

Examining Social Work as a Canadian Settler Colonial Project: Colonial Continuities of Circles of Reform, Civilization, and In/visibility

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Abstract

This article aims to challenge dominant narratives found within both mainstream and anti-oppressive scholarship about the historical origins of social work by exploring the crucial role of race and racialization in the development and maintenance of the social work profession. Mapping out the shifting ways in which the social work profession actively participated in the construction of *colour lines* to enforce and reinforce the dominant imagery of the valorized Canadian subject reveals simultaneous social processes we call circles of *reform, civilization, and in/visibility*. Through a critical race feminist theoretical framework, we explore the complex ways in which these circles allowed leading social workers to promote the social work profession as an important colonial mechanism for the consolidation of Canada as a white settler society. We conclude by critically reflecting upon the possible colonial continuities of these circles and the implications for current anti-oppressive social work practice.

Key words: history of social work; charity and settlement house movements; anti-oppressive practice (AOP); race and racialization

A number of critical and anti-oppressive social work scholars have examined the relationship between the historical origins of social work in Canada, and contemporary anti-oppressive social work practices (Baines, 2011; Carniol, 2005; Hick, 2002). Social work's historical origins in the early 20th century as a charitable movement have been identified and characterized as one in which middle/upper class women became "friendly visitors" to poor families in order to change their "immoral" behaviors (Baines, 2011; Carniol, 2005). This oppressive history of social work is oftentimes juxtaposed with the settlement house movement whereby social workers simultaneously served those in need while working towards the re-organization of society for the purposes of economic advancement and social justice (Baines 2011; Hick, 2002).

While this critical framing of the historical development of social work is important to acknowledge, crucial pieces of the historical puzzle remain hidden from view. In particular, this historical scholarship is nearly devoid of acknowledging the crucial role of race and racialization in the development and maintenance of the social work profession (Este, 2004; Yee & Dumbrell, 2003). Henry & Tator (2009) describe racialization as referring to "the broad social processes, including colonialism and cultural privileging, through which racialized 'others' are constructed, differentiated, stigmatized, and excluded" (p.23). Thus, racialization implies an active process in ascribing social meaning to the term race as an object or a subject; highlighting the ways in which race is constructed through social processes and practices (Henry & Tator, 2009).

In this context, examining the historical role of racialization in the making of a white-dominant Canadian social work profession may shed light on why “the majority of texts used in Canadian schools of social work reflect and articulate the Eurocentric perspective – the dominant worldview guiding social work practice” (Este, 2004, p.3). This marginalizing and near absence of racialized perspectives has resulted in what Yee and Dumbrill (2003) describe as a ‘whiteout’ whereby the histories and experiences of white social workers are both unmarked and universalized in relation to racialized Others. Through examining the historical conditions for this contemporary ‘whiteout’, our aim is to denaturalize the white-dominance of the Canadian social work profession by “invest(ing) our energies in exploring the histories, social relations and conditions that structure groups unequally in relation to one another and that shape what can be known, thought and said” (Razack, 1998, p. 10). How might re-formulating what we know about the historical origins of the Canadian social work profession re-shape what can be known, thought and said about contemporary anti-oppressive social work practice?

Re-framing the historical origins and development of social work within the Canadian nation-building project during the early 20th century reveals the complicity of the profession in perpetuating racial hierarchies through devastating colonial and imperialist policies and practices towards Indigenous communities and communities of colour. Tracing these historical continuities, or what Heron (2005) describes as colonial continuities, not only reveals the ways in which the social work profession participated in complex social practices of inclusion/exclusion, but also how these practices still continue today. Exploring the development of social work practice in Canada reveals the complex racial hierarchies in which differentially inferiorized communities were influenced by motivations within the profession to raise the professional respectability, and therefore social power of a growing number of white, middle/upper class, mostly female social work professionals; adhering to a dominant expectation and image of the Canadian subject/citizen.

In order to address this gap in the social work historical literature, this article seeks to historicize, from a critical race feminist theoretical perspective, the profound role of racialization and interlocking systems of domination in producing and re-producing the Canadian social work profession. Razack (1998), citing Hill Collins and Minh-ha, describes the concept of interlocking systems of domination as emphasizing the mutual constitution of interlocking systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexuality and ability in historical and site-specific ways. In order to expose the key role of the nascent North American social work profession in promoting specific policies and practices which differentially organized the lives of racialized European settlers, Indigenous communities and communities of colour into complex racial hierarchies, it is imperative to examine how interlocking systems of domination operated in including and/or excluding particular communities from the benefits or consequences of social work practices. We enter our critical analysis around the process of racialization and the fluid and discursive concept of the *colour line*, and how it has been used as a device to systematically include and exclude members of the Canadian nation-building project.

When examining how particular communities were included or excluded from the benefits or consequences of social work practices, the category of race surfaces explicitly and repeatedly in the words and thoughts of leading social workers in the early 20th century. These conceptions around race ultimately organized the spaces in which social workers chose to

operate and those which they chose to ignore. Because of their categorization of race, the social spaces where white social workers situated themselves were largely determined by what Este (2004) describes as the *colour line*, or what could be identified in this case as *colour lines* (plural versus singular) to denote the separation between the dominant white Canadian, middle/upper class, heterosexual and able-bodied subject, and those deemed to be outside of these discursive boundaries. Therefore these *colour lines* were constructed not only about conceptions of race, but also class, gender, sexuality and ability. While these *colour lines* were not fixed or rigid policies, they were contextual and fluid devices of inclusion and exclusion; changing over time and revealing the ways in which “racialization avoids reproducing fixed racial hierarchies because racial meaning, examined and conceptualized (is) part of an ongoing historical process... (and) evolve in response to political, economic and social contexts” (Teelucksingh, 2006, p.4).

