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Settler colonialism in Canada and the Métis

TRICIA LOGAN

Although the literature on settler colonialism intends to identify what is specific about the settler colonial experience, it can also homogenize diverse settler colonial narratives and contexts. In particular, in Canada, discussion of the ‘logic of elimination’ must contend with the discrete experiences of multiple Indigenous groups, including the Métis. This article examines relationships between Métis people and settler colonialism in Canada to distinguish how Métis histories contribute to a broader narrative of settler colonial genocide in Canada. Cast as ‘halfbreeds’ and considered rebels by the newly forming Canadian nation-state, Métis peoples were discouraged from ‘illegitimate breeding’. Moreover, their unique experiences of the residential school system and forced sterilization have heretofore been underexplored in historiographies of genocide and settler colonial elimination in Canada. These social, political and racial divisions in Canada are magnified through genocidal structures and they reach a critical juncture between colonialism and mixed ethnicities. At that juncture, groups like the Métis in Canada are within a metaphorical gap or, more accurately, a jurisdictional gap. Colonial treatment of the Métis demonstrates, in part, the broad reach of colonial control and how uneven it is, often to the detriment of the Métis and Indigenous groups in Canada.

Introduction

Métis are one of the three officially recognized groups of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Métis history is laden with attempts to create, redefine and impose nominal definitions on Métis identity.¹ Métis people at times adhere to or resist such definitions, as well as efforts to specify their homes and historic ‘homelands’.² But the Métis are the free people, *Otipemsiwak*, who for centuries have been a distinct nation. The terms used to refer to the Métis vary by region; this article will use the broadly accepted term ‘Métis’.³

Popular Canadian histories celebrate the creation of Canada as a safe haven for immigrants within a vast, ‘untouched’ wilderness, and these histories still resonate with much of the Canadian public.⁴ These persistent narratives of Canadian history often give a false, benevolent impression of the measures taken to create and maintain Canada as a nation-state. Until they grapple with genocide, and in particular settler colonial genocides, Canadian histories are incomplete and under-represent Indigenous removal in Canadian history. In particular, the

partnership of government, corporations and Canada's churches is still relatively unexplored with respect to settler colonialism in Canada.

This article considers the case of the Métis in Canada. The role of the Métis within these histories will be considered in the larger context of what is described by colonial genocide scholar Andrew Woolford as a colonial 'mesh' or 'net'.⁵ The 'mesh' cast over North America has a distinct impact on Indigenous peoples. Fuelled by colonial desires to claim land, extract resources and to demonstrate a level of dominance over the land and the people that live on those lands, the mesh can squeeze or constrain. That constraint may come in the form of assimilation, Christianization or a series of settler colonial institutions that create this net. The squeeze of this net has the potential to suffocate existing systems but it also has flaws in the mesh that allow for resistance and tears in the fabric of the colonial net.

In particular, attention in this article will focus on how the 'net' has created holes and intersections in the places where the Métis meet the colonial systems. The colonial net has been cast quite widely and it expands and contracts over time. Not as linear as a 'path', the net is not operated by one individual or one state entity. This net is an interconnected system involving government departments, churches and corporations; at times communities are caught in the net and at other times they are able to slip between the strands of the mesh. Such a broad reach and malleability make a colonial net a system that, while not easily defined, is nevertheless easily identifiable as a pattern in colonialism. Moreover, such a conceptualization, with its sensitivity towards the uneven spread of settler colonialism, as well as its consideration for the possibilities of Indigenous resistance, provides a nuanced lens through which to revisit the definitional debates over genocide and the Métis.⁶

Like other Indigenous groups in Canada, Métis were removed, displaced and dispossessed of land, and military action was taken against them in order to reduce their presence and prominence in Canada.⁷ Nonetheless, the religious, racial, economic, political and social divides between the Métis nations and Canada are distinct in the patterns of Canadian settler colonialism. This article examines the invisibility of Métis histories and how this works within the colonial net in Canada. Using the meso-instance of Métis attendance at Indian residential schools (1880–1996) as an illustration of both this hidden history and a portion of this colonial mesh, as it is contracting and expanding, this article addresses not only the complexities of settler colonial genocide, but also the reach of the net.

This article is not a legal examination of genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UNGC).⁸ Rather, it is a historical review of one of the many 'nets' of settler colonial genocide in Canada.⁹ It may indeed be the case that sections of the UNGC can be applied to a number of the colonial events and crimes in Canada. Attention is often directed towards article 2(e) of the Convention—'forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'—in regards to both the Indian residential school system and the child welfare system in Canada. A number of scholars, such as David MacDonald,

Tamara Starblanket, Dean Neu and Richard Therrien, are pursuing the many avenues connecting the UNGC and genocide in Canada.¹⁰

