The result is that a disproportionate number of Métis children are being taken into care, many for no other reason than the real-life Métis situation of living in poverty and overcrowded conditions. Poverty has never been an acceptable reason for depriving children of their natural parents and their place in the extended family. The fact that the practice is so prevalent in Métis communities suggests the degree to which the Métis are a devalued people as well as the degree to which provincial family and child welfare institutions and Métis society are alienated from each other.\textsuperscript{195}

Federal and provincial governments’ long history of denying the existence of Métis rights and marginalizing Métis families has made it harder for Métis governments to gain control over child welfare. Métis child and welfare services are generally funded by the province or territory, as opposed to being federally funded, although, as Métis scholars Jeannine Carrière and Catherine Richardson explain, “Métis children continue to receive strikingly low levels of funding for child welfare and family service.”\textsuperscript{196}

Most provincial and territorial child welfare legislation includes some kind of directive to include Indigenous Peoples in cases involving Indigenous children. But the vast majority fail to name or propose a way to work with the Métis, relying instead on the overarching term of “Aboriginal” or “Indian.” For example, the most common Indigenous provision in child welfare legislation is the requirement to notify an “Aboriginal” band of court hearings involving “Aboriginal” children. However, there is no equivalent given for Métis.\textsuperscript{197}

\begin{quote}

Elaine D.
\end{quote}

Colonial Encounter: Distinctive Inuit Experiences

First Encounters with Qallunaat

While Inuit women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people share some similar experiences of colonization with other Indigenous Peoples, there are also many differences. For Inuit, important distinctions in time and place are a key feature of their distinguishing experiences of violence.

As Director of Social Development Hagar Idlout-Sudlovenick recounted at the National Inquiry’s hearing in Iqaluit, the arrival of the Qallunaat (white Europeans) was an important and irreparable imposition in the North.
When Qallunaat first arrived to the North, they were very scary, such as RCMPs… When they tell people, Inuit people, to do this and that, we had to – we had no choice but to say yes, and that’s from being scared, fear…. They came into the communities as if they were higher than Inuit, and Inuit feared these Qallunaats.198

Inuit first interacted extensively with European whalers and fishermen, whom they called “Qallunaat.” Labrador Inuit encountered fishers and whalers relatively early in the colonization process (as early as the 16th century). In other regions of Inuit Nunangat, however, Inuit did not interact with whalers until the second half of the 19th century.199

Over time, whalers began to hire Inuit to do various jobs, including working on whaling crews and provisioning whalers with meat and clothing. By the late 19th century, bowhead whale stocks had declined substantially, depriving Inuit of a resource that had been a cornerstone for some communities. As a result, in the early 20th century, commercial whalers stopped visiting most areas of Inuit Nunangat.200

The decline of commercial whaling coincided with the expansion of the fur trade into Inuit Nunangat. Driven by a jump in the market value of Arctic fox furs, the Hudson’s Bay Company expanded its network of trading posts into the Arctic in the early 20th century. In the 1920s and 1930s, rival companies and independent traders also established operations in the region. These posts also hosted American military personnel, missionaries, and a variety of traders. Over time, Inuit became dependent on the goods supplied by fur traders. This dependency was an important factor in the power Qallunaat would later hold over Inuit.201

Sexual Encounters and Exploitation with the Qallunaat

Canada’s claims of sovereignty within the Arctic provided the grounds for the introduction of a Canadian justice system, and laid the foundation for the role that the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and later the RCMP, would play in Inuit Nunangat in the early 20th century, by applying
Canadian laws in the Arctic territory. Their responsibilities were broader than other police postings. In addition to law enforcement, they were required to gather census information and aid Inuit in emergency situations. The RCMP played an important role in establishing the Canadian state’s authority over Inuit society and its claims of Arctic sovereignty over Inuit Nunangat.202

These early colonial encounters in Inuit Nunangat resulted in many sexual relationships between Qallunaat men and Inuit women. Historian W. Gillies Ross documented significant “sexual liaisons” between Inuit women and Qallunaat whalers and police officers. For example, between 1897 and 1911, over 60% of recorded Inuit births near Cape Fullerton harbour were attributed to Qallunaat fathers.203

Many of these relationships were no doubt consensual, and some were probably driven by the sexual desires of Inuit women. Historian Dorothy Eber documents the relationship between American whaling Captain George Comer and Nivisinaaq (an Inuk woman and community leader known as “Shoofly” to the whalers). According to Eber, the relationship between the two was “both warm and enduring.”204 Both Inuit oral history and Comer’s journals record that he cared deeply for her well-being and, after the whaling era ended, regularly sent her gifts until her death.