This article aims to map out the shifts and ways in which the social work profession actively participated in the construction of *colour lines* to enforce and reinforce the dominant imagery of the valorized Canadian subject through simultaneous social processes we call circles of *reform* (European settlers), *civilization* (Indigenous communities), and *in/visibility* (communities of colour). We will explore the complexities of these circles of reform, civilization and in/visibility and how they have allowed leading social workers to promote the profession as an important colonial mechanism for the consolidation of Canada as a white settler society. To conclude, we will critically reflect upon the possible historical continuities of these circles of reform, civilization and in/visibility, along with exploring implications for contemporary anti-oppressive social work practice.

Social Work as Settler Colonial Project: From Charity to Settlement Houses

The popular perception of Canada as a benevolent nation-state has served to virtually erase the collective memories of Canadians and its historical origins as a nation founded on the logics of white supremacy (Thobani, 2007). The promotion of white supremacy as central to Canadian nation building can be exemplified by the following statement by the Deputy Minister of Labour (and future Canadian prime minister) William Lyon Mackenzie King, who in the year 1908 suggested “that Canada should remain a white man’s country ...not only desirable for economic and social reasons, but also highly necessary on political and national grounds” (Price, 2011, p. 70). With a background in law, political science and social work, Mackenzie King was a settlement house advocate who eventually became Canadian prime minister for three different periods of time between 1921 to 1948 (Kongeter, 2012; Price, 2011). In order to understand the role of racialization in constructing the lives of social workers at the turn of the 20th century, it is crucial to identify the ways in which the social work profession was folded into practices of domination by contributing to the mythology of Canada as a white settler society. Razack (2002) describes the origins of white settler society formation as:

structured by a racial hierarchy. In the national mythologies of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land. European settlers thus become the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship. A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is

therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour (p.2).

This critical re-framing of Canadian history is necessary for us to understand the ways in which the social work profession was integral, and perhaps essential, to the settler colonial project. Although Fellows & Razack (1998) caution against the reductive transposing of European histories with North American ones, they describe the interconnection between European empire building, its dominant discourses, and the historical origins of Canada as a mythical white settler society. Thus, understanding Canada as a white settler society cannot be divorced from the historical origins of colonial nation building and development of capitalism and industrialization in Britain and France (Carty, 1999; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Razack, 2002). Alongside the flows of migration that facilitated the settlement of European colonies, came the transportation of British social work institutions affiliated with both the charity and settlement house movements (Addams, 1915; Carniol, 2005; Kongeter, 2012).

Certainly, there are important distinctions between the philosophies underpinning the charity versus settlement house movements. As the charity movement migrated from the UK to Canada in the late 1800s, Christian-based Charitable Organization Societies (COS) were set up with the aim of “provid(ing) ‘friendly visitors’ from the upper class who volunteered to visit poor families” (Carniol, 2005, p.43). The Christian charity movement was a clear example of a specific British social system which valued particular Victorian notions of culture and family that was transferred and instilled onto Canadian soil (Agnew, 2004).

During this same time period, social work pioneer Jane Addams established Hull House, the first settlement house in the United States in the city of Chicago, Illinois (Kongeter, 2012). Addams critiqued the charity model as overemphasizing “cleanliness, thrift and temperance in the home, claiming that this approach simply encouraged a mock display of ‘impossible virtues’ while ignoring the actual experiences and values of poor families” (Agnew, 2004, p.105). Inspired by the settlement movement that was initiated in the UK, Addams would influence the establishment of the first set of settlement houses in Canada (Kongeter, 2012).

Canadian settlement house advocate (and subsequent Prime Minister) Mackenzie King visited and spent time with Addams at Hull House before implementing settlement houses in Canada (Kongeter, 2012). The Canadian settlement movement responded to the social and economic barriers which faced the communities which they served in the same manner as their US counterparts, resulting in a systemic critique and involvement of social and economic justice movements such as for white labour and white women’s rights (Addams, 1910; Addams, 1915).

However, there are troubling features of the charity and settlement house movements which shared similar, if not equivalent, histories and characteristics, revealing the ways in which both movements were central to the settler colonial project in Canada. First, both movements were forms of social organization transported from Britain with the central purpose of settlement, and therefore, colonization. Whether the approach was charity-based (i.e. focus on individual defects of poor people) or settlement house based (i.e. focus on community organizing and solidarity building), both movements served an integral role in the colonial nation-building project. This contributed to the mythology of white settlement in Canada, and what Razack

(2002) would describe as “the story of the ‘empty land’ developed by hardy and enterprising European settlers” (p.3).

