aside from questions regarding the relationship between the Canadian state and the TRC, critics have pointed out the inadequacies of the Commission. The TRC has no power to call government officials to testify or explain their actions, and the government has played a minimal role in the TRC events (Niezen 2013, 78; Bonner and James 2011, 23). The Settlement Agreement has required the federal government to take some financial responsibility, but it has largely avoided taking social and political responsibility (Bonner and James 2011). There are those that argue that the TRC attempts to erase or ignore Canada's colonial history and to placate Aboriginal people, rather than address the underlying causes or ongoing wrongs (Henderson and Wakeham 2013; Carr 2009, 110). There are those that have critiqued the actual procedures used by the TRC indicating that the detailed guidance given to those that share testimony at TRC events is doing too much to actively shape the historical record of the residential school experience, although they also acknowledge that some speakers have found room for resistance and have managed to include their critiques of the TRC, the Settlement Agreement, and current political realities within their testimony (Brady 2013, 133-134; Niezen 2013, 67-72).

I agree that the TRC is flawed. It faces restrictions due to its creation through a legal settlement (Niezen 2013, 3-4) and its budget and powers are in many ways very limited. However, I also agree with the sentiment that there is the potential for the TRC to "play an important role in the ongoing process that legitimizes Aboriginal ways of understanding the world" (Turner 2013, 110). The Missing Children Project, despite sharing the TRC's budgetary,

legal and time constraints, was created in response to testimony from those affected by missing children. The project can draw attention to the issue and, though it has limited resources, has the ability to find significantly more information than many individuals are able to find on their own. Because this project was created in response to calls from Survivors and families, and because of its goals to bring answers to the families of the missing children and recognition to the lives of those who died, the project can be seen as a call for the Canadian public and government to recognize the person-as-such in the lives of each of these children who died. A reasonable argument can be made that focusing the TRC, and therefore public attention, on the wrongs of the school system without addressing the other wrongs of colonialism may be an attempt to maintain the status quo. However, regardless of its limitations and problems, Aboriginal people and others that seek change can use the TRC to further the cause of demanding a new political relationship with the Canadian state.

Community and Family Responses

Charlie Hunter

The demand for a new political relationship can be seen in the broader movement for recognition of residential school Survivors, and as Survivors pursue their healing journeys. It can also be seen in cases of missing children. One such case is that of Charlie Hunter. In 1974, Charlie was 13 years old and attending St. Anne's Residential School in Fort Albany, Ontario. He drowned after trying to save another student who had fallen through the ice while skating. The other child was saved; Charlie was not. Charlie was buried in Moosonee, which is 515 kilometers away from his home community of Peawanuck (Edwards 2011b). The family was left to wonder at the full story and was frustrated that they were not consulted regarding the burial arrangements (Carpenter 2012). They tried to ascertain as much information as possible, and tried to have the body brought back home. Charlie's family tried access to information requests and contacting the police, the church that ran the school, and Indian Affairs, but the family never felt as though they were getting anywhere (*Ibid*). Charlie's father, Mike Hunter, stated that "it troubled him greatly that Charlie had no family or friends to visit his original gravesite in Moosonee" (Edwards 2011a). Charlie's family knew that he had died. However, the family was not given the closure of having his body returned to them for a culturally appropriate burial. The specific details of his death, the knowledge of what exactly happened, the comfort of having his body home and buried in an appropriate way where they could easily come and pay their respects when they wished to, was missing for this family. His body was treated as an object, something that the school had a right to make decisions over. Rather than acknowledging that as a person, as a family and community member, there may have been people who would want a say in how Charlie was laid to rest, the school acted unilaterally and gave the family only limited

information. The body was buried in a location that was far from the boy's home and nearly impossible for his family to visit as no roads connect the communities. His parents wanted the body returned to them so that they could bury him at home and made requests to the school and to the Canadian government. Ottawa repeatedly denied their requests.