In other cases, however, the dynamics were very different. In some circumstances, Inuit women may have consented to their liaisons with Qallunaat men and may have even initiated them. However, this does not mean that they were not being taken advantage of, and neither does it mean that they did not suffer negative repercussions with regards to their social, emotional, and physical health. For example, the Qikiqtani Truth Commission205 found that relationships between Inuit women and RCMP officers frequently “resulted in both anguish for the women and lingering hurt for children who never met their fathers and were physically different than others in their community.”206
In many instances, the liaisons between Qallunaat men and Inuit women were clearly coercive and abusive. The Qikiqtani Truth Commission found that “some RCMP used their position of authority to coerce Inuit women into sexual acts.” Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak, an Elder from the Arviat area, recounted the historic sexual abuse of Inuit women by the RCMP in a documentary film.

Some RCMP officers used to beat and rape us women. They took us into another room and locked the door. I was beaten and raped but had no one to turn to. We didn’t know they weren’t supposed to act like that. Even if we had been informed of our rights, as Inuit we couldn’t speak up. Years later, looking back, I would get very angry.

July Papatsie told the Qikiqtani Truth Commission that a similar dynamic existed in the Qikiqtani region.

With that much power they could do anything they wanted to do…. The RCMP could do anything they wanted with any woman that was living up north. Anything. Now that woman who was forced sexually by this officer cannot talk back, has nowhere to go and complain. Her husband knows but cannot do anything, is powerless.

Imposing Christianity among Inuit

Christian missionaries also established a permanent presence in Inuit Nunangat in the early 20th century. By the 1930s, most Inuit had become members of various Christian churches. Missions disrupted the relationship between Inuit men and women. Inuk scholar Lisa Koperqualuk explained that the transition to Christianity resulted in a decline in Inuit women leaders in Nunavik, because Anglican missionaries did not recognize women’s leadership. As she explains, “In the early days, it was not unheard of to have Inuit women angakkuit and leaders, though it was limited. When a new era of Christianity began in the early 20th century however, it shut the door on women.” Therefore, the church helped impose patriarchal gender relations on Inuit society, as it had previously done in many First Nations.

Medical care was often tied into a narrative of conversion. Sarah Stringer, a nurse at Herschel Island in 1897, wrote of how she hoped that the successes of Western medicine could convince Inuit to give up their traditional practices. In the eyes of missionaries, those Inuit who became Christian were often more willing to abandon traditional medical practices in favour of Western medicine.
Reverend David Marsh described such a process in his account of how his wife, Winifred, convinced a converted Inuit woman, Caroline Gibbons, to give birth using Western practices. Marsh recounted how Winifred’s first task was to displace the traditional Padlimiut women healers and deny them access to the pregnant woman, so as to remove their influence. This encounter was framed in language that emphasized the dangers of traditional practices and the authority of Western medical practitioners.213

**Government Interventions and the Assimilation of the Inuit**

Prior to 1940, the Canadian state had maintained a *laissez-faire* (or “hands off”) approach to Inuit. The federal government initially decided not to apply to Inuit the assimilatory practices that were fundamental to the colonization of First Nations, like the *Indian Act*. While government provided “relief” to destitute Inuit groups that had become dependent on the fur trade in the 1920s and 1930s, its policy was that Inuit were best left as hunters and trappers living “on the land.”214

This approach began to change during World War Two in the interests of defense,215 as the state intervened in Inuit society in increasingly intensive ways. The motivations and goals of these interventions changed over time. However, they share many common features. As Inuit politician Mary Simon wrote:

> In the period leading up to the 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between the Europeans and Inuit was a grossly one-sided one. We Inuit suffered a steady loss of control over our ability to make decisions – decisions for ourselves and for the lands and waters that have sustained us for thousands of years. We became a colonized people. We were pushed to the margins of political and economic and social power in Inuit Nunangat.
The low points of this one-sided relationship were experienced in the period when entire family camps were wiped out by measles, when Inuit households were coerced into relocating thousands of miles in order to serve agendas developed elsewhere, and when Inuit children were taken away to residential schools.²¹⁶

Inuit usually felt that they had no choice but to go along with the plans developed by government officials. For example, a report by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission explained that Inuit felt they were unable to say “no” when Qallunaat officials told them to send their children away to boarding schools.