In addition, both movements were very strongly linked with the dominant notions of Christianity at the time, despite the charity movement’s orientation towards the maintenance of the nuclear family, and the social settlement movement’s divergent focus on issues related to social solidarity (Agnew, 2004; Valverde, 2008). The social and institutional power of the charitable and settlement house movement in Canada led to the creation of a national organization titled the Social and Moral Reform Council of Canada in 1908 (Rooke & Schnell, 1987). It was through this council, and later the Social Service Council of Canada (established in 1912) that both charity and settlement house advocates came together to serve as a powerful lobby group motivated by religion, charity and European settlement to Canada (Rooke & Schnell, 1987; Valverde, 2008). As promoters of social and moral reform, the establishment of COS and settlement houses reflected the broader logic of the settler colonial project since “the clean souls and bodies prized by social purity were not only symbolically but literally white...racist ideas permeated the economics, politics and social policy of early twentieth-century Canada” (Valverde, 2008, p.104).

Social Work, White Life for Two, and Eugenics

During the early 20th century, Razack & Fellows (1998) examine the normative power of white middle class domesticity within the making of Canada as a white settler society by describing the “home” as a “site where a class was produced and reproduced and where the life of the individual was connected to the making of a liberal democratic social order” (p. 345). A central feature of this liberal democratic social order was the expectation that individual members of the ruling group would have self-control over their own emotions and sexual desire (Valverde, 2008). Therefore the dominant group’s expectation of individual self-control and desire for “respectability” was the primary self-regulatory practice which drove the promotion of a social order that valorized the white, middle/upper class, heterosexual, cissexual¹, able-bodied, nuclear family (Razack & Fellows, 1998; Thobani, 2007; Valverde, 2008). For example in Western Canada, marriage was explicitly articulated by the colonial government as central to the health and wealth of the nation and “dependent on the establishment of the Christian, monogamous, and lifelong model of marriage and family - the ‘*white life for two*’” (Carter, 2008, p.8). In addition, the patriarchal nature of this particular family formation resulted in a white middle class domesticity whereby white women’s social roles were inferiorized, highly regulated and mostly restricted to privatized domestic spheres (Razack & Fellows, 1998).

It is from this broader social context that the social work profession in Canada emerged as a central mechanism to consolidate white middle/upper class superiority through the valorization and normalization of the nuclear heterosexual family. It is important to note that this prevailing social order was partly transported to Canada from Britain through the charity movement’s promotion of Victorian notions of culture and family (Agnew, 2004). In fact both the charity and settlement house movements were led by mostly white middle/upper class men and women of British origins (McLaren, 1990, Kongeter, 2012; Valverde, 2008). Therefore, the

¹ Cissexual refers to individuals who understand their gender identity and physical sex as aligned and therefore do not identify as trans or gender nonconforming (Serrano, 2007).

promotion of the white patriarchal nuclear family formation was not only promoted by social workers in their work, but also cultivated and re-produced within the social work profession itself (Agnew, 2004).

Although the majority of the people involved in charity and settlement work were white women, the movement leaders and decision-making powers were dominated by white men. However, these movements did provide space for some white middle/upper class women to gain political power and a degree of respectability whereby they were able to sidestep certain patriarchal social relations, as was the case for Canadian social worker Charlotte Whitton (Rooke & Schnell, 1987). Thus, the push for professional respectability, ties with the ‘superior’ religion of Christianity, and participating in the colonial project of Canada did serve to elevate the social stature and political power of the white middle/upper class women involved in the social work profession (Rooke & Schnell, 1987; Valverde, 2008, Thobani, 2007).

A central pathway for these white middle/upper class women to gain respectability and structural power was through the re-enforcement of their racial superiority in relation to the inferiority of racialized Others whom they were “helping” (Thobani, 2007). Generally speaking, the marking of racialized bodies as inferior served to consolidate the development of white middle/upper class power, and the normalization of the nuclear heterosexual family (Fellows & Razack, 1998). Therefore, the practice of racist classification and labeling, versus white, middle-class domesticity was a relational one, whereby the inscribing of racialized bodies as inferior was essential to re-enforcing the imagining of superiority within the dominant group (Fellows & Razack, 1998). Moreover, respectability was gained not only through the pathologizing of Indigenous peoples and people of colour, but also through the racial labeling of other “degenerate classes” whom McClintock (1995) identified as “the militant working class, the Irish, Jews, feminists, gays and lesbians, prostitutes, criminals, alcoholics and the insane - who were collectively figured as racial deviants” (p.43).

Indeed the respectability/degeneracy relation was a prevailing feature of the charity and settlement movement. The racialized language of respectability/degeneracy reveals the ways in which the discourse of eugenics became an important mechanism of control for leaders within the charity and settlement house movements (McLaren, 1990; Valverde, 2008). One example of how social workers participated in the Canadian nation-building project was through the promotion of the discourse of eugenics (McLaren, 1990). The eugenics movement in Canada promoted “the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mental(ly)” (McLaren, 1990, p. 15, citing Galton).

Born out of scientific racism and notions of racial purity, the Eugenics movement was a central pillar for many Canadian social work professionals to valorize discourses of race betterment through the promotion of social and mental hygiene (McLaren, 1990; Valverde, 2008). Thus, the discourse of eugenics became integral to processes of racialization and in determining the ways in which *colour lines* were produced and re-produced through and by the social work profession. Given this rich context of the charity and settlement house movements, we now focus our attention on how these value-systems were enforced and reinforced through

colour line devices we have termed the circle of reform, the circle of civilization, and the circle of in/visibility.

