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Abstract: This article examines the delimiting role time plays in criminological research, especially with respect to historical studies related to genocide in a settler-colonial context. In short, we argue that criminological temporalities often exclude forms of collective destruction defined by a more complicated duration or scope. We do this through investigation of Canada’s residential school system, with specific attention to a single Indian Residential School (IRS) within this system, the Assiniboia Residential School (ARS) in Winnipeg. Assiniboia was different than other residential schools in Canada because, despite playing a role in Indigenous assimilation, students experienced more freedom and less abuse than was characteristic of other schools. We argue that grappling with an institution such as Assiniboia, as part of an experience of state crime, requires that the notion of crime as a temporal event, or as the outcome of a linear criminogenic process, be challenged and opened to concepts of time that are pulsating, uneven and persistent within a broader settler-colonial mesh.

Keywords: genocide; settler colonialism; temporality; forced assimilation; residential schools

Introduction

This article examines the delimiting role time plays in criminological research, especially with respect to historical research related to genocide and mass violence. In short, criminological temporalities often fail to fully capture forms of collective destruction defined by a more complicated duration. Through investigation of Canada’s residential school system, with specific attention to a single Indian Residential School (IRS) that was less outwardly violent than others in this system, the notion of crime as a temporal event, or as the outcome of a linear criminogenic process, is challenged and opened to concepts of time that are pulsating, uneven and persistent.
The need for regarding other ontologies of time is illustrated through the Assiniboia Residential School (ARS), which opened in 1958 on Academy Road in Winnipeg’s River Heights neighbourhood and closed in 1973. Initially, ARS served as a residential school for upper-level students who had previously attended residential schools closer to their home reserves. Later, it was a dormitory where students resided while attending Winnipeg public schools. ARS represents an entryway for consideration of how settler-colonial harm travels through a multitude of divergent times and spaces, often taking a shape too amorphous to be bound by rigid understandings of crime as an event. More specifically, the harms of this particular school are only translatable through an approach that looks beyond ARS as a criminological event to recognize its complicated standing in the broader sweep of settler-colonial history.

**Methodological Note**

The research presented below draws upon both written and oral archival records. The written records are from Library and Archives Canada and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, where we examined quarterly reports, government and church letters and communications, ARS newsletters, school annuals, issues of the *Indian Record* (a national newspaper on IRSs that was produced by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and occasionally featured stories on ARS), and ARS-related articles from the *Winnipeg Tribune* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Oral records include testimony given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, as well as public statements made to the media and recorded in memoirs written by former students.

It should be noted that the broader project out of which this article has emerged is one that seeks to adhere to decolonizing and unsettling methodologies (Regan 2010; Smith 1999) by working with Indigenous communities to ensure they have ownership of, control over, access to and possession of the research project (Schnarch 2004). The group of former ARS students with whom we work, the Survivor Governing Council for the project, asked us to track down other Survivors from the school, organize a reunion event at the school and contribute to other efforts to raise awareness about and bring attention to their former school in Winnipeg. Their stories, in their own voices, will be published under their authorship in a separate volume we are helping prepare. For this reason, we do not directly quote from their remembrances, since this is their knowledge to present; their remembrances have, nonetheless, informed how we read and interrogate the colonial archive. This article is secondary to our work with the Survivor Governing Council for this project, who support our efforts to engage in scholarly discussion to advance the study of settler-colonial genocide in criminology and genocide studies.
Criminology’s Time

Recently, scholars have taken greater note of the temporal underpinnings of the law. For example, Renisa Mawani (2015) notes that “time is rarely conceptualized as an ontological, requisite, or constitutive feature of law” and calls on scholars to look beyond the recent focus on legal spaces to also consider the way temporality shapes the law (255). In her work on security studies, Mariana Valverde (2010) questions the wisdom of treating security as a “thing” and proposes viewing it rather as an umbrella concept that assembles a multiplicity of dynamic and often contradictory governmental processes. In assessing the scope of such dynamic processes, she recommends specific attention be given to the spatio-temporal scale since too often this scale is assumed and left unquestioned. Whereas the scope of a phenomenon focuses attention on its existence within a broader spatio-temporal duration, the scale alerts us to specific dimensions of jurisdiction and governance in an instance. Together, these concepts demand attention both to patterned flows of time across space and to the specific manifestations of spatio-temporal governance within particular events. Through use of such terminology, we are reminded that law and criminology deploy particular temporal narratives that are by no means neutral. Moreover, this literature provides tools for critically assessing the underlying spatio-temporal assumptions that guide scholarly work (Crawford 2015; Mawani 2015; Valverde 2010, 2015). For our specific purpose, the settler-colonial ontology that undergirds many criminological temporal narratives is of primary concern.