Years after dealing with the trauma of being sent away for school at age 7, Jeannie Mike recalled for the [Qikiqtani Truth Commission] a confrontation with her mother. Looking at her own children at seven years old, Jeannie stated she felt compelled to ask her mother, “how could you let me go?” In response, her mother replied, “When Qallunaat asked for something there [was] no choice of refusal.”²¹⁷

The power imbalance that had developed made it difficult, if not impossible, for most Inuit to refuse instructions from government officials. Inuk author and politician Sheila Watt-Cloutier explains that this power relation caused Inuit to view Qallunaat with a type of fear and apprehension that Inuit call ilira.²¹⁸ This power relationship that made it difficult for Inuit to refuse orders from Qallunaat underwrote all government activities in Inuit Nunangat in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.
Working with Qallunat: 
the RCMP Special Constable Program in the Arctic

For the first 70 years of its operations in the Arctic, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was wholly dependent on Inuit special constables. A report by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission explained how RCMP officers from the South relied on Inuit who filled these roles.

The capacity of RCMP to communicate with Inuit and to survive in Arctic conditions required help from Inuit, both as employees and simply as neighbours providing support in times of need. All regular police detachments were staffed by at least one Inuk employee, normally serving with his wife and children. Beginning in 1936 and continuing until at least 1970, patrol reports submitted to Ottawa officially referred to Inuit staff as “special constables,” an official rank and employment status within the RCMP. Men sent north with the RCMP often received no special training on northern survival, navigation, or travelling; on patrol, they were entirely reliant on Inuit special constables who hunted food for qimmiit [sled dogs], built iglus, navigated, and translated.

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission found that the RCMP also benefited from the unpaid labour of special constables’ families.

The families of the Inuit special constables also offered considerable and invaluable assistance to the RCMP, often without compensation. Women would make and mend the trail clothing, do household chores, and prepare meals. Children were expected to help with the detachment chores.

Inuk Special Constable Minkyoo of the Twin Glacier Detachment of the RCMP erects the building for the post at Alexandra Fjord, Nunavut, 1953. Source: Library and Archives Canada/National Film Board of Canada fonds/a137757.
However, despite playing an integral role in the RCMP’s Arctic operations, special constables were not given the opportunity to advance a career in the police service.

There is little evidence that the RCMP anticipated that special constables might eventually choose to become full RCMP officers. Inuit staff members were not offered any training or duties that might have led to better pay or new positions. The RCMP’s use of qimmiit was essentially finished in 1969; as soon as the RCMP no longer needed Inuit to help them travel by dog team, Inuit special constables were largely assigned to the role of interpreter.Ⅲ

According to Inuk historian Deborah Kigjugalik Webster, neither did the RCMP recognize the role of Inuit special constables. In many books about the Arctic written by former RCMP officers, “We’d find reference to Eskimo guide, or Eskimo interpreter – when they were actually a special constable – and there were no names attached.”Ⅳ

Ⅰ Qikiqtani Truth Commission, Pallisikkut, 22.
Ⅱ Ibid.
Ⅲ Ibid., 23.
Ⅳ Zeinicker, “Northern researcher digs.”
Forced Relocations and the Slaughter of the Sled Dogs

Relocations are one of the most notorious government interventions from this period, with important social and economic implications for communities. Between 1940 and 1970, the government of Canada relocated many groups of Inuit, as well as some First Nations. Some Inuit groups were relocated repeatedly. Early relocations involving Inuit from Ennadai Lake (1949, 1957, 1958) and Nunavik (1953, 1958) were intended to reduce Inuit reliance on government assistance after the collapse of the fur trade. Later relocations were intended to centralize Inuit into permanent settlements to improve the efficiency of delivering social services. The government of Newfoundland and Labrador also relocated several groups of Labrador Inuit to reduce the cost of service delivery.