Debate on the definitional applicability continues in Canada.¹¹ For the purposes of this article, I consider genocide in terms of the two-phased process described by Lemkin, entailing the ‘destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed’ and the imposition of the ‘national pattern of the oppressor’.¹² These two phases are not delineated in the same way that the Lemkinian model frames the processes against the oppressed as two distinct actions. In settler colonial contexts the oppressed and the oppressor steadily interact and are twisted together with one another. This article is an analysis of some of these destructive processes placed upon the Métis and is not meant to be a mediation between Canada and the applicability of legal accusations of genocide(s). In this light, recent scholarship has been moving away from the framing of ‘other genocides’ through the conceptual lens of the Holocaust.¹³ I also consider the implicit connections between what Lemkin originally conceived as ‘physical’ and ‘biological’ genocide and ‘cultural’ genocide as one and the same.¹⁴ Indigenous conceptions of holistic lifeways, moreover, correspond in part with Lemkin’s conception of genocide as comprising physical and cultural dimensions. When language, spirituality, ontology, educational systems and family structure are threatened or destroyed, the culture of people disintegrates along with the lives of people in the group or ‘genos’.¹⁵ Indeed, and more importantly, when Indigenous groups in Canada use the term genocide, they know painfully too well what that term *means* to them, where the term comes from and how it should be understood. In fact, my engagement with the term has come from working with Survivors of the residential school system in Canada.¹⁶ This article represents a small collection of recorded archival sources and portions of Métis oral history collections. Inside Métis communities, Métis organizations and especially within the oral records of Métis people there is a considerable volume of additional information on forced removal from Métis homes, social and political experimentation with Métis communities and unreported or unaddressed cases of physical violence against Métis people.¹⁷ Ideally, this article will contribute to growing recognition of settler colonial violence in Canada against the Métis. Federal and provincial files in Canada simply do not share or retain a great deal of records as they pertain to organized and sanctioned removal of Métis from their home communities.

After an introduction to the Métis and the colonial ‘mesh’, I will examine how the mixing of races and cultures influences the colonial discourse. In particular I discuss the construction of the colonizer’s version of the Halfbreed woman, where we can see how the net ties together at the bonds between gender, race, culture and colony.¹⁸ In Canada, similar to other colonized nations, the state and church attempt to socially control interbreeding or intermarriage and this colonial phenomenon contributes to the discussion on settler colonialism in Canada. I will also provide an examination of the Métis experiences in residential schools and the removal of Métis homes and communities in order to build homes for new settlers. I discuss these potentially destructive systems and processes in

order both to illustrate the colonial 'net' and to demonstrate how Métis people were constrained by the net as well as able to stretch the net to resist the systems.

The Métis

Métis people have unique languages, communities and social organizations. Often living on the perpetual margins and Canada's true periphery, the Métis in Canada inhabit a space that is neither fully Indian nor fully 'white'. In communities, or alongside Indian reserves and Euro-Canadian towns, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, Métis posed a different kind of 'problem' to the Dominion.¹⁹ Back and forth across provincial and federal boundaries, the control and manipulation of the Métis was never administered consistently, but was declared an ongoing, lingering 'problem' by federal and provincial authorities in Canada.²⁰ These inconsistencies also contributed to the invisibility of Métis histories that are lost in a debate over naming and identity.²¹ Rudimentary beginnings to the Métis nations in Canada started in communities involved in the fur trade system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as European men had children with First Nations women. Large, often encapsulated communities of Métis arose from these unions, and from these communities grew distinct social, political and economic orders, as well as an original Indigenous language and a distinct land base.²² Métis communities grew across Canada, but it is in Canada's West that Métis political economy became both a prominent aid and a barrier to the creation of Canada. Métis emerged as powerful intermediaries between European settlers and First Nations and as an independent set of nations, whose role as traders and entrepreneurs fuelled North American trade and a new West in Canada. Métis spirituality, religion, language, laws and community structure were unique from First Nations and Europeans, but they also shared characteristics. Take, for example, *Michif*, which integrates a mixture of French nouns with typically Cree or Ojibway verbs into a unique language. As a metaphor for the Métis themselves, Michif is a language that is used among Métis people, though it is occasionally mistaken for an intermediary language only for speaking with French or Cree speakers. It is a separate language developed beyond what would be considered a pidgin language.²³ Métis bridged between colonizer and the colonized but were more than just intermediaries. They are a nation with unique, Indigenous origins and are more than the sum of their blood quantum.²⁴

Métis nations and leaders in Canada were cast as both treasonous and rebellious through the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. After their removal and dispossession they became marginalized, destitute and largely forgotten.²⁵ Several decades passed before Métis were given ample and free opportunity to self-define and legally determine their own collective and individual identities.²⁶ In contrast to First Nations communities in Canada, Métis are consistently asked to define and redefine their identity and the parameters of their communities. There are undoubtedly grey areas for individuals who over their lifetime have been considered Métis, Non-Status, non-Indigenous or Halfbreed. Changes in legislation, the Indian Act in particular, meant that a single person

could be considered under the law an Indian, a Métis and then an Indian again over the course of his or her lifetime.²⁷ Notwithstanding government legislation of identity, the Métis nations still exist in all regions of Canada, and with fairness to the definitional debate, the Métis know exactly who they are.

Often aligned behind Louis Riel, one of Canada's most recognizable historical figures, the Métis peoples' histories and identities have become mythologized by others, much like the identity of this particular leader. One of Riel's biographers, Albert Braz, describes the many public faces of Riel, and in doing so describes many assumed lives of the Métis as well. Braz describes both Riel himself as well as changes to popular perceptions of Riel. As the latter have changed over time, so have perceptions of the Métis as a whole:

Louis Riel is simultaneously one of the most popular and most elusive figures in Canadian literature, and culture in general. Since his hanging for treason on November 16, 1885, he has been depicted variously as a traitor to Confederation, a French-Canadian and a Catholic martyr, a bloodthirsty rebel, a New World liberator, a pawn of shadowy white forces, a Prairie political maverick, an Aboriginal hero, a deluded mystic, an alienated intellectual, a victim of Western industrial progress and even a Father of Confederation.²⁸

As Métis artist and historian Sherry Farrell Racette describes these changes, Riel has become 'Canada's Riel' and the image is continually reincarnated.²⁹ Revisions in Canadian and Métis histories repeatedly change the image of Riel and the narrative of the Métis as a whole. The Métis have long been cast under many of those same descriptions, as traitors, rebels, martyrs, liberators, Aboriginal heroes and/or victims of progress. Many also accuse Métis historians of manipulating historical narratives either for or against the just allotment of Métis rights to land. Often these interpretations themselves are used to define Métis into or out of rights or recognition.³⁰ Métis identity and political cohesion of course involves a great deal more than the allegiance behind one historic leader like Riel. But persistent struggles for self-determination and recognition leave Métis identity in Canada always on the margins and always locked in a state of perpetual redefinition.