Our purpose is not, however, to simply reverse these narratives and valorize Indigenous notions of time as a replacement for Western conceptions. While we do seek to make space for such understandings, we follow Valverde’s (2012, 2015) reiteration of Immanuel Kant’s view that time and space are not objective phenomena but rather filters through which we see the world. Our goal, then, is not to propose an alternate notion of time to that prevalent in much of criminology; instead, we seek to assess how the dominant lens makes it difficult to access certain aspects of settler-colonial harm. In particular, criminological frameworks often impose “settler modes of time” (Rifkin 2017: 4) that prefigure the sort of justice demands available to residential school Survivors. Opening to alternate temporalities allows new possibilities for presenting experience as simultaneously harmful and nostalgic – both part of a broader cyclical pattern of destruction and a period of life where fond memories reside. As well, though our focus is on the temporality of settler-colonial harms, we acknowledge that time is not separate from space; for this reason, at the end of this section we draw upon Valverde’s (2015) reworking of Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope, which refers to configurations of space and time.
The notion of crime often, though not always, presumes an episodic, progressive and linear temporality. This temporality is captured by the mainstream notion of the criminal “event” or “incident” (e.g. L. E. Cohen and Felson 1979; S. Cohen and Scull 1976; Kennedy and Forde 1990; Kposowa and Breault 1998; Sacco and Kennedy 1998; Verma and Lodha 2002). Verma and Lodha (2002) suggest that the criminal event is delimited in terms of time (it occurs within a moment or set of moments), space (it occurs at a particular site, real or virtual), law (it violates certain elements of the criminal code) and participants (it features a perpetrator, or group of perpetrators, and a victim, or group of victims). To complicate the analysis of the spatiality and temporality of crime, some scholars have introduced notions such as “hot spots”, crime “clusters” and various topographical metaphors to better understand interconnections between events and their emergence (E. Brown 2016; LeBeau and Vincent 1997; Nasar and Fisher 1993; Sherman, Gartin and Buerger 1989; Verma and Lodha 2002). All these events, however, exist within the universal continuity of linear time; they emerge as discrete illegalities out of a specific set of social arrangements, only to fade before they perhaps resurface. They are crime, or not crime, following a Boolean logic of ones and zeros and thereby can be counted, examined, compared or acted upon in some other manner.

The criminal event is related to the idea of the “criminal career”, shorthand for the patterned involvement of an individual in crime and delinquency over an extended range of time (Glueck and Glueck 1930). The very notion of the criminal career presupposes a structured and bi-directional (i.e. engagement in or desistance from crime) narrative that explains the deviant choices of the individual as they enter into and perhaps eventually desist from crime; the age–crime curve, peaking in the teenage years and then decreasing, is a common temporality ascribed to theories of the criminal career (Farrington 1986). The same temporality has informed many mainstream criminological approaches, from strain theory to social control theory, which suggest that specific moments of anomie or lowered social control arise in an individual’s life (that may exacerbate more long-term influences) to increase the likelihood of their participation in criminal episodes or events (Agnew 2006; Hirschi 1969).

There are, of course, alternative approaches to time within the criminological field. Contemporary variants of life-course criminology, for example, tend to speak more in terms of temporal patterning. This approach assumes less stability over time, with increases and decreases in the variables that generate criminal offending that depend on situational deviations to baseline conditions in an individual’s life (Agnew 2011; for earlier approaches, see Laub and Sampson 2001; Moffitt 1993; Nagin, Farrington and Moffitt 1995; Piquero, MacDonald and Parker 2002; Sampson and Laub 2005). The focus is nonetheless on the individual offender and his or her likelihood of engaging in a temporarily confined criminal
event on a singular timeline. The primary effort is towards identifying those factors antecedent to the perpetration of a criminal act, capturing the intensification of forces that make criminality possible, though in a manner more sensitive to the complexity of short-term and long-term causes of deviance than was the case for classical criminology (Agniew 2011).

Marxist and other critical criminologies have broadened the temporal scope through notions such as “criminogenic structures”, which suggest a temporality that is less neatly bound in time and space and instead is diachronic and structural in its formation. For example, criminogenic market structures form across historical time and become generative of specific types of, and legal responses to, criminal activity such as fraud (Calavita, Pontell and Tillman 1997; Lacey 2008; Reiner 2002; Tombs and Whyte 2003; Williams 2011). Others emphasize structured economic processes that intersect with race and gender (Barak, Flavin and Leighton 2001; Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988; Simpson 1989). Nonetheless, even in this critical criminology, these processes tend to cash out in specific events – moments of criminality that are understood as effects emerging from structural causes, though they are not as narrowly focused on individual criminal engagements. Socialist feminist approaches that operate under an intersectional lens, however, can at times break free of this temporality, especially in how they confound episodic thinking by multiplying the subject positions a person might simultaneously occupy. Each individual thereby becomes a complex biography in the present but simultaneously connected to the past and projected into the future (Balfour 2011; Burgess-Proctor 2006; Cooper 2016). Through this frame, an individual can be both victim and offender, upsetting synchronic categories of criminal identification.