These relocations are now notorious for the social costs and disruptions they caused. It is now well documented that many of these relocations were poorly planned and caused significant hardship for the Inuit involved – in some cases, famine. Some families were divided, causing significant emotional pain. Further, as we explain below, the movement into centralized, permanent communities was deeply traumatic for some Inuit.
Other disruptions also have had lasting impact. In addition to relocation, the killing of Inuit sled dogs is perhaps the most controversial of the interventions in this period. In the 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of Inuit sled dogs were shot by RCMP and federal government officials in the Qikiqtaali (Baffin Island) and Nunavik regions.\(^\text{222}\) As a result, many Inuit lost their dog teams and were forced to move into the permanent communities that had been established by Quallunaat. In Quebec, the Makivik Corporation and the Quebec government commissioned a retired Superior Court judge to head an inquiry into the killing of Inuit sled dogs in Nunavik. His final report in 2009 concluded that Nunavik society had “suffered damaging consequences from the actions, attitudes and mistakes of bureaucrats, agents and representatives of the two governments, who killed at least 1,000 dogs in Nunavik during the 1950s and 1960s.” Sled dogs were not just animals that Inuit had for leisure – they were essential to preserving a certain way of life. Their slaughter dramatically impacted the ability of Inuit to live on the land and to pursue their traditional lifestyles, and contributed to even greater social disruption and dependence on wage labour, driving changes in social relationships and economic well-being for Inuit families, and for Inuit women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

**Residential Schools and Hostels among the Inuit**

Beginning in the late 1950s, the government of Canada made formal schooling compulsory for Inuit children. Some Inuit were sent to church-operated residential schools while others attended day schools operated by the federal government. Although Inuit children attending day schools could technically go home to their parents for the evenings and weekends, in many cases, their parents remained on the land. As such, day schools still required most Inuit children to live in boarding homes, or hostels, and therefore involved the painful and traumatic separation of children from their parents.\(^\text{223}\) In *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*, Rhoda Kaujak Katsak recalls how painful it was to be separated from her parents while attending a federal day school.
I remember that first Christmas that my parents came for the holidays, I remember having a really difficult time. I was enjoying myself because my parents were there, being with them and staying with them, but when they were ready to go back to the camp, that was heartbreaking for me. I was crying and crying. I remember my father was sitting upright on a chair and I was kneeling at his knees, crying and crying into his lap. I stayed like that for hours and hours. I was crying and begging him to let me go with him, but he couldn’t do anything. Even if he had wanted to he couldn’t do anything. At that time I was really mad at him for not taking me home with him. Later I realized that we had to be in school. He had no choice. The Qallunaat authorities in the settlement said so, and there was nothing he could do.224

Residential and day schools also exposed many students to abuse, and contributed to the erosion of Inuit traditional knowledge.225 As Inuk residential school survivor Annie B. told the National Inquiry, “My mother, she couldn’t talk to me because I was English. We only had to communicate with our fingers. Communicating with my fingers, with my birth mother.”226

The residential schools and hostels were also a vehicle for child apprehension. In the times prior to government intervention, many Inuit had practised custom adoption, in which children were openly adopted by their relatives (which also took place, in varying degrees, within First Nations communities). Among other things, it was a way of coping with changing circumstances, but in the 1960s, the government intervened in those systems, as well. Within Inuit communities, the practice of custom adoption helped take care of Inuit children and ensure that they were raised within culturally safe environments. Custom adoptions among Inuit could take place in times of difficulty such as sickness, food scarcity, or the death of biological parents, and were a way to ensure that camps had functional distributions of population to ensure the continuation of kinship bonds.
In 1961, the Child Welfare Ordinance imposed a new rule: Inuit must have home assessments prior to adopting, and submit documentation to Ottawa within 30 days of the adoption. This meant that an absence of “qualified” homes could increase the number of Inuit students enrolled in government-run institutions.