‘Circle of Reform’

The charity movement’s influence on early social work practice certainly inferiorized poor white families and European settlers, marking many as degenerate and resulted in the power of social workers to engage in acts of surveillance and social control (Agnew, 2004). While the settlement movement acknowledged the role of external social forces in determining the lives of poor and immigrant Europeans, there was an implicit belief of the superiority of belonging to a white Anglo-Saxon nation. In Addams’ (1898) own words: “one thing seemed clear in regard to entertaining immigrants; to preserve and keep whatever of value their past life contained and to bring them in contact with a better type of American” (p.169). Moreover, leading social work publications echoed racial hierarchies which presented British subjects as ideal immigrants to Canadian society. Writing for *Social Welfare*, contributor John Cormie (1929) noted “three thousand families in the British Isles were carefully hand-picked with a view to discovering persons likely to meet with success on a Canadian farm. ...To further assist them to become happily established in this country community efforts were put forth to welcome them” (p. 9).

When the demands of the nation-building project required additional labour that could not be supplied by preferred British subjects, Cormie (1929) advocated for Central and Southern European settlers, arguing that “there is more promise of immigrants in the non-preferred areas of Europe than in any other part of the Western world... If we could fill up our vacant spaces within the next few years here is a source from which the people could be brought” (p. 99). Although immigrants from Central and Southern Europe were viewed as culturally inferior, they were at the same time, potentially assimilable.

McLaren (1990) explains “in English-speaking Canada the arrival of newcomers fostered an ideology of assimilating newcomers into Anglo-conformity” (p.47). This particular kind of cultural racism surfaced repeatedly during the first few decades of the 20th century in North America, where a large influx of Central and Southern European settlers entered US and Canadian borders (McLaren, 1990; Rooke & Schnell, 1987). These racialized European settlers were seen as coming from what Addams (1893) would describe as ‘foreign colonies’ characterized by their country of origin (i.e. Italy, Poland, etc.) or their non-Christian religious affiliation (i.e. ‘Jewish colonies’).

While the racialization and therefore, inferiorizing of these immigrants could be expected within the victim-blaming social work practices of the charity movement, the social settlement movement also engaged in a more subtle form of racism; defending the capacity of *deserving* European settlers from ‘foreign colonies’ to become Americanized, while at the same time disparaging those *undeserving* as “sordid and ignorant immigrants” (Addams, 1915, p.47). These complex social relations serve to illustrate the contradictory ways in which these processes were meant to include *and* exclude European settlers as potential nation builders of North America. Thus, while these European settlers were racialized and perceived as inferior, as a group they were by and large, permitted to enter into Canada because of their potential to assimilate and become full citizens. This is echoed in the reflections of Adams (1893, 1915, 1910) who spoke frequently of the potential of those deserving European settlers to become assimilated into the

dominant white Anglo-Saxon culture. While the various social work structures did inferiorize these settlers, they also provided some European settlers, a pathway into white middle-class respectability through what Agnew (2004) describes as the ‘circle of reform’.

Many social work professionals of this era reinforced this view of racially inferior European settlers, with one leading Canadian social worker serving as a member of the Social Service Council of Canada, Charlotte Whitton, going as far as to present her fears of the ‘degeneracy’ of new settlements in racially poisoning the lives of their white Anglo-Saxon neighbors (Rooke & Schnell, 1987). While not all of her fellow social workers agreed with this viewpoint, Whitton’s racist beliefs did reflect to a certain degree “the anxiety of a colonial country with only eight million people who, despite the existing ‘two nations’, were afraid that an influx of non-Anglo-Saxons might radically alter the composition of Canada’s political and racial ties” (Rooke & Schnell, 1987, p. 23). From this racialized anxiety expressed by the white Anglo-Saxon population, came the birth and promotion of the eugenics movement.

Although it was clear that, through the racist ideology of the eugenics movement, there was a *colour line* drawn between the superior white Anglo-Saxon middle/upper class race and newcomer European settlers, this colour line was indeed *malleable*. If, through close evaluation, a particular settler was deemed to be physically and mentally able-bodied, they were permitted to cross the colour line and become assimilated into the nation. On the other hand, those who were deemed to be ‘feble-minded’ were excluded from entry into citizenship, labeled as ‘degenerate’ and remained racialized bodies which threatened the racial purity of what McLaren (1990) described as the white Anglo-Saxon desire for a ‘master race’. As Whitton explains about poor British settlers who were potentially ‘feble-minded’, “statistics abound to show the alarming degree to which an immigration policy that sought not quality but quantity has contributed to the social problems of this young country. ...Our strength and resources are bent to the task of keeping this country strong, virile, healthy and moral and we insist that the blood that enters its veins must be equally pure and free from taint” (McLaren, 1990, p. 198).

Therefore, the charity and social settlement movements (to varying degrees) served as one of the principal regulatory and filtering system for all European settlers to move through. It is important to note that in general, the settlement movement was more progressive in its perceptions of European settlers than the charity movement, and many social workers did not agree with the racist ideology of the eugenics movement (McLaren, 1990). However, they nonetheless participated in this racialized process which assimilated some able-bodied European settlers while excluding ‘degenerate’ others; thus being complicit in reinforcing the dominant notions of white supremacy and ability.