Existential and narrative criminologies further complicate the criminological event by offering a different notion of the event that goes beyond treating it simply as a co-construction or confluence of offender, victim, space, law and linear time. Such an approach provides needed insight into the singular experience of the individual who opens herself or himself to the event as experienced rather than externally defined. Subsequently, this experiencing individual can orient himself or herself in terms of past, present and future in relation to the event. The event in this perspective is not a neat and discrete mark upon a timeline. It is rather an amorphous confluence of experiencable forces that are difficult to contain in any clear narrative (Arrigo 2001; Crewe and Lippens 2009; Farrall 2005; Holstein and Miller 1990; Rock 2002; Spencer 2011). Narrative criminologists likewise emphasize the meaning of criminological action as told by the storyteller. These narratives of the criminogenic event reconstruct the past, present and future to create a sense of meaning; they impact the ways in which people make sense of themselves, the criminal event itself and the world (Pemberton and Aarten 2018; Presser 2016; Presser and Sandberg 2015; Sandberg, Tutenges and Copes 2015;
Vaughan 2006). We would also point to Jack Katz’s (1988) work on the “seductions of crime” as an example that provides insight into the simultaneity of diverse affective experiences that emerge from a particular criminal act and their complicated relationship to an individual biography.

In governmentality and risk studies, time is both a means and an object of governance. For the former, time is, for example, indoctrinated and trained into the rhythm of disciplined life, and then responsibilized into the neoliberal citizen. And time may also be policed and potentially stolen; notions of efficiency demonstrate the responsible use of time, while “doing time” in penitentiaries is utilized to punish deviant citizens (Foucault 1975/1977; Snider 2001, 2002). This is not unrelated to time’s role as an object of governance. For the prudent risk manager learns to use time rationally and appropriately, in particular, managing the self through a future orientation that rationally embraces one’s status as an individual unit of human capital. The future thereby becomes an object for biopolitical management of the population (Binkley 2009a, 2009b; W. Brown 2015; Ericson and Haggerty 1997; Hogeveen 2005; Opitz and Tellmann 2015; Woolford and Nelund 2013; Yesil 2006; Young 2015). More generally, governmentality scholars speak of “technologies of temporality” that are mobilized by policymakers and other dominant actors in an effort to better constitute and govern subjects and to produce more certain political futures (Garland 2001; Lippert and Stenson 2010; Povinelli 2010; Walters 2006; Williams and Lippert 2006).

In this brief overview, one can see how critical criminological approaches on occasion do direct attention to broader and more complicated temporal ranges than those initially suggested by the logic of the criminal event. To this extent, it is important to note that multiple temporalities are deployed within the criminological literature. However, too often when looking at the structural patterning of crime over time, governance through time or the singular nature of the event, criminology fails to offer a fulsome understanding of the event itself as part of a duration or process (scope), without reducing it to a moment within the flow of an individual or structural history. As well, it does not always capture the distinct technologies of governance that arise in relation to a specific locality (scale; Valverde 2010, 2015). Such approaches, therefore, have difficulty attending to the networked and mutating harms such as those of settler colonialism (Woolford and Benvenuto 2015). Settler colonialism cannot be isolated within a circumscribed state of being; it is instead always in a state of becoming (Wolfe 2006). To try to address this state of becoming, we need to be aware of the spatial-temporal architecture, in other words, the chronotope, that guides our analyses and “thickens” and gives flesh to the spatio-temporal dimensions of our lives (Valverde 2015: 10; see also Bakhtin 1981). Criminological tools bring a particular chronotope to the study of state crimes such as those that occurred in residential schools, rendering the flux of settler-colonial
harm into distinct moments of wrongdoing amenable to criminal accusation but potentially losing their place in the broader scope of settler-colonial domination. In short, without adaptation to move beyond static and episodic approaches, criminology is potentially conceptually ill-disposed for detailed examination of this form of state crime.

Returning to the insights of Mawani (2014, 2015), as drawn from Bergson, we are reminded that time as duration signifies the open and flowing quality of the temporal but that this duration is also often bound and captured through scientific pronouncements. Through such work, that which is fluid, multiple and decentred in time is transformed into something calculable and linear. Recognizing the work of scientific discourse in delimiting time is particularly crucial when engaging with the wrongs of Canadian settler colonialism since here the stakes are tied into durable patterns of settler-colonial elimination (Wolfe 2006) – that is, temporal choices hold the potential to contribute to or be complicit with ongoing patterns of elimination. By isolating moments within settler-colonial processes and decontextualizing them from broader historical flows, settler-colonial harms can be made to appear more easily delimited so as to be made “reconcilable” or redeemable in a manner that they are no longer viewed as moments of a broader settler-colonial duration. This services a state-logic of reconciliation, currently prevalent in Canada, whereby the past wrongs of residential schools are isolated as a “dark chapter” in Canadian history and thereby disconnected from ongoing experiences of settler colonialism that include continued child removals, mass incarceration and ongoing land dispossession (Woolford 2015).