While they were not representative of the majority, some officials rejected the ordinance, arguing that custom adoption systems had been practised in Inuit Nunangat for generations, and were working well. Justice John Howard Sissons, who presided over the first legally registered Inuit custom adoption in 1961, argued that the newly imposed rules of the ordinance trampled on Inuit rights and kinship systems, as well as imposed barriers on Inuit who wished to adopt. The barriers were based on geography and access to postal services, since the documents had to be mailed. Language barriers were a further impediment to following these official new rules. In Sissons’s petition for the adoption of a child named “Kitty” by a
well-respected couple, Qiatsuk and Nuna Noah, he argued that custom adoption “is good and has stood the test of many centuries and these people should not be forced to abandon it, and it should be recognized by the Court.” Sissons was successful, and he continued to register hundreds of custom adoptions in what is now Nunavut and Inuvialuit.

As in other parts of Canada, though, the number of children in the state system grew. Today, according to the Director of Youth Protection in Nunavik, since 2017, one in three Inuit youth in Nunavik have come into contact with child protection services. Workers handle an average of 45 files, compared to 18 per intervention worker, meaning that resources and capacity may be stretched thin.

“I REMEMBER THAT FIRST CHRISTMAS THAT MY PARENTS CAME FOR THE HOLIDAYS, I REMEMBER HAVING A REALLY DIFFICULT TIME. I WAS ENJOYING MYSELF BECAUSE MY PARENTS WERE THERE, BEING WITH THEM AND STAYING WITH THEM, BUT WHEN THEY WERE READY TO GO BACK TO THE CAMP, THAT WAS HEARTBREAKING FOR ME. I WAS CRYING AND CRYING. I REMEMBER MY FATHER WAS SITTING UPRIGHT ON A CHAIR AND I WAS KNEELING AT HIS KNEES, CRYING AND CRYING INTO HIS LAP. I STAYED LIKE THAT FOR HOURS AND HOURS. I WAS CRYING AND BEGGING HIM TO LET ME GO WITH HIM, BUT HE COULDN’T DO ANYTHING. EVEN IF HE HAD WANTED TO HE COULDN’T DO ANYTHING. AT THAT TIME I WAS REALLY MAD AT HIM FOR NOT TAKING ME HOME WITH HIM. LATER I REALIZED THAT WE HAD TO BE IN SCHOOL. HE HAD NO CHOICE. THE QALLUNAAIT AUTHORITIES IN THE SETTLEMENT SAID SO, AND THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO.”

Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak

A representative from the Department of Indian Affairs speaks to two Inuuk women about pablem, 1948.
Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds/a167631.
Medical Relocation among Inuit

The government also began to take greater responsibility for the delivery of health care to Inuit after 1940. Like other interventions, the delivery of government health care was an aspect of colonization. The government response to tuberculosis epidemics is an especially notorious example of how Inuit experienced health care delivery as an externally imposed system that caused extreme social suffering. Beginning in 1950, a patrol vessel called the C.D. Howe (which, as discussed earlier, Inuit knew simply as “Matavik,” or “where you strip”) would visit coastal Inuit camps each summer to administer health care. Inuit infected with tuberculosis were sent to sanatoria in the South, where they were separated from family members for extended periods (sometimes years). Inuk filmmaker and former Commissioner of Nunavut Ann Meekitjuk Hanson explained that the patrol vessel quickly became notorious among Inuit.

The CD Howe inspired fear. Pure fear. If you had tuberculosis or any other sickness, they would keep you aboard and take you away. You hardly had time to say goodbye to your family, if they happened to be on board with you, and you didn’t know where you were being taken. On top of that, you would have to sail around the Arctic for about three months, until the ship finished doing its rounds of the communities and left for the South. That ship is still talked about by the Elders today.

These medical relocations resulted in many Inuit women going missing from their families. For example, in her testimony before the National Inquiry, Micah A. explained that her grandmother had been taken for tuberculosis treatment and never returned: “My mother’s mother, before I was born, she was sent down south because of tuberculosis to a sanatorium. And she passed away down there and she was buried in Winnipeg. We couldn’t find her for a long time and [she] never came back home.”