Polemic narratives of Louis Riel, Métis resistance and unlawful land acquisition by Canada contribute to an already tenuous relationship between Canada's mainstream historical narratives and narratives of Indigenous history in Canada.³¹ Adding to these histories are those that demonstrate that Métis were left to either assimilate or die during these periods of Métis resistance.³² Rifles and expeditionary forces were sent by Ottawa to respond to Métis protection of their territories in the Northwest.³³ In particular, the influx of Protestant, Orangemen-English settlers into the Métis lands around Red River caused tensions with the primarily French-Catholic Métis residents.³⁴ Canadian-Métis relations during the period before and after Canadian Confederation in 1867 reflected the reverberations of European clashes between Catholics and Protestants. In Canada it was typically French Catholics and English Protestants and the politics of the new Dominion at the close of the nineteenth century that determined how Métis rights and territories would be administered.³⁵ With little demonstrative

knowledge of Métis communities in Canada, plans for removing the Métis were at times quite reactionary following Fenian raids by Irish Catholics between 1860 and 1870, the rise of English, Protestant Orangemen-led racism in the east of Canada and what were regarded as ‘Indian uprisings’ in the United States.³⁶ To the Métis, theirs was a movement to protect their rights to land, language, education and political claims. In contrast, the government perspectives were driven by race and religion, including the desire to staunch the rise of Catholicism, Halfbreeds and Indians as well as protecting lands for ‘fruitful settlement’. These resistances and military actions against the Métis have defined Canada’s relationship with the Métis. The rights promised to the Métis after these resistances and the recasting of Métis as rebels and as the dispossessed continue to influence perceptions of the Métis.³⁷

The Halfbreed in colonial discourse

Before Métis existed as a distinct Indigenous identity, there was the settler colonial category of the Halfbreed. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, attention and concern for the Métis originated from both the governments of the new Dominion of Canada and the churches. Concern for these Halfbreeds differed from the continued interest in the ‘full-blooded’ savage, heathen ‘Indian’ or ‘Eskimo’.³⁸ The mixed-breed, or Halfbreed, was a blend of European and native. Elements of race, barbarism and savagery, of moral decline and the rebellious nature of the ‘restless Halfbreed’ concerned the Empire and the new Dominion. Miscegenation of native and the ‘civilized’ was an issue beyond race and skin colour; it was about ‘moral evaluation’ of this new hybrid group.³⁹ Metissage, the process of miscegenation in Canada and the appearance of Halfbreeds in Europe’s colonies, created a new fascination alongside a series of studies and policies to address the ‘Indian problems’ of the colonies, like Canada.⁴⁰ Between the lines separating civilized and savage, the ‘half-breed’ posed a unique question to both the colonial state and the church who desired to ‘improve the breed of man’.⁴¹

Fixation with the Halfbreed existed for centuries, following histories and narratives built on the growing colonial relationships between the ‘savage’ and the ‘civilized’. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) were one of the first missionary orders in the Northwest prior to confederation that recorded the life of the ‘Indians and Métis’ and spread the belief that these people were destined to ‘die off’ in any event. As a reflection on the early days of mission work in the province of Manitoba and the Northwest, OMI Father Duchaussois stated:

To religious minds it has justly seemed that it was by a very special divine providence Christianity was brought last of all in these days to the Far West and North of the New World for the earthly consolation and eternal bliss of a suffering, a disappearing, a dying race.⁴²

Early on, though, in mission histories from the late 1700s, church officials delineated the social and racial differences between Indians and Halfbreeds. In another OMI record of the Northwest from this same period, the Reverend

A. G. Maurice historicizes the marked differences that they believed to have existed between the Métis and the Indians.

The origin of that wonderful race, the Halfbreeds has certainly been set down at too recent a date. As early as 1775 the Indians of the Canadian West recognized them as superior to themselves in war and at the chase.⁴³

What emerged were the first lines of intervention into the Métis mesh, the ties of race, religion, society, politics and community. Racial divisions between the First Nations, Métis and non-Indigenous Canada only served to further tighten the colonial mesh.