That is to say, a criminological approach that emphasizes genocidal destruction as a single event, or a point on a linear trajectory of time, will tend to overlook the dynamic processes of settler-colonial elimination and its adaptive, ongoing force. In the discussion to follow, we argue that criminology must open itself to temporalities (or, more properly, a chronotope) that is defined more precisely as a settler-colonial mesh; an uneven destructive force which cannot be defined solely in discrete and definable moments (Woolford 2015); it is a process that ebbs and flows, loosening and tightening and adapting its assimilative and eliminative energies over time and space. Following this logic, even the notion of an “event” or “moment” is problematic when it is isolated from movements, forces and changes in other parts of the settler-colonial mesh, as well as the simultaneity of experiences of resistance, hope, violence and destruction. Static notions of time are hard to parse apart within Indigenous cosmologies which view time and temporality as multi-dimensional, processual and, in some instances, cyclical rather than linear (Adams 2009; Donaldson 1996; Huebener 2010; Latulippe 2015; Mika 2015; Nguyen 1992; Pelletier 2015; Pinxten 1995). Opening space for such alternative understandings of time requires greater dynamism from the conceptual models we use to confront wrongdoing.
Canada’s IRS System and Assiniboia

The Canadian IRS system is defined by an uneven temporality. Those who seek to periodize the system often cite dates in the late nineteenth century as the starting point while also acknowledging the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century missionary schools that preceded formal state involvement in the delivery of assimilative schooling. Nicholas Flood Davin’s 1879 journey to the United States to examine their emerging “industrial” approach to Indigenous schooling, which was undertaken at the behest of John A. Macdonald’s Conservative government, is also noted as a pivotal moment. In his report, Davin recommended that Canada adopt some aspects of the US industrial model of Indigenous education, arguing that day schools were ineffectual in removing Indigenous children from the influence of the “wigwam” (Davin 1879: 1). However, he also argued that Canada’s more dispersed Indigenous populations made it necessary to rely upon the existing network of Christian (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United) denominations that had already made inroads into Indigenous communities.

The industrial schools that followed Davin’s report, as well as the smaller “boarding schools” that were placed closer to Indigenous communities, have been cited as the source of much harm to Indigenous peoples, ranging from the physical and sexual violence of the schools to the disciplinary tactics used to sever children from their cultures, communities, and families (Woolford 2015). The goals of “assimilation” and “civilization” that were the driving purpose of these schools were, in effect, an effort to eradicate Indigenous cultures from Canada and further dispossess Indigenous peoples of their territories. “Techniques of temporality”, as discussed by Povinelli (2010), were key within the schools since it was believed Indigenous people had no respect for the value of time. Indigenous children were thus to be forcibly converted to a European temporality in which time was something invested within productive labours, whether upon oneself or in the sense that “time is money” (Woolford 2015). As well, time was wielded as a means of disconnecting children from their Indigeneity. The children were held away from their families for most of the year and, in many cases, sent to work in agriculture or domestic service in the summer when the schools closed. Moreover, children returned, year after year, generation after generation, to the schools, leaving as many as 150,000 Indigenous children without socialization into their families and cultures. Through these deployments of temporality, the schools promised a “futurization” of Indigenous peoples, unbinding them from their pasts and opening them to a more Europeanized future (Opitz and Tellmann 2015).

The temporality most of concern in this article, however, is the complex admixture of time and space – the chronotope – that resulted in a system that cannot be neatly captured in any single description of a particular residential school. Schools
varied greatly based on their spatial/temporal location as local factors such as the residential school staff’s adherence to federal and church rules, as well as the power of nearby Indigenous communities, could impact student experiences (Woolford 2015). The “system”, if we can even describe it as such, was therefore amorphous, despite being founded upon a clear purpose to eliminate Indigenous groups as distinct and separate peoples. For this reason, a school like Assiniboia must be understood across multiple registers so that we can situate its commonalities and differences with other residential schools within the broader network, recognizing both its singularity and connection to a broader settler-colonial duration.

ARS was opened on 2 September 1958 under the auspices of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Government of Canada 2012). The Oblates operated the school until 1969, when the federal government took it over and ran it until it closed on 30 June 1973 (Indian Record 1969). It was the first high school for Indigenous pupils in Manitoba; similar schools existed in other provinces, such as Saskatchewan and Ontario, though none, such as ARS, were located in a major city. Prior to its opening, Indigenous students were often sent out of province because of the lack of facilities for upper-level students in Manitoba (Fulson 1958). The Roman Catholic Church in Manitoba, including Indigenous Catholics, lobbied Manitoba’s Royal Commission on Education for the creation of such a school (Guimont 1957). In general, there was a belief among many state and denominational leaders that high schooling for Indigenous students was necessary to create a caste of leaders who would help facilitate integration of their communities into Canadian society (Indian Record 1952). The former Veterans’ Home on Academy Road was thus acquired for purposes of housing ARS.