Qaqqaqtaaq, an Inuk woman, looks out at the C.D. Howe, anchored in Pangnirtung Fjord, n.d. Source: Library and Archives Canada/National Film Board of Canada fonds/a166461.
The introduction of Western health care is an example of how colonization was gendered, because of the way it intervened in aspects of life that are most intimate for Inuit women, such as childbirth. By removing pregnant Inuit women from their community and sending them to hospitals to give birth, the government disrupted the transmission of Inuit women’s knowledge about midwifery.232 This process also caused considerable emotional pain for Inuit women. In *Saqiyuq*, Elder Apphia Agalakti Awa describes the emotional difficulty involved in being sent away to a hospital to deliver her baby.

That time I was pregnant and I had to be sent out for delivery, it was summertime and I went down to Iqaluit to deliver my baby. I had never delivered in Iqaluit before. All of my other children, I delivered them all on the land, in our sod-house or in igluviak or tents.

I had trouble with my pregnancy that time, and the Qallunaat said I had to be sent out. It was with Ida. She was my last baby I gave birth to and I had to be sent out with her. My daughter Joanna, she was only five years old when I left, and Phillip and Salomie were just babies, little babies. We went by boat to the plane and I remember looking out the plane window. I remember staring out the window at my children, watching Martha carrying Phillip in her amautik and Oopah carrying Salomie in her amautik. I felt so horrible leaving my little ones behind, leaving them all alone. It was August and the ice was all gone. I had tears in my eyes when I was leaving our camp and my children, my little children. I was so sad. It was the beginning of August when I left. I didn’t get back to our camp with Ida until January.
When I got to Iqaluit it took me four days in the hospital to deliver. The nurses put me on my back to deliver, so I couldn’t deliver. I had so much trouble with that one! Before, whenever I was delivering, I did it sitting up, and usually my husband was with me. It took me four days to deliver my last one. When I delivered on the land, my husband would be with me, holding my hand, helping me. I was used to that, so I couldn’t deliver in the hospital. Once you have delivered by yourself or with a friend or your husband, that is the only way that you can deliver. I was in labour in the hospital, but I couldn’t deliver, because my husband wasn’t with me.233

The introduction of government health care also resulted in the sterilization of some Inuit women. A report by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission notes that there is significant controversy over whether Inuit had consented to this practice. As the Qikiqtani Truth Commission reported, Roman Catholic priests called attention to the issue, which received national coverage. Father Lechat estimated that 23% of women in Igloolik had been sterilized, and similar procedures were performed at the hospital in Iqaluit. The QTC reported, “Barry Gunn, a former regional administrator in Iqaluit, claimed women agreed to the sterilization procedures and signed forms to that effect. However, due to language issues, they may not have realized what they were agreeing to.”234

“The CD HOWE INSPIRED FEAR. PURE FEAR. IF YOU HAD TUBERCULOSIS OR ANY OTHER SICKNESS, THEY WOULD KEEP YOU ABOARD AND TAKE YOU AWAY. YOU HARDLY HAD TIME TO SAY GOODBYE TO YOUR FAMILY, IF THEY HAPPENED TO BE ON BOARD WITH YOU, AND YOU DIDN’T KNOW WHERE YOU WERE BEING TAKEN. ON TOP OF THAT, YOU WOULD HAVE TO SAIL AROUND THE ARCTIC FOR ABOUT THREE MONTHS, UNTIL THE SHIP FINISHED DOING ITS ROUNDS OF THE COMMUNITIES AND LEFT FOR THE SOUTH. THAT SHIP IS STILL TALKED ABOUT BY THE ELDERS TODAY.”

Ann Meekitjuk Hanson

Centralization and Social Trauma

Because of these interventions, by the early 1970s, most Inuit had moved into the permanent settlements established by Qallunaat, some by choice and some by coercion.235 In any case, the move from Inuit camps to Qallunaat-controlled towns brought massive changes to Inuit economic, political, and social life. It caused a drastic reduction in Inuit autonomy and self-determination, because government power was more firmly established in the settlements than in the camps.236

The move also caused a decline in Inuit systems of leadership and authority, as traditional methods of social control lost their effectiveness, and political and religious dynamics changed.237 Hanson explained that the move from camps is a root cause of many of the social problems Inuit communities are confronting today.
When Inuit lived on the land, we lived in small groups consisting of about three to five families. That size of a group is easy to look after. Social order is easier to maintain, so there are fewer social problems. But when we moved into bigger communities and began living with so many other people, it caused a lot of confusion. I saw once-powerful hunters and leaders becoming poor. They were now in a wage-economy, where you work for an employer and get paid for it; hunting and gathering on the land were no longer valued as full-time work.