The Halfbreed woman

The image of the Halfbreed created by church, colonial government and fur trade companies established a relationship between colonizer and the Métis. Settlers constructed Métis men in Canada as ‘naturally’ rebellious and degenerate, which translated into the apparent need for their removal.⁴⁴ Similar logic created the increasingly oppressive construction of the ‘promiscuous native woman’, through which young Halfbreed women, who were the majority of the female population in nineteenth-century Western Canada, were raised by the Euro-patriarchal and dominant society both to expect marriage and to be continually reduced to the status of racialized ‘mistress’.⁴⁵ There were very few European women present in Western Canada, so the union of European men and First Nations women created these emerging racialized categories of ‘hybrids’ and sub-categories of sexualized women. As historian Adele Perry describes it: ‘Gender is where the abiding bonds between dispossession and colonization become most clear. Notions and practices of manhood and womanhood were central to the twinned businesses of marginalizing Aboriginal people and designing and building a white society’.⁴⁶

Connections between violence and gender permeate each epoch of settler colonial relations. The contemporary ‘sociological phenomenon’ of violence and murders of Indigenous women in Canada is related to these historic origins.⁴⁷ Canadian churches, government and the media create an image of the Indigenous woman as ‘dissolute, dangerous and sinister’,⁴⁸ while historic accounts of European women replicated Victorian images of ‘purity, spirituality, as civilizers and as reproducers of the race’.⁴⁹ While institutions like residential schools along with the persuasive influence of the churches pressed Indigenous women to adhere to the Victorian model, Canadian society saw only the dangerous and sinister figure. Centuries of colonial influence constructed an imagined ‘native’ woman or ‘halfbreed’ woman, that served as a pre-conceived trope much like the manifest destiny doctrine gave colonizers a moral ‘permission’ to reduce the value of Indigenous women’s lives.

Political restraints and definitions imposed upon Métis and other Indigenous women have been utilized in Canada in an effort to bureaucratically reduce the total Indigenous population. Restraints have been legislated through the imposed definitions of identity via the categorization of Métis and the Non-Status

Indian.⁵⁰ The 1876 Indian Act, falsely assuming First Nations and Métis women were, like Euro-Canadian women, subordinate to men, created distinct constraints, especially for those women who married non-Aboriginal men. Under the Act, a First Nations woman lost her status as an Indian if she married a Non-Status Indian (white) or Métis man. These women, as well as any children from such marriages, were forced to leave the Indian reserve and exempted from gaining status. Indian Affairs policies targeting gender and marriage were put in place partly to reduce the number of Indians who had rights to land title and other benefits of Indian status.⁵¹ Many women and families forced from their home reserves joined Métis communities and became part of a jurisdictional gap that erased their entitlements to First Nations rights and land and illuminated the demonstrative power that definitions imposed through legislation had on Indigenous peoples. Jurisdictional gaps and government definitions are strands of the colonial 'net', which sometimes stretched to allow Métis to slip through the holes while at other times entangling them in the 'mesh'.

Halfbreeds and 'illegitimate breeding'

As a dominant Euro-Canadian society emerged after Confederation in 1867, the 'legitimate heirs' of European women were expected to fulfil this Canadian manifest destiny to occupy and cultivate the 'unused' land.⁵² Mixed-race heirs and illegitimate offspring of First Nations women were considered less desirable, especially as concern for race and purity developed in the field of eugenics through the early twentieth century.⁵³ In this context, interest in First Nations, Métis and Inuit grew between the early 1920s and 1960s. At the start of the twentieth century, Euro-Canadian eugenicists still assumed that Métis, First Nations and Inuit were a 'dying race'. Desires to 'better the race' in Euro-Canadian society grew with race sciences in the early 1920s and 1930s. The movement included gravitation towards ridding the world of undesirables, such as those deemed to be criminal, insane, imbecilic, feeble-minded, deaf, blind and diseased. At the same time, there was a concomitant desire to promote the creation of 'supermen'.⁵⁴ The eugenics movement focused on Métis, First Nations and Inuit, as well as incoming immigrants. A 1909 article in the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* illustrates the medical community's concern with the declining genetic stock of Canada, and gave specific attention to those who were 'native' as well as the feeble immigrant.⁵⁵ Halfbreeds, described primarily through race and as descendants of both the 'native' and potentially undesired Europeans, were thus doubly cause for concern. In Canada, the eugenics movement most remarkably took shape through the creation of the Sexual Sterilization Act, which was passed by the province of Alberta in 1928. It is important to note that at the time of the Sexual Sterilization Act of Alberta, Métis and First Nations comprised only 2.5 per cent of the total population of Alberta but over twenty-five per cent of those who were sterilized under the act.⁵⁶ Additionally, Catholics, including the Métis-Catholics, were over-represented in this programme.⁵⁷

A curious correlation exists between the rise of racially driven policies in Europe, the trans-Atlantic eugenics movement and the colonization of the 'native' and the 'half-caste' in Canada and North America.⁵⁸ State concerns over what was considered as either the illegitimate or proper breeding of the Métis temporally coincided with the social and political climate over race that was developing throughout Europe and the Western world.

It should also be made clear that the relationship between the eugenics movement and genocide or settler colonial genocide is tenuous, at best, since the presence of a eugenics programme does not always lead to genocide.⁵⁹ Much as the term genocide is not synonymous with mass murder, there are discrete differences between 'purifying the race' through eugenics and 'eliminating the race' through the construction of an 'enemy other'.⁶⁰ Again, the Métis fall into a racially derived grey area where they are made invisible by their 'genetic predispositions'. Nevertheless, there is a level of state intervention that is shared between eugenics programmes and genocide. In their chapter on eugenics and genocide, Dirk Moses and Dan Stone note: 'mixed-race children posed particular challenges to eugenicists in thrall to ideals of cultural homogeneity in which case eliminationist policies of assimilation, absorption, or sterilization might be pursued'.⁶¹ Additionally, while assimilation does not automatically lead to genocide, the combined physical, biological and cultural assaults on groups like the Métis and all Indigenous peoples in Canada become a vehicle for a broader pattern of genocide. This is all to say that race, racism and race science are together merely one part of the settler colonial relationship between Canada, its churches and the Métis.