Reverend Omar Robidoux OMI, who was previously principal at the Qu’Appelle Residential School in Lebret, Saskatchewan, was selected to be principal at Assiniboia (Tourigny 1958). The Grey Nuns of the Cross of Montreal joined forces with the Oblates to staff the school (Indian Record 1958). Together, they managed the hostel, as well as the two Grade 8 classes, as well as one Grade 9 and one Grade 10 class that occupied the four classrooms in September 1958. In 1959, a Grade 11 class was added, and a Grade 12 class in 1960. By the 1960–1961 school year, 130 students were enrolled at ARS (Government of Canada 2012). Assiniboia graduated its first students in 1961. At the graduation, the link between Christianity and Canadian citizenship was firmly reinforced:

The Most Rev. Paul Dumouchel, O.M.I., Vicar Apostolic of Keewatin, who has sent a large group of students from his Vicarage to Assiniboia school, was guest speaker; distinguishing between formal or academic instruction, he described the complete education which makes good Christians good citizens and without which instruction alone would be practically worthless. (Indian Record 1961: 1)
Students were predominantly Catholic (Davey 1958). It is important to remember that the provisions of the 1920 amendments to the Indian Act specified that children located in communities designated to particular Christian denominations were to be sent to schools operated by those denominations. Many students came to Assiniboia from Catholic day schools and residential schools. Several of these schools, such as the Fort Alexander IRS, had reputations as violent places, where too often predatory staff lurked and exploited their charges (Fontaine 2010). Some students were directed towards Assiniboia because they were considered strong students with good potential to succeed with advanced schooling. Others were sent out of concern that they might find themselves in trouble if they were to remain in their home communities (Ragan 1958).

Former students describe their arrival at ARS as a time of overwhelming change in their lives. Some recall being brought to Winnipeg to visit the campus prior to the start of school, then being left to find their own way back to their home community. For all, whether they had previously visited Winnipeg or not, the city presented a dramatic change from their home environs. The cars, the building and the noises are all recalled as sources of uncertainty and surprise. Even in the later years of the school, students experienced some disorientation when thrust into the city. In a newspaper article that somewhat dramatizes this transition, the reporter wrote of one student crossing Academy Road: “it was the first time he’d seen a car: Eddy is an Indian boy.” The reporter then quotes the children’s impressions of arriving in Winnipeg: “We felt like strangers from Mars when we first came here. For some of us it was the first time in a big city. With lights all over it’s really groovy” (Square 1968: 7).

Once the school semester had begun, students both adapted to and resisted the educational program. Whereas some found a refreshing change from the stricter and more violent residential schools from whence they transferred, others bristled against the continuation of tight regulation over their lives. Jane Glennon (n.d.) writes,

Upon my arrival in the Fall of 1958 at the Assiniboia Indian Residential High School in Winnipeg, it wouldn’t be long before I once again found myself disappointed with the way things were run . . . Speaking of potential, after my first two schools, I thought this experience might prove more modern and uplifting. But the same basic rules and regulations were in place at Assiniboia.

One young man was sent home from the school when it was learned he purchased alcohol and was intoxicated while visiting a relative (Robidoux 1958). Others continued to experience the common residential school malady of homesickness and attempted to run away from ARS (Glennon n.d.).
In these early years, before September 1967, when Assiniboia would become a hostel for Indigenous students being integrated into Winnipeg public schools, daily life was filled with course work, time in the school yard, occasional field trips and nights in the dormitories. For the most part, students did not leave the school grounds. On occasion, they might venture into the River Heights neighbourhood to visit the corner store, shovel snow from driveways or provide domestic labour in nearby houses. In the 1958–1959 school year, field trips were made to see the Ice Capades and the Shrine Circus, as well as a visit by the Grade 8 and 9 classes to the Coca-Cola plant on 8 June 1959, while the Grade 10 group was brought to a soap factory on 11 June (Assiniboia News 1958–1959).

Classes at Assiniboia had Catholic teaching at their core. As stated in the Catholic presentation to Manitoba’s Royal Commission, the belief was that “It is necessary not only that religious instruction be given to the young at certain fixed times, but also that every other subject treated be permeated with Christian thought” (Indian Record 1957: 2). The Grade 9 students at Assiniboia, under the editorial guidance of their teacher, reiterated this belief in their newsletter, “Reverend Father Alarie teaches us the most important subject, Religion. We appreciate the kindness and untiring zeal he displays in trying to show us to live a true Christian life. He is also our literature teacher” (Assiniboia News 1958–1959: 8). In 1964, the Grade 11 class participated in a composition contest organized by the Knights of Columbus in which they were required to write on topics such as “Come and Follow Me” and “The Greatest Among You Must be the Servant to Others” (Assiniboia Highlights 1964a: 8).

From 9:00 p.m. onward, the children were in bed in their dormitories. In the early years, the dormitories had approximately 15 beds per room. It is at this time that the children would have one of their more negative experiences. As they lay in the dark, people in passing cars harassed the children from their sleep, issuing mocking “Indian war whoops” towards the dormitories (Woolford 2016).

Like many Indigenous boarding schools across North America, ARS claimed to provide a “family atmosphere” (Assiniboia Highlights 1960). This atmosphere included preparation for an assimilated family life complete with prescribed gender roles. The young women at ARS took part in Home Economics classes where they engaged in activities such as embroidering, knitting, sewing, baking and preparing a fancy dinner to celebrate the principal’s birthday, complete with white tablecloth, silverware and candles. The young men, in contrast, were engaged in typical masculine activities, including sports such as football, and cadet corps, which involved drilling and weapon training.