After stories about the situation ran in the *Toronto Star* in 2011, money was raised by community efforts and private citizens to pay the cost of having the remains returned to the family. Charlie's family, including aging parents Mike and Pauline, were anxious to have the body returned home (Edwards 2011b). Brian, Charlie's brother, wrote in response to the public support the family received once the story ran in the *Toronto Star*: "For the first time in my life I feel like I'm not struggling alone in bringing my brother back home to my reserve" (*Ibid*).

In this example, we can see a family struggling to have their son returned to them. For years, they were searching for answers, for closure, for the truth of their son's death, for recognition that he mattered, and that their wishes with regards to his final arrangements mattered. The school system took much of the control away from Aboriginal peoples. The children had to go to school, and the parents had to send them or allow them to be taken. And here in death, the family had no say over what happened. This was a type of politics that denied Charlie Hunter's personhood and denied his family's claims to have a say in how he was treated after his death. Charlie's body was objectified and treated as something that the school had to deal with. That is not to say that no one at school grieved for Charlie. It is possible that other students and even that teachers or administrators as individuals were upset by Charlie's death as well, but the way that the death and burial were handled demonstrates the attitudes that underpinned the school system. Specifically, it demonstrates the belief that the school had the right to make decisions without consulting the people that loved Charlie. For Charlie's family,

their fight to have him brought home represents a fight to have his personhood acknowledged. He was not an object to be managed or to be buried according to policy, but rather that he was a person whose death meant a family's loss of a valued young man, a life that they wished to recognize, commemorate, and honour.

Cemetery at Regina Industrial School

In the process of doing construction on the Global Transportation Hub just outside of Regina, Saskatchewan, a graveyard was discovered on the former location of the Regina Industrial School. The graveyard had been essentially forgotten. At one of the meetings regarding what to do about the site, Don Black, a former member of Regina's Heritage Committee noted that though there are many books written about Regina's history, none of them mention the school or the cemetery (Archdiocese of Regina 2014). According to Lisa Hein and David McLeod, archeologists working with the Regina Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee, they have found 22 possible gravesites. It is possible that more than 22 bodies are buried, as the technology used locates gravesites, rather than bodies, and it is also possible that the cemetery area extends beyond what was initially examined (McDonald 2013). One of the graves is marked and evidently belongs to the first school principal's children (*Ibid*). It is not clear who the rest of the graves may belong to.

The school closed in 1910, so the immediate families of the students are not very likely to be living. The school had students from a number of different Indian bands. There were apparently previous attempts to get the federal government to take responsibility for commemorating and maintaining the site, but these earlier attempts did not receive much response (ICTMN Staff 2013). In recent months, an informal and rather ad-hoc group of concerned citizens in Regina has gathered to try and get recognition for the cemetery. It seems

that there may be several small groups that are concerned about the issue, including Regina community members concerned about the city's history, as well as people from some of the city's churches, including a United and Catholic church (Archdiocese of Regina 2014). News articles report that people have met to draw attention to the issue, and attend several meetings held by the City of Regina and its various committees to try and ensure the city protects the site (ICTMN Staff 2013; CBC News 2014a). At least one of the interested groups has also established a Facebook page called "Honour the Children – Regina Industrial School Grave Site". One article reports that the group has contacted 45 bands from which the children of the school came and each of these bands wanted to be involved in recognizing the site (Archdiocese of Regina 2014). Despite calls from the TRC on the city and the province of Saskatchewan to "ensure that these cemeteries and children are appropriately remembered" (CBC News 2014a), the city of Regina is reluctant to designate the site as a Heritage Site, which they claim has to do with the fact that they feel someone more appropriate, such as Aboriginal communities or leaders, should take the lead on commemorating the site (*Ibid*). The city has stated that the site will not be disturbed despite the lack of heritage status (ICTMN Staff 2013).