Moving the Métis to make 'living space' for actual settlers

In a letter on the Métis from the first prime minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, he spoke about the dire need to remove them from the land, which he felt was marked for Euro-Canadian settlement: 'these impulsive half breeds have got spoilt by their émuete [riot] and must be kept down by a strong hand until they are swamped by the influx of settlers'.⁶² Canada had seemingly infinite resources and an 'empty' wilderness to exploit.⁶³ MacDonald's vision was to create a railroad joining the Atlantic and the Pacific that would export these endless resources and import agrarian settlers. Removing Métis and First Nations was herein deemed essential to Canada's manifest destiny. Métis and First Nations were not passive observers to this process but rather agents amidst these changes who often led resistance against incursions into their territories while also building undeniable partnerships with incoming settlers. In order to protect their lands, rights and safety, provisional Métis governments were created and Métis attempted negotiations with the new Dominion to retain their rights.⁶⁴

Famously, land was granted to Métis around the Red and Assiniboine Rivers through the Manitoba Act, and it was through 'lawless administration' of the Act that these same lands were massively dispossessed from the Métis.⁶⁵ It would take until March 2013 for the government of Canada to officially recognize the Métis rights to this land.⁶⁶ Following the period of 1869–1885, the Métis were

dispossessed through both informal and formal methods. Formally, the government of Canada bureaucratically dismantled Métis title to their own lands through lawless administration of the Manitoba Act,⁶⁷ which greatly disregarded the provisions and rights outlined through the Act. Informally, Métis were facing a government that wished to ‘avoid large concentrations of native people’.⁶⁸ Métis faced waves of intimidation and racism from the ultra-Protestants from Ontario who immediately clashed with the French-Catholic majority of Métis in the North-west.⁶⁹ The dispossession of Métis lands was not an isolated or unintended consequence of a growing Canadian population, nor is it the story of impoverished pockets of ‘natives’.⁷⁰ Bob Desjarlais was relocated from Lestock to Green Lake, Saskatchewan and he recalled the original migration from Red River in a 2002 oral history. He recounts the level of pressure and intimidation from soldiers at Red River, forcing migration of the Métis:

... that is the reason why you find all those Métis people that moved out of the Red River Settlement, they came out of there in groups, that was the reason why because they didn't dare come out by themselves because they knew damn well what was going to happen. And that is why you found Métis people in groups... they all traveled all together because if somebody was after me out there, I would not want to be alone and I guess all the families, the cousins, the uncles and the aunts, and the grandmothers and the grandfathers they all traveled together in a group.⁷¹

The mass removal of Métis followed on the heels of the near extinction of the buffalo, famines of the early twentieth century, social marginalization, severe racial discrimination and spread of foreign diseases towards and amongst the Métis. Moreover, Métis were cast as rebels and ‘disloyal’ to the government of Canada. Historian James Daschuk describes how this same period of resistance and removal coincided with the rise of disease in the areas around Red River: ‘The coincidence of the outbreak with a political crisis in Red River undermined the HBC's ability to counter the spread of the disease. The chief officer in the infected country, W. J. Christie requested the immediate delivery of the vaccine in August 1869. None came until 1870’.⁷² It should be noted while many Métis were forcibly removed from their homes and were left with few options for self-determination in their communities, many still thrived through this period. Accustomed to adaptation and with strong societal bonds, Métis did not disappear, even though they seemed invisible to many observers of the first half of the twentieth century in Canada.

The government of Canada had a large-scale scheme to populate and create living space for the new Dominion and immigrant populations, to stop annexation of territory from the United States, to complete a transnational railway and to achieve an agricultural transformation of the prairies.⁷³ Canada's ‘benevolence’ extended to several different groups of immigrants, many seeking political asylum. In the province of Manitoba, as an example, large grants of land were offered to Mennonite immigrants seeking religious freedoms and safe passage. Canada promised incoming Mennonites freedom to practise their religion and offered them the right to conscientiously object to conscription. Additionally, it

was made clear that encouraging Mennonite settlement in the prairies would be considered a catalyst to mass conversion of 'unused' land to agricultural lands.⁷⁴ In this case, Mennonite families were quite simply granted land that was occupied and promised to the Métis. Surveyors and Métis representatives petitioned against these moves but the promises made to the Mennonites were kept over those made to the Métis.⁷⁵ Canada's desire to radically alter the land regime on the prairies was made clear through events that coincided with the land grants to immigrants. The Reserve system, the Indian Act, the Reserve Pass system and the Indian residential school system all worked towards converting Aboriginal territories into agricultural lands, private property or lands marked for resource extraction.⁷⁶ Aside from building large-scale agricultural schemes and a trans-Canada railway, federal concern for the Métis was often delegated to the provinces. Inconsistencies like this created what would become a common feature of Métis political life in Canada—the jurisdictional grey area or gap that they would continue to fall into. Where the Métis were not forced out by legislation, they were socially compelled or intimidated out of their homes, and/or cast as rebels and outcasts.