When we lived on the land, we always had one leader who pretty much looked after everybody. When we moved in to Frobisher Bay and other communities, we no longer knew who our leaders were. There were Hudson’s Bay Company managers, RCMP officers, the clergy, and government agents. We weren’t used to having so many leaders in one place. On top of that, they were all Qallunaat. The absence of Inuit leadership caused a lot of social problems. Suddenly, there was more gossiping, cheating, stealing, adultery, alcohol, and that sort of thing.238

The government’s interventions into Inuit society also caused a great deal of emotional pain for many Inuit. As Sheila Watt-Cloutier explained, these interventions were extremely traumatic, and impacted the way many men treated the women around them when “the shame, the guilt, the loss of integrity and pride was turned inward and festered as anger and resentment.”239

This trauma was then transmitted from one generation to the next. As one generation struggled to cope with their traumatic experiences, younger generations were exposed to traumatic experiences of their own (through “adverse childhood experiences”).240 A report by Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada explained how this intergenerational trauma is passed on through cycles of violence.

The current high levels of violence and abuse in the Inuit context can be traced back to two main ‘roots’. 1) loss of culture and tradition; and 2) loss of control over individual and collective destiny. This history leads to psychological trauma, the breakdown of families, alcohol and drug addictions and increased feelings of powerlessness. Fear, mistrust, abuse and denial result, creating a cycle of abuse in which individuals can be both victim and abuser – a cycle that repeats itself with each new generation.241

The trauma that was caused by government interventions in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s is thus the root cause of a great deal of the violence Inuit women are exposed to today. As we explain in Section 2 of this report, the majority of murdered Inuit women were killed by their spouses. As such, domestic violence and the unresolved trauma that lies behind it are fundamental causes of the murder of Inuit women.242 As family member Sarah N. explained:

If a woman has been injured, she’s not going to lead the life she wants to. As long as she doesn’t seek healing methods or ways to get better, her life will not have direction. This begins from the start. This begins as far back as the residential school days. There’s that influence. And, those behaviours are repeated into the next generation. Even if they don’t
want to do that, it’s what they’ve learned. The pain and the damage to the common sense is lost. And, that behaviour continues. And, this is the result. These are the results of pain being experienced.\(^{243}\)

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified “healing from trauma” as a priority to address these social problems.\(^{244}\) Elder Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak points out:

Inuit have not had much time to reflect on what happened to them over the last 100 years and to examine the hurt that Inuit experienced when their lifestyle suddenly changed. Their self-esteem and mental health were really affected, and Inuit have not yet tried to reflect on this or to really understand it. If Inuit Elders and parents do not have an opportunity to reveal their unsolved issues to someone who is able to help, it is hard to find answers for these unresolved issues stemming from colonization. In the past, Inuit could go to their Elders or shaman to help them deal with issues, but since the colonization of Inuit, the way Inuit deal with unresolved issues is not being practiced anymore.\(^{245}\)

As such, in addition to being a root cause of violence against Inuit women, colonization has also impeded the ability of Inuit to address the problem.
Conclusion: A Crisis Centuries in the Making

This chapter has examined a brief history of colonization in Canada through a gendered and intersectional lens, arguing that the policies, practices, and stereotypes confronting Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people today were put into place long ago. Understanding colonization as a structure of encounter, rather than as a series of isolated events, we have demonstrated how Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of understanding land, governance, and identity were targeted by colonizers who wanted to possess the land and to rid it of its people. In addition, we have focused our analysis on key encounters – policies and rules, stereotypes and misconceptions – that were applied differently to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and that have impacted them in harmful ways. At the same time, this chapter is a testament to the strength and resilience of these women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people whose traditions and values continue to manifest at the individual, family, and community levels.