This is an interesting example because non-Aboriginal Canadians have also become involved. Many of those involved, whether from the city administration or members of the local community, have expressed concern over commemorating this site and honouring the dead. In this case, it is not completely clear who all of the children are, and chances are, their families are no longer actively looking for them, except in such cases as where there may be stories of a distant Aunt or Uncle or cousin that never returned. Still, in many ways, these children were missing. Given the norms of the schools, it is very likely that their parents were not given full information regarding their children's death and were denied the right to decide how the body

was buried and whether or not it was returned home. Also in a way, without being commemorated, their lives are missing from history. It is not clear what, if any, personal connection those involved have to the school and those that attended. Regardless of this lack of personal connection, these concerned community members are fighting to commemorate the site and to acknowledge the personhood of each of those buried there. They are pushing for recognition of these dead students, and for recognition of what happened to them. These actions show a demand that the value of these individuals be recognized. The school system buried the students in unmarked graves. These children were unacknowledged in many ways, and were simply left there to be forgotten with time. This group is refusing to let these lives be forgotten. They are demanding commemoration and acknowledgement. Even if some of the bodies are never identified, there is evidence here that people care about who these students were. They care that their lives are marked and remembered and seen as something of value, not merely objects to be forgotten.

Augustine Allen

In the summer of 1920, Augustine Allen made a suicide pact with nine other boys who were attending St. Joseph's Indian residential school in British Columbia (Furniss 1995, 14). Augustine was the only one who followed through with the pact, chewing and swallowing poisonous roots to find death. His family was never told where his body was buried. He was about nine years old at the time (Barrera 2014b). A relative of Augustine, Charlene Belleau, Esk'etemc First Nation Chief, says: "They never told my family he died. We want to find his grave. Part of our family's closure will be when we find his remains and are able to take him home" (Barrera 2014b). The boy's father was deeply grieved by his son's death when he learned what had happened. He also feared that his other son, who was still in school, might also attempt

suicide (Furniss 1995, 92). In this case, the family learned that their child had died, but they wanted closure, they wanted to reclaim the body, and life of this young boy to recognize his life and his value, to have him valued for the person he was. Writing about the situation, the local Indian Agent did not believe the stories of a suicide pact and wrote in a letter to the department of Indian Affairs, “Indians are very adverse to any kind of restraint, and to put it mildly, are not to be believed, as a general thing when they complain about Schools or similar Institutions, as they let their imaginations run riot, if they think that by doing so it will help them to gain what they happen to want at the moment” (Agent O’Daunt, quoted in Furniss 1995, 93). Thus, rather than addressing a tragic situation with compassion and humanity, the students’ telling of the events was completely denied. A family was denied the compassionate and immediate notification that should have been theirs.

Family Members’ Remarks

Some stories do not gather much media attention, but still the families are left to wonder about what happened to their child. Through the sharing of their stories and some of their thoughts, family members, community members, and friends of students that died provide some insight into their attitude toward political relationships. Rita Custer’s daughter, Monica died at age 13 under mysterious circumstances in 1986 while at Prince Albert Indian Residential School. Monica was placed in the infirmary, none of the other students knew why, and her mother was not informed. Monica was moved to Saskatoon and declared brain-dead. Her mother has never known the cause of death, or whether or not more could have been done to save her. In this case, she was informed of the death in time to attend the funeral, but she is left with questions: “I want the truth for my family, but for all of the other families, too”. She says, “[a]s parents, this is painful, but we have the right to know how our children died (and) how many of them died”

(Warwick 2013). She speaks to the need to know the truth about her daughter's life, but also to the wider issue that the Aboriginal community has the right to know the truth about all of the deaths within the school system.

Irene Cowley, 79, spoke of two uncles who died at the Elkhorn residential school in Manitoba: "They didn't bring their bodies home. They don't know where they are buried," (Barrera 2014b). The family does not know how they died and Irene does not know their first names, but the sense of loss, the sense that these people were missing and needed to be returned to the family, reclaimed, and recognized, was passed on to her by her father, the younger brother of the boys that died. The way that stories were passed down between generations shows a deep concern over these lives that were lost. The families longed for answers, for knowledge of the whereabouts of the bodies, for confirmation that their loved ones lived, and that they mattered. They want recognition for their suffering, and recognition of these individuals.