During depression-era droughts in Manitoba, the creation of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (1934) was meant to support non-Aboriginal farmers and remove Métis homesteads. Congruent with other government policies and legislation intended to alleviate pressures on new or immigrant farmers, Métis were moved to make way for 'adequate farm land'. Under the authority of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, for example, the Métis town of Ste. Madeleine was destroyed in order to create new farms under the Act. Houses were burned, dogs and animals were shot on site and the church was dismantled to create a piggery. Métis were offered only empty promises of relocation and support. Hundreds of residents and families were forcibly relocated to surrounding towns and road allowances. Métis families were never able to return or rebuild homes in Ste. Madeleine. Today, the field still stands empty with only a few remnants of Ste. Madeleine. However, the cemetery is still visited by Métis every year to commemorate the loss of their town.⁷⁷

Settler colonialism and the systematic dismantling of Indigenous ways of life manifested in Métis lives as it did for the First Nations and the Inuit. The grand creation of Canada and expansion of profitable farmland dominates the Canadian historic narrative. The victors write histories and it benefits Canada in many ways to maintain a historical status quo on the creation of the successful agricultural West in Canada. As the historian of American settler colonialism Walter Hixson states, 'Historical distortion and denial are endemic to settler colonies. In order for the settler colony to establish a collective useable past, legitimating stories must be created and persistently affirmed as means of naturalizing a new historical narrative. A national mythology displaces the indigenous past'.⁷⁸ Métis are so often considered the by-product of Canadian history, the imagined hybrid of the newcomer European and the native, assumed to be a caricature more than an agent in Canada's true narrative. In contrast, Canada's history treads heavily on the Métis, leaving them in the margins and undermining their

agency. Most remarkable about the visibility of settler colonial histories of Canada is the invisibility of Canada's violations and the long absence of historical treatment of settler colonial genocide in Canada. Simply, Canada gave homes to persecuted and violated immigrant communities, but in order to make these homes available they violated Indigenous peoples. It is easy and comforting to ignore that reality in Canadian history. Marginalization of the Métis is also a demonstration that it is not only or always a state that makes 'living space' for settlement or takes action to remove an entire nation. Federal and provincial governments often manipulated the Métis through management or mismanagement of legislation. Churches also manipulated the Métis, as did land surveyors and Imperial-Canadian corporations who long had a hand in the lives and livelihood of the Métis. The Métis consistently exist in these 'jurisdictional gaps' between bureaucracies in Canada. Even though it appears that these gaps were caused by bureaucratic mismanagement, and that what happened to the Métis was unintentional, there was clearly a system in place. The actions and intent of the farm creation and the forced removals were quite clearly part of a system and Métis, even though in a gap, still were part of one or many of these systems.

Métis and residential schools

Social and political control of the Métis extended to the forcible transfer of Métis children into the residential school and child welfare systems. Manipulation of Métis children through the administration of the Indian residential school system was intended to address, in part, the Métis 'problem' facing administrators. The problem they felt they were responding to was to attend to the 'destitute Half-breeds', often considered 'worse off than Indians', living in squatter homes and too 'lazy and slow' to be educated by the typical provincial schools. In a letter to the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan, the superintendent of schools remarks on what he considers to be the living conditions of the Métis:

The condition of these Métis is deplorable. Large families live in one or two rooms. Children have grown up without learning to read or write; some can not even speak English reasonably well. I feel that only through education can we help these people, and at the same time prevent our Métis problem from becoming more serious. Unfortunately, as I said before, I fail to see how adequate schools can be financed unless some Department of either the Dominion or the Provincial government accepts more responsibility for these people, who seem to be looked down upon by both the white people and the Indians.⁷⁹

Often, the solution to both the Indian and the Métis 'problem' was for the government to remove children from the communities. There would be several approaches to coercing Métis to the Canadian 'mode of living'. In additional correspondence to the Department of Education in Saskatchewan, one director states: 'Education of the children of the Métis is one phase of a larger problem—the adjustment of these people to our mode of living'.⁸⁰ Social engineering through cooperative farms, control and monitoring of 'illegitimate breeding', evaluation

of individual family lives and health status monitoring would accompany education for the Métis. Both the Department of Indian Affairs and the provinces monitored Métis parents, children and families, but neither were willing to take administrative or fiscal responsibility for them. While these other measures accompanied the residential school, like they did for the Indian children, the Métis were not originally meant to be in the Indian residential schools. A great deal of debate circulated between provincial representatives, church administrators and the Department of Indian Affairs over Métis attendance. How the Métis would attend the schools was an early focus of residential school administration. Famous for his Indian Affairs administration and policies, Minister of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott penned this instruction to Indian schools regarding the admission of Métis children:

A well-defined line drawn between half-breeds, properly speaking, and Indians and while the Minister does not consider that the children of half-breeds proper, of Manitoba and the Territories should be admitted into Indian Schools and paid for by the Department, still he is decidedly of the opinion that all children, even those of mixed blood, whether legitimate or not, who live upon an Indian reserve and whose parents on either side live as Indians upon a reserve, even if they are not annuitants, should be eligible for admission to schools. It should be remembered in this connection that boarding and industrial schools were not established for the purpose of carrying out the terms of treaty, or complying with any provisions of the law, but that they were instituted in the public interest, so that there should not grow up upon reserves an uneducated and barbarous class.⁸¹

The great act of ‘benevolence’ and of social ‘uplift’ through the residential schools was meant as social rehabilitation for the Métis. Policies were created and implemented all under the assumption that Métis were in any measure ‘uneducated and barbarous’. Becoming secondary to the needs of the Dominion, it was not considered that this could be a way to grant the Métis communities a source of education. In another set of correspondence in response to church requests to allow the admission of Métis to residential schools, the government often responded with a standard refrain on the purpose of the schools: ‘There is no more unfortunate class in the country. . . . What is to keep them from becoming outcasts and menaces to society if they be not taken to Indian Schools, schools established and maintained, be it remember, not for the mere purpose of fulfilling the conditions of Indian Treaties but in the interest of the commonwealth’.⁸² Created in the interest of the commonwealth and the Canadian public, the school system was to admit the Métis based on a class system. Based on racial and social characteristics, Halfbreeds would be judged according to their proximity, both racially and geographically, to Indian reserves. Department of Indian Affairs policy was clear as to how the Métis would be admitted:

Halfbreeds may be grouped into three fairly well-defined classes.