A key point in all of this history is that it isn’t just “history.” Although they might look different now, these policies and the structures and ideas that feed them are still around today and are still forms of violence. We can’t brush off things like failures in policing, in health services, or in child welfare as “the way things were done back then.” The reality is that many of the people who testified before the National Inquiry have lived through, and continue to heal from, these policies. Many more people are in current conflict with them. Many of the policies and ideas in place today, as well as the structures they are associated with, are modern iterations of the same historical atrocities.

Our analysis of these experiences brings us to three important conclusions.

First, the process of colonization was gendered, because Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA people experienced these encounters differently from Indigenous men. The process of colonization features multiple moments of encounter and transformation where fundamental rights to culture, health, security, and justice are at stake, particularly for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

European colonizers brought their own ideas about the roles of women and of men to Indigenous lands and territories, and applied them to diverse communities with their own traditions, roles, and values about women, girls, and gender-diverse people. European land tenure systems, as well as legal and social orders, relied on patriarchy – the dominance of men. Early Europeans simply could not see how Indigenous women’s roles supported entire communities, as well as their own families, and helped to ensure continuity of culture, knowledge, language, and values from one generation to the next. When they did come to understand some of these roles, they consistently undermined the role of women in economic production and in governance in an effort to target communities for assimilation and, ultimately, extermination.
Second, the targeting of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is not new, but has been a common thread throughout the colonization process. Residential schools and various types of relocations caused mothers, daughters, and aunties to go missing from their families, sometimes permanently, and created conditions that feed, rather than prevent, violence. Moreover, violence against Indigenous women, including sexual abuse in residential schools and by various colonial officials, is a common thread throughout the history of colonization, and contributes directly to Indigenous Peoples’ distrust of many institutions today. This distrust, in turn, makes it less likely for Indigenous women, girls, or 2SLGBTQQIA people to place faith in these systems in their current state.

Third, the process of colonization created the conditions for the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people that we are confronting today, economically, socially, and politically. Indigenous Peoples were economically marginalized by the dispossession of their land and resources and the related destruction of their economies. Indigenous women experienced political and social marginalization through the imposition of patriarchy by Christian churches and the government of Canada. Colonization also gave rise to racist and ethnocentric ideas that continue to dehumanize Indigenous women and make them targets of violence. The cycles of intergenerational trauma, set in motion by colonization, are a root cause of domestic violence in Indigenous communities today.

The crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is centuries in the making. This is what families told us; it is what survivors told us. In considering these histories, and as researchers Sarah Hunt, a member of the Kwakwaka’wakw Nation, and Cindy Holmes assert, we should not be surprised that “the rhythm of today … is made possible through the historic and ongoing processes and ideologies of colonialism.”

Many witnesses before the National Inquiry discussed the need to learn more about the history of colonization, even as targets of its policies.

Mike Metatawabin, Chairman for the Board of Directors of the Nishnawbe-Aski Police Services, explained to the National Inquiry:

> What we have to remember is the assimilation policies, the residential school policies, and their impacts have left a lasting legacy which is violence, anger, unresolved issues. And, I think for the most part, I, myself, as a survivor of residential school, did not understand what happened, or what happened to us, or what is happening even within our own families. Trying to understand the anger of why people are so angry with each other. It took me until I was 30 years before I began to understand what had happened. And, for the most part, most of our people have never had that chance or do not have that beginning yet. We are still a long ways to go. We have a long ways to go before we understand what really happened to us with all these policies.
Family member and survivor Shaun L. explained why this history matters today:

After 500 years, these [colonial] ideas have not changed much. The First Nations women and girls are thought of as disposable. They are not. They are the life-givers, the storytellers, the history keepers, the prophets, and the matriarchs.... The fallout of colonialism is like a fallout of a nuclear war, a winter without light.248

In this way, we position the following chapters, which focus on the more contemporary encounters with culture, health, safety, and justice – or the lack thereof – as extensions of these historical moments, and as expressions, in part, of a deep historic and contemporary web of limitations, barriers, and challenges to basic Indigenous human rights – both collective and individual – that continue to target women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people for harm.