These comments demonstrate that the families of missing children are searching for answers. They want to understand what happened, not because it will bring their loved ones back, but because they have a need to know how their lives ended. As Edkins' wrote of the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, these families are not only looking for information, but are "protest[ing] against the injustice of the disappearances" (Edkins 2011, 174). Families of the missing seek to reclaim the lives and deaths of their missing in order to proclaim the value of the lives that were lived. The families are very aware of how this governance system that reduces to bare life has let them down. Their missing loved ones were treated by the school system, the Canadian government, as a number or statistic to be filed away, and largely ignored. Occasionally, a small bit of attention was paid to such cases, such as in the case of Augustine Allen when a brief inquiry was conducted. Ultimately, the rationalization was generally the same:

that incidents occurred because Aboriginal people were wild and unmanageable and therefore simply reaffirmed the belief that they needed to be controlled and tamed (Furniss 1995, 107).

The families that speak out against this injustice and demand answers are rejecting this understanding of political relationship. They know their family member to be a unique individual who was loved and known in a relational context. The families see their missing child as the person-as-such. The families want to know their loved one's story and find closure for them. In seeking the full picture of what happened to their loved one, the families are demanding that the government acknowledge their loved one as an individual person, rather than as an objectified statistic.

Responses from the Canadian Government

Thus far, this paper has outlined two very distinct understandings of political relationships that exist in Canadian history and society. The paternalistic and racist attitudes which underpin the residential school system and the way deaths within the system were handled can be seen as part of a larger approach to politics. In reducing people to bare life, the government is better able to categorize and manage them. Personhood is largely ignored, and where it is acknowledged, it is undervalued or seen as an obstacle to be overcome. People become the objects of policies, rather than persons with a political voice and political value. The other understanding of political relationship, which is exemplified in the movement that has called for recognition of the suffering of residential school Survivors and families, represents a call for a politics that acknowledges the value of each person. A major part of this acknowledgement is recognizing the value that comes from allowing different cultural identities and languages to flourish. It is a call for a political system that allows competing political philosophies to coexist. But how has this call for a different kind of politics been met by the Canadian government?

The Missing Children Project has requested access to federal, provincial and territorial records that could be relevant to determining the details surrounding deaths in residential schools (Barrera 2014b). Thus far, a number of the provincial and territorial governments have responded in a relatively helpful manner (*Ibid*). However, the federal government seems reluctant to turn over files to the TRC. These files are needed for the TRC to fulfill its mandate of creating a complete history of the residential schools. Many of them could also provide insight into the deaths of students (Barrera 2012). In the case of one specific school, Survivors from St. Anne's Residential School, the federal government refused to release documents that demonstrated that St. Anne's was a particularly bad example of an abusive environment. The

documents were needed to assist with their compensation claims, but also related to students who had gone missing in the school. One of the Survivors stated “I know of at least four who went missing and were never found” (Nahwegahbow 2014). This group of Survivors had to take the federal government to court, where the government was ordered to release the documents in January of 2014 (Ibid).

Unfortunately, this school is not an exception, but seems to represent the overall approach of the federal government to the work of the TRC. Millions of government documents were requested from the government by the TRC in order to complete their mandate (Galloway 2013). These documents were from a variety of departments and represented data on a variety of aspects of the historical record of residential schools (Galloway 2013). After months of back and forth and requests from the TRC with regard to a large number of government files, the TRC felt they had no option but to take the federal government to court. "The commission is taking this step very reluctantly and with a sense that it has been left with no alternative," TRC Chair Murray Sinclair said in a statement (Perkel 2012).

The government claimed that the meaning of the Settlement Agreement was unclear and that it was unfair to expect the government departments to track down and pass on all relevant documents. However, Judge Goudge of the Ontario Superior Court felt the government's duty was straightforward: “It is to provide all relevant documents to the TRC”... “The obligation is in unqualified language unlimited by where the documents are located within the government of Canada” (quoted in Galloway 2013). There was also little room for doubt in the minds of many Aboriginal people and leaders. The Assembly of First Nations said that the refusal to release the documents could undermine the official apology from the government in 2008 (Galloway 2013). As well, Commission lawyer Julian Falconer reported at one of the hearings on the case that the

Settlement Agreement in its current form would not have been made if Indigenous people had realized how the government would behave with regard to turning over the relevant records. At the time of negotiations, many groups were calling for a full public inquiry that would have the power to compel witnesses and the production of documents. They agreed to a TRC with limited powers which would operate on the honour system, only because they believed that the government would in good faith turn over all relevant documents (Galloway 2012b). Without the federal government providing these documents to the TRC, the TRC would find it impossible to complete their mandate within their timeframe and budgetary constraints (Perkel 2012).

This approach of the government, which shows a reluctance to cooperate with the TRC and establish a better relationship with Aboriginal peoples, despite their official apology for the residential school system, shows a continuation of the political thinking that sees the Aboriginal population as something to be managed. A further example of this type of politics is the continuing refusal to negotiate fairly with First Nations leaders. The Canadian government has a poor record of consulting with First Nations leadership when it comes to resource development on traditional lands, and many First Nations have had to seek their place at the negotiating table through court cases. As well, the government has made significant cuts to funding Aboriginal agencies and groups. Some have written about how these cuts undermine the apology issued by the government in 2008 (Wagamese 2013). The current administration has also refused to address the ongoing issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Despite public calls for an inquiry from citizens, opposition parties, and many Aboriginal groups, Prime Minister Harper has maintained that the issue is not a sociological issue, but should be treated as isolated incidents of criminal activity (CBC News 2014b). In all of these cases, the message from the government is that the political views of Aboriginal people are not relevant. This system of

governance says we will manage your affairs for you. You do not need a political voice, because we will make political decisions on your behalf.

Even the way that the apology for residential schools was issued demonstrates this type of political thinking. The apology was given with the explicit assumption that it would be accepted by Aboriginal people. The Canadian state and much of the media did not let Aboriginal people speak for themselves. Individual political views and agency were largely ignored in the coverage of the event, and the focus instead was on the grand gesture of the government. Mackey criticizes: “The presumption of acceptance also indicates that the Canadian government and mainstream press still feel entitled to define and speak for Aboriginal people, even while voicing regret for earlier acts or misplaced attitudes of knowing what was ‘best’ for them” (Mackey 2013, 56).

The Canadian government is still stubbornly refusing to engage with the personhood of Aboriginal people. In the way that the apology was approached, in the unwillingness to fulfill its obligations to the TRC in good faith, in the poor track record on negotiations with First Nations leaders, and in many other ways, the Canadian state can be seen seeking to manage Aboriginal people as objects or people with no political agency. The underlying worldview that allowed the horrors of the residential school system remains.

Conclusion

The case of the Missing Children is an interesting extension of Edkins' framework as it considers the case of Aboriginal peoples, who have often been considered apart from Canadian society and were, in the case of status Indians, denied certain aspects of Canadian citizenship, such as the right to vote, until 1960 (Canadian Museum of History). The objectification of Aboriginal persons by the Canadian state is in many ways more pronounced than the objectification of other Canadian citizens. Through colonial efforts, including the residential school system, the Canadian state sought to block not only the political agency of Aboriginal persons, but also, in many cases, to deny their humanity. The interest of the Canadian state in reducing Aboriginal persons to bare life through the school system and other forms of colonial violence comes from a desire to preserve and further the Canadian state. Removing political agency from Aboriginal families and attempting to eradicate the Aboriginal population through the violent assimilation of the residential school policy allowed the Canadian state to suppress Aboriginal protest for many years. The residential schools and other colonial policies were designed to deny political participation by reducing the residential school students and their families to bare life. Aboriginal people were to be stripped of what made them Aboriginal – their language, their culture, their families, their individual identities – and then turned into objects that the state could more easily manage. Unlike in a biopolitics model where the state seeks to entrench its power by offering security to its citizens, the Canadian state sought to reduce to bare life in order to eradicate Aboriginal people through its policy of assimilation. The Canadian state was not only entrenching power structures, but also attempting to avoid or de-legitimize Aboriginal claims to sovereignty. It did this by reducing Aboriginal people to bare life and

attempting to silence their political voice. If the Aboriginal population were eliminated through assimilation, then there would be no competing claims to the Canadian state's sovereignty.

Though the emphasis here is on the treatment of specific groups of persons, rather than the treatment of the population as a whole, we do see in this case evidence of the same patterns seen in the cases Edkins explores. When persons went missing, when children went to school and never returned home, families demanded answers and in doing so, found a channel through which to challenge this political model. In demanding answers and action, the families and communities of the missing challenge the political understanding that allowed their loved one to be objectified in the first place. They refuse to see their loved one reduced to bare life and dismissed as replaceable. They demand an acknowledgment of the person-as-such. In doing so, and through other political efforts as well, Aboriginal individuals and communities refuse to be reduced to bare life. Instead of demanding to be counted in the same biopolitics model that sees non-Aboriginal Canadians counted, they call for a radically different politics. They call for a politics that acknowledges the person-as-such, which, in the Canadian context, also means acknowledging Aboriginal sovereignty.

Edkins explores examples of how family and friends have responded to a missing loved one because a missing person challenges the biopolitics understanding of political relationship that western society seems to have largely accepted as normal. Our governments treat us as populations to be managed, rather than as individuals with complex and interwoven relational identities and political thoughts. When a person goes missing, it shows us the flaw in this logic, the flaw in accepting uncritically this political relationship with our governments. Part of Edkins' goal is not simply to draw attention to the cases of missing persons and how governments treat missing persons and their family members, but rather it is to draw attention to the ways that a

biopolitics model of governance treats citizens as part of a population to be managed and leaves little room to acknowledge our individual identities or political agency. While similar patterns do emerge between this case which addresses colonial violence, and Edkins' cases, the case also shows that there are some limits to the framework or perhaps a need to add further complexity to the theory.

In her book, Edkins does allude briefly to colonialism, writing in her introduction:

we need, as white Europeans or Americans, to examine the heritage we share, a heritage arguably grounded in the reduction of the majority of persons-as-such to the status of nothing but objects, a heritage of colonialism as much as a heritage of war. Before the U.S. residents among my readers disclaim their complicity in European colonialism, may I remind them that many of them are descendants of colonizers or reap the benefits of past repression, and moreover, that they, now, inherit the mantle of colonialism (Edkins 2011, 7).

Despite this acknowledgment of the way the West's acts of colonialism have objectified its victims, she focuses her analysis almost exclusively around examples of Western governments reacting to the missing that “count” in the first place (*Ibid*, 7). The focus on the biopolitics model emphasizes the idea that all citizens are treated the same, and reduced to bare life in order to be managed and to ensure security. She does allude to cases of “double disappearance” with regard to undocumented workers that went missing after the 9-11 attacks (*Ibid*, 24), but the fact that all people are not seen as equal adds greater complexity to the politics of bare life than is reflected in the framework. The framework has been pushed here to consider a case that addresses an aspect of Canada’s colonial legacy. Though Edkins has acknowledged that colonialism presents a paradox to biopolitics as some people do not “count” at all in this system that reduces people to only what they “count” for, she fails to address how this paradox can be accounted for in her theory of the missing person and the resulting demand for a new kind of politics.

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