1. Those who live, in varying degrees of conditions, the ordinary settled life of the country.
2. Those who live, in varying degrees, the Indian mode of life.

3. Those who—and they form the most unfortunate class in the community—are the illegitimate offspring of Indian women, and of whom white men are not the begetters.⁸³

In the same series of correspondence, the Department was clear that these policies were created in the interest of the state, noting: ‘That policy appears to have been adopted to discourage illegitimate breeding’.⁸⁴

Christianization, assimilation and ‘civilization’ of the Métis through residential schools was to coincide with the social reorganization of communities into relocated towns or cooperative farm experiments. Moreover, discouraging illegitimate breeding and moral reform of the Halfbreed were all methods to reduce their presence in Canada. Frank Auger, Métis from High Prairie, Alberta describes the Métis presence: ‘The halfbreeds had no rights. They weren’t treaty status but they weren’t white either—so they’ve always, didn’t really have anyplace they could belong’.⁸⁵

Métis were living with the causes and effects of the military resistance in Saskatchewan and Manitoba at the end of the nineteenth century. The Métis were deemed a danger to the ‘educated Indians and the community’ and were firmly cast as the rebels in the new Canadian West. It is at this juncture where some mainstream histories of residential schools cite administrative oversight and ‘unintended’ aims to use the schools to extinguish land rights and rights to resources. In a series of bureaucratic responses between schools that were attempting to remove children and then subsequently transfer land to government control, attention was drawn to Métis children. Residential school correspondence on the Métis attendance at residential schools was clear about the ties between the schools and land schemes. ‘The Government of the Dominion never took the position that it had no obligation at all as to half-breeds. It recognized them as possessing, in a degree, an Aboriginal title to the land of this country; and took measures to extinguish it.’⁸⁶ Residential schools were the ultimate expression of settler colonial genocide and control in Canada. As part of the colonial net, the residential schools and removal of Métis children from their homes were tied tightly to the removal of their families from the land. The endurance and morphing of that system into what is today known as the child welfare system in Canada is quite remarkable.⁸⁷ A regulated, government-run system routinely, forcibly and manipulatively removing children from their homes for over one hundred years caused massive ruptures in families and communities. Residential schools were thus not isolated or stand-alone systems. Removal of children was associated with overlapping government policies on Métis, First Nations and Inuit communities.

For example, the Adopt Indian Métis campaign that grew rapidly through the 1960s was in part a response to the decline in the perceived ‘effectiveness’ of the Indian residential school system.⁸⁸ In a phrase coined by Patrick Johnston in 1983, the system was named the ‘sixties scoop’ and it refers to the adopting-out of thousands of Métis and First Nations children.⁸⁹ Like the residential school system, the sixties scoop became notorious for forcibly removing children from their homes, maintaining unfair criteria for removing children. As an example,

by the early 1980s over half of the Métis and First Nations children in the Manitoba child welfare system were adopted outside of the province. Less than ten per cent of non-Aboriginal children were adopted out of the province during this same period.⁹⁰ As with First Nations and Inuit children, Métis children have been highly over-represented in this system for well over fifty years. The child welfare system has become so deeply entrenched in Canada that it has become notorious for its appalling lack of funding or equitable funding to support the high numbers of children in the system. Additionally, there is critically low support for families and parents who face removal of their children.⁹¹

Part of the disturbing reality of the child welfare system is the continuation of both the system and the highly disproportionate number of Indigenous children removed from their homes under the auspices of child welfare. Notoriously underfunded, the operation of the child welfare system for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children has been the subject of a Canadian Human Rights tribunal case, which is ongoing into 2015.⁹² These are not anomalies in government control over the health and welfare of Indigenous children. Moreover, these issues have been known about for some time already. For instance, reports were conducted in 1984 to address the inequities in this system for Indigenous children. In 1984 the Province of Manitoba released a report by Judge Edwin Kimelman, chairman of the 1982 Review Committee on Indian and Métis adoption and placements. Following the review of every case of out-of-province adoption, Kimelman concluded that ‘cultural genocide has been taking place as a systematic, routine matter’.⁹³ Métis and First Nations community leaders in Manitoba responded with great concern and continued with calls to the government for increased support.⁹⁴ With a system that has been clearly ‘broken’ since the 1960s, Métis and First Nations children are still taken from their families in a manner that is highly disproportionate to the system available to the ‘rest of Canada’.

Conclusion

The absence of one consistent set of policies or legislation to govern over the Métis seems to indicate that Métis were left alone. However, it was actually a set of jurisdictional gaps and the bureaucratic manipulation of the Métis that compounded their removal from their original homes and land base. Historical narratives of settler colonialism and the Métis rely on one another. The invisibility of Canada’s crimes was not a mere oversight. Historical blind spots and disputes have influence over collective memories and recognition. Ignoring or erasing history is endemic to settler colonialism and genocide. The historical blind spots allow for the comforting national myths and the continuation of colonial control.