‘Circle of Civilization’

“I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone. ...Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.”
-Duncan Campbell Scott (as cited in Milloy, 1999, p. 46)

Both the charity and social settlement movements were transported from Britain, in order to further the Canadian and US colonial nation-building projects. As such, both movements would inevitably engage with First Nations whose presence, history, and social system predated European contact. While there were few explicit exchanges between Indigenous communities and the charity and social settlement movements, the complicity of the social work profession in supporting genocidal policies and practices² towards the First Nations are undeniable. While both the charity and social settlement movements served as a pathway to include some European settlers into dominant whiteness and middle/upper class respectability, the absence of indigenous people in the discourse of many leaders within these social work movements has significant implications. This kind of discursive absence was a clear example of how social work professionals implicitly contributed to the mythology of how white settler societies were constructed in Canada and the US, while masking its origins in the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples (Razack, 2002).

Another aspect of this absence was due to the charity and social settlement movements' location in mainly urban settler geographies while most First Nations were placed on reserves. However, one of the consequences stemming from the implementation of the Indian Act in 1862³, led to the increase of mixed-race 'half-breeds'⁴ (part Native, part white) within the major urban areas of Canada (Mawani, 2002). Even with this increase of mixed-race individuals residing in the same urban geography as the charity and social settlement movements, there were very few written reflections by social work leaders within these movements about 'half-breeds'.

Therefore, nearly complete discursive absence of Indigenous peoples in the writings by and about leaders within the charity and social settlement movements contributed to and perpetuated to what Razack (2002) would describe as the denial of European colonization and conquest, "largely through the fantasy that North America was peacefully settled and not colonized" (p.2). Furthermore, this discursive absence also indicates a more rigid and exclusionary *colour line* for indigenous peoples and 'half-breeds' – one where instead of being divided into binaries of the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' like European settlers, Indigenous peoples were almost entirely excluded from this particular gateway into white respectability, through practices of segregation and elimination.

Perhaps one of the most destructive policies introduced by the Canadian state and implemented by Christian churches was that of the residential school system. This system, which

² The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2000) defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, *forcibly transferring children of the group to another group*."

³ First implemented in 1867 by the Canadian state, the Indian Act was a racist and sexist piece of legislation which included the segregation of Indigenous communities onto reserves and defining of 'Indian' status based on gender and blood lines. A white woman marrying a Native man were both defined as 'Indian', while a Native woman and white man were not (Mawani, 2002).

⁴ Mawani (2002) defines 'half-breeds' as the children of Native women who married white men as they could not be treaty 'Indians'.

violently separated Indigenous parents from their children, was described by the Canadian state as providing a pathway for Indigenous peoples to enter into the ‘circle of civilization’ (Milloy, 1999). The rhetoric of entering the ‘circle of civilization’ suggests that it could be considered as similar in its intent to assist Indigenous people in entering into white middle class respectability, as for European settlers during this exact time period. In one of the few articles written in the journal *Social Welfare* about Indigenous peoples, Reverend W. H. Day (1926) describes the residential schools in the following way:

...the present policy of the Government in building the larger residential schools has much to commend it...In these schools the children are taken off the Reserves, the English language is taught and every opportunity and encouragement is given them to gain all the knowledge they would gain in in the public school and in addition the boys are trained in practical farming and the girls are trained to become practical housekeepers and all in an atmosphere of kindness and friendliness... in order to make the education of Indian children effective there must be a larger element of compulsion introduced and enforced (p.156).

This description of the Indian Residential Schools as a caring and compassionate policy belies the reality of these schools being a tool for the genocide of Indigenous peoples as “the death toll, excessive discipline and overall educational failure of the schools - well-known to any Indian Affairs bureaucrat who possessed a critical mind or conscience - also leaked out frequently into the public eye” (Fournier & Crey, 2011, p. 174). Although some European settlers labeled as ‘feble-minded’ were pathologized, and in some cases placed in jails and asylums (Rooke & Schnell, 1987), this pales in comparison to the devastating intergenerational consequences for the vast majority of children placed into the residential schools during the early decades of the 20th century.

Moreover, one of the standing committees for the Social Service Council of Canada (SSCC) in 1913 was ‘Indian Affairs’, where a variety of Christian churches were intensely involved within its internal workings (Rooke & Schnell, 1987). Because of this intimate relationship between the building of the social work profession and Christian churches, along with the involvement of the SSCC in ‘Indian Affairs’, it is clear that the growing social work profession was very much involved with the residential school system during its early and most devastating stage in the first few decades of the 20th century. By identifying First Nations as racialized Others, the government constructed a rigid colour line that was embodied through the Indian Act and implemented by Indian Residential Schools, which ultimately served the purpose of eliminating First Nations rather than facilitating their entry into the ‘circle of civilization’.

Circle of In/visibility

“It would be very like a betrayal of trust, as things are, were the citizens of British Columbia to become party to the orientalizing of the Western Seaboard”

- Committee Report on the Oriental Situation in British Columbia (as cited in *Social Welfare*, 1922, p. 154)

With some racialized European settlers entering into the sometimes violent assimilatory ‘circle of reform’, and indigenous communities enduring practices of elimination through being forced into the ‘circle of civilization’, communities of colour were treated with entirely different Canadian state policies and practices. Generally speaking, racialized communities were acknowledged as providing essential labour to the accelerating nation-building project, but were continually surveilled and denied the opportunity to integrate into Canadian society. State policies explicitly excluded, and thus rendered racialized communities simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible by imposing various financial restrictions and taxes, and by purposely categorizing them outside the dominant image of the loyal Canadian subject.

In line with the discursive absence of Indigenous peoples, social work leaders of the charity and social settlement movement straddled conflicting ideas which sometimes made hyper-visible but overwhelmingly ignored the existence of communities of colour thereby contributing to the mythology of the Canadian white-settler society. Publications in *Social Welfare* during the early 20th century provide a clear understanding of how social workers were made complicit in the exclusion of racialized immigrants through reinforcing notions of the valorized Canadian subject in Canadian society. Noted *Social Welfare* columnist Elmore Reaman (1921) wrote about the ‘Canadianization’ of incoming immigrants, which she described as:

[the] absorption of the foreign-born into our national life and the acquisition on the part of the foreigner himself of a general knowledge of and appreciation for our language, laws, institutions and ideals. Such a definition... has two phases to it: ...A large part of Canadianization is the encouragement of the average Canadian to appreciate the foreigner because for a long time we have looked upon the foreigner as an economic asset only. ...The other phases concerns the newcomer himself and emphasizes the fact that he can never be one of us until he speaks our language, understands our laws and institutions and appreciates our ideals, because to a major extent it is the foreigner himself who must go through the process of Canadianization, we Canadians can only facilitate it by our sympathy and understanding. (p. 136)

Though Reaman’s discussion on Canadianization was addressing the influx of immigration from Central and Southern Europe, it clearly outlined the conditions through which outsiders from racialized communities in South Asia, China, and Japan could transcend binary colour lines in the expanding Western frontier in British Columbia. Conditions within the ‘Canadianization’ process included labour contributions to the expanding agricultural sector, as well as full assimilation into the dominant Canadian language, law, and ideals. While able-bodied Central and Southern Europeans were actively invited into these processes of ‘Canadianization’ or circle of reform, migrants of colour were denied these opportunities despite their significant contributions to the nation-building project. In these instances there was a systematic and explicit ignoring of how “slavery, indentureship, and labour exploitation – for example, the Chinese who built the railway or the Sikhs who worked in the lumber industry in the nineteenth-century Canada – [were] all handily forgotten in an official national story of European enterprise” (Razack, 2002, p.3).

The systematic exclusion was largely due to the perception of migrants of colour as ‘unassimilable’ and therefore, undesirable as citizens of the colonial project of Canada (Razack,

2002; Ward, 2003). As McLaren (1990) describes, people of colour were placed at the lowest rung of a social hierarchy since “British and Americans were viewed as the most desirable, next northern and western Europeans, after them the central and eastern Europeans (including the Jews), and last of all the Asians and blacks” (p.47). This discursive in/visibility indicates that similar to indigenous peoples, communities of colour were completely excluded from accessing the potential pathway to white middle-class respectability, which both the charity and the social settlement movements strove and provided for. Moreover, similar to indigenous peoples, the exclusionary colour line for communities of colour was rigid and steadfast.

However, while Indigenous and ‘half-breeds’ were situated both on indigenous reserves and urban areas, communities of colour were almost entirely restricted to specific urban areas where their numbers and presence would be controlled and surveilled to the benefit of the Canadian state. According to a report presented to the General Ministerial Association which addressed the “Oriental situation in British Columbia”, the head tax imposed to Chinese immigrants (under the Chinese Immigration Act) simultaneously generated considerable revenue for the state, while curtailing the growing presence of the Chinese community along the Pacific coastline. The report moreover recognized how “in return for the immense revenues received from Chinese immigration by the government, little or nothing has been done in the way of Canadianization” (p. 153).

The exclusionary logic of the colour line was reflective of how communities of colour were racially segregated within the Canadian urban geography⁵ and provides further explanation as to why they were unable to access the white dominant charity or social settlement movements. Este (2004) explains that due to systemic exclusion from white social work institutions, the Black community in Montreal had to develop alternative ways to construct a social work system into its community. For instance, the Union United Church was a crucial social welfare institution, providing essential social services to the excluded Black community in Montreal (Este, 2004). It is important to note that although Christianity played a vital role for the Black community in Montreal during the early 20th century, local white churches were actively complicit in maintaining the color line/circle of invisibility where “Blacks were often placed in the choir lofts or in the back pews where they could not be seen” (Este, 2004, p. 10). As a result, the Black community created their own spaces and churches which ensured their social, cultural, and spiritual survival (Este, 2004).

The exclusion of racialized communities from Canadian society was (and continues to be) reflective of the circle of in/visibility; where their presence in largely urban spaces was a mechanism for surveillance and control both financially as well as socially. Communities of colour were visible in the sense that they were recognized as providing essential labour to the nation-building project, but were rendered invisible particularly in regards to social welfare, being considered legitimate members of Canadian society, and being confined to urban spaces.

⁵ Examples of the history of racial segregation of communities of colour across Canada is well documented – for example ‘Africville’ (Nelson, 2002), Vancouver’s Chinatown (Anderson, 1991), South Asians (Ward, 2003), and Japanese-Canadian internment (Oikawa, 2002), to name but a few.

Colonial Continuities within Circles of Reform, Civilization and In/Visibility

This article has thus far, considered the ways in which processes of racialization and interlocking systems of domination have historically guided social welfare services in maintaining the image and order of Canadian subjects as white and middle/upper class. These processes were instilled and reinforced to settlers from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, First Nations and communities of colour through what we have termed circles of reform, civilization, and in/visibility. While these devices were essential to the Canadian nation-building project, they continue to be constructed and re-constructed within contemporary social work practice, which to date, is heavily influenced by principles of neoliberalism. Since the latter 20th century, nation-states have actively created and preserved institutional frameworks and conditions that facilitate the free flow of capital and people (Harvey, 2007).

Such transformations have been installed globally, and are reflective of the neoliberal doctrine which proposes that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey, 2007, p. 22). With the free flow global market installing itself across geographic borders, scholars have noted how the neoliberal paradigm has drastically dismantled the social welfare state; introducing cuts to social spending, privatization of public resources, and encouraging business and corporate solutions to social issues (Ross, 2011). Within the social welfare arena, Baines (2011) argued that neoliberalism “has resulted in reduced funding for social programs, new service user groups and workplaces with fewer resources and increased surveillance, management control, and caseload size” (p. 31).

Over the past century, communities identified as deserving of entry into the ‘circle of reform’ and folded into white middle-class respectability and the colonial nation-building project have shifted and changed over time. The genealogy of this gateway of assimilation began with settlers from the Britain and France and later encompassing settlers from Central and Southern Europe. Since the 1960s and the supposed elimination of explicitly racist immigration policies, some settlers of colour finally have access into this ‘circle of reform’. However, under the guise of neoliberalism and neoliberal policy, greater emphasis has been placed on individualism and able-bodiedness; simultaneously providing less social welfare and/or more restrictions in accessing state assistance.

Such a retrenchment of social welfare programs and policies further perpetuate notions of meritocracy while further consolidating the dominance of able-bodied, middle-class respectability, and effectively punishes those who are likely to require some level of state intervention (e.g. employment insurance). Therefore, an important historical continuity are the ways in which the social work profession and social workers continue to serve as well-intentioned gatekeepers whose primary purpose is to Canadianize deserving newcomers into middle-class social, cultural, moral and political norms (Iacovetta, 2006). The once *malleable colour line* for European settlers entering into the circle of reform has been re-fashioned into a malleable neoliberal, yet still racialized, line. This neoliberal racialized line continues to determine those deserving versus undeserving of entry into the colonial nation building project.

Equally important to recognize are the colonial continuities manifested through the intergenerational effects of the Indian Residential Schools, the 60s scoops, and the current child welfare system; which collectively re-produce the ‘circle of civilization’. According to Blackstock and Trocme (2005), the pattern of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children entering the child welfare system is pervasive – stemming from the imposition of Euro-centric legislation, inadequate access to financial resources, and the “continued marginalization of indigenous knowledge within Euro-western social work” (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005, p. 12). Interactions within the child welfare system are also extended within correctional institutions where Aboriginal men and women have accounted for the most incarcerations in the last five years (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2012). Such overrepresentation within the child welfare and prison systems are held in the backdrop of the legislative extinction of First Nations, which noted academic and First Nations activist Pam Palmater (2011) warned of with the continuation of the Indian Act:

What is most disturbing about the registration of the Act is the impact they will have on future generations and what that means for the internal composition and legal existence of Indigenous nations into the future. The RCAP clearly warned of what is in store for Indigenous peoples should Canada continue to use the Indian Act to control and define Indigenous identity “it can be predicted that in the future there may be bands on reserves with no status Indian members. They will have effectively been assimilated for legal purposes into provincial populations. Historical assimilation goals will have been reached, and the federal government will have been relieved of its constitutional obligation of protection, since there will no longer be any legal “Indians” left to protect” (p. 46, citing the RCAP report, 1996).

Historically, the dominant discourse embedded within the aim of bringing Indigenous peoples into the circle of civilization was one of benevolence. However, critical scholarship has clearly shown the ways in which the Indian Act and policies such as the Indian Residential Schools served more as a colonial mechanism for the elimination of First Nations (Milloy, 1998; Fournier & Crey, 2011). Bringing together the high rates of incarceration and over-representation of Indigenous peoples in child welfare in conjunction with Palmater’s (2011) assertion of the impending legislative extinction of First Nations with Indian status, suggests a colonial continuity in practices of elimination shrouded in a rhetoric of assimilation. Although the Indian Act has certainly been re-articulated with the end of Indian Residential Schools and introduction of C-31, in many ways *the colour line* for Indigenous peoples remain rigid, through practices of incarceration, over-representation in child welfare and legislative extinction.

Finally, though the Canadian state boasts its commitment to “the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation” (Canadian Immigration and Citizenship, 2012), people of colour continue to be regulated by policies which both recognize and deny their contributions and presence within Canadian society. These contributions, according to Galabuzi (2006), are contingent on the needs of the Canadian economy and labour market, which systematically segregates and consigns racialized group members to particular types of work and occupations. As a resource-rich and labour poor nation-state, Canada has historically met its labour shortages by actively

encouraging immigration. However the willingness to accept incoming newcomers was, and continues to be, predicated on assumptions that maintain the logics of white supremacy and settler colonialism.

More recently, Canadian immigration policy has shifted its attention to temporary and labour-driven programs which are largely filled by applicants from the Global South. Programs such as the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, Live-in-Caregiver Program, and Provincial Nominee Program are migration and labour policies which offer limited possibilities for permanent residency. Such policies exist against the backdrop of retrenched opportunities for family reunification and refugees. These examples demonstrate a re-shaping of the colour line for racialized people, in some ways becoming malleable for those in the middle/upper class, while becoming more rigid for the poor/working class communities of colour who are increasingly becoming criminalized, as evidenced by the significant increases in the number of people of color with temporary or undocumented migrant status and those held in prison or detention systems.

Conclusion

Comparing the differing relationships between the charity and social settlement movements with European settlers, Indigenous peoples and communities of colour during the formation of a mythical white settler society in Canada reveals how a complex and contradictory set of social relations were constructed during the early 20th century. The ruling white middle/upper class or ‘respectable’ settlers had dominant social power through what Thobani (2007) describes as “the inscription of whiteness as embodiment of legitimate and responsible citizenship” (p.75). This was in direct social relation to European settlers whom a *malleable colour line* resulted in the possibility of inclusion into this dominant whiteness contingent on being able-bodied and heterosexual. However, more rigid *colour lines* were imposed through the inclusion of indigenous children into the destructive and deadly residential school system, and the exclusion of communities of colour from white social work structures.

We argue that the charity and social settlement movements in Canada, which eventually transitioned into the contemporary Canadian social work profession, were in fact, British systems which were brought over to North America in order to further the colonial project of building a white settler society. These movements were actively re-producing the logics of settler colonialism and white supremacy through assimilating able-bodied European immigrants into the patriarchal, white, middle-class, nuclear family and heterosexual/cissexual norm (Thobani, 2007). For European settlers, capitalism, patriarchy and ability worked in particular ways to include able-bodied people into dominant whiteness, while excluding, racializing and pathologizing those settlers who were poor, disabled and female. These processes worked in tandem with the Eugenics movement, and served to distinguish those who could be assimilated and reformed from those who were deemed outside these boundaries (circle of reform).

Indigenous communities, on the other hand, were particularly impacted by white supremacy, patriarchy and Christianity. This occurred through the creation of the racist and gendered Indian Act and deadly Christian residential school system which violently and forcefully sought to ‘Canadianize’ Indigenous peoples (circle of civilization). Finally, white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy interlocked to racially segregate and entirely exclude

communities of colour from white social work structures, where they were surveilled and controlled within urban spaces; but still made necessary for their labour in the Canadian nation-building project (circle of in/visibility).

While we sought to highlight particular systems of domination for each social group, this does not mean that they are the sole dominant systems at work. As mentioned previously by Razack (1998, 2008), these interlocking systems of domination function simultaneously and work within and through each other and thus cannot be separated in a simple or linear fashion. Our hope is to engage in critical analysis around the role of racialization and interlocking systems of domination in a historical and site-specific way in order to reveal how socially constructed 'colour lines' worked to include or exclude specific communities in particular ways.

By re-constructing prevailing narratives found within critical and anti-oppressive scholarship about the historical origins of social work in Canada, this article denaturalizes the white-dominance of the present day Canadian social work profession. By doing so, we disrupt what Austin (2010) calls Canada's *master-narrative* of a country of two founding nations (the British and the French) where "both narratives provide fertile soil for the modern exclusion of non-White groups, despite the fact that this population is inching towards half the population in Canada's major cities. But there are narratives that challenge the dominant mythologies of two founding nations" (p. 27). Re-constructing what we know about the historical origins of the Canadian social profession is not simply an intellectual project, but a profoundly political one, as it re-shapes "who can speak, and how they are likely to be heard, but also how we know what we know and the interest we protect through our knowing" (Razack, 1998, p. 10).

By re-constructing the historical roots of Canadian social work, this article questions whose interests are protected when the settlement house movement is not revealed to be a settler colonial project and how does this in turn, determine who can speak and how they are heard today? How can this explicit naming serve to make visible historical continuities in the reproduction of the logics of settler colonialism and white supremacy within contemporary social work practices? How might re-shaping what can be known, thought and said about contemporary social work practices, including anti-oppressive ones, unsettle and disrupt the naturalization of a white-dominant social work profession? Dominant assumptions within the social work profession need to be challenged and critical questions must continually to be asked around which communities are being included versus excluded within our social work policies and practices, and whether there are newly formulated 'colour lines' in which the social work profession is being complicit in re-enforcing and re-producing. Such inquiries will hopefully generate questions of how these processes continue to be at play; especially within the current context of neoliberal influence within social work practice.

Moreover, this article aims to incite and extend Massaquoi's (2011) notion of *transformative disruption* as an identity-based experience of transformative learning. Having access to this re-configured understanding of the historical origins of the Canadian social work profession can serve as a 'pivotal incident' which may contribute to a kind of historicized transformative disruption, or processes of critical self-reflection that "push theory and practice forward in ways that are linked to the constantly changing realities of social life" (p. 228). This opens space for social workers to reflect back and re-frame their previous experiences, and to re-

align their future anti-oppressive social work practice. By making these historical and present links, we aim to open anti-oppressive spaces that “end our silence and speak our truths about oppression as we know them” (Massaquoi, 2011, p. 228). Our hope is that this will contribute to re-configured and renewed practices of resistance within and beyond anti-oppressive social work, in order to challenge the dominant status-quo and re-shape calls for transformative social justice.

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