Discipline at the school came in the form of military and religious instruction, as well as further habituating students to dominant gender norms. Through such activity, the Oblates sought to shape student souls to reflect both Canadian citizenry and
Catholic standards. Principal Robidoux’s (1964) vision of the perfected student is captured in his editorial advice on preparing for Easter exams, which was printed in the school’s newsletter:

This motivation must be similar to the motivation which prompted Christ to die for us – LOVE. Our love must be outgoing and unselfish. It must inspire us to perfect ourselves as individuals and thus help perfect the society in which we live. (9)

While these forms of discipline sought to positively effect change upon the student, more negative strategies of disciplinary punishment were also in evidence, though perhaps not to the extent that was common in the schools from which the students had transferred. There are reports that one hockey coach, in particular, was prone to strike his players.1

ARS appears to have provided satisfactorily nutritious food in its refectory (Regional Dietician 1962). However, this quality of food should not be attributed to government largesse. Throughout the history of ARS, food costs were a distinct concern. The Federal Government made little allowance for the cost differences faced by a school with older children, expecting them to run according to the same per diem costs as residential schools for younger students (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015a). Cost overruns for food are noted in many years of the school’s operation, and the Federal Government continually chastised ARS Principals for their lack of economy. For example, Father Robidoux’s over-expenditures for food and clothing in 1959 were to be recovered from the 1960 budget, lest the Church would have to reimburse the government for the excess amount (Davey 1960). This problem persisted across many years (Champagne 1968).

The push towards integration eventually transformed ARS. As early as 1965, Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, C. M. Isbister (1965), wrote to Reverend A. Linde, Provincial Superior of the Oblates, to complain that “Over the past seven years the original purpose of the school has not been achieved, and the tendency has been for it to become more and more a segregated school” (n.p.). This alleged oversight was corrected in 1967 when the school was converted into a hostel for 79 students. The expressed rationale for the transition to a hostel was framed in a discourse of equal rights and opportunity. The Indian Affairs Branch stated that it wanted to give the Indian students the same choice in courses available to students at public schools. But integration was also a primary matter of concern: “Branch officials say integration with non-Indian students at the high school level will break the social barriers through association with the non-Indian way of life and thus promote better understanding on both parts” (quoted in Indian
The language of “integration” thus began to replace that of “assimilation” in Indian policy, but it still amounted to much the same thing: transforming Indigenous students to better fit the Euro-Canadian norm.

Integration was not a smooth transition for ARS boarders. Some faced discrimination within Winnipeg public schools. Martina Therese Fisher recalls being ignored by her teachers:

The teachers never talked to me, students never talked to me. I felt singled out. I was, I was lonely, I was scared. There was nobody to help me with my work. I couldn’t wait to be eighteen years old. (Quoted in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015b: 131)

In all of its eras, ARS was a space of colonial ambivalence (Bhabha 1995); it presented an opening for students to engage critically with colonial domination, while also fostering continuity of the assimilative project. For some students, the school offered a space so different from their previous schools it was experienced in largely positive terms. Indeed, on occasion, the young people were able to develop critical perspectives on residential schools, Canada’s treatment of Indigenous peoples, and the so-called Indian problem. Such perspectives came not through the specific teachings of ARS teachers, but rather the exposure to critical Indigenous perspectives the students received from their location in an urban centre. These perspectives were becoming more prominent in Winnipeg and across Canada. They managed to penetrate the walls of ARS through media reports and public events that the students on occasion were able to attend (Bradshaw 1962). ARS Student awareness of the growing criticism of Canadian settler colonialism was on display in a May 1962 meeting. Reporter Theda Bradshaw presented the students with “several controversial statements about the Indian.” These included a statement that “The Indian feels he is not given sufficient consultation in matters affecting his own life and destiny.” In response, students took contrasting positions, one arguing that “The Indians are not ready to be consulted”, while another countered, “The white man always has the last word.” Likewise, when presented with the debate about Indigenous integration into White schools, the students demonstrated varied insight into the topic, including some very critical of it as yet another form of settler-colonial domination: “When Indians go to public schools they don’t seem to be accepted because white people don’t want their children mixing with us. Indians drop out of public schools very quickly” and “The main problem of the Indian is the white man. Integration is not the solution” (Bradshaw 1962: 22).

Students also were prepared for leadership. In the 1963–1964 school year, a student council was formed “to give the boys more responsibility and to have to
organize themselves better” (Assiniboia Highlights 1963: 7). Students could also take leadership roles through sports, cadets and student associations. While these were opportunities for empowerment, they also were consistent with a shift in Oblate policy towards Indigenous education that emphasized higher education that would encourage Indigenous children to become leaders who “will save the Indian Race” (Indian Record 1952: 1). This message continued throughout the history of ARS, such as when in 1966 Archbishop Flahiff advised the five school graduates “to forget past grievances, and to take full advantage of the opportunities they now have to their rightful place as leaders in Canadian society” (quoted in Indian Record 1962: 8).

But debate and discussion also took a more dogmatic form, such as through the school’s Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate (MAMI) club. For example, the 1964 MAMI group reports discussion of questions such as “What are the advantages and disadvantages of having women as councilors or chiefs?” The MAMI correspondent reporting to the school’s newsletter wryly noted, “The disadvantages for this question, as given by several boys, were patiently accepted by the girls” (Assiniboia Highlights 1964b: 14).

The school’s existence at the later stages of the residential school system also had direct impact on how it was experienced:

I hear good stories from former residential school survivors in Assiniboia, but at that time, too, things were already changing in the world, so our people are becoming more aware of their rights I think at that time in the late ’60s and ’70s. (Anonymous 2010: n.p.)

This statement is from someone who did not attend the school but rather heard about it from others. Moreover, if positive moments arose at the school, it is clear what they are positive relative to another set of moments. The speaker above added,

The younger people were frequently going to Winnipeg, and there was residential school students who in Assiniboia, who were coming back into the community, and basically letting us know what was going on in the outside of the reserve because it was so isolated like. And these, I think these younger people started to realize that, that, hey, these, these nuns and these priests are doing things they shouldn’t be doing to us, and they started fighting back. (Anonymous 2010: n.p.)

The speaker recounts how students from ARS were instrumental in inspiring resistance to the violence at the local school, in this case, the Fort Alexander Indian Residential School, and to reasserting Indigenous autonomy in the face of religious oversight.
On the flipside, Survivors have also described troubling episodes at the school. Notable among these was the attempted rape of Violet Rupp Cook in the school gymnasium by one of the ARS supervisors. She was able to fight him off but was nonetheless distressed by the incident:

I didn’t know what to do. I was, I was afraid, I was just shaking, I went, I went back to the dorms. I didn’t tell anybody I was so, I felt so ashamed. I didn’t tell my supervisor, I didn’t tell anyone. I didn’t tell any of the girls that were there. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015b: 162)

In a recent tour of the school at the aforementioned reunion, several other former students recalled troubling memories of trauma they experienced in various parts of the former classroom building.

It is also worth noting the complexity with which Indigenous young people were temporally sited within discourses at ARS. The Indigenous child pursuing higher education was seen as occupying a liminal chronotope between past and future. Their Indigeneity was a relic of the past, to be preserved through the retelling of Indigenous stories, which were taken as little more than quaint lessons from a simpler people in a simpler time. Ultimately, their destination remained the assimilated future, where, as leaders of their people, they would guide Indigenous nations into the settler-colonial present. For example, the 1964 Assiniboia student newsletter captures this temporality. Relegation of the Indian to the past is presented in a student poem that reads, “Long ago there were many Red-faces; / But sickness struck; the enemy too/ The Indians left at speedy paces/ Til at last, there were only a few” (Assiniboia Highlights 1964c: 22). As well, Indian stories, such as the “Legend of Keewatin,” are recounted. But these references to a dwindling Indigenous past are juxtaposed to the words of Theresa Goulet-Courchene, a former teacher afflicted with blindness, who told the children:

The Indians are at a turning point. At least they have outgrown their natural tidility. Instead of uncertain pleas, they have found their voice now and use it ... Perhaps more than any other race you will be called upon to forgive and forget the many little obstacles and hurts. (Assiniboia Highlights 1964d: 25–26)

ARS closed on 30 June 1973. Economic reasons were cited as the primary motivation for shuttering this and three other residential schools in Manitoba. It was also noted that Indigenous parents wanted to have their children educated closer to home (Indian Record 1973). The main building was demolished in 1984 (Winnipeg Free Press 1984).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada referred to the IRS system as “cultural genocide”; many Survivors, scholars and Indigenous leaders simply use
the unqualified term, genocide. Cultural genocide, as conceptualized by Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish jurist who created the genocide concept, was intended as a technique of genocide, not a distinct type. Cultural genocide was largely excised from the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (1948), as several state representatives to the General Assembly felt the term was too vague to be justiciable. In truth, many held dearly to the power of a sovereign to forcibly integrate subject peoples, as well as to evolutionary beliefs about backward and primitive races that required “civilization”. To this extent, the language of genocide is itself contoured by colonial discourses, making any quick and simple application of the term to our subject beyond the scope of our paper, though we have argued for its applicability elsewhere (Woolford 2015).

Bracketing such definitional concerns, we argue that the fact that students at ARS enjoyed playing hockey, grew critical of the IRS system and settler society, or experienced principals and teachers who provided them support, does not mean that the genocidal process stopped at the boundaries of the ARS campus. ARS was founded upon a notion of the Indian problem, whereby the intended goal of the school was to fashion a future group of leaders who would return to their communities and help integrate Indians into the fabric of settler Canadian society. It was part of the destructive scope of Canadian colonialism, though its scaler quality presented conditions where student resistance was made more possible. ARS is thus an important school in the history of the IRS system because it forces us to wrestle with the complexity of this system. Engaging ARS requires that we understand the variety of residential school experiences, while not using those that are on the surface and in some limited respects positive or at least not as outwardly violent as what has been captured in TRC testimony and elsewhere, to somehow absolve the system.

Too often, positive statements about residential schools are drawn upon to posit a counter-narrative of life at the schools (Bays 2009). Most recently, a Canadian senator was roundly criticized for presenting a benign view of the Canadian IRS system based on such testimony:

> I speak partly for the record, but mostly in memory of the kindly and well-intentioned men and women and their descendants – perhaps some of us here in this chamber – whose remarkable works, good deeds and historical tales in the residential schools go unacknowledged for the most part and are overshadowed by negative reports. (Senator Lynn Beyak, quoted in Kirkup 2017)

In such instances, an episodic, event-based criminology can complement these redemptive narratives by narrowing the scope of analysis and missing the broader duration of settler colonialism.
Criminology’s Time, Genocide and Assiniboia

If ARS did not consistently show the harsher face of the Canadian residential school system, as experienced at schools such as Fort Alexander (see Fontaine 2010), it also did not forsake the assimilative goal of removing children from their Indigenous past and readying them for a “civilized” future. The school sits at a particular spatial and temporal juncture within the movement of the residential school system. It pulsed with dimensions of care and control as it navigated towards the next mutation in the Canadian settler-colonial project, namely transforming Indigenous children through their integration to public schools with non-Indigenous children. The settler-colonial mesh here shifted, loosening in some respects, but also recalibrating its grasp upon Indigenous youth. Echoes of previous eras of the residential school system still reverberated in the threat of violence, the denigration of and condescension towards an Indigenous “past” and a future imagined where the Indigenous child embraces the dispositions of Euro-Canadian “civilization”. But, simultaneously, the school presented openings for the stirrings of Indigenous resistance that gained even greater momentum during the 1970s. It therefore does not mark the end of assimilation, but merely a part of its mutation – a mutation that also allowed new opportunity for Indigenous resurgence.

Treated in isolation, the various moments that comprise experiences of ARS could be taken as a counterpoint to the argument that Canadian residential schools amounted to genocide. What sort of criminal act involves “Ice Capades” one might ask? But such a view is only made possible by the narrow chronotope selected by those examining the school. Episodic approaches to Criminology, in general, tend to operate within a settler-colonial temporality that has specific deleterious consequences for understanding processes of settler-colonial destruction. In relation to a school like Assiniboia, restricting this school to an event and weighing the positive and negative experiences of the students who attended during its relatively short period of operation divorces the school from the broader settler-colonial mesh, which is a duration rather than a monolith or moment. This then allows the settler-colonial observer to regret residential schools as a moment that has passed, while noting other less destructive counter-moments like ARS, which are then portrayed to have redemptive value for the settler-colonial project. This exercise also allows the observer to place residential schools firmly in a past separate from the settler-colonial present, leaving this present untouched by anything but affirmative forms of justice (we commemorate and reconcile while the settler-colonial process mutates and continues). This response imagines what Strakosch and Macoun (2012: 54) refer to as a “vanishing endpoint of settler colonialism” in that it marks what is in fact a continuity and adaptation disguised as an end.
There is also the risk that the ambivalence of student experiences within Assiniboia might be used to retroactively dampen the destructive force of Canadian settler colonialism, particularly in the form it assumed during its assimilative era. Indeed, it creates a framework in which assimilation can be periodized, making it seem that it fades from government policy as of the 1950 amendments to the Indian Act, and representing ARS as evidence of a linear temporality that shows a gradual softening of policy. But in the settler-colonial mesh, a loosening in one locality can often mean a tightening in another, or simply a redirection or adaptation of assimilative energies. There is flux and flow within this durable process rather than discrete and definable moments (Mawani 2015). One could also describe this as a “pulsating” (Pinxten 1995: 237) or oscillating movement. Thus, a more variegated temporality allows us to think beyond the event and its specific intensity to consider multiple moments and their networked intersections; in this sense, Assiniboia is both an opening and a recalibration – a nodal point in a shifting settler-colonial mesh that remains structurally oriented towards Indigenous elimination.

In sum, in this article, we argue that criminological conceptions of time are often too episodic, linear and teleological to adequately come to terms with the harms manifested in a space that was sometimes experienced as “freeing”, especially when it was contrasted to the residential schools attended prior to ARS. In short, we argue that Assiniboia troubles a reductionist criminology of genocide in relation to Canadian residential schools. By this, we mean that criminology too frequently tends to treat its research objects as singular events separated from the ebb and flow of time. These are too often blunt tools for analysis that are unable to attend to the broader scope of settler-colonial state crime and its multi-nodal and mutating impacts on Indigenous peoples. In contrast, we present the scope and scale of the settler-colonial mesh as a means for coming to terms with simultaneity of forces of destruction and resurgence through the ARS.

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Note

1. This was communicated to the lead author during the reunion we organized.
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