Entangled histories and lives, the struggle between the colonized and the colonizer, seem perpetual. Colonizing and colonized lives keep merging with and resisting one another. The complexities of genocide and settler colonial genocide emerge in each of these crossroads. These are tenuous connections. The connections between the forced movement of Métis homes and communities, the slaughter of the buffalo, military incursions, racialization of the Halfbreed, the Indian

residential school, the sexual exploitation and violence against Indigenous and Métis women, the child welfare system and the lawless administration of Métis lands and dispossession are just a sample of these ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ methods of removing the Métis from Canada. In Canada, our hybridity and our nation-to-nation partnership could become a strength again. Métis ingenuity and adaptability saved thousands through these times of settler colonialism. Those same qualities can renew relations between nations again. Decolonization does not mean sending the newcomers home; it means finding these points of connection and restoring dialogue between nations. Métis have adapted these relationships between native and newcomer for centuries and they will continue to do so.

Canada imposed the national pattern of the oppressor while often quite brutally eliminating the national pattern of the oppressed. Highly diverse groups of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities were part of this colonial ‘net’ that was administered by government, church and corporations in Canada and abroad. While some parts of this settler colonial genocide in Canada are relatively well known, other parts remain invisible to the colonial gaze. Legislation and administration was pervasive and far-reaching to the point that it is hard to quantify the direct impact and the number of people who resisted and confronted the systems. In the same way, actions of individual Indian agents, provincial child welfare administration, private corporations, police forces and church officials have over time both supported and violated Indigenous peoples. These are complex narratives, and how the Métis have been made visible and invisible in the discussions on settler colonial genocide makes the colonial ‘net’ possible, creating holes and spaces for blind spots in Canada’s memory. Like the Indians, the Métis were meant to disappear. Invisibility means that records of removing the Métis are not as overt, as many thought the Métis and the buffalo were already gone. Invisibility also means that programmes designed to aggressively assimilate and extinguish land, rights and language often eclipse the perpetual use of the Métis language, rights and land. Invisibility also means that imposed definitions raise and lower the statistical counts on registers and census details.⁹⁵ These numbers do not measure Métis, First Nations and Inuit nations nor are their livelihoods defined by the efforts to remove them.

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Endnotes

- 1 I use a broad and inclusive definition of Métis for the purposes of this article. I aim to be inclusive of community-based definitions as well as colonial-governmental imposed or regulated definitions. These include

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 - 6 I use the term 'settler colonial' with the intent to highlight the dichotomy and imposed definitions that exist between the 'settled' and the 'unsettled' or colonized. Fluidity undoubtedly exists, yet there are still groups typically in flux, divided between colonized and colonizer, settled and 'nomadic' and oppressor and oppressed. In the case of Canada the term 'settler colonial' exemplifies these dichotomies best for the purposes of these discussions.
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 - 8 UN Secretariat, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 9 December 1948, United Nations Treaty Series 77 (hereafter UNGC).
 - 9 Woolford, 'Discipline, territory and the colonial mesh', p. 30
 - 10 David MacDonald and Graham Hudson, 'The genocide question and Indian residential schools in Canada', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2012, pp. 427–449; Tamara Starblanket, 'Genocide: Indigenous nations and the state of Canada' (LLM thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2014); Dean Neu and Richard Therrien, *Accounting for genocide: Canada's bureaucratic assault on Aboriginal people* (Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2003).
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 - 13 Benvenuto, Woolford and Hinton, 'Introduction', p. 11.
 - 14 Benvenuto, Woolford and Hinton, 'Introduction', p. 11.
 - 15 Christopher Powell, 'What do genocides kill? A relational conception of genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2007, pp. 527–547.
 - 16 I worked alongside Survivors of Indian residential schools in several capacities. Primarily, I spent more than a decade working for and with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and some of its funded projects.
 - 17 While Métis people currently reside in all parts of Canada, the majority of the files and sources originate from Western Canadian sources. This is an issue of both resources on the Métis and their location as well as historic Métis connections to the Canadian West.
 - 18 The capitalized Halfbreed has been used in a depreciative manner towards the Métis. It has also been used to denote the difference between French Métis and the mixed English Halfbreeds. Contemporary use of the term has been, in part, reclaimed by Métis people as a means of self-identity or self-determination. For the purposes of this article, it will be capitalized as 'Halfbreed'.
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 - 21 Andersen, 'Mixed ancestry', pp. 35–36.
 - 22 Howard Adams, *Tortured people: the politics of colonization* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1999), p. 21; Shore, 'The emergence of the Métis nation'; Adams, Dahl and Peach, 'Introduction', pp. xii–xxii; Peterson, 'Red River redux'.

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- 25 Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal people and colonizers of western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 108.
- 26 Harry Daniels, 'Forward', in Paul L. A. H. Chartrand, *Who are Canada's Aboriginal peoples? Recognition, definition & jurisdiction* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishers, 2002), pp. 11–14.
- 27 See Andersen, 'Mixed ancestry', p. 26.
- 28 Albert Braz, *The false traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 11.
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- 30 Carter, *Aboriginal people and colonizers*, p. 111.
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- 37 Senior, *The last invasion of Canada*, p. 32.
- 38 Carter, 'Aboriginal people of Canada', p. 214.
- 39 Norbert Finzsch, "'It is scarcely possible to conceive that human beings could be so hideous and loathsome": discourses of genocide in eighteenth and nineteenth century America and Australia', in A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone (eds.), *Colonialism and genocide* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 